YOUTH AND DEVELOPMENT:

EXPLORING OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN CAMBODIA

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of International Development Studies at Massey University, Manawatū, New Zealand

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This thesis is dedicated to:

My darling Gran (Margaret Ann Daly) who was always a huge prayer supporter for my academic pursuits and sadly passed away in July 2024.

You are greatly missed.

ABSTRACT

This purpose of this thesis is to understand the existing opportunities for youth voice in community development in Cambodia. This study engaged with NGOs in Cambodia working to explore possibilities to expand youth participation in decision-making processes. Young people have a right to express themselves and the right to be actively heard. This was a right included in Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989). Approximately 70% of the population in Cambodia is under the age of 30 (World Population Review, 2025, para. 1). This large population of young people in Cambodia indicates a crucial opportunity to empower and develop the capacity of this national treasure and human potential.

Participation and empowerment are core principles in a Rights-Based Approach to development (Gready, 2008). Through this framework, I analyse the relevance of two models of youth participation in the Cambodia context. The first is Lundy's (2007) theorising of Article 12 of the UNCRC through notions of space, voice, audience and influence, and secondly Hart's (1992) ladder of participation. My primary methods were semi-structured interviews and creative workshops with young people. Both methods were conducted when visiting Cambodia for 5 weeks in July-August 2023. The field research was followed by a thematic analysis of the data. This allowed me to identify repeated patterns of meaning across the data with relevance to my research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The data revealed that community development NGOs in Cambodia are undertaking a diversity of participatory practices with youth. NGOs have intentionally created space for youth to meet regularly, share ideas, and bring them forward to local

commune leaders. Other NGOs have fostered trusting relationships between youth and staff. This has allowed for the ongoing presence of youth voice within the NGOs decision-making processes. The workshops highlighted the willingness of Cambodian youth to share ideas and be involved in community development. These youth are expressing their right to be heard and have meaningful influence in their communities. The biggest barrier to youth participation was the restrictive political environment in Cambodia. Participants identified that for youth voice to be valued in Cambodian society, political and individual freedoms needed to increase.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADB – Asian Development Bank

CCP – ChildCare Plus

CIP – Commune Investment Plan

CPP – Cambodian People's Party

CDPO – Cambodia Disabled Persons Organisation

CSDG(s) – Cambodian Sustainable Development Goal(s)

EDP – ERIKS Development Partners

FUNCINPEC – United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia

HEI(s) – Higher Education Institution(s)

LGBTQIA+ – Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual, queer, intersex, asexual, + others whose identities are not heterosexual and cisgender

MoEYS – Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport

NGO(s) – Non-Government Organisation(s)

PRK – People's Republic of Kampuchea

RBA(s) – Rights-Based Approach(es)

RGC – Royal Government of Cambodia

SDG(s) – Sustainable Development Goal(s)

UN – United Nations

UNCRC - United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

UNGA – United Nations General Assembly

UNTAC – United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia

U.S. – United States

YWAM – Youth with a Mission

CHAPTER ONE:
Why Should Youth be Considered in Community Development?

1.1 Introduction: A Life with Dignity

In their statement of common understanding, the United Nations (UN) (2003) explained the principles of participation and inclusion to accommodate all people regardless of their age as rights-holders. This is elaborated to mean meaningful participation in all aspects of social, cultural, political, economic, and civil freedoms (United Nations, 2003), including through means such as policy analysis, advocacy, and capacity building to empower marginalised groups to have a life of dignity (Rand & Watson, 2007). Yet, youth are often excluded from these participatory rights and given little voice in processes that shape their lives, societies, and contexts (Layton et al., 2022). This thesis explores the potential for more meaningful youth inclusion in local Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) led development efforts and investigates how young people themselves understand their role and aspirations within these processes. In this research, I draw on a Rights-Based Approach (RBA) to development to understand the shifting landscape of young people's participation in development processes. With more understanding of development as both a means and product of establishing human freedoms (Sen, 1999), development practices have shifted from a focus on crisis alleviation and product delivery since the emergence of RBAs in the 1990s (McAuliffe, 2022). Rand and Watson (2007) identify inadequate access to health care, safe drinking water, economic, and social opportunities as violations of human rights within an RBA framework. The outcomes of rights-based development

approaches depend on both the capacity of the rights-bearer and the fulfilment of the duty bearer's obligations. RBAs involve looking beyond the surface level problems to identify the underlying issues and meaningfully address imbalances of power (Rand & Watson, 2007). The potential of RBAs is the reframing of the relationship between people and their governments, allowing them to see themselves as actors with rights that should be upheld. This is enabled by some of the key principles of empowerment and participation within an RBA to development. If communities and individuals are empowered to engage and participate in political processes and choices that impact their livelihoods, it allows for rights to become meaningful (McAuliffe, 2022). For the purposes of this research the terms youth and young people are used interchangeably.

1.2 Personal Positionality and Motivation

My interests lie in exploring these areas of youth participation particularly in the nation of Cambodia, along with the roles youth have in shaping their own development and communities. I lived in Cambodia working in a voluntary role for 18 months in 2017-2018. This role involved teaching children and young people in both urban and rural contexts. In my under-graduate studies, I undertook several projects with stakeholders that involved working with communities and organisations to develop child-friendly spaces. Through these projects I conducted studies with children and gained their feedback and ideas. I also worked with youth in various capacities both paid and voluntary in New Zealand for over ten years. I trained and recruited youth as young leaders, established and ran a youth mentoring programme, and coordinated after-school and holiday programmes for children and youth. These experiences both

within my local community and cross-culturally allowed me to see how creative and capable young people are when empowered to make decisions for themselves and when given the chance to lead and grow. I saw first-hand what it looks like for youth to stand up for what they are passionate about and seek to have a voice in decisions that impact their lives and futures. Therefore, this research aims to raise awareness of the right for youth voice and to investigate the types of engagement and participation youth are wanting to have in Cambodia.

1.3 The Importance of Youth Participation

At its core, youth participation is understood as young people's involvement in all stages of decision-making and their ongoing participation in the corresponding outcomes. For participation to be meaningful there must be a recognition of youth as rights-holders with the ability to contribute knowledge unique to their age and context (Teixeira et al., 2021). Youth participation is positioned in a transitional life stage and celebrates the opportunity to empower an innovative generation that has been marginalised, unrecognised, and exploited in development processes (McAslan Fraser & McLean Hilker, 2012). Creating safe spaces for youth voices does not mean to suggest theirs are the only voices that matter, rather to amplify voices that have previously been restricted or ignored. Inclusion of youth in development processes can be beneficial for the whole community or society when time is taken to listen to their ideas (Finlay, 2010). A diversity of voices working in collaboration is needed, to address the complex challenges faced by local and international communities (Cockburn, 2000).

By taking an RBA, this research focuses on empowering youth voices and exploring what empowerment looks like for young people in Cambodia. However, Head (2011) acknowledges that outside of formal participation practices, there are young people participating in village life and contributing their perspectives through means of expression that they are confident and comfortable with. As I sought to understand participation through an academic lens of rights and empowerment, it was important to remain open to other forms of participation that presented during my fieldwork, which I may not have actively been looking for. One characteristic of meaningful youth participation is that there is no clear set of instructions to follow. Instead, those seeking to understand youth perspectives should be flexible and respectful of the issues and ideas of concern to young people (Cockburn, 2000).

1.4 Research Questions and Objectives

This study aims to understand the existing opportunities for youth voice in community development NGOs in Cambodia and to explore possibilities to expand their participation in decision-making processes. Therefore, this thesis seeks to answer the following research questions and their corresponding objectives:

QUESTION ONE: What do existing opportunities for participation look like for youth involvement in NGO's local community development projects in Cambodia?

OBJECTIVE: Look into how community development NGOs' working with children and youth are involving youth in decision making.

QUESTION TWO: What do youth involved in local community development projects in Cambodia consider important in community development and how can these

considerations be better included by NGOs?

OBJECTIVE 2.1: Identify ideas youth have for shaping their communities.

OBJECTIVE 2.2: Explore ways to foster and strengthen youth voice and participation in community development NGOs working with youth in Cambodia.

1.5 Layout of Thesis

The above research questions and objectives are framed, investigated and discussed throughout the eight chapters comprising this thesis:

CHAPTER ONE: has introduced the rationale for this study, as well as my personal motivations for this research. This section included a brief discussion on the importance of youth participation and then went on to state the research questions, objectives and thesis layout.

CHAPTER TWO: situates youth participation within a rights-based framework, and justifies the importance of youth as decision-makers and rights-holders. This chapter discusses the challenges of defining youth as well as the varying challenges in defining who youth actually are. It then goes on to introduce two models of youth participation.

CHAPTER THREE: explores the economic, political, and cultural histories of Cambodia and how these have shaped society. It then goes on to understand the context of the NGO landscape in Cambodia and the roles and responsibilities of young people in society.

CHAPTER FOUR: outlines the extensive process of developing an ethical and participatory methodology. There is a description of research methods used and the field locations. The Methodology chapter also includes ethical considerations and

precautions taken to conduct field research safely for all involved. The limitations of this research are mentioned.

CHAPTER FIVE: The first data analysis chapter examines the findings of the interviews with NGO staff members. It discusses the levels of meaningful participation that were present and then goes on to talk about the barriers or challenges to youth participation in Cambodia.

CHAPTER SIX: The second data analysis chapter analyses the findings of the two workshops that were run with young people. It draws out the key themes from both the individual and group activities they participated in. There is also some explanation by youth who identified support they would need to realise their ideas.

CHAPTER SEVEN: leads the discussion on how the examples of youth participation present in Cambodian NGOs sit within the global models of participation from Hart (1997) and Lundy (Lundy, 2007). It examines suitability of these models and whether other solutions are needed to accommodate the Cambodian context.

CHAPTER EIGHT: this final chapter will conclude the discussions on meaningful participation. It also includes the practical application and some final thoughts of this research.

CHAPTER TWO:

Situating Youth Participation Within a Rights-Based Approach to Development

2.1 Introduction

The shift towards RBAs in development indicates a change from traditional forms of engagement to methods that promote the realisation of human rights. Young people's participation through an RBA produces more relevant outcomes for both communities and youth. Youth develop the skills to go on and become key actors of community development (Blanchet-Cohen & Bedeaux, 2014). This reflects how two of the key principles in RBAs, empowerment and participation, work together to strengthen genuine upholding of youth rights. However, moving from an idealised rights-based philosophy to comprehensive actions and strategies can be a critique of RBAs (Noh, 2021). To overcome the disparity between values and practice it is important to structure participatory methods on real and tested frameworks. Two recognised models of youth participation are Hart's ladder of participation (Hart, 1992) and Lundy's conceptualisation Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as 'space, voice, audience, and influence' (Lundy, 2007, p. 932). Undertaking participatory practices through these frameworks is helpful, as they acknowledge youth as active stakeholders in fully realising their own rights (McCafferty, 2017). Accountabilities of realising youth participation and competing legislative influences, such as the UNCRC and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are changing (McAuliffe, 2022). These multiple influences have led to varying understandings of youth participation and youth across contexts. This chapter discusses how youth

participation has been interpreted in the development landscape and clarifies how youth are defined in the context of this research. A consideration of some limitations of participatory methods will conclude this section.

2.2 Youth Participation: Recognising Youth as Change Makers

The essential elements of RBAs is their advocacy for sustainable change and the prioritisation of marginalised and discriminated groups in society (Gready, 2008). RBAs acknowledge that no one is completely without power regardless of their social standing or economic circumstance (Rand & Watson, 2007). The principle of participation within RBAs can be transformational for engaging young people in their own development. It is a tool to help them realise their own rights and a bridge to connect and create relationships between youth and key decisions-makers in their communities, governments, and NGOs (Gready, 2008). Youth participation can be defined as the "process wherein young people and adults work together to actively seek to understand views, experiences, and ideas in order to bring about change on issues that matter to young people" (Horgan & Kennan, 2022, p. 89). Within a community development space young people can actively participate in decision-making processes and become increasingly empowered to identify issues relevant to their lives, while being equipped with the tools to come up with relevant solutions (Gready, 2008). Development trends are shifting away from viewing young participants as objects of research and allowing youth to become active participants in their everyday lives and decisions (Horgan & Kennan, 2022). Youth participation is key in development because not only does it draw upon young people's expertise and their right to contribute, but it provides opportunities for their personal development (Checkoway, 2011). There are only nine

countries that include youth as young as 16 in their voting rights, and only six countries allowing 17 year olds to vote (World Atlas, 2023). This indicates that most youth under 18 years have a limited influence on the politics and decision-making processes that effect their daily lives. If young people are repeatedly excluded and told that their voices are unimportant because they are only concerned with selfish desires and not those of others, then that is the discourse they will believe. Viewing young people this way can be demeaning and restrictive and robs them of the potential agency they inherently have (Huebner, 2021).

Youth participation has added value because of the histories of excluding youth voices in political and development processes. However, youth are not all knowing and not everyone has the education and knowledge to give best advice on all outcomes and issues. Young people are creative, and they have opinions and innovative approaches that may differ to how adults see the world. Adults often think in big pictures and they have years of experience and information to help highlight, inform, and provide scope for what needs to be addressed (Checkoway, 2011). In an ideal world, an intergenerational, cross-cultural approach would be appropriate in addressing issues that impact on all people's futures, where everyone has space to participate and engage around issues as they choose. However, to get to this place there must be an intentional inclusion of unheard and marginalised voices so that not only the loudest or most powerful voices get their say (Scheyvens et al., 2014). For these reasons this research focuses on the participation of young people because there is still a gap in understanding how to effectively engage youth, and how to balance respecting their rights and the obligation of protection (Checkoway, 2011). Some groups of youth are more disadvantaged, such as young girls, those living in rural areas, those from certain

ethnic minority groups or lower castes, young people with disabilities, and young migrants (DFID-CSO, 2010). Shifting to inclusive participatory development approaches, should carefully prioritise excluded young people and engage them in ways which are socially, culturally, and age appropriate ways (Checkoway, 2011). Also, acknowledging the differing levels of participation and respecting young people's choice not to participate. Despite the understanding of participation as a right, for some the means and time to engage formally in participatory activities is considered a luxury. For hidden members of society and marginalised groups there are other factors such as social exclusion, cultural or religious barriers, or economic challenges that focus their priorities elsewhere (McAslan Fraser & McLean Hilker, 2012). The ways in which they participate might be more relevant to their situations or less recognised (Checkoway, 2011). This varying participation should be intentionally considered to ensure interventions and approaches are inclusive of youth on the outskirts. Inequalities and discrimination, even if unintentional must be addressed (Gready, 2008). After 'defining' youth, this chapter will explore next, how participation with young people can be meaningful and inclusive.

2.2.1 Varying definitions of 'Youth'

It is challenging to define youth, as the understanding of what it means to be a 'youth' varies over time and space and as a result there is no universal definition of the term (United Nations, 2016). According to the United Nations, youth are those between the ages of 15-24 years old (United Nations, 2016). In 2023 this is a group that consists of 15.55% of the global population according to the UN Population Division (2023, para. 1), which represents approximately 1.24 billion individuals (Roser & Rodés-Guirao,

2019). This data overlaps with the UNCRC, which defines a child as someone under the age of 18, to ensure the rights and protection of this age group (United Nations, 2016). This indicates how age, the most common classifier of youth, is a category that varies within one organisation. In the Global South it is estimated that around half of the population is under the age of 25 (DFID-CSO, 2010, p. vi), with around 60% of this group living in Asian countries (McAslan Fraser & McLean Hilker, 2012, p. 4). This large proportion of youth in the Global South, sometimes known as the 'youth bulge', can be challenging when young people in these places are still viewed as unstable, threatening, or dangerous. These perceptions are often exaggerated because of representations in the media, academic research, or resulting from youth's perceived threat to undemocratically elected governments (Abebe & Kjørholt, 2012). Investing in youth participation in the Global South can improve their ability to meet their own basic needs, help youth to gain resilience to economic and political vulnerabilities in potentially unstable conditions, encourage them to take ownership of their own ideas, and build trust and confidence for youth to be more involved in their communities (DFID-CSO, 2010). Youth participation can benefit development not just for young people and their futures, but for whole communities and nations.

Moving beyond age defining boundaries can help to indicate the cultural and social contexts of individuals that place other parameters around notions of youth. Factors such as familial obligations, gender, religion, political association, marriage, wealth, and levels of education can indicate how someone is situated on the spectrum from youth to adulthood (Abebe & Kjørholt, 2012). Youth share characteristics with both children and adults, meaning that they may need care and protection, but they should be supported through opportunities and responsibilities that prepare them for the future (DFID-CSO,

2010). This reflects the transitional nature and fluidity of the category of youth (Abebe & Kjørholt, 2012; McAslan Fraser & McLean Hilker, 2012). The media, academia, and international organisations have dominated the narrative of who youth are and transported these understandings, often based on age or Global North customs, to the rest of the world. Outside of the globalised notions of youth the space between childhood and adulthood reflects an individual's ability to move in the social hierarchy (Abebe & Kjørholt, 2012). Adult or mature status are not simply gained naturally by age, but rather determined through earning various rights, authorities, or meeting particular obligations. In many areas of the Global South, having the economic ability to establish a household and get married can indicate the social transition away from youth to maturity (Abebe & Kjørholt, 2012). Gender can also be a contributing factor in the Global South. Young women do not often retain the status of youth upon getting married and having children, which can be unlike men in the same context who remain a youth for much longer (Abebe & Kjørholt, 2012). Other socio-economic factors such as poverty, limited education, household and familial obligations, and life experience can equate to the early maturity of youth in the Global South. In some places, birth registration structures are difficult to access or are non-existent, resulting in many young people not knowing their chronological age. Young people know their social position and relate to others in their family or community based on who is older or younger. This understanding also contributes to how resources and responsibilities are distributed and who has more or less agency (Abebe & Kjørholt, 2012). These understandings are counter to Global North notions that youth should be in safe, supervised, and controlled environments, which has led decisions being made about youth and for them, rather than with them (Scheyvens et al., 2014). These ideations of

youth belonging to a family, having a home, going to school, and being cared for are problematic when reality does not meet these standards. In this way, youth that fall outside these ideals often become further marginalised or excluded from meaningful participation. For some young people, involvement in activities or lifestyles that are marginal in the Global North, such as theft, prostitution, and drug dealing, are necessary to meet their basic needs (Abebe & Kjørholt, 2012). Young people in the Global South are shaping the socio-economic landscape within cities and actively pushing for change to oppressive systems despite the hardships they face (Abebe & Kjørholt, 2012).

Youth are portrayed in different ways depending on who is trying to understand them. For example, the media often portrays young people in the development space as most at risk, subject to poverty, or problems for society (Checkoway, 2011). Within social science disciplines, youth are identified as detached from their communities or disinterested in engaging. The focus of professionals who work with youth is often on their deficiencies and provide services that cater to this (Checkoway, 2011). Young people are the experts on knowing themselves and are capable of constructing their own understandings of what it means to be youth regardless of what others may say (Checkoway, 2011). Therefore, in any research involving youth, asking them how they see themselves and how they choose to be defined should be an early consideration (Abebe & Kjørholt, 2012).

2.2.2 What is Meaningful Youth Participation?

The opportunities for youth participation are not equally accessible across different cultures and geographies. In parts of the Global South, low income and level of

education can have a significant impact on youth's ability to participate or self-mobilise (Ridge, 2006). To understand meaningful approaches to participation with youth, it is necessary to seek an understanding of the cultural, historical, socio-economic, political, and geographical factors influencing a group, so that outcomes benefit all involved (Beazley & Ennew, 2006). It is a fundamental right for youth to have representation in decisions that impact their lives. This is an important part of building social competency, responsibility, and shaping the individual identities of youth. It is beneficial for organisations to consult the different perspectives and experiences that youth offer, to ensure diverse voices are represented (Zeldin, 2004). Supporting youth as future leaders should be a priority to enhance their capabilities and allow youth to be contributors in society (ECSSR, 2019). Several key considerations determine if youth participation is meaningful or tokenistic. The question of what meaningful participation looks like will be answered in this section.

It is evident an organisation has a clear commitment to youth participation when it is prioritised across all areas and in their policies, and they recognise and show commitment to the UNCRC (1989) and any other national strategies relevant to protecting the rights and well-being of young people (Horgan & Kennan, 2022). Where the focus is on deficiencies and the trouble youth can cause, their energies and talents are not recognised, and positive outcomes are not realised. One recent approach to youth development in New Zealand is recognising the inherent value that all young people possess and that cannot be taken away from them. This can be compared to the Te Ao Māori concept of Mana, which is the authority we are born with that can accrue throughout our lives (Ara Taiohi, 2019). Viewing young people in this way immediately adds value to what they have to say. It is important to acknowledge what youth have to

say, that they want to act, and they want to find connections and be accepted as who they are. Even actions that may seem anti-social or negative to adults, may have deeper meaning when seen from a youth perspective. For example, gaming is often perceived as an individualistic activity, not particularly social, and sometimes a cause of bullying (Owens, 2020). Gaming can also be a source of income, it provides community and friendships online, as well as being source of fun and enjoyment for youth. In one analysis of youth engagement methods, gaming platforms were presented as a preferred place of connection for some young people (Child Youth and Wellbeing, 2022). This explains why it is important to ask young people for their opinions and seek meaning beyond the stereotypes that get assigned to them by adults. Strengths-based approaches are a common strategy to focus on young people's value rather than their deficits (Layton et al., 2022).

To justify participation a crucial consideration is whether the type of active engagement has real influence or practical outcomes (Checkoway, 2011). If youth are participating without the hope of their voice being heard and actioned, then this process of participation is disempowering, and youth involved may not take the process seriously. To measure the 'activeness' of engagement, the scope of the project, activity, or research, and the resulting outcomes can be regarded (Checkoway, 2011). For example, often studies asses youth's involvement in formal processes such as voting. Lack of participation in these activities does not mean youth are disinterested in politics, instead, youth do not feel that their voices are actually valued or represented in the election outcomes (Checkoway, 2011). In young people's everyday lives, they have become accustomed to situations where they are in deferent positions to adult authority figures. Sometimes it is researchers who unconsciously assume that adults are superior

to youth. The result of this assumption is that knowledge produced by youth becomes less reputable and adults make decisions on their behalf (Teixeira et al., 2021). When adults underestimate young people's competencies, participation loses meaningfulness. Youth's capabilities vary across age groups and skill levels, although their ideas are not unimportant. Using children and young people as a check box in development practice, instead of listening to their ideas is tokenistic and not participatory (Hart, 1992).

Meaningful participation should not be extractive but instead flexible and respectful by working alongside youth to develop their ideas and address issues of importance. There are no specific guidelines to achieve greater meaningfulness in participatory approaches (Cockburn, 2000), although having influence and seeing the outcomes of their voice in decision-making is key for meaningful youth participation. All people have the ability and right to identify ideas and make suggestions for the betterment of their personal lives and communities (Cockburn, 2000). Hart describes this as a "fundamental democratic right" (Hart, 1992, p. 6) and there must be concern for addressing these barriers that some youth experience. Seldom heard youth voices have more chance of engaging when time is invested into building trust and confidence. An important step is listening to why youth have difficulty participating, and adapting opportunities to facilitate the different needs of young people (Feely et al., 2022). Youth may feel uncomfortable or unable to join projects due to a lack of consideration of cultural or sexual identities, economic barriers, accessibility, or mobility challenges. This may suggest that participation practices are not taking a holistic approach to engagement and empowerment (Feely et al., 2022). Addressing these barriers that some youth face is important for participation to be meaningful.

As participatory methods have developed under RBAs to development, so have the influences on youth participation and the various legislative and strategic documents that have made inclusions for youth. The twentieth session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) (1965, p. 40) suggests early recognition of youth in the "Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding." The declaration acknowledges that the challenges that face humanity also impact upon young people, and that youth can contribute ideas towards international peace and security. This recognition of youth in decision-making processes acknowledges that they offer a unique perspective that adults cannot. Another key legislative influence is the UNCRC in 1989. The UNCRC makes provisions for young people through the acknowledgement of their rights and legal status in society. Article 12 states that children can form their own views and should have the right to express those views freely in matters that affect them in accordance with their age and maturity. It also states that children have the right to be heard and should be provided opportunity to speak either directly or through a representative (UNCRC, 1989, p. 4). The provision of youth voice as a right in Article 12 has been practically applied and conceptualised through participatory methods (UNCRC, 2009). Lastly, the UN Agenda 2030 (UNGA, 2015) outlines the 17 SDGs that aim for an inclusive sustainable future for all (Solís & Zeballos, 2022). Agenda 2030 saw a need for inclusion of youth voices and the unique perspectives they offer through creativity, fresh energy, and vision for the future (United Nations, 2018). In these planning processes towards the SDGs, young people were identified as a vulnerable group that required special attention and support. The SDGs and their targets are "integrated and indivisible" (UNGA, 2015, p. 14). This means that although they set out to address specific needs, they should not be

applied in isolation to one another. Therefore, the SDG framework is an important influence on youth participation as it has clear and distinct interconnections and inclusions for young people throughout all the goals and targets (UNGA, 2015). Young people are the future leaders and must be a part of sustainable development planning and implementation.

2.3 Models of (Youth) Participation

Several models of youth and child participation have emerged which can be used as a tool for others to follow in their journey to empower young people and incorporate youth voice in their work. Two that stand out as influential in shaping the youth participatory landscape are Hart's (1997) ladder of child (and youth) participation, and the Lundy (2007) model of youth participation. This section will compare these two models and explain their relevance for youth participation.

2.3.1 Hart's Ladder of Participation

Hart's work (1992) on children's participation follows on from the 1989 UNCRC and reinforces that children and young people are active citizens who are entitled to understand their rights and have space to speak up about issues that impact their own lives. Hart uses the imagery of a ladder (Figure 2.1) to suggest the varying levels of involvement or collaboration young people may have when participating in projects with adults. The lower rungs of the ladder indicate types of participation that are unacceptable in the context of RBAs. The lowest rung "Manipulation or Deception" involves adults using young people to convey their own messages, or denying their own

involvement so that projects appear completely youth led (Hart, 1997, pp. 40-41). "Decoration" is when youth are used as the face of causes or organisations with little to no understanding of the cause (Hart, 1997, p. 41). The third rung of the ladder "Tokenism" has the potential to trap those with good intentions, although more critical engagement is needed (Hart, 1997, pp. 41-42). Tokenistic projects have the appearance of a strong youth voice when young people are not included in decision-making or given sufficient time to form their ideas and opinions.

The next three rungs on the ladder begin to indicate more genuine participation. The fourth rung "Assigned but Informed (Social Mobilisation)" is a common approach used when young people do not initiate projects, although they may be well informed and can take meaningful ownership (Hart, 1997, pp. 42-43). Social mobilisation allows youth to reflect critical issues, which is a first step in encouraging them to initiate projects for themselves. Projects that are led by adults, intentionally consult youth voices, and inform youth of the results, sit on the fifth rung of the ladder "Consulted and Informed" (Hart, 1997, p. 43). "Adult-Initiated, Shared Decisions with Children" is participation does not target specific age groups, such as community projects shared by everyone (Hart, 1997, pp. 43-44). To avoid certain voices dominating the decision-making it is important that young people are included in all stages of the process. The next two rungs of the ladder are focused on participation that is initiated by a child. The seventh rung is "Child-Initiated and Child-Directed" where adults will take a supporting, less hands-on role (Hart, 1997, p. 44). Projects that are child-led require adults to be alert and observant so that their initiatives don't go unnoticed. The eighth rung on the ladder which Hart (1997) suggests is the highest degree of child and youth participation is "Child-Initiated, Shared Decisions with Adults" (p. 45). He reasons that it is acceptable

for adults to be involved as young people should initiate and manage the project as they see fit. If youth feel that it is necessary to collaborate with other members of their community including adults, then control is not surrendered back to adults.

Figure 2.1: *The Ladder of Participation (Hart, 1997, p. 41)*

It would be unrealistic to exclude adults from the process, as consultation is needed to gain certain consents or access depending on the nature of the project (Hart, 1997). The emphasis on young people's participation and the move away from social mobilisation is the hope that young people will gain a sense of responsibility for the community and maintain ongoing engagement with issues of importance to them (Hart, 1997).

2.3.2 Lundy's model of Youth Participation

Laura Lundy (2007) developed a model of participation in response to findings that young people's rights under Article 12 of the UNCRC are largely dependent on adults. Lundy (2007) acknowledges that youth participation is not just good practice, but a human right and therefore has legal obligations. A model of participation is proposed to understand the key points in Article 12 which are "the right to express a view" and "the right to have the view given due weight" (Lundy, 2007, p. 931). This is conceptualised through the four interrelated elements shown in Figure 2.2, Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence. This model (Figure 2.2) indicates how the other UNCRC articles influence the interpretation of Article 12 and position it within the wider context of child and youth rights and protection (Lundy, 2007). In this model the first step is creating a safe and inclusive space for youth to express their views freely and authentically. This involves the active process of ensuring the space is youth-friendly, safe from criticism, caters to youth's preferences, and prepares youth in advance (Kennan et al., 2018a). The next step is facilitating youth to use their voices to express their views. Young people have indicated that having information given to them in child-friendly formats and having adequate time to understand the issues in advance, allowed them to feel that their participation was meaningful (Lundy, 2007). Part of facilitating

youth voices is offering a variety of means for them to communicate. Creative forms of expression such as plays, drawings, videos, or puppet shows provide non-written and non-verbal forms of expression which is important when including diverse voices of youth (Lundy, 2007). The requirement to give young people's views "due weight" is presented in the notion of having an audience (Lundy, 2007, p. 937). This means that even without the guarantee that these views will be taken into account, youth have an opportunity to be heard in decision-making processes by someone who is responsible to actively listen (Lundy, 2007). The next step is being open to their ideas and views having real influence (Kennan et al., 2018a).

Figure 2.2: *Lundy's Model of Participation (Lundy, 2007, p. 932)*

Young people should be told exactly how their views were taken into consideration, the decisions made, and why the actions occurred (Lundy, 2007). Lundy's model does not dismiss that in most cases there will be adult decision makers in the process of youth participation. However, it offers a way to navigate these roles so that youth rights are adhered to, and their participation is meaningful.

2.4 Youth as Active Rights-Holders

How did the age of 18 become a measure where society suddenly decides someone is mature enough to have more rights and freedoms? If the concern for giving young people access to political decisions such as voting, lies around their understanding of these processes and therefore their inability to make reasoned decisions. Then education should be offered to inform youth of their rights, instead of excluding them from these spaces entirely. To some extent this is attributed to the obligations that parent and legal guardians have to protect and care for young people (Teixeira et al., 2021). The UNCRC (1989) includes rights to protection and safety. This brings forward the question, if youth are encouraged to participate in society and decisions that impact their lives at a younger age, is this robbing them of some naivety or aspects of childhood? Also, putting them into spaces where their opinions and ideas are criticised or put under public scrutiny could have emotional consequences if youth are not equipped or resilient to these critiques (Abebe & Kjørholt, 2012). However, the actions of young people would indicate otherwise. Youth are self-organising to combat global issues such as climate change (Akter & Tasnim, 2022; Gasparri et al., 2021), economic inequalities through micro-enterprises and entrepreneurial activities within the informal economy (Holt, 2020), and working towards the SDGs through the pathways

and strategies developed by young people who are contextualising the goals in their own local communities in what Anderson et al, calls “YouthMappers” (2022, p. 85). This reinforces that young people do not want to remain on the sidelines when it comes to addressing challenges and disparities that affect local and global communities. The result is that youth are actively claiming their right to participation. As rights-holders’ young people are removing the middle responsibility of duty-bearers to facilitate their opportunities to participate. Moving away from these traditional structures has allowed youth to become key actors in their own development (Blanchet-Cohen & Bedeaux, 2014). The next section highlights some of the challenges in this process of activating youth as right-holders.

2.5 Challenges of Youth Participatory Methods within an RBA

It is increasingly recognised that young people are capable role models and passionate change-makers on issues that affect their lives and futures. However, there are still some limitations to participatory approaches with young people. Participatory approaches with youth do not mean that adults are no longer relevant and have no role in decision-making and development processes. Instead, there needs to be a greater transparency and openness to youth’s ideas and a more equitable view of youth as partners in decision-making (Teixeira et al., 2021). Cummins et al, (2022) suggests that young people should have leadership roles and influence over decisions-made at local, national, and international levels. This does not mean leaving all adults out of discussions. Many youth-led programmes include the role of an adult mentor, youth worker, or support person in projects or research undertaken by youth (Kennan et al., 2022). Hart (1997) advocated that the process of empowerment and the increasing

independence of young people should be gradual. He outlined that youth empowerment would ideally be supported by the family and other institutions (Hart, 1997).

Youth participation should be approached with realistic expectations at the forefront. Not all young people will have the best interests of the collective at heart. There will also be youth that have no desire to participate (Kennan et al., 2022). Naturally there will be some voices that are louder and more willing to share, while other young people are faced with additional obstacles which limit their ability to participate unless intentional accommodations are made for them (Cockburn, 2000). This includes youth from certain ethnic minorities, low-socioeconomic communities, gender identities, religious beliefs, youth with disabilities, geographic location, or those hospitalised or in state care (Feely et al., 2022; McAslan Fraser & McLean Hilker, 2012). Feely et al. call those groups of young people with more barriers to participation "seldom heard voices" (2022, p. 87). It is important to take an intersectional approach to understanding youth voices. Intersectionality recognises young people's experiences, identities, and opportunities to speak and be heard are not only shaped by their age, but also by their gender, race, class, ethnicity, ability, sexuality, religion, and geographic location, among other factors (Crenshaw, 1991). Young people are a diverse group and the right to participate is not exclusive to only a few. There should be space created for new opportunities that allows the different groups of young people to dialogue and negotiate in decision-making processes (Cairns, 2006). Insufficient time limits consultation with youth across wider contexts, and restricts space to build trust with seldom heard youth voices. Training, equipping, and resourcing young people also requires financial contributions which may be dependent on additional funding or donors (Kennan et al., 2022).

Another challenge to youth participation is the concept of adultism. Adultism stems from the assumption that adults think youth are inferior and should therefore remain dependent. As authority figures, adults should be the decision-makers and leaders in society (Barron, 2022; Checkoway, 2011; Kennan et al., 2022). This mindset is problematic in that it suppresses youth voices, and that it often leads to youth believing such labels of inadequacy, and doubt their own validity in roles of influence (Checkoway, 2011). Adultism can also extend from parental apprehension to youth rights. They may struggle with the concept of young people having authority if it means equality with parental authority. However, recognising young people's rights to appeal decisions that impact their lives does not mean relinquishing the roles of a parent (Hart, 1997).

Another instance of adult authority over youth is seen through manipulative and tokenistic participation. This occurs when adults underestimate young people's abilities while also using them to further adult causes and agendas. It is considered manipulation when young people have no understanding of the issues or are not informed on how their ideas and feedback are being implemented (Hart, 1992). Young people's ideas appear to be considered, but there is no meaningful participation or influence in the process. Tokenism occurs when adults are pulling the strings and there is no input or communication with youth about what they actually want or think on the matter (Hart, 1992). Adults can also be a hinderance to youth access to rights and participation through gatekeeping and parental consents. Gatekeepers can play a positive role in filtering out unsafe or manipulative participation with young people, although they also have the potential to refuse access to youth participants against their interests. As a result, young people may never be informed about potential opportunities for participation or if adult approval is given then youth might feel pressured to take part

(McCarry, 2005, 2012). The mentality of consent assumes parents will make decisions for their children that are in their best interests. This is not always the case in situations where parents may lack education or knowledge on certain issues relevant to youth, or in cases of family or domestic abuse (McCarry, 2005). Therefore, navigating adultism, gatekeepers, and consent is not a straightforward approach. In RBAs to research with youth it is important to ensure there is time to negotiate these challenges carefully while maintaining youth voices at the forefront of decisions.

2.6 Concluding Thoughts

Youth participation represents an opportunity for innovation and to step away from the traditional methods of community development. Perceptions of youth and their involvement in decision-making processes have undergone a transitional period. There has been a shift from youth as vulnerable children to be protected, to an acknowledgement of their agency and right to participate (Camino, 2000). A focus on young people's strengths and inherent value has instead allowed them to exercise authority and respect (Ara Taiohi, 2019). Young people are less frequently perceived as lacking, immature, incompetent, and instead they are overcoming structural barriers to inclusion (Teixeira et al., 2021). There is a long way to go before youth share the same inclusions as older generations in their communities. Marginalised youth communities experience additional barriers to participation. McAslan Fraser & McLean Hilker (2012) have labelled this "double marginalisation" (p. 9), and explain that some young people are simply forgotten in the policy and programme development process. These forgotten youth voices reflect the challenges ahead for realising meaningful youth participation. The perceptions of young people are rapidly changing (Cairns, 2006),

although there are many attributes of participation that remain imperfect (Barron, 2022). Youth are resilient and innovative, and are utilising new technological advancements to unify and mobilise people across generations (Gasparri et al., 2021). Youth are becoming catalysts for a different way of looking at the world by inspiring others towards addressing global issues that impact on the futures of all (Zeldin & Petrokubi, 2006).

CHAPTER THREE:

Cambodian Context

3.1 Introduction

Cambodia is a nation that has shown incredible resilience through its histories of monarchism, colonisation, socialism, civil war and modernisation. Cambodian society carries the legacies and hardship of its past and yet Cambodians today are welcoming, innovative, and creative people. Over the last 30 years there has been a rebuilding of what is unique to Cambodian culture through a reclamation of the arts, religious spaces, education models and community life. This chapter will explore some of these histories and the impact they have on Cambodian society, as well as understanding the context for the landscape of NGOs and young people in Cambodia.

3.2 Cambodian History, Culture and Politics

Similarly, to many Southeast Asian neighbours, Cambodia has had a mixed political history that is not exempt from conflict. Cambodian society has been influenced by other Asian cultures as well as countries in the Global North such as France and the United States (U.S.) (Overton & Chandler, 2023). Identifying the cultural and political histories in Cambodia is important for understanding the lasting impacts and influences on the current political structures and processes. By looking into Cambodia's political systems, it is possible to discern who is excluded and what opportunities currently exist for young people. The influence of religion on society, also reinforces aspects of Cambodia's

hierarchical social structures and plays an active role on everyday life and community development (Brehm, 2021).

3.2.1 Cambodia's History and the Current Political Landscape

The Khmer state dates to the first century and was known for its strength and expansion. This period was defined by rulers who reigned like gods and prospered the kingdom through discoveries in art and architectural developments (Peang-Meth, 1991). However, by the 19th century the Kingdom of Angkor was struggling and became established as a French colony in 1863 and did not regain independence until 1953 (US Department of State, 2011). During French rule in Cambodia, ideologies from the Global North of social mobility through education and economic prosperity influenced individual status and rank (Peang-Meth, 1991). Two years after Cambodia's independence from France in 1953, in order to become Prime Minister, King Sihanouk abdicated the throne in favour of his father (Brehm, 2021; Peang-Meth, 1991). During the 1950s and 1960s the Cambodian government under Prime Minister Norodom Sihanouk remained politically neutral (Brehm, 2021; Dy, 2004; Woods, 1997), although indecisive political manoeuvring saw growing discontent among the population. New thoughts of independence, anti-colonial and socialist movements were emerging (Brehm, 2021). The stability and peace of Sihanouk's first fifteen years of rule in Cambodia faded when the external pressures from the Vietnam war and the political opposition from within were poorly handled (Ledgerwood et al., 1994). An authoritarian regime led by General Lon Nol seized control in March 1970 (Ratner, 1993), which saw the strengthening of communist ideals in rural areas. Pol Pot, the self-

declared Maoist leader of the Khmer Rouge movement, came to power in April 1975 (Brehm, 2021).

The Khmer Rouge leaders sought a Cambodian society liberated from injustice and all outside influence. Their radical policies included collectivisation of agriculture, evacuation of urban areas, reorganisation of the population into work teams, disruption of family units, and suppression of religion (Ledgerwood et al., 1994). The Khmer Rouge intended to reconstruct society from ground zero (Duffy, 1994). It is estimated that around 40% of the population or 2.3 million people tragically lost their lives during the Khmer Rouge era, either as a result of malnutrition and starvation (Brehm, 2021, p. 26), or from brutal execution, illness and hard labour (Ledgerwood et al., 1994). There is debate over the cause of these tragic events in Cambodia and who is responsible for Pol Pot's assumption of power. Some scholars suggest that Global North countries, particularly the U.S., downplayed events. Stories from refugees were discredited by the Democratic Cambodian government and were therefore ignored by Global North journalists (Beachler, 2009). It is also contended that the Khmer Rouge would not have come to power had the U.S. not illegally bombed the Viet-Cong along Cambodia's borders (Woods, 1997). In 1978 the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia with support from exiled Khmer Rouge defectors, and by 7th January 1979 took control of the capital Phnom Penh. A new government was established, with Hun Sen at the head, called the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), which lasted until Vietnam withdrew in 1989 (Ledgerwood et al., 1994). Perspectives on this ten-year period (1979-1989) in Cambodian history vary with terms such as liberation but also occupation used to debate the role of Vietnam (Brehm, 2021). The presence of nearly 200,000 Vietnamese troops controlling most cities and rural areas was felt as a continuation of an oppressive

regime and alienated the Khmer population from political processes (Brehm, 2021; Deth, 2009). Cambodia lost territories to Vietnam and the new PRK government was isolated from international assistance (Deth, 2009). Few non-communist nations were willing to recognise the PRK state and Cambodia continued to be represented in the UN by Khmer Rouge leaders until the 1990s (Brehm, 2021). The other side of the January 7th, 1979, debate is the perception of Vietnamese troops as liberators. The ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) party considers the date a "second birthday" and the start of a new chapter as a nation (Deth, 2009, p. 10). However, the only legitimacy held by the PRK government at the time, was through their conquer of the Khmer Rouge regime. A lack of first-hand accounts of life under the PRK make it difficult to determine if liberation, suffering, or simply relief from the Khmer Rouge was the dominant experience during this regime (Deth, 2009).

The Paris peace agreement was signed in 1991 and the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) government supervised a peacekeeping mission (Ledgerwood et al., 1994). The Cambodian state under UNTAC was the first of its kind where the UN was the temporary governing state power (Beban, 2021). In the 1993 elections, a coalition government was formed between Sihanouk's FUNCINPEC and the CPP (Ledgerwood, 1994; US Department of State, 2011). This period in Cambodian history reflects the multitudes of lived experiences of the Khmer people who were trying to reclaim their identity and livelihoods in a nation with an experimental new government attempting to establish peace (Overton & Chandler, 2023). The high voter turnout in 1993 indicates the eagerness of the people to have a voice in decision-making processes where all political and social rights had been taken from them. The new constitution included universal voting rights for those 18 years old and over, and a small increase in the

number of women in government positions. However, young people were still largely excluded from the political space with only those aged over 25 years allowed to hold elective office (Overton & Chandler, 2023). The split outcome of the 1993 election reflects the indecision of a population and the uncertainty about how best to bring forth peace. Some choosing to hold onto the royalist ideals of the 1950-1960s, and others remaining loyal to the leader who brought freedom from the Khmer Rouge.

Following the 1993 election Cambodia experienced relative stability compared to the previous decades of radical political changes and conflict (Finsen, 2015). However, political violence was an ongoing issue throughout the 1990s (US Department of State, 2011). From 1997 the CPP under Prime Minister Hun Sen have asserted their influence and superiority in elections. Many senior members of opposition parties have been killed or forced to flee the country (Sullivan, 2016). Cambodian elections continue to balance the tension between wanting greater democracy and political freedoms, while greatly desiring to avoid any civil conflict like that of the 1970s. The patterns of Hun Sen's systematic removal of any opposition to himself and the CPP, sometimes through violence, arrests or intimidation, have also continued throughout his time as Prime Minister (Brehm, 2021; Finsen, 2015; Sullivan, 2016).

Now without a viable opposition party the legitimacy of Cambodia's democracy has been brought into question. The current distribution of power in Cambodia is far from transparent and perhaps some of the historic socialist and authoritarian ideologies have subconsciously remained embedded within Cambodia's political mindsets (Springer, 2011). The CPP had no serious challenger in the latest July 2023 elections and unsurprisingly won significantly. Three days after the election, 71-year-old Hun Sen resigned which began the process of handing over political power to the next

generation. Hun's Sen's eldest son Hun Manet was appointed as Prime Minister and the Cambodian cabinet saw a hereditary succession of new younger leaders (Hutt, 2024). Although this new government has promised change, there has been a democratic backsliding in Cambodia, along with strengthening of patronage networks (Morgenbesser, 2016, 2020) and state violence towards those who questions the CPP (Hutt, 2024; Lamb et al., 2017).

3.2.2 A Brief Overview of Cambodian Economic Development

Understanding the current economic conditions in Cambodia is helpful to recognise the causes of inequality that have led to the exclusion of young people from certain spaces. Underlying the hierarchical structures in Cambodia is socio-economic status and a system of patronage. This impacts young people's access to certain educational, social, religious, or employment opportunities (US Department of State, 2011). The increase in urban migration trends and urban development has opened opportunities for social mobility in Cambodia. The large population of youth in Cambodia are entering the workforce and creating demand for more jobs in the formal sector (Holt, 2020). Many of the key industries such as agriculture, fishing, and forestry continue to be important for the Cambodian economy (Mysliwiec, 2005; Overton & Chandler, 2023). Other sectors such as tourism and garment manufacturing have been driving economic growth (US Department of State, 2011). The economic impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic were felt within Cambodia, which had previously been one of the fastest growing economies the Asia-Pacific region with an annual GDP of over 7% (ADB, 2024a, p. 1). Local companies were forced to reduce staff, schools were closed, and there was a restriction on foreigners entering the country which impacted

significantly on tourism (CAMFEBA, n.d.). This resulted in a drop of the annual GDP growth rate to 5% in 2023, and it is estimated that 20.5% of the employed population were earning under US$2.15 a day (ADB, 2024b, para. 2-3). The leading industries in 2023 were the tourism and non-garment manufacturing exports. A renewed openness to trade and foreign direct investment contributed to the growth and recovery of the Cambodian economy (ADB, 2024a).

UNTAC introduced neoliberalism in Cambodia, which was presented to bring improvements to the lives of many through participation in a free market. The result looks more like a system of patronage where public resources have been drained, and local elites dictate policy reforms. Issues of corruption, violence, and state control of resources have been the result of the Cambodian approach to neo-liberalisation (Springer, 2011). The Cambodian government could now be considered an electoral authoritarian regime as far as regular elections are held, yet there is no democratic freedom or fairness (Morgenbesser, 2016). This regime has been criticised for a lack of economic transparency and accountability. Corruption is commonplace in Cambodia and bribery in various forms is part of everyday life for most Khmer citizens (Vuković & Babović, 2018). Cambodia scored 21/100 in the 2024 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index which puts it at 158th out of 180 countries (Transparency International, 2025, para. 1). “Lower scores indicate perception of more corruption” (Finsen, 2015, p. 171). Finsen (2015) suggests that these deeply imbedded issues are hierarchical and engrained in society. Addressing corruption requires systematic changes such as proper tax laws and improved wages for workers. The current challenges can be attributed to the complete destruction of the formal economy under the Khmer Rouge (Duffy, 1994). The reintroduction to urban life and basic freedoms in

early 1979 saw the start of informal trading and busy marketplaces (Deth, 2009). The lasting impact of civil war left many people operating from a “survival mentality” (Springer, 2011, p. 2564). With few state provided social well-fare options, the Cambodian people have normalised meeting their own needs and providing for their families by their own merit (Springer, 2011). In some regions, other institutions have filled some of the social welfare gaps, such as NGOs or the Buddhist Pagodas (Brehm, 2021; Springer, 2011).

The informal economy is another aspect of the Cambodian economy that falls through the cracks of the market economy. Although this section of the economy may be a source of livelihood for many Cambodians, without the support of economic knowledge, the system of wealth distribution remains the same (Springer, 2011). These informal economic spaces are often found in Global South nations and have been labelled as the unregulated portion of trade and market interactions (Holt, 2020). The increasing migration from rural to urban areas in Cambodia has also coincided with the rapid spread of access to technology. Youth in Cambodia are at the forefront of recognising the inequalities present and expecting something different for the future (Beban, 2021). Despite some of the negative outcomes of the informal economy such as the corruption at play in Cambodian society. The combination of informal livelihoods and youth innovation allows for unique opportunities for economic entrepreneurship, which is necessary for growth and sustained development (Holt, 2020).

3.2.3 Cambodia a Nation Rich in Culture and Religion

Cambodia has a rich cultural heritage that is shaped by historical narratives and religious contexts. Knowledge of the everyday social nuances and expectations that Cambodian youth navigate is vital to understand their roles and influences in society. Early trade routes, such as the silk road, played a significant role in spreading not just resources but culture, religion, and political ideologies throughout Asia. Influences from Indian and Chinese civilisations brought with them Hindu-Buddhist religions that are still present in Cambodia to this day (Overton & Chandler, 2023). The formation of the centralised Kingdom of Cambodia with sophisticated religious and social structures was one of the first of its kind in the Asian region (Dy, 2004). The peak of the Empire in the 12th century saw the construction of impressive imperial capitals and temples including Angkor Wat, Bayon, and Angkor Thom (Overton & Chandler, 2023). Religious leaders were regarded as intellectuals and gurus who provided education to the Cambodian people. The majority of youth in Cambodia have been shaped by Buddhist values for individual and family life, as well as for society (Dy, 2004). These values included passivity and conservatism, honour, dignity, gentleness, emotional equilibrium and lack of concern for material wealth (Future Forum, 2023; Peang-Meth, 1991). These virtues in the Khmer mindset are important for seeking inner peace, and good karma. Under the tranquil surface, there can sometimes be a lack of motivation or confidence to take action, a holding onto of grudges, and the necessity of saving face (Peang-Meth, 1991).

Kobayashi (2020) discusses the Buddhist-Khmer ritual of sângkeahăh, which suggests a diversification of wealth distribution to care for vulnerable community members. If directly interpreted sângkeahăh is understood through concepts of aid, assistance, or help. Sângkeahăh reflects an innovative response to look after one another

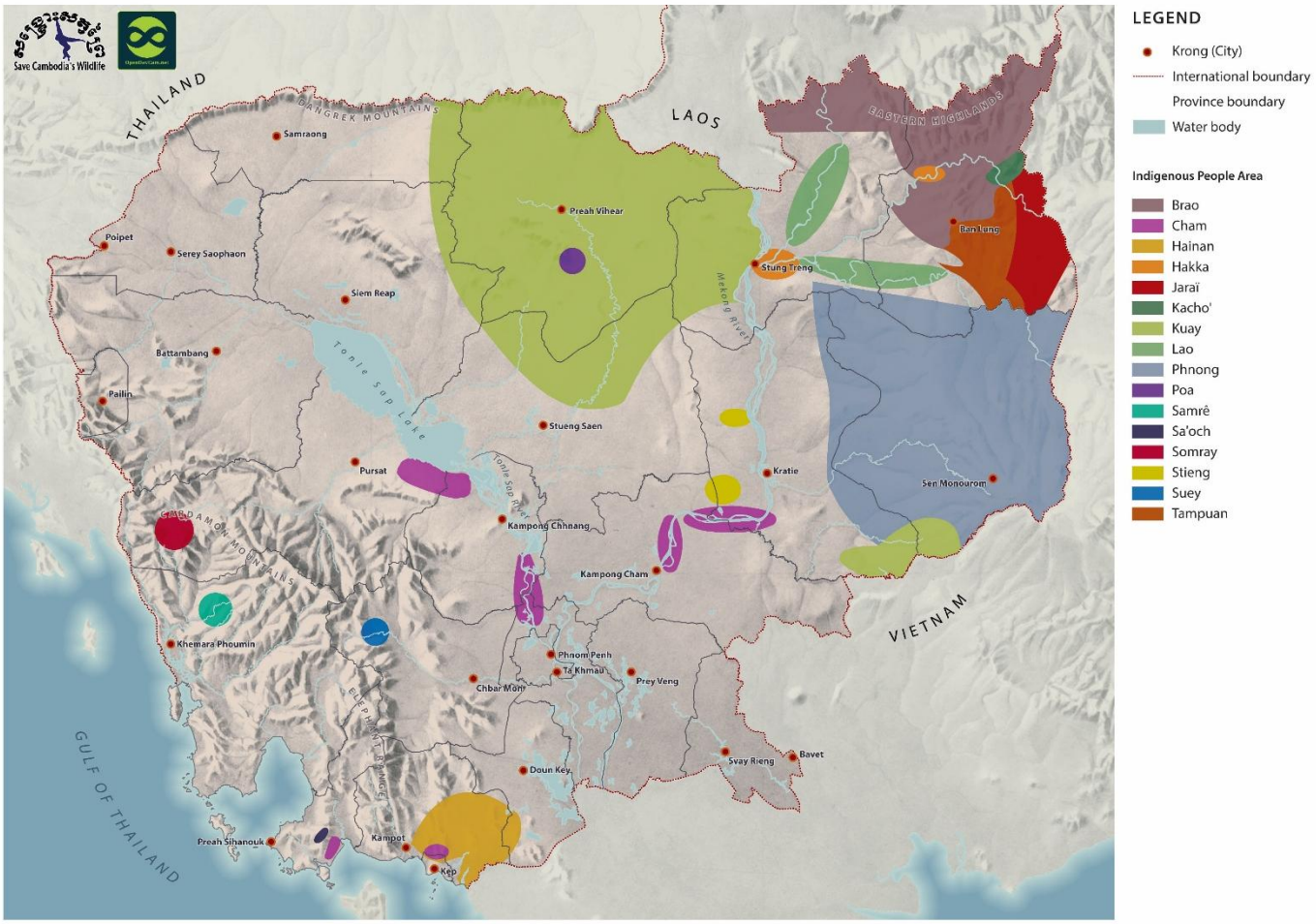
through social welfare. It is rooted in the Buddhist practice of collecting donations to give away to those who are unwell. In some communities this has been adapted outside of religious organisations, and village chiefs have become the distributors of resources to those in need (Kobayashi, 2020). Cambodian villagers are actively engaging in re-building the social life after their nation's devastating conflict. The example of sângkeahăh goes beyond familial obligations and suggests the presence of deep inter-connections between Cambodian people. These socially constructed patterns resemble a new way forward for Cambodian society, as well as a remembrance of traditional culture, and pre-war ways of being (Brehm, 2021).

Cambodia's diverse population contains groups defined by their ethnic or gender identities, geographic locations (urban or rural), income level, and age or sexual orientation. This amalgamation of contexts and groupings defines the nation's social cohesion, shared sense of trust, and peace amongst its people (Future Forum, 2023). For example, Cambodia is home to many indigenous people groups who claim ethnic identity through a sense of belonging to the land. This is highlighted in Figure 3.1 through the diverse list of indigenous people groups who reside within Cambodia (Open Development Cambodia, 2020). Some efforts have been attempted to better include indigenous voices in political and economic spheres and protect their rights to collective land ownership. However, the national identity of Cambodia is predominately Khmer-centric, and Khmer is recognised as the official language. Indigenous groups are often dissatisfied with the economic and political structures in Cambodia which further marginalises them through land conflicts, deforestation, and loss of traditional livelihoods (Future Forum, 2023). Similarly, there is a shortage of social and public services in rural areas, and the welfare of rural communities often falls to neighbours or

other family members (Kobayashi, 2020). Support and protection from those with higher social status is conditionally provided through expectations of loyalty or political support (Beban, 2021).

Urban tensions exist between generational groups due to desires for greater diversification. The youth populations are seeking to celebrate and build a Cambodia where society reflects the diversity of the population, although older generations are holding on with a tight grip to traditional mindsets (Future Forum, 2023). This traditional view of success has been measured by level of education, job status, and income which has primarily focused on boys and men (Cambodian Center for Human Rights, 2019). In Cambodian law women are guaranteed equal right to work and labour opportunities, although the perceptions of women's roles have resulted in few women holding senior political or business management positions (Overton & Chandler, 2023). In 2020 only 15% of the National Assembly in Cambodia was comprised of women (Future Forum, 2023, p. 25). These patriarchal structures perceive men's power as superior, and women are expected to manage the household, make decisions for the family, and maintain family harmony (Beban, 2021; Ledgerwood, 1995). Therefore, the hierarchical structures of Cambodia's culture are layered. There are different privileges and access to decision-making powers at different levels of society.

Figure 3.1: *Map of Indigenous People Groups in Cambodia (Open Development Cambodia, 2020)*



3.3 Development, Aid and NGOs in Cambodia

Cambodia's NGO landscape has been shaped by the nation's unique histories. The years of civil war and conflict, followed by UNTAC, and the now electoral authoritarian regime have restricted NGOs' operational space (Vuković & Babović, 2018). The capacity of the Cambodian government has increased greatly since the 1990s, although there is still a reliance on the capacity development and expertise of NGOs (Edwards Jr. & Brehm, 2016). There are an estimated 3,400 NGOs operating in post-conflict Cambodia, which places it among the highest density of NGOs in the world (Edwards Jr. & Brehm,

2016; Frewer, 2013). Most of these NGOs depend on the funding of foreign donors (Springman et al., 2022), and half of Cambodia's annual budget is comprised of international aid (Edwards Jr. & Brehm, 2016). Cambodia has become an electoral authoritarian state, dependent on aid, that is sustaining systems of patronage through threats of violence and harassment of political opposition (Lyne, 2023). This creates a difficult climate for NGOs to operate within. The Cambodian government's zero-tolerance of political criticism has restricted the ability of NGOs to challenge human-rights, corruption, and sustainability issues (Edwards Jr. & Brehm, 2016). A study by Frewer (2013), a director of a community development NGO, explained the tension faced between advocating for Cambodian people and maintaining positive relationships with government officials:

> They have a land problem - they have been fighting very hard. At first, we could support them by mediating between them and the local authorities. But now it feels like there's not much I can do. I can't push the authorities because we are a non-political organization (Frewer, 2013, p. 104).

This indicates that the Cambodian government depends on foreign aid, but NGOs must comply with government values and attitudes. Springman et al. (2022) describes this as the difference between service delivery and advocacy work. NGOs working in the health care and education sectors are often favoured and considered government partners. However, NGOs engaging on behalf of individuals and communities in advocacy work, are considered adversaries and face harassment by local officials (Springman et al., 2022). This makes empowering marginalised groups in Cambodia difficult, and NGOs must manoeuvre this tension with caution to maintain legitimacy (Frewer, 2013).

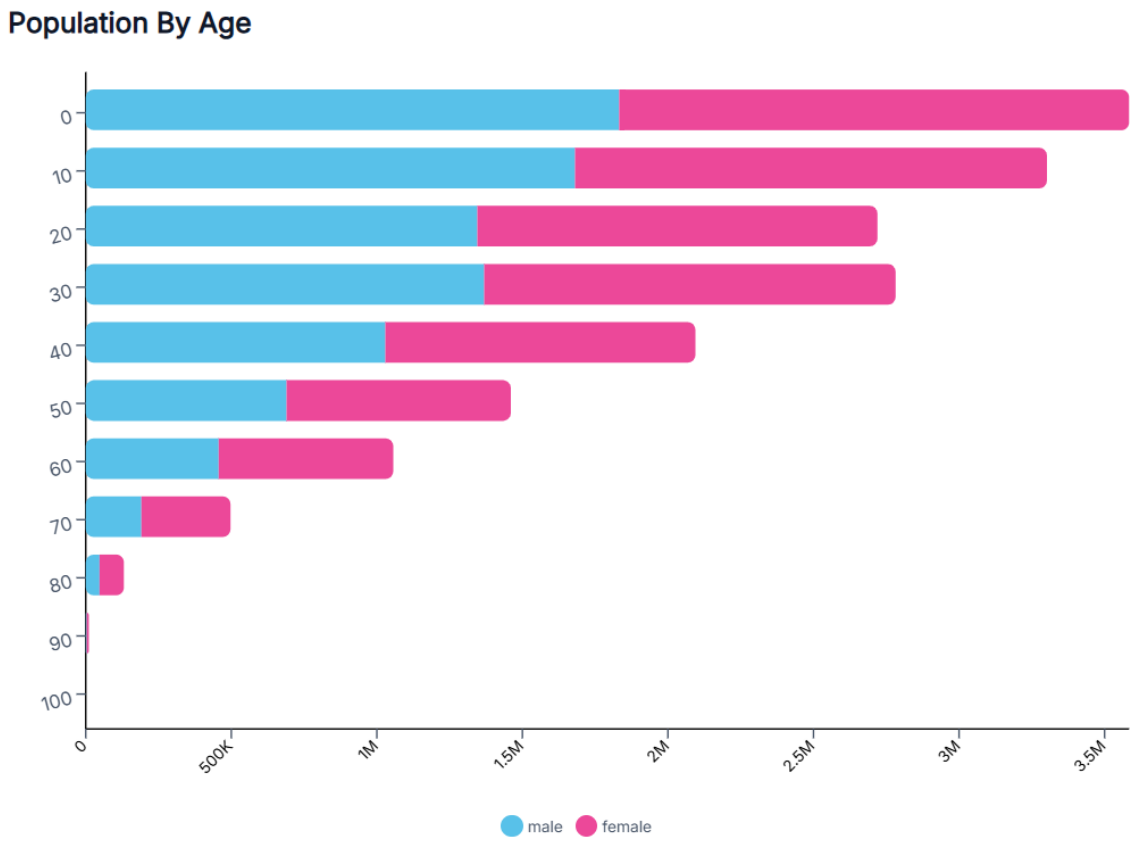
Cambodia has shown a commitment to partnership with the SDGs through strategies to prosper people and planet. Cambodia's priorities are strengthening climate resilience, and advancing human development (ADB, 2024a). Cambodia is extremely vulnerable to climate change, through risks from flooding, droughts, and temperature rises (UNDP, 2025). Addressing issues of sustainable development and climate change are of significant concern to Cambodia. The SDGs have been localised by the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) in 2018, and an 18th goal has been added in the Cambodian Sustainable Development Goals (CSDGs) framework 2016-2030 (Ministry of Planning, 2022). The National Strategic Development Plan 2019-2023 was adopted into law in 2019 to action sustainable development strategies and "to reach the status of an upper-middle income country by 2030" (RGC, 2019, p. cover page). The additional SDG 18 sets out to "end the negative impact of Mine/ERW and promote victim assistance" (Ministry of Planning, 2022, p. 39). This goal includes targets to completely clear the country of mines and Explosive Remnants of War (ERWs), reduce the number of casualties to less than 10 per year, and to improve life for landmine victims by 2030 (Ministry of Planning, 2022).

3.4 Young People in Cambodia

In 2023, the population of Cambodia was estimated to be 17.1 million people (ADB, 2024b). According to World Population Review (2025) data on the age distribution of Cambodia's population, approximately 70% of the population is under the age of 30 (para. 1). Figure 3.2 displays the age demographics of the population in ten-year age groupings. Anyone aged 15 to 30 are defined by the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport (MoEYS) as youth in Cambodia (Chansambath & Chantarasingh, 2017),

which incorporates more people than defined by the UN. It is unlikely Cambodians in their late-20s and 30s would consider themselves as youth. It is also interesting to consider this definition from a political perspective. In the 2013 elections in Cambodia, there were only three representatives elected to parliamentary roles who were under the age of 35 years. The RGC is criticised for intentionally excluding youth from political roles (Chansambath & Chantarasingh, 2017). As mentioned earlier, young people are seeking change and diversity within their nation. Political resistance in these areas could mean that raising the age parameters of youth is a device to keep younger generations excluded from decision-making power. Evidence suggests that youth have limited access to policy development and political influence in Cambodia (UNDP, 2025). The large population of young people in Cambodia indicates a crucial opportunity to empower and develop the capacity of this national treasure and human potential. Young people have a significant influence on shaping modern cultures and societies, so it will be vital for Cambodia to consult and empower young people if they are seeking to reach their national goals for sustainable development and economic growth by 2030 (UNDP, 2025). The following sections will look at the spaces Cambodian youth are currently occupying, the existing opportunities for participation, and the barriers youth face to meaningful participation.

Figure 3.2: *Distribution of Cambodian Population by Age (World Population Review, 2025)*



3.4.1 Where are Young People Present in Cambodian Society

Youth are active members of Cambodian society and are taking steps to claim their rights to participate in various ways. Traditional spaces where youth are expected to be, are no different in the Cambodian context. Education is one space where young people are actively present. The 2016 education statistics state the number of schools in Cambodia was 12,505 across the whole Kingdom with just over three million students enrolled. Two million of those enrolments were at primary level, and about 825,000 enrolments at secondary level (MoEYS, 2016, p. 1). Around this time Cambodia had nearly achieved the goal of universal primary education, which may be an indicator for

the high enrolment rates at the primary level. There is a significant drop in secondary education enrolment rates (Sitha, 2016), and enrolment rates are not a reflection of the quality of education, attendance rates, or learning levels (Chansopheak, 2009). Overcoming the dropout rates in later school years, and multilingual education for indigenous populations have been areas of focus for educational improvements (Chhinh & Dy, 2009). Youth are also present in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). In 2014 there were 105 HEIs, with 66 of these privatised education options (Research Team in Cambodia, 2016, p. 45). Reforms and investment in HEIs contributed to achieving development goals, and the values of transparency and participation have been incorporated into Cambodia's National Development Plans 2014-2018 (Research Team in Cambodia, 2016). Higher education options have either focused on academic achievement or vocational training (Chealy, 2009). Youth in Cambodia perceive higher education as a gateway to future opportunities and desirable job prospects. There is a gender imbalance in the levels of education in Cambodia. In low-income households there is a higher chance young boys' education will be prioritised over their sisters. On average young women in Cambodia receive 1.2 less years of schooling than their male peers (United Nations, 2018, p. 26).

Young people are active members of their communities through volunteer spaces. Mutual assistance is a core value in Cambodian society and evidence of this dates to the 1970s before the Khmer Rouge. Original pioneers of volunteer spaces were pagoda associations (Mysliwiec, 2005). Buddhist monks' involvements are a traditional form of volunteerism in Cambodia. The rite of passage of young boys to join the monkhood is seen by society as a transition from youth to adulthood. Pagodas are sites of free education for young men, which reflects a form of non-monetary investment in the well-

being of youth in the community (Brehm, 2021). More recently there has been a resurgence of youth volunteering space in Cambodia. Through education, government, and NGOs, young people are encouraged to serve their communities (Mysliwiec, 2005). An example of this is the previous Prime Minister Hun Sen's youth volunteer programme. He rallied young people from university and temple associations to do the political work of land surveying. As volunteers and young people, they held a unique place in the community of being just outside political corruption, and fresh to be helpful and trustworthy workers. Additionally, the ruling CPP have control over well-known volunteer organisations in Cambodia such as Scouts, the Red Cross Youth, and many large youth associations (Beban, 2021). Currently, there are many volunteer work opportunities, although incentives are poor, and economic well-being to select unpaid work is a middle to upper-class luxury (UNDP, 2024)

Cambodian youth are also occupying spaces of diversity and claiming new territory for themselves. The LGBTQIA+ community in Cambodia are advocating for equal employment opportunities, legal protections and social diversity (Cambodian Center for Human Rights, 2019). LGBTQIA+ youth in Cambodia face pressures from challenges accessing education and employment, as well as discrimination and rejection by their peers and family members (APCOM, 2020). However, access to social media and increasing urbanisation has created spaces where youth can be confident to express themselves however they identify. Cambodian cities such as Phnom Penh and Siem Reap have been noted as places where the LGBTQIA+ community feels safer to socialise and are welcome (UNDP & USAID, 2014). Indigenous youth communities are also sitting in new territories as traditional livelihoods change. There are tensions of land inheritance in the north-east province of Ratanakiri, which is home to the Charay indigenous people

groups. In previous generations the youngest daughter was usually the one to inherit the family house and land, and in return she would have the responsibility of looking after her parents in their old age. Commercialisation of agriculture, land grabbing, and migration of Khmers has rapidly changed this system of Charay inheritance. The land loss and lack of state social infrastructures has flipped this traditional pattern of inheritance and care. Indigenous Charay young people are now forced to create space for new ideas, although they are hopeful that with openness to change the next generation will not face the same crisis (Beban & Bourke Martignoni, 2024).

Another marginalised community are young people with disabilities. There are several groups paving space for better inclusion and attitudinal changes towards people with disabilities. Some challenges faced by this community in Cambodia are amplified by poverty and economic inequalities. However, young people with disabilities, their families, and teachers are attempting to change the structural and social barriers through learning and policy changes (UNICEF, 2024). Cambodia Disabled Persons Organisation (CDPO) is one example of an organisation run by and for people with disabilities in Cambodia. Their strategy to bring awareness to the diversity of people with disabilities, seeks to include youth in social change. As a non-political agency, they can remain neutral in their efforts to support and inspire others in their work. CDPO hopes to continue to improve outcomes, inclusion, and accessibility for people with disabilities in Cambodia (CDPO, 2021).

3.4.2 Existing Spaces for Youth Participation in Cambodia

A key example of youth participation in Cambodia is positive action for climate change. The CSDG framework (Ministry of Planning, 2022) is a starting point for a nation that is highly susceptible to climate change disasters. Cambodian young people have expressed a strong desire to be at the forefront of environmental issues (UNDP, 2025). A recent UN report on Youth Engagement in Cambodia discovered three layers of climate change participation (UNDP, 2025). The first level is actions taken by the individual, such as sustainable lifestyle adjustments. Young people are reducing their environmental impact through waste reduction, tree planting, and clean-up campaigns. At a collective level, Cambodian youth are raising awareness of climate issues and promoting innovative solutions. The highest level that Cambodian youth were engaging with climate action was through systematic policy solutions. However, the number of youth participating at this level was significantly lower. Various forums and conferences have been established in Cambodia for youth to discuss issues of sustainability and climate change. Through these platforms Cambodian youth have reached both national and international spaces for discussions on climate change (UNDP, 2025).

Cambodian youth are participating in the entrepreneurial and social business landscapes. These youth are imaginative and passionate and able to harness technologies to advocate for solutions to social problems (Mysliwiec, 2005). An investigation into educational initiatives in agricultural innovations, found that young people were interested in participating in the sector when their perceptions were changed (Alrawashdeh et al., 2022). This process involved re-connecting young people with the local environment and understandings of food systems, rather than pressuring them into agriculture as a future career (Alrawashdeh et al., 2022). This education

strategy addressed the barrier that some rural youth face when accessing specialised knowledge and skills training (McAslan Fraser & McLean Hilker, 2012). Youth have been able to rediscover agriculture through a lens of innovation, technological advancement, inclusion, and sustainability. It is hoped that this reframing will help to maintain the longevity of youth participation in the agricultural sector in Cambodia (Alrawashdeh et al., 2022).

3.4.3 Barriers to Participatory Approaches for Cambodian Youth

The social, economic, and political climate in Cambodia poses challenges to the participatory space for young people. As mentioned, the restrictive political environment is not conducive to a participatory environment. Cambodian youth have expressed their lack of voice in political matters, and the inability to speak freely on issues of importance to them (UNDP, 2024). Young people are afraid of the consequences of advocating on contentious issues such as corruption, or environmental degradation (Chansambath & Chantarasingh, 2017). The poor quality of education in Cambodia and young people's lack of knowledge and skills is a challenge. Education is foundational for knowing how to navigate political environments and employment opportunities (UNDP, 2024). This is further exacerbated in rural areas where access to information is even more restricted, and school drop-out rates are high (Chansambath & Chantarasingh, 2017). Young people's health and mental well-being are also barriers to their participation. Youth health issues in Cambodia are tied with drug use and alcohol consumption. Youth have disclosed psychological violence and a lack of mental-health services as significant challenges (UNDP, 2024). This is closely linked to the resource and economic inequalities that youth experience when trying to access empowerment

processes (Chansambath & Chantarasingh, 2017; UNDP, 2024). Some children and youth are further restricted by social issues such as child labour and marriage. This involves hazardous activities or long hours of laborious work in factories or construction (ILO, 2010; UNDP, 2024).

The hierarchical submission of young people to senior generations is culturally embedded in Cambodian society. Children and young people in Cambodia are expected to respect the authority of parents, teachers, and elders by conforming and not asking questions (Chealy, 2009; Mysliwiec, 2005). Parents often discourage their children's participation in community or political development. Some parents even regard young people's participation a waste of time and money. This can be reinforced by community leaders and village elders who believe that youth have nothing to contribute and are lacking knowledge on community issues (Puthkalyaney, 2017). Young people in Cambodia, as within any society, also face personal challenges that may inhibit their participation (UNDP, 2024). Self-confidence and motivation are struggles faced by young people that may exacerbate feelings of inadequacy. Therefore, there are many barriers Cambodian youth experience that make participation in decision-making processes difficult. There are layers of exclusion from social and culturally embedded issues to the wider political landscape. However, as seen in the previous sections, there are a lot of Cambodian youth who are actively pursuing change for their future.

3.5 Concluding Thoughts

The era of Cambodian history before the Khmer Rouge reflects a society eager to learn, develop, and grow. Prior to the overflow of conflict into Cambodia's borders in the 1960s and the civil war that followed, the society of Cambodia was ahead of its time. The

urban, rural divide was evident, although each context reflected an innovative people (Ledgerwood et al., 1994). Histories of Khmer civilisation are still spoken of with pride by the Khmer people (Peang-Meth, 1991). There are still remnants of fear and distrust due to the collective trauma and memory of the painful Khmer Rouge histories. This has embedded itself into Cambodia's political and social structures through systems of patronage and electoral authoritarian rule (Beban, 2021). Buddhist philosophies maintain hierarchical power structures and unquestioned authority (Frewer, 2013). It is in this environment that Cambodian young people have been paving the way for greater participation and inclusion. The diverse young people represented in Cambodian society include indigenous youth, LGBTQIA+ young people, young people with disabilities, rural, and urban dwellers. These diverse voices are not only advocating to be heard, but will be the future of the nation. That is why youth participation is so important in Cambodia where youth people are the majority.

CHAPTER FOUR:

Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This research aimed to understand opportunities for youth participation within Cambodian NGOs. The chosen methods reflect the importance of participation as one of the key principles in a rights-based framework. Chapter 2 on youth participation further describes the rationale for taking an RBA in this research context. The method design took place in consultation with Cambodian NGO staff, my research supervisors, as well as conducting a review of the literature and drawing on my own experience working with youth for over a decade. The exact outcomes of this process and the practical methods chosen are outlined later in this chapter. These methods were selected due to their flexibility and the need for participants to have the ability to self-determine their level of engagement. The chosen participatory methods were designed to be age and culturally appropriate and create options for youth participants. More structured or quantitative methods were not suitable in this context as they do not allow youth to engage on their own terms or have the flexibility to share their ideas freely. The semi-structured interviews and creative workshops allowed space to be given to relationship building and for participants to share on topics that they felt strongly about within the context of youth participation in Cambodia. These methods were conducted during five weeks of fieldwork in Cambodia in July-August 2023.

4.2 Methods

This section outlines the chosen methods and the justification for their selection.

4.2.1 Semi- Structured Interviews

The first method was semi-structured interviews which were conducted with NGO staff in both Phnom Penh and Siem Reap. Through previous connections in both cities, I was able to contact most partnering NGOs prior to entering the field. This allowed me to send some information about the research and relay expectations ahead of time. The choice for semi-structured interviews was based off their flexibility and the opportunity to allow the interviewee to speak openly about what was important to them (Davidson, 2012). The purpose of the interviews was to gain insight into how Cambodian NGOs approached youth participation and whether they had existing participatory policies and procedures. In this way the semi-structured approach made it possible to ask both pre-prepared questions and open questions as lead by the subjects brought up by the interviewee (Walliman, 2016). This was necessary in this research context as there was limited knowledge in existing literature about youth participation approaches within Cambodia specifically. As an outside researcher with only some lived experience and insight from the literature I needed to assume that the participants were the experts on their own culture and context. Therefore, open questions were able to guide conversations, and participants could answer to their context and expertise.

4.2.2 Creative Workshops

Conducting research with young people requires thought out methods that approach participants with sensitivity and respect. It was important that the methods

chosen when talking to youth allowed them to feel confident and have some control over the research process (Scheyvens et al., 2014). For this reason, creative workshops were chosen. The structure of these workshops allowed participants to give feedback in a group or individually, as well as presenting options or variations on activities so that youth could choose how to engage and present their ideas. The creative element of the workshops included drawing, sculpting, and acting, which allowed for young people to share their experiences and worldview through alternative methods of communication. Arts-based methods are participatory, empowering, and provide opportunities for imaginative responses. These non-verbal forms of expression aimed to be inclusive of youth who may not have been able to read or write, and to allow for youth to bring up difficult topics or ideas as they did not have to directly discuss them in front of their peers or the NGO staff if they chose not to (Woodgate et al., 2023). Creative methods were also helpful to communicate with participants despite the language barrier between Khmer and English (Hickey-Moody et al., 2021). The intention was to create an environment where youth could choose how to use their voice and felt comfortable to be honest and open in their responses. As an outside researcher, taking the time to get to know the young people was an important step in the process. Arts-based methods also were an appropriate choice as they have been known to help reduce any power imbalances between the young people and researchers. In previous studies, some young people expressed that the opportunity to engage with research in a creative way helped to promote their self-confidence and improve their social and emotional well-being (Woodgate et al., 2023).

It was also important to choose locations that were familiar to the youth, including spaces that they already felt comfortable and safe. The NGOs who work with the young

people who participated in this research gave insight into suitable venues where they met regularly and that were welcoming and youth friendly. However it was important that a distinction was made between the hosting organisation and the research so that expectations were clear (Hickey-Moody et al., 2021). As outlined in Table 4.1 which provides the timeline of the workshops, there was time planned for group discussion and sharing of ideas as young people felt led to speak. Giving young people time to explain their creations was important to gain deeper insight into their ideas and thoughts for community development. As well as group sharing, young people had time to write an explanation of their creations. Time was planned at the end of the workshop to encourage participants and show appreciation for their time and ideas. This was also accompanied by thank you cards and some food and drink.

4.2.3 Field Journal and Observations

It was recommended that I keep a field journal in addition to the above methods which directly interact with participants. Journalling helped me to reflect on personal thoughts and to keep a record of other observations or conversations that related to this research while in Cambodia. I found it useful to note descriptions of locations where NGOs were based or other spaces where Khmer young people were present. Observing research settings built context around collected data and activities or behaviours as they occurred (Schensul & LeCompte, 2013). The main goal of the field notes was to keep an updated and accurate account of interactions, conversations, events, organisations, and locations while in Cambodia rather than relying on notes from memory.

Table 4.1: *Plan for Workshops with Youth*

ACTIVITY	DETAILS	TIMEFRAME
Welcome & Introductions	- Introduce researcher & assistant. - Share about the project & what data will be used for. - Explain ongoing consent. - Participants introduce themselves.	10mins
Icebreaker Game	- Game: Fruit salad	10mins
INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY Part 1: Draw, create or build an idea you have that could help or benefit your community in some way. Part 2: Then write down why you built what you did & what would have to change for this to exist/barriers to realise your dream?	- Youth will choose a means to create something they would like to see in their community. - Explain that youth will be given the opportunity to share with the group what they have created and why (for youth that are not comfortable with public speaking, they may choose to write it down or work in pairs).	Part 1: 10-15mins for creating Part 2: 5mins to write notes 15-20mins for sharing
SPOT PRIZE	First person to bring me a….	1min
GROUP DISCUSSION POINT: Now that we have heard everyone's ideas – how do you feel about seeing them happen? Is that something you would be able to do? What kind of support would you need to make your ideas happen?	- Discussion time as whole group. - Flexibility here – if whole group discussion is a bit awkward, split into pairs or threes and jot down some ideas, and then share back to group.	10mins
GROUP ACTIVITY In groups of 3-4 youth can choose to act out a play or create a poster for what it would be like *"in an ideal world where youth are decision-makers".*	- Youth choose which way they will present their ideas & then will have opportunity to present to the group. - Can use props or notes to present.	20mins to create 20mins group presentation time
SPOT PRIZE	Quiz question (test their memory)	1min
GROUP DISCUSSION POINT: Were there any commonalities between groups with what it would look like for young people to be decision-makers? What might need to change for this to be possible? In what areas do you already feel that you have a voice in decision making in this NGO/your community?	- Discussion time as whole group. - Flexibility here – if whole group discussion is a bit awkward, split into pairs or threes and jot down some ideas, and then share back to group.	10mins
FINAL THOUGHTS, CONSENT & THANK YOU	- Youth have space to share any final thoughts or come talk to researcher after. - Youth can consent again they are fine with what was shared being used in research. - Thank you for participating!	10mins
CONCLUSIONS: FOOD & SOCIAL TIME		15-20mins

The notes were recorded with an awareness that my own bias and perspectives influenced how I interpreted Cambodia life and culture. This was done by continuously questioning my own worldviews while taking notes on events as they occurred (Schensul & LeCompte, 2013). The research in each field location occurred over several weeks which gave time for an approach of observing from a distance with some opportunities for more participatory observations when involved directly with activities or programmes at the NGOs. The combination of these approaches meant it was possible to access moments or interactions that would have not been visible to the public, as well as observe contextual data unnoticed by research participants (Schensul & LeCompte, 2013).

4.3 Data Collection

To ensure this research was participatory and that it engaged with Cambodian young people in their own contexts and communities, it was necessary to travel to Cambodia. This section will outline where the field research took place and what this cross-cultural process entailed.

4.3.1 Fieldwork and Locations

The field research took place over 31 days during the months of July and August 2023. To gain perspectives of different youth and NGOs working in Cambodia I visited two different cities in Cambodia. The first was Phnom Penh where interviews took place with staff from five different NGOs and one Korean development studies student who has a close relationship with Green Bethel School which is a predominately Korean run

NGO near the Dangkao Landfill. Some time was spent at the beginning of the research process to reassimilate into Cambodian culture and learn how to navigate my way around this large citySome NGOs were working directly with young people and others were international donor NGOs who provided support, training, and oversight for local NGOs. An outline of each NGO can be found later in this chapter.

The next location was a six-hour bus trip north to Siem Reap, the home of Angkor Wat and a popular destination for tourists visiting the region. The impact of COVID-19 lockdowns and the global travel restrictions were much more evident in Siem Reap city, which had been reliant on the income provided by tourism. Large resorts and hotels sat empty with 'For Lease' signs, and the large 'Old Market' which sold souvenirs, clothes, shoes, and Khmer specialty foods, was only half filled with stall owners. It felt as though there was an air of desperation in the voices of the sellers and the independent tuktuk drivers, "please help, please buy from me." It appeared that the local population in Siem Reap had not been adequate to sustain businesses and shops through the pandemic.

It was in Siem Reap that research was conducted with University of the Nations (or also known as Youth with a Mission – YWAM) Siem Reap at two of their village programmes. The first was about thirty minutes out of the city in Leang Dai district behind the Angkor Wat National Park area, also known as Apsara land. In this village, they ran predominately English lessons with the help of the Khmer team leader who oversaw the programme. While I was there, they had a Brazilian woman helping, and three other Khmer youth, who came straight from their own studies to volunteer teaching. They had classes for children depending on their level of English. Youth from the village also came here in the evening after government school to learn English, so I was given this time slot to run the first workshop. As this programme was in a rural area

the facilities were much more traditional. A large wooden building on stilts hosted two classrooms upstairs and one large open-air classroom downstairs. This building was painted bright blue which was a distinction from the other brown wooden buildings in the village. In the area next to the building sat a well-used colourful playground. When we arrived, we parked the car next to a lady running a small shop and then walked the rest of the way from the main road, into the village. The path was very muddy and flooded, and afterwards my shoes had a thick coating of clay mud. During rainy season this road becomes dangerous even on a motorbike. Upon arrival students rushed to greet us and many were scattered around playing games and badminton.

The second workshop took place in Pouk district around forty-five minutes by tuktuk from Siem Reap city. Once off the main highway, the village roads were also very muddy after the heavy rain recently. While waiting for my friend and the programme leader in this area to arrive, I watched many motorbikes struggle to cross a particularly boggy section of the road. This area hosted the base of this organisation. Many international staff left during or after the pandemic and they no longer have a base in the central city. The building was named 'Blue School' due to its bright blue exterior walls. It had a section of land in front that hosted this large building for teaching as well as bunkrooms for hosting staff and visiting outreach teams. They are reclaiming the land in the front and the day I was visiting the clay had not yet been levelled. This meant we all had to navigate our way across the thick, muddy ground to get to the building. Watching the youth jump across to find dry land was like a high stakes game of hopscotch. Those who took a wrong step had to wash off the excess mud at a tap to the side of the building before entering the classroom. We ran the workshop downstairs in

the staff meeting room, which had windows overlooking the rice fields behind the building. This workshop in Pouk concluded my field research.

4.3.2 Recruitment of Participants

As recruitment took place from afar there was a reliance on friends and connections in country to assist with finding participants. The challenges of communication in a Global South country also had an impact on recruiting. A New Zealand friend who had lived in Phnom Penh for over ten years was helpful when connecting to NGOs who were working with young people. Through her established relationships with staff and founders, it was possible to connect for interviews. In several cases it looked like contacting with the NGO founders or conducting an interview with them first. Then further connections with other staff were made and interviews could be set up. In one instance I met with a previous mentee and colleague of my contact from New Zealand, who now works for a European funded NGO. He was able to connect me with a friend of his who was also working for a Swedish donor NGO. Despite attempting to organise and connect prior to arrival in the field it was difficult to allocate a specific time or finalise interviews until arrival in country. Once on the ground I was able to acquire a local sim. I also discovered that the Telegram messaging application was a common means of communication amongst Cambodians. This made it much easier to connect and directly contact participants who lived in Phnom Penh particularly.

The ability to share a more formal and detailed outline of the research project was often not possible until meeting with participants face-to-face. However, a full

explanation and opportunity to read the information sheet was provided before beginning interviews. All participants read and signed a consent form and were given time to ask questions if needed. The timeframe for field research also meant that there were no workshops with youth conducted in Phnom Penh. This is because of not having prior relationships with these NGO staff and limited time in the field to build connections. With more time in Phnom Penh there may have been opportunities to recruit youth participants and gather ideas there. All interview participants were purposefully selected based on common criteria (Meyer & Mayrhofer, 2022), such as their organisation's connection to youth, or their focus on community development. This meant that all participants could speak to the context of youth in Cambodia and their approaches to working with youth.

The recruitment process in Siem Reap was different as I had existing relationships and connections from previously living there. The interviewee in Siem Reap was a previous colleague who was then able to help recruit young people to participate in the workshops through the programme she runs. She also connected me with another staff who I had known earlier, and I was able to recruit participants in a village where their English programme runs. To avoid youth being coerced or specifically selected by NGO staff based on any internal bias, the information sheet was given to staff in advance and an explanation of the workshop activities. The invitation was then put out to youth leaders and students over the age of 16 within their programmes in two different villages. On the selected date, those who were interested to join came along to the workshop. Upon arrival there was an introduction, and participants were able to read the information sheet in their own language, ask questions, and had the option to opt-out before any consent forms were signed or activities began. Further explanation was

provided about the meaning of consent and what would happen with any information or ideas shared during the workshop. Consent forms in Khmer were signed by all participants wanting to continue with the workshop. It was then further explained that they might choose not to participate at any time if they choose not to engage in a particular activity. Throughout the workshop there was opportunity to ask questions and reminders that there was no obligation to continue. In the end, however, all the young people engaged with all the activities in both workshops to the level they were comfortable.

4.3.3 Research Assistance

The importance of having assistance in some capacity was established before leaving to conduct research. This decision was influenced by the contextual and cultural factors of conducting cross-cultural research as well as the need for translation in the field and post-data collection. Having a research assistant who is familiar with the culture, known and trusted by the community was also very useful (McLennan et al., 2014). However, because of some communication challenges, I ended up having a variety of assistance from different sources, rather than one designated research assistant. My friend in Phnom Penh assisted with document translation through her connections. In Siem Reap my old colleague was able to help with recruiting and translation. In each NGO staff assisted with translation where necessary, and the friend connections in both cities helped with cultural orientation and directed me as needed.

Assistance was also essential in supporting and advising me practically with travel and safety while in Cambodia (McLennan et al., 2014). The timeframe of this research

meant that this assistance solution was appropriate. It was important that I was flexible to local rhythms of time and communication. A small monetary contribution was given to my assistant in Siem Reap who helped with translation and workshops, and payment was also given to the helper who translated research documents while in Phnom Penh. Those who helped with translating the workshop data from youth also signed consent forms and understood the importance of maintaining confidentiality.

4.3.4 Interviews with Staff

The full list of interviews is indicated in Table 4.2 along with the organisations and justification for each interview. Some participants did not give consent to use the name of their organisation. Many of the interviews in Phnom Penh took place in cafes or coffee shops, which then often followed by an invitation to visit their organisation. I was able to see first-hand the work they were doing. The first NGO I visited was the Global Student Centre in the Khan Sensok (Sensok District) of the city which is near the University of Cambodia. This facility had a dining and café style area where the students come for meals. A smaller airconditioned room filled with couches had a stage, where I met with the staff. They explained this room housed their Sunday church services and was open for students to come to study or hang out during their breaks. To the side of these rooms were classrooms for teaching and attached to the building (although I only saw this from the outside) were several floors of dorm rooms which provided affordable accommodation for students who came to study in the city. The second NGO I was invited to visit was FLAME Cambodia. Their facility in the city was a three-story building with classrooms on each level, plus offices, and a kitchen area where students hang out and eat noodles before and after class. I was able to visit FLAME on two occasions, the

first to observe their LAMP programme which is leadership and life skills for young adults and university students on a Saturday morning. On that Saturday they had completed their module on identity, and I was able to listen to the students' presentations and hear some of their stories. The second visit was a Wednesday evening when their PATH programme was running. These classes had two rotations of English and computer skills, that allowed students to attend both subjects.

The last site I visited was a bit further out of the city to Green Bethel School. This was founded by a Korean NGO who saw that children in the villages surrounding the Dangkao Landfill were not able to attend school. This location was approximately thirty minutes out of central Phnom Penh. The extent of poverty in this area and the distrust of outsiders meant that they had to first build trust and strengthen relationships with these villagers. I was shown around the school and surrounding village area. I was able to see that the villagers and children were very open and friendly. I was told this was not always the case. The facilities provided by the school included education, a small pharmacy with basic health care, provision of food for the students, and a church. These resources had helped reinforce the positive relationships with the community. A five-minute tuktuk trip from the edge of the village is the base of Good Link Centre. This was another Korean initiated NGO that was not specifically youth focused, although they are renting to buy electric tuk-tuks to drivers. These drivers will then own their own 'E-tuktuk' to use for their work and earn a living. The plan was also to start a youth-run social enterprise to offer skills training and employment opportunities from the Good Link Centre's hub. This was to establish an alternative to working long hours on the old landfill. Youth are often not able to attend school because of work on the landfill. I was told young people had expressed concerns about leaving their village to work in the city

centre. Therefore, the short journey to the Good Link Centre provided a compromise for youth to earn money while also being able to attend school. In Siem Reap only one interview was conducted with a previous colleague. She gave an overview of the organisation now and what kinds of work they were doing with youth. She also gave insight into the locations for workshops. This time with her was also used to go over the plan for workshops in person and discuss logistics which was beneficial.

Table 4.2: *List of Interviewees*

INTERVIEWEE	LOCATION OF INTERVIEW	NGO	REASON FOR INTERVIEW
Participant 1	Brown Coffee – TTP (Phnom Penh)	Prefers not to be mentioned European donor NGO	Participant 1 represented a donor NGO staff member who oversees rehabilitation and restoration for Khmer society following the Khmer Rouge genocide and civil war. The organisations they support work across generations and encourage youth to take the lead in many aspects of this peace keeping process.
Participant 2	Coffee Culture (Phnom Penh)	ERIKS Development Partner	Interviewee 2 was referred by Participant 1 as they were connected through previous employment. ERIKS Development Partner was founded by youth and is a global donor organisation that directly supports NGOs working the areas of child and youth rights and participation. This interview provided extensive insight into the youth participation landscape in Cambodia.
Participant 3	Brown Coffee – TTP (Phnom Penh)	FLAME Cambodia	Participant 3 is the founder of FLAME and provided insight into the vision and mission of FLAME Cambodia. S also invited me to visit their organisation and referred to other staff for interviews.
Participants 4 & 5	Global Student Centre (GSC) (Phnom Penh)	Global – Phnom Penh	Participants 4 (director) and 5 were staff both in leadership and administrative roles. They were able to provide an overview of Global's work and their engagement processes with youth.
Participant 6	GSC (Phnom Penh)	Global / Child Care Plus (CCP)	Participant 6 is in a management role for CCP which provide holistic support for children in poverty in several communities in Phnom Penh province. They have an intergenerational approach that empowers children/youth as well as their parents, family and community.
Participant 7 & 8	FLAME & Viking House (Phnom Penh)	FLAME Cambodia	This interview with participants 7 & 8 was informative to understand FLAME's youth programmes and how they were developed in partnership and consultation with young people. Part of this time involved a tour of FLAME's PATH programme for youth.
Participant 9	Green Bethel School & Good Link Centre (Phnom Penh)	Green Bethel School & Good Link Centre	Participant 9 was an unexpected participant that I met by chance while in Phnom Penh. She had conducted research very similar to this prior to COVID-19 and had returned to continue study and found a social enterprise. Upon invitation participant 9 showed me around the village and NGOs she has partnered with and shared about their work with children and the surrounding communities. Her focus is on youth empowerment and providing youth with opportunities away from the Dangkao landfill.
Participant 10	Cha Meow (Siem Reap)	Youth with a Mission (YWAM) – University of the Nations Siem Reap (UofN Siem Reap)	YWAM is a global organisation that offers various training schools for youth as well as offering education and community support in many Global South countries including Cambodia. Both the workshops were conducted within communities YWAM Siem Reap is working with. Participant 10 provided an overview of her current ministries, and we were able to discuss the plan for workshops.

4.3.5 Workshops with Youth

There were two workshops conducted with youth in two different districts within Siem Reap Province. The first was in Leang Dai district with 13 young people invited through the staff leading the education programme in this village. Most youth participants were volunteer teachers and students at the language school aged between 16-17 with one aged late 20s early 30s. All participants were female except for one male student. The workshop plan outlined in Table 4.1 was followed with the exception that the spot prizes became more of a quick quiz question due to the space in the classroom not allowing participants to get up quickly to bring forward items. There was also limited time as some participants came late because it was exam season at the time and students were finishing school later than usual. To avoid keeping them too late into the evening we skipped the initial icebreaker game but maintained time to do a round of names and introductions. Time was also spent with some of the volunteer teachers in their break between classes which gave opportunity to get to know them and learn about their interests and motivations for helping. In this workshop all participants chose to conduct the individual activity alone and three young people came up to share their posters and creations on their ideas for community development. They pushed for extra time to write up their ideas, as the five minutes designated was not enough. We ended up spending about fifteen minutes on writing explanations as requested by the youth. The group then split into three groups all choosing to practice and present a skit on their interpretation of Cambodian society if youth were leaders. All groups incorporated humour and focused on similar subjects of prioritising education and the lack of intergenerational support for youth. The social time at the end involved food and thank you cards with gifts from New Zealand which the youth accepted. Some young

people stayed around to talk more with me at the end. Many youth stated they would happily come again another day if I needed anything further for my research and were happy to stay later than planned. Overall, the workshop ran for approximately two and a half hours once all the youth had arrived, and the consent process was explained with space for questions.

The second workshop was in Pouk district at YWAM's Blue School which is down the road from another English language school and children's programme. Two of the staff from this ministry attended and one other staff who I knew previously assisted with translation. The other attendees were all volunteer youth teachers at the English school. This group included five male youth and nine females who were, to the best of my knowledge, between the ages of 16 to 30. However, there was some confusion when emphasising the importance of participants being over the age of 16. In the recruitment process in Pouk this specification may have been muddled as the staff here did not want to exclude any of their volunteers. The workshop plan was followed similarly to the first workshop. The icebreaker game was not possible as many participants came late after teaching. Priority was instead given to introductions and questions about the consent and research process. Spot prizes were given to correctly answered quick fire quiz questions to liven up the group. All participants chose to work individually on the first task with five youth choosing to share their ideas with the whole group. Three groups were formed for the group activity. All groups chose to present a skit on different interpretations of the question "what it would look like if youth were leaders in Cambodia?" The groups covered topics around care for the environment, support from teachers and family, and quality of education. All participants engaged in the skits, which was followed by a time of acknowledgment with food and small gifts. Both

workshops added value to this research as they gave space for youth to openly share and express ideas and suggestions on issues that were of importance to them. The excitement from both groups to continue beyond the designated time and the thoughtfulness that went into their responses and creations indicated that these youth valued their voices and opportunities to use them (Guest et al., 2012).

4.3.6 Audio recordings and Data Collation

Audio recordings were made with consent from participants of all the interviews and the in-person translations during the workshops. These were transcribed after leaving the field and grouped into locations and organisations. Summaries, dates, and any useful information was added to the transcriptions during data analysis to help with recalling context and distinctions between interviewees. A friend and assistant in Siem Reap translated the written descriptions that accompanied the individual ideas of young people in the workshops. These were then associated with their corresponding creations or posters and grouped based on which workshop they were from.

4.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis phase consisted of a reflective thematic analysis approach. As an outside researcher in Cambodia, awareness of my positionality was ongoing and continued into the analysis phase. This involved reflecting on my own assumptions and expectations that I may have held towards the data, and making a conscious effort to consider what I might be missing in the data, or any biases towards certain answers (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The process began with transcribing the audio recordings from

workshops and interviews, and organising the visual data with its corresponding translations from Khmer into English. This contributed to my familiarisation with the data which was followed by the systematic identification of codes. Code labels were created as sections of data related to the research question, or if they provided relevant cultural context. There was no pre-existing list of labels or codes, and some sections were not coded if they showed no relevance (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The digital software NVivo was used for the coding process due to its ability to store and organise data to be accessed from anywhere. Through NVivo, data files were uploaded and read thoroughly, and codes were labelled as sections of the data related to the research questions. Some sections generated more than one label, and others were outliers that pertained potential relevance to the research. These codes were then collated over time as similarities or connections were made between some code labels. As these groups of data came together it was possible to generate some early themes from the patterns that were forming. These were also informed by some additional insights from field journals and observations which helped to develop a picture around the dataset and code groupings. These themes were developed and reviewed further to tell a relevant and coherent story (Braun & Clarke, 2022). A reflective thematic analysis approach was chosen as it was flexible and accessible for the nature and size of the qualitative dataset that through coding allowed patterns and themes to emerge. The reflective element was also important for cross-cultural research. Themes emerged based on my engagement and understanding of the data. Therefore, it was important that I understood my own perspectives and the influence these had on coding and theme generation which is inevitably unavoidable (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

4.5 Ethical considerations

Ethical issues that could have arisen from this research were discussed extensively on multiple occasions with both of my research supervisors for this project. This process involved discussion of approaches to methodology and data collection and how to best undertake this with minimal harm to participants, myself (researcher) and the university. There were several meetings where discussions took place around working safely with young people and how to be inclusive while not further marginalising any vulnerable groups. The ethics process involved a thoughtful analysis of an extensive list of potential risks and issues. This was then analysed against the NZ Travel Safe guidelines and suggestions. Travel authorisation and insurance was a condition of ethic approval and had to be ensured before conducting research. Therefore, this section elaborates on some of these ethical dilemmas, and the precautions that were taken to minimise harm.

4.5.1 Mitigating the Ethical Challenges

The aim of this study was to explore the opportunities for youth participation and understand the way youth's contributions are considered important in decision-making processes. It was necessary to ensure that youth were consulted and had a voice in the outcomes of this research. Therefore, the age of participants was regarded in terms of ethics, local understandings of youth, and inclusivity of youth voices. The recruitment of participants for the workshops was promoted to young people between the ages of 16 to 30 years old. The focus on workshops within this age group was to provide a space for those who have often been excluded from participatory processes particularly in

Cambodian society and political spaces. Cambodian culture includes a hierarchy of respect and honour towards older generations. This can include those in positions of authority, higher socioeconomic status, religious figures or role models, and in some settings also foreigners. Respect and fear can influence youth participants answers or responses in activities (Frewer, 2013). This was a significant ethical challenge to overcome as I could not control how I was perceived by participants who had not previously met me. Steps to mitigate this looked like meeting in familiar places, working together in small groups, introductions, and getting to know each other at the start. This approach aimed to provide equal opportunities for all participants to have a voice and to avoid dominant voices taking over. Sharing in front of others was optional and when working together participants were able to choose their own groups with peers and friends. Local leaders and staff who had existing relationships with the young people helped to facilitate and translate the workshops. The interactions I observed between staff and the young people indicated that they a had fun and trusting relationship. The political context in Cambodia could also have been uncomfortable for participants to discuss. No questions directly addressed Cambodian politics. If participants brought up any political issues in the interviews, then this was kept anonymous. In workshops participants were reminded on multiple occasions to keep discussions private within this group.

4.5.2 Interactions with Participants

It was important to appropriately acknowledge participants for their involvement in my research. Reciprocity was essential to ensure that those who had given time and knowledge were recognised and felt their contributions were meaningful. As a visitor

and foreigner to Cambodia it was uncomfortable to acknowledge, although I knew from past experiences that sometimes you may be shown undeserved favour and respect for being an outsider. However, it was important that all participants did not feel they had to act in a particular way or treat me any differently to their Cambodian staff or their peers. I was particularly cautious of this potential favouritism when interacting with the younger participants in the workshops. As mentioned, I attempted to overcome this barrier by taking time to build rapport with participants. More specifically, this looked like sharing about our backgrounds, showing genuine interest in people's lives, or having fun and playing games.

Another important factor in how staff and participants responded to me as the researcher was most likely influenced by my Christian faith. Most of the NGOs I interacted with were of the same shared faith. This perhaps played a role in preconceived levels of trust despite never meeting previously. I did not explicitly state my religious beliefs or discuss them with participants, although those who already knew me would have known. In some instances, this was beneficial in creating an unspoken connection. Due to this, some participants may have felt safer discussing their beliefs or ideas freely without persecution. However, it did limit opportunities to speak to those from different religious backgrounds. If given the chance it would have added diversity of youth voices to this research. Not all youth who attended the NGOs' programmes would have necessarily been of the same faith as the staff. The majority of workshop participants indicated through their responses that they most likely shared the same faith. Considering that Buddhism is the dominant religion in Cambodia this was a limitation that will be discussed further later in this chapter.

As much as possible I tried to comply with Cambodian customs in particular showing respect to those older, greeting, and speaking to them in a way that acknowledged their experience and roles. Previously visiting and staying in villages in rural Cambodia gave me a small glimpse into what daily life is like in these communities. As a foreign researcher my understanding will probably never be complete. I approached each visit as an opportunity to learn and entered with humility to submit to their customs and culture. This looked like implementing the attitude outlined by Chambers (1983) of sitting, asking, and listening. I took the approach to act slow, not to rush participants, so they were free to express themselves in their own time. Having some questions pre-planned I was able to ask and listen, so that I could respect and learn from participants. This attitude also mimics Cambodia's culture as a relational society that values time taken to build trust. Leaving the field well was also as important as entering well, and will be an ongoing process beyond the immediate acknowledgement given to participants while in the field (Davidson, 2012).

4.6 Research Limitations

There were several limitations that restricted the findings or future application of my research. Some of these were external and were mitigated where possible through the ethics process and discussions with my research supervisors. Other limitations were realised after leaving the field or throughout the data analysis process. The external limitations were factors such as my personal positionality as the researcher, the timeframe for research, the political climate in Cambodia, and translation from Khmer language to English. My positionality impacted my results in several ways. I shared a Christian faith with most interviewees and workshop participants. This was not an

intentional decision, although the choice of organisations occurred as I networked through existing connections and friendships I had in the field. This was a benefit to some extent as it created an unspoken bond and understanding between myself and the research participants. However, at a wider societal level it means that my research has a bias towards ideas and perspectives shared from a Christian worldview. This is limiting when the dominant religion in Cambodia is Theravada Buddhism (Brehm, 2021), and some indigenous populations such as the Cham-Malays, are Muslim (Overton & Chandler, 2023).

Another limitation was the timeframe for research. Due to the scope of this research, I spent five weeks in the field across two locations, where I conducted eight interviews and two workshops. The data from these provided insight into my research questions and objectives. With more time it would have been possible to run another workshop in Phnom Penh. This data may have provided different youth voices from an urban context. The timeframe was also restrictive as I had to be patient and flexible to local rhythms. Despite attempts to connect ahead of the field and recruit workshop participants in advance, nothing happened in a hurry. Once I was present in person more participants joined, and workshop information was more easily communicated face-to-face.

My limited Khmer language skills meant I had to rely on local translators. This was successful so far as information sheets, consent forms, and workshop activities could be translated and better understood by participants. When discussing the workshop data some concepts were a bit lost in translation. The question of what it would look like if youth were leaders in Cambodia, was not fully understood or did not translate to Khmer in a meaningful way. This was not due to any lack of ability with the translators,

although it seemed that the question was understood differently to how I had intended. However, this was insightful, as I discuss further in Chapter 6. It may have revealed how the notion of youth being in leadership roles is a foreign idea in Cambodia. In hindsight, framing the questions differently may have helped with better understanding as well. The political climate in Cambodia also had to be considered. The current government is restrictive of free speech and participants may not have been willing to discuss some issues if they felt this could cause trouble for them (Chansambath & Chantarasingh, 2017). This limits the results as important subjects may not have occurred in the data.

Two other limitations were recognised in hindsight that may have impacted the results. The first was the range of ages in the second workshop. Participants in the second workshop ranged from age 16 to possibly mid-20s. For the scope of this research, all the participants were categorised as youth. However, having older young people in the group may have influenced younger voices willingness to share. This may have been more evident in the small group activity if older participants naturally took the lead and decided on the themes they discussed. It was challenging to include a diverse range of participants and to navigate the hierarchical social structures in Cambodia. The last limitation that arose in data analysis was that all except one of the participants in the first workshop were female. This was also identified when analysing the interview with the YWAM ministry leader, as she mentioned that they were having trouble with male students dropping out of school. Dropping out of school is part of a wider societal challenge in Cambodia at the moment as reported by the UNDP (2024). So, it was interesting that this came up in the data.

4.7 Concluding Thoughts

The process of forming and developing the methodology for this research was an enjoyable one. The methods were chosen to reflect an openness to learn and better understand youth participation in Cambodia. It is with fondness that I recount these processes that were set to engage and empower the youth who were involved. Extensive examination of the ethics process was undertaken prior to field work. Ethics approval was granted as low risk and the precautions taken resulted in a relatively smooth and successful time in the field. As much as possible I was prepared in advance to undertake this research. The realities of data collection and the wisdom gathered from participants will be discussed in the following chapters.

CHAPTER FIVE:

How do NGOs Envision Youth Participation in Cambodia?

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will analyse how NGOs in Cambodia are enacting youth participation, and what roles youth currently hold in their organisations, drawing primarily on my interviews with NGO staff. Throughout the duration of my field work in Cambodia I was encouraged to see from both formal interactions with NGOs and informal observations that genuine opportunities for youth to have meaningful participation in decision-making and leadership within their communities and organisations were present. At a national level Cambodia has experienced some significant political leadership changes following the most recent election in July 2023. From conversations with participants sensed a stirring of hope that younger leadership in the country may bring about changes. Many interviewees indicated that there is a tendency for the older generations to distrust Khmer youth and felt that this was a frustration for many young people who are ready to bring about change in their society and communities. I was encouraged to hear that NGO staff were enthusiastic about bringing young people to the forefront of discussions and decisions that impact their daily lives. This chapter will describe the challenges raised by interviewees that may be inhibiting or restricting the next generation of young people from being the decision-makers or having an active role in their communities.

5.2 How are Cambodian Community Development NGOs Engaging with Youth Participation?

I outlined in the methodology chapter several NGOs that allowed me to conduct interviews with their staff. In each interview, I have staff the space to describe in their own words what their role is in the organisation and what kind of work their organisation takes part in. The following descriptions are a combination of these responses from staff, observations and entries from my field journal, and documents from the NGOs. These responses and observations helped me to form a picture of what youth participation looks like in each NGO and what opportunities they provide for youth voice and youth as decision-makers. This section describes the vision and mission of the NGOs I met with and their approaches to working with youth.

5.2.1 FLAME Cambodia

FLAME Cambodia is a Phnom Penh based NGO employing around 29 staff with the mission to "Identify, grow and launch leaders" (FLAME Cambodia, 2020). In my interview with the FLAME founder and CEO she discussed the reasoning for starting another NGO in a country that is already over-saturated with organisations. She emphasised that the difference is not about what they were doing but why. In her words the "why" behind FLAME is that they believe "every child, no matter how disadvantaged or difficult their background, has the potential to be a nation changing leader" (FLAME CEO, 04/08/2023). I was told this is acted out in their mission to identify, grow and launch leaders, with the focus on identifying and attracting children of the urban poor to their programmes. The FLAME founder in our interview retold events where they had to

turn away several families from middle class or higher because they did not meet the requirements for entry to their programmes. According to FLAME's founder this is very important to the entire structure of their organisation because most of their staff have done the full circle journey: from being a child on a FLAME after-school programme, to a teenager at their PATH programme, and onto the LAMP leadership course. Then they became staff themselves and paid it forward to the next generation of children and youth at FLAME. She mentioned that because of their unique experiences staff can relate to the young people they are working with in ways that would not be possible for someone who has not shared similar life experiences. This journey was reflected in a story from an interview with a FLAME staff member who leads the PATH programme (Participant 7). She described her first experiences moving to the city from her village in the province and retold how the other staff member (who was a little older - Participant 8) used to come and pick her up on her bike and take her to FLAME programmes. She thought it was so strange that she was wearing a bike helmet. Despite this unusual occurrence she knew the FLAME staff member cared about her, and that she needed support as a newcomer to the city because she had once been in that position.

This character of FLAME carried over when I had the opportunity to observe some student presentations at the conclusion of one of their modules on the LAMP leadership programme. This is a programme run for young adults and university students. I saw firsthand the care and dedication from the whole staff team in the way they interacted with students and supported them to prepare for their presentations. There were students in attendance who had already completed their presentation the week prior but wanted to come anyway to support their classmates. An entry from my field journal

(05/08/23) depicts how moved I was by the support FLAME offers to young people wherever they are at. This was my comment on the presentation of one young person:

> It was his first *ever* time doing a presentation and he was the only one not to use slides but instead wrote on big sheets of paper. He shared that he moved around a lot growing up because he had a single mother who was running away. So, him and his siblings and his family didn't value education. When he found FLAME initially it was for the free soy milk and that he could bring leftovers back to his younger brother. Now he is studying at university and enrolled in their leadership programme (Field Journal, 05/08/23).

I observed another student share that she thought the opportunities at FLAME were too good to be true. I had the opportunity to hear and see the impact that FLAME has on the lives of some young people. It showed to me how they endeavour to fulfil their mission to treat every child and young person as a potential nation changer. This quote and observation from my field journal also indicates that they are managing to reach the urban poor. As I was told that staff share a similar background, therefore their experiences give them an understanding of what the young people's needs are and they can recognise that food is important for a poor child. By offering food or opportunities that seem to be too good to be true, it is possible to see how they are drawing in youth to care about getting an education and seek a better future for themselves.

In the interview with staff on the PATH programme it was evident that they seek to give leadership opportunities and decision-making influence to youth within their programmes. They told me how the PATH programme was formed to meet the needs of young people and that it was youth voices and ideas that shaped most of what PATH

looks like today. One staff member said she had students who were about to age out of their afterschool programmes coming to her and saying they wanted to keep studying, but they could not afford to pay for another school in the evening. Youth were busy during the daytime as they had to attend government school. This prompted staff to consider teaching in the evenings and she recalled how they would ask students what they wanted to learn. They received a resounding response for English and Computer classes. She said they went on to intentionally ask students what they wanted the PATH programme for teenagers to look like.

The evening classes accommodated to their daytime schedules, although the youth also wanted to have time for fun, time to connect with friends and maybe some more general knowledge teaching. I was told that they now have a youth club that runs on the weekends once a month where around 90-100 youth attend. I observed and was told in both interviews with FLAME's founder and the PATH leaders that FLAME is responsive to the needs of young people and flexible to adapt where possible. The PATH programme staff said that there are requests continuing to come in as youth build relationships and feel confident to share with them. These staff stated that they will continue to try their best to meet the needs and give youth a meaningful voice in the organisation.

5.2.2 Global Student Centre

For the interview with staff from Global Student Centre (Global) and ChildCare Plus (CCP) I was able to travel to their facility and meet with them in person at their youth space and offices. When first meeting with one of the directors at Global and another staff member, I was told the Student Centre hosts a social space, church, music

and language lessons, and a dormitory for university students at their location in Phnom Penh. They said the social area operates as a drop-in style space and is filled with games and entertainment as well as facilitating lunch and study areas for the nearby university students. I was told that the Student Centre began as a coffee shop where students could come to hang out or study. It has been operating for over eight years, and they have a team of six staff. The staff help to run the centre, church services on a Sunday, and look after the approximate one hundred youth who live in the dormitories. Global's staff informed me that they value helping young people get ahead and provide a safe space in the busy city. One of the directors said that students often come from poorer families, so they need a "safe place to stay in in Phnom Penh, to study. It does not matter in the first year, or the second year [whether] they can get a job, we still give them a place to stay in Phnom Pehn" (Global director, 09/08/23). The director described the emphasis to provide more than just a service to students during their studies and early working lives.

Global aims to offer opportunities for young people to serve each other and to have input in the functioning of the dormitory where they live. The director said that the students came up with the idea for a library in the dormitory so that they have a place to study. It was also the idea of the students to have a separate social space and room for church services. This became the room we were sitting in, that had air conditioning and comfortable couches and chairs. Staff said that they met regularly with the students to hear their ideas. In the interview they told me that they value getting young people involved. It was important that they provided opportunities for people to lead or serve one another so they could be connected and included. Under the same roof and umbrella as the Student Centre is the CCP programme. In an interview with a CCP leader

I was told that they respond in a holistic way to the needs of children in their focus communities. He mentioned that when supporting a child in education their site manager not only needed to consider the child, but that they also needed to work with the parents and school principal. This was to give that child the best opportunity to stay in school. He also said that because they work with children from a young age that they see the importance of long-term mentoring relationships:

> We need to follow up with them, okay so now, I can say like four years ago until now, [things are] much, much better, because we are not letting them get away even though they've done with grade 12. Like, they are done, but we are not like that. We have fellowship with them and also follow up with them. So now they are in year 1 year 2, and some kid graduate of college, but we still follow up with them, Telegram, messenger, phone (Interview with CCP leader, 09/08/23).

I observed that the unique partnership between Global based in the city and CCP working in more rural communities means that they have the opportunity to follow up and offer that ongoing relationship when possible. They are present in the same spaces as young people and can walk with them through different life stages.

5.2.3 University of the Nations Siem Reap, YWAM

Having previously worked for YWAM in Siem Reap I had some insight and existing relationships with the staff prior to interviews. YWAM is a globally connected NGO with several bases in Cambodia including the site that I had the opportunity to revisit in Siem Reap. Here they operate various projects with a focus on education and raising up the

next generations of young leaders in Cambodia. Their team of volunteer staff, many of whom themselves are between the ages of 12 and 30, are a mixture of international and predominantly Khmer individuals. In an interview with an old colleague who is still on staff, the Ministry leader described YWAM's vision "to raise up the next generation, like champion the youth. Raise up the youth and also want youth to be leaders in the future, or want the youth to be another generation, to raise up another generation" (YWAM ministry leader, 14/08/23). She went on to describe how this mission aligns with YWAM globally through the three main ways they put this vision into action. This is firstly, by serving the community; secondly by educating young people; and then by developing leaders. From previous insight and revisiting some locations, I observed that YWAM ministries are rurally based outside the main city and are run by several key staff in each location. These staff are supported by a team of volunteers. From my observations this time in the field, I noticed about two to four staff ran each ministry, with around five to ten young people who help run classes, cook for the students, run activities for younger children, and teach the Christian faith which is part of YWAM's special character. In this interview I was told the ministry she is working with currently had around one hundred children and youth coming. She also shared about some of their volunteer teachers who they have been able to mentor and who are passionate about sharing the Christian gospel. This reflects their organisation's focus to provide opportunities to young people and raise them up as future leaders.

5.2.4 Donor NGOs

During fieldwork, I had the opportunity to meet staff from two internationally funded NGOs who operate as donors and support locally based NGOs. The first of these was a European funded NGO who operates globally within the scope of peace building work. In this interview the staff member described their NGO's work as civil peace service. This NGO is operating in conflict and post-conflict countries, to build peace and reconciliation and transitional justice. This interviewee said he is a clinical psychologist, so his role was in mental health and psycho-social support. This extends to supporting their NGO's partner organisations throughout Cambodia. In this interview, he emphasised the importance of involving younger generations in Cambodia in this peace building work. He said that Cambodian youth are future leaders of the nation, and they want them to be well educated and informed to prevent past tragedies re-occurring. Their work looks like creating a dialogue between the older generations and young people. Opening the conversation between generations can help to build trust, and he stated that "often the older generation they feel that the young generation don't believe what happened" (donor NGO staff member, 31/07/23). This staff member at the European donor NGO mentioned the importance of involving youth in this work so they can understand what the country has been through. The NGO also wants to empower youth as they enter spaces with the previous generation to hear stories and communicate their histories with others.

In another interview I learnt about the work of ERIKS Development Partners (EDP). The staff member I interviewed said that EDP operates in a similar nature with funding coming from overseas and then support and training distributed to support the work of local NGOs. The staff member recalled the story of Erik from Sweden, who

observed through personal experience the ways in which young people and children are perceived within society. This stirred Erik to speak out until one day he was invited to speak on a popular Swedish radio station which brought awareness to his cause. Erik started a charity at the age of 17 that now supports partner organisations in 16 countries.

As a current staff member at EDP this interviewee believed in the importance of Erik's story as a tool to empower the youth they were working with. He now shares this message with youth so that they can see themselves as change makers and influencers in their communities and societies, just like Erik was. The EDP staff member told me about the four main points of focus in their NGO: education, protection, health, and humanitarian assistance. He also mentioned the organisation's commitment to child rights under the UNCRC and the special character of EDP being their Christian faith. In Cambodia they are working with six different partner organisations. One of EDP's partner NGOs is Hagar, Cambodia. This staff member said that at EDP they are working through partnership with the local and international NGOs through offering financial support, capacity development and mentoring.

5.3 What types of Participation are Evident in these Community Development NGOs?

Based on my analysis of interview data and observations, I identified three different approaches to youth participation in the above-mentioned NGOs, which I will discuss below. These include, on a continuum from those that are youth-inspired to those that are completely run and organised by young people: (1) Skills-building

programmes for youth; (2) Youth volunteering programmes; (3) Youth designed and/or led projects. There is some overlap between these categories where perhaps an activity is inspired by teenagers and run by young adults so not entirely youth- or adult-led. The activities at the early end of the continuum are offering skills and equipping youth so that they can be the ones leading programmes in the future. It was touched on by several staff at more than one NGO that Cambodian youth can be lacking in confidence. This was especially evident in rural areas where their ideas and independence were not often considered. Therefore, equipping to lead and "raising up", that was mentioned by the YWAM ministry leader (14/08/23), are strategies that can be seen to help prepare and pave the way for young people in Cambodia.

5.3.1 Language and Life-Skills Programmes

A popular means of community engagement by NGOs in Cambodia is the provision of various life-skills programmes. These are intended to provide helpful skills to build career options, self-confidence, English language skills, and open opportunities for participants desiring to go on to university or seeking employment. The data outlines several examples of how NGOs are using these programmes to equip youth and empower them to participate within the NGOs, their communities, and society.

Two interviewees described specific programmes that offer practical skills to build agency and confidence. One example was FLAME's Computer classes. A leader of the PATH programme told me that opportunities for young people to grow their computer skills were inaccessible due to financial obligations, lack of resources, or the timing of classes. When FLAME started facilitating a class on basic computer skills, the PATH

programme leader said about their students: “they don’t know, they never know what does a laptop look like… they don’t know how to use it" (Flame PATH programme leader, 09/08/2023). In response to many requests from young people FLAME established computer classes. These classes empowered youth through confidence and development of computer skills. FLAME youth have since continued on to higher education and employment after graduating high school. The two PATH leaders interviewed noted the difference they had seen for youth: “When they have this [computer] skill, they get more opportunities, more than other students who don’t have these skills” (Flame PATH programme staff, 09/08/2023).

The FLAME PATH programme also focuses on life skills related to individual identity, “life path and, you know individual ‘who and I?’ path” (Interview with FLAME founder, 04/08/23). This programme was developed with youth participation in mind. In both interviews with FLAME staff, they described to me how they offered guidance for students as many of the staff and volunteers have had similar journeys to the young people in the programmes. The two PATH leaders and FLAME’s founder told me how they have adapted PATH as directed by young people, who expressed their needs and desires at this stage in their adolescence.

YWAM Siem Reap demonstrated an example of life skills to empower youth participation. One of the ministry leaders detailed the sewing classes they had been running in a rural community, which taught practical skills, while also allowed participants to create and sell items. In turn earning some additional money for their families. Another example was from the EDP staff member, who told me of a community where investing in youth empowerment programmes had positive outcomes. The EDP staff told me that when youth had been equipped and trusted with certain roles in their

communities, in turn the community had trusted them with greater responsibilities. This has resulted in youth getting roles on their local commune councils and as volunteer teachers: “because they have this kind of influence, and capacity they [village leaders] acknowledge their authority” (EDP staff member, 03/08/23). Even within this approach to youth participation a depiction of what it can lead to is obvious. The example from the EDP staff member shows the outcome of equipping and trusting youth is their confidence to lead increases and youth’s responsibility over tasks grows. At face value adults teaching skills to youth may not seem participatory. However, when this process of equipping is directed by the young people who determine their own educational needs, then it becomes an important step towards fully youth-led projects and development.

5.3.2 Youth Volunteering Opportunities

As young people engage deeper with NGOs, a natural progression often occurs from programme recipient to leadership or volunteer opportunities. Within YWAM the interview with the ministry leader and observations of YWAM’s programmes indicated to me that opportunities for young people to lead or take on more responsibilities were present. The ministry leader stated the importance placed on raising up young people to lead other young people, and recognising youth as leaders. I observed that in YWAM, leadership development is actively implemented, with volunteers of 13 years old leading groups of younger children.

Youth volunteers were given agency and authority over their classes with guidance from the English curriculums and programme structures. YWAM staff are available to

encourage, offer advice, or assistance as requested by youth volunteers. The YWAM ministry leader mentioned that this process of building confidence can take time and initially tasks were broken down and delegated among youth. Youth volunteers who have been helping for some time have been preparing and running classes and youth activities by themselves or with peers. I observed this when visiting YWAM's village ministries. The importance of these youth leaders was not just seen as beneficial for YWAM, but the ministry leader stated:

> It's a great example for their communities as well, that they can show to their communities that they can do it, and they can lead the people. They're a great example to their communities especially. It's really amazing for the community to see that young people can be leaders, young people can lead the team, young people can raise up another generation, and be a good example to other people, and if many people can follow them, it will be a big change to Cambodian people (YWAM ministry leader, 14/08/23).

This quote above reflects how youth in rural communities are perceived. YWAM's youth leadership opportunities build self-confidence and indicates to other young people that they too can be leaders with options for the future. This statement could imply that youth are looking for positive role models. It poses that mentoring relationships with youth might be lacking in rural spaces where young people are encouraged to work instead of pursuing education. This theme comes up again in the next chapter through the youth responses.

Two other interviewees identified examples of youth participation outworked through youth volunteering and leadership roles. A staff member from EDP discussed

how young people have been contributing time to charity work. Often in areas of interest identified by the youth themselves. One example was university students raising funds by organising events to buy school supplies and materials for students in remote areas of Cambodia. Youth have volunteered on projects to communicate their concerns for the environment through creative means such as drawing and making videos. At Global a staff member discussed volunteer opportunities they have for youth to lead in their church services such as the music bands. The Global staff member expressed the importance of getting young people involved to build their confidence and solidify their place in the community. Offering leadership as an approach to youth participation, indicates to young people and their communities that youth are capable.

5.3.3 Youth Designed and/or Led Projects

Programmes developed and led by youth are the most recognisable as active youth participation. Youth-led programmes often represent the interests, wants, or needs of young people most obviously. This is because youth are self-determining the issues or areas of focus for the activities they are leading. From my interview data the scale of examples ranges from events within NGOs, to the community level, to a national level in Cambodia. The two PATH programme leaders at FLAME told me that PATH emerged from a recognition of the changing needs of youth and the desire to involve them in the formation of something different. The outcome was a youth designed programme tailored to youth wants and needs. The consultation process involved asking youth “how do you want the PATH programme to look?” (Flame PATH programme leaders, 09/08/2023). Young people expressed the types of subjects they would most benefit

from. They requested for it to be fun, and a place of belonging, friendship and community. Students wanted PATH to be about building confidence and teaching knowledge and skills. The participation process extended to the development of a growing monthly youth club, fulfilling the social requirement. Youth club is a place to discuss with trusted adults the topics and questions that typically adults feel uncomfortable talking about with youth. Young people wanted "the tricky subjects: sexuality, money management, you know, 'I want to have my own money, but my parents say I'll just waste it'" (Interview with FLAME founder, 04/08/23).

At the community level the EDP staff member outlined in an interview a key example from Hagar who is one of their partnering NGOs. In the northern districts of Cambodia, he recalled that Hagar has had a focus on regular capacity development, child protection, and installing child-rights reporting mechanisms. This has been actioned through the formation of children and youth groups. Young people who have been participating in these programmes for several years have noted a significant shift in confidence and willingness to be open with one another. The EDP staff member said that representatives from these children and youth groups have had opportunities to speak and share their ideas to their local commune councils, and in some cases even at a provincial level. Young people in some communities have been allocated budget from the commune investment plan (CIP) towards their recommendations and to assist with their activities and programmes.

One interviewee from an European donor NGO discussed with me the recent government changes in Cambodia in the context of youth-led actions. This change in generational leadership was a step towards a younger government, although the leadership would still be several generations older than the young people were in this

study. However, it is interesting that during the previous government's authority, a change to something new is perceived as young. This interviewee could see that "over the past few years, there's a lot of opportunity for the young generation to get involved, you know, in government sectors and also private sectors as well" (donor NGO staff member, 31/07/23). These examples suggest an important step for youth-led projects, groups, and activities in Cambodia is the trust of their communities and older generations. Trust can take time, which should be considered in the context of youth participation in Cambodia.

5.4 Challenges to Youth Participation Identified by NGOs

My thematic analysis of my interviews with NGO staff highlighted four key challenges faced by NGOs in Cambodia around youth participation that I elaborate on in this section. Several of these could reflect greater societal trends and sub-cultures in Cambodia, although some are indicative of the need for further education or development of what youth participation means in a Cambodian context.

5.4.1 Distrust and Differing Priorities Between Generations

There were two different perspectives in the interviews that suggested distrust can hinder approaches to youth participation. Firstly, several of the interviews discussed deeply rooted generational stereotypes that both NGOs working with youth and young people themselves must overcome. Within communities most leaders are from older generations, who believe it should remain this way. Older generations hold all the knowledge and experience. A common saying that reflects this is: "young people they're

the ones who see the sun later than the older, the older they see the sun first" (interview with donor NGO staff member, 31/07/23). The interviewee explained that this saying meant that older generations see the sun first and hold all the knowledge, whereas young people see the sun later and are still learning. Interviewees discussed how this age-based hierarchy in Cambodia can hinder young generations from opportunities to raise their voices at both local and national levels.

The PATH programme leaders at FLAME experienced how the age-based social hierarchy in Cambodia limited openness between generations. They found it difficult to enact youth-led programmes when FLAME students did not feel confident to tell the staff their needs. To overcome this distrust, staff at FLAME recognised the need to be intentional and invest time in building relationships with youth. Trust was required for youth to be open to share their ideas. "It needs a lot of time to build that relationship between the students to actually be okay, they can feel comfortable to open themselves to us" (Flame PATH programme staff, 09/08/2023). The PATH leaders acknowledged that this process could take months and that it was important to make the classroom environment comfortable. FLAME leadership equip teachers to foster this culture of honesty and genuine care for each other and saw that with time their students were able to open up and share without pressure.

Secondly, another generational difference that arose in interviews in both Phnom Penh and Siem Reap was the expectations placed on young people by their family members. Three interviewees mentioned that they had found young people enthusiastic with ideas for their communities who wanted to seek higher education, but they were restricted by other obligations. Staff at FLAME, YWAM and CCP said that youth wanted to engage in NGOs leadership programmes, graduate high school, or go on to higher

education. However, family members instead required them to work in factories, on farms, or low-level employment to help support the family financially. One participant said:

> Then [what] happens [is that] a lot of my students, they study, study, and after that their parents stop them. They are so young, like 13 years old, 14 years old they already work (YWAM ministry leader, 14/08/23).

In this interview the YWAM ministry leader identified that often the cause of this repeated pattern is due to debt owed by the parents who cannot afford to pay it back. These interview responses gave the impression that negotiating with parents was almost as much a part of the participation process to allow youth engagement.

5.4.2 Restrictions on Free Speech

Two of the interviewees discussed the difficulties surrounding the lack of free speech in Cambodia. They both highlighted that it is difficult to speak openly particularly about the government or their policies for fear of being arrested or facing severe consequences. This was identified as a major barrier for youth voice, because the types of issues youth can address or bring awareness to is limited. The result of speaking out against the government could have severe repercussions. In one interview with a donor NGO staff member, he discussed the responsibilities and obligations of duty bearers:

> The government and NGO as the duty bearer, they need to really respect on the human right and also the children and youth right and then support them to really express the issue that they believe it's really matter for them

> now and even in the future rather than give the limitation and pressure that somehow, they are afraid to talk about it. For example, when we talk about the environment or climate change or global warming, if the children or youth believe like what you are doing now it's not really protecting but destroying, so we need to make sure like they have space to really express about it freely (EDP staff member, 03/08/23).

This interviewee felt strongly that there was great importance on young people's right to speak freely on issues of importance to them, and compared Cambodia to other countries where youth can protest for climate change action. Both interviewees speaking on this topic were staff from donor NGOs and highlighted deforestation and environmental degradation as issues of significant importance to young people. However, they said it was not something that young people were able to freely discuss or act on in Cambodia.

Participants stated that the wider societal and political context in Cambodia impacted on everyone in society. A donor NGO staff member recalled how the lead up to the 2018 elections was a catalyst for the restrictions on free speech. At this time most independent news and media agencies were shut down. He said that now only media supporting the government existed and it was dangerous receiving this one sided and biased information; thus, removing opportunities for people to make informed decisions. Even as an adult this interviewee was constrained within the system:

> So even at my age now, when we talk about expressing our own opinion and right, I need to really be careful, I'm in this kind of system, I can only

> do this inside this framework. If I go beyond, I already know what gonna happen. How can we break this kind of issue (Interview with donor NGO staff member, 03/08/23)

This expresses how the struggle for free speech is not confined to young people. The donor NGO staff member joked about having hidden cameras in their offices. The culture of an age-based hierarchical society and the lack of free speech indicate the restriction for youth voice in Cambodia.

5.4.3 Unequal Access to Opportunities and Resources

The interviews provided evidence of three inequalities that shaped opportunities for different groups of Cambodian youth. Firstly, gender was discussed and perspectives varied depending on rural or urban positioning. The staff member from a donor NGO stated in the interview that young girls have a higher chance of dropping out of school because of the different roles and expectations placed on them at home. This was in the context of urban Phnom Penh, where it was presumed by the interviewee that young girls had an obligation to help with household duties, childcare, or work to support the family. However, in rural Siem Reap province the YWAM ministry leader observed the opposite. In the villages she has visited, young boys are not finishing school and have little encouragement or support from their families towards education. She has noticed the influence of peer pressure and an increase in alcohol and drug addiction amongst teenage boys. These gender-based expectations indicate that access to youth participatory programmes are not equal for all young people.

Inequalities were also discussed by these same interviewees in terms of positions in society. It was highlighted:

> Sometimes they don't give value to the villagers, people who are living there, they don't give value to them, they say "oh they don't have knowledge enough to do this, to do that" (YWAM ministry leader, 14/08/23)

This was expanded upon when interviewing the donor NGO staff who noted that leadership opportunities are not equally dispersed amongst the population. Not only are rural communities not valued, there is a strong bias when determining leadership roles and most often positions are not given to those who are capable, but those who are connected. The NGO staff said: "while there's a lot of [other] young people who may actually be very confident, and very strong, very experienced, and but then they don't have the opportunity" (donor NGO staff member, 31/07/23). Capable youth may not be considered for opportunities in favour of those with wealth or power.

Secondly, unequal access to resources is a challenge that arose in interviews with YWAM and FLAME staff. Both these NGOs' staff mentioned that when working with larger groups of young people there was a struggle for adequate resourcing. In Siem Reap, COVID-19 negatively impacted local businesses, and many international staff returned to their home countries. Finding staff and suitable meeting spaces became problematic for YWAM ministries. Demand for classes was increasing, and classroom sizes were getting too small. YWAM had to limit spaces as they were unable to run additional programmes to due to few staff and volunteers. FLAME PATH leaders identified similar struggles with the demand for classes exceeding the teaching capacity.

The popularity of PATH's computer classes has meant youth want the next level of skills. This has not been possible due to the expense of additional laptops and having only one computer skills teacher. In both contexts, youth have been able to shape the programmes, although they have been limited by resourcing challenges.

5.4.4 Lack of Collaboration and Youth Participation as a 'Buzzword'

Throughout the interview process it seemed that there was some collaboration and connection between NGOs. However, there was not always agreement on the best way to engage with young people through participatory approaches. Three interviewees mentioned that it was difficult when each individual NGO becomes too focused on their own goals:

> But I can say many times its challenging because NGOs when they could not work quite well in the coordination and cooperation with one another, that can also be challenging, because some NGOs they have intention to really working too much focus within their own scope or their own agenda (donor NGO staff member, 31/07/23).

The staff interviewed from CCP mentioned that sometimes they can work around challenges by going directly to community leaders and coordinating their efforts from the top. They have found that remaining open minded and having people on the ground managing each site has been an effective way to get to know other NGOs working in the same communities and build partnerships this way.

Another difficulty with collaboration seemed to be around the misunderstanding or perhaps tokenistic approach to youth participation. One interviewee stated that in

some NGOs "child [and youth] participation is more on the theory but then when they come to the practical strategy or tool to really engage them, involve them, is still limited" (EDP staff member, 03/08/23). Youth participation has become a popular buzzword within youth organisations. The staff from EDP was concerned that well intended NGOs did not have extensive knowledge on implementing participatory approaches that upheld the rights of youth under the UNCRC. There are layers to this challenge. A united front by NGOs and a shared definition of what youth participation means in Cambodia could be seen as a threat to political structures. Youth participation may only be supported by higher leadership if it can be determined on their terms, not from the bottom-up. However, the challenge of misunderstanding also extended to perceptions of youth values and motivations. A FLAME staff member identified that there was a negative response from other adults when investigating the reasons for youth school dropouts. They heard assumptions such as youth were unmotivated, they just wanted to work to get money, or they wanted to spend all day hanging out with friends or on their phones. When FLAME staff approached the youth directly, they found the response was drastically different:

> Bong [older brother/sister], I want to drop out of school because I can't read and write, I can't read and write, and I can't understand what the teacher's saying. And the maths, I have no idea how they get from there to there (FLAME founder, 04/08/23).

This quote reflects the reality that young people would rather give up than struggle through another several years of schooling in an education system that was failing them. If FLAME staff had not approached youth directly then they would not be able to address this misunderstanding and generalisation of young peoples' motivations. Instead, staff

were able to take a participatory approach and give youth a voice in their future education.

5.5 Concluding Thoughts

From the perspective of NGOs significant efforts are being made to enhance youth participation in Cambodia. In the context of political repression, the NGOs are continuing to provide spaces for youth to be empowered and heard. The examples outlined in this chapter provide hope for Cambodian NGOs and young people, showing that youth are not forgotten and have much to offer their nation. Interviewees emphasised the importance of role models and mentors for youth. Pioneering new paths comes with challenges that are already becoming evident. Some of the adversities youth face in Cambodia are deeply rooted in issues of mistrust due to the years of instability and civil war (Brehm, 2021). It will take time to invest in relationships and build trust.

There are also inequalities and resourcing issues stemming from Cambodia's socio-economic position in the Global South. When compared to some nations where youth have mobilised and acted on issues quickly, Cambodian youth may need outside support. The political context also restricts the free expression of youth voice. Despite these challenges Cambodian youth are full of fresh perspective and ideas as will be highlighted in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX:

Youth Voice in Community Development in Cambodia

6.1 Introduction

Cambodian young people have a lot to say about matters that impact upon their every-day lives. This was a clear observation from the time I spent with two groups of youth in rural communities in Siem Reap province. Throughout the workshops, I sought to give space to the participants to create, act, and speak about ideas that are sitting in the minds and hearts of the young people who joined. Every youth participant responded to all the activities and questions posed in both sessions, reflecting their shared desire to have a say in their communities and nation.

This chapter draws on the data from the two workshop exercises, including a drawing exercise where participants shared their ideas for future community development. I will unpack the key themes that emerged from the exercises, including access to quality education, environmental protection, health care improvements, job opportunities, and protection for vulnerable community members. Participants also identified the forms of help they would need to action their ideas. I will then discuss their suggestions of good leadership, community unity, and adequate resources in this chapter.

6.2 Youth Ideas for Community Development in Siem Reap, Cambodia

I began the workshops by inviting the participants to draw, create or build an idea that could benefit their community in some way. Materials such as pens, paper, and modelling clay were provided, allowing the participants to take their time and express their ideas in the way they preferred. Participants then described their creations in more detail through written explanations. My thematic analysis of the data from this activity highlighted key themes regarding how Cambodian youth envision community development. Each theme reflects some commonalities as well as how young people in the workshops envisioned community development from different perspectives.

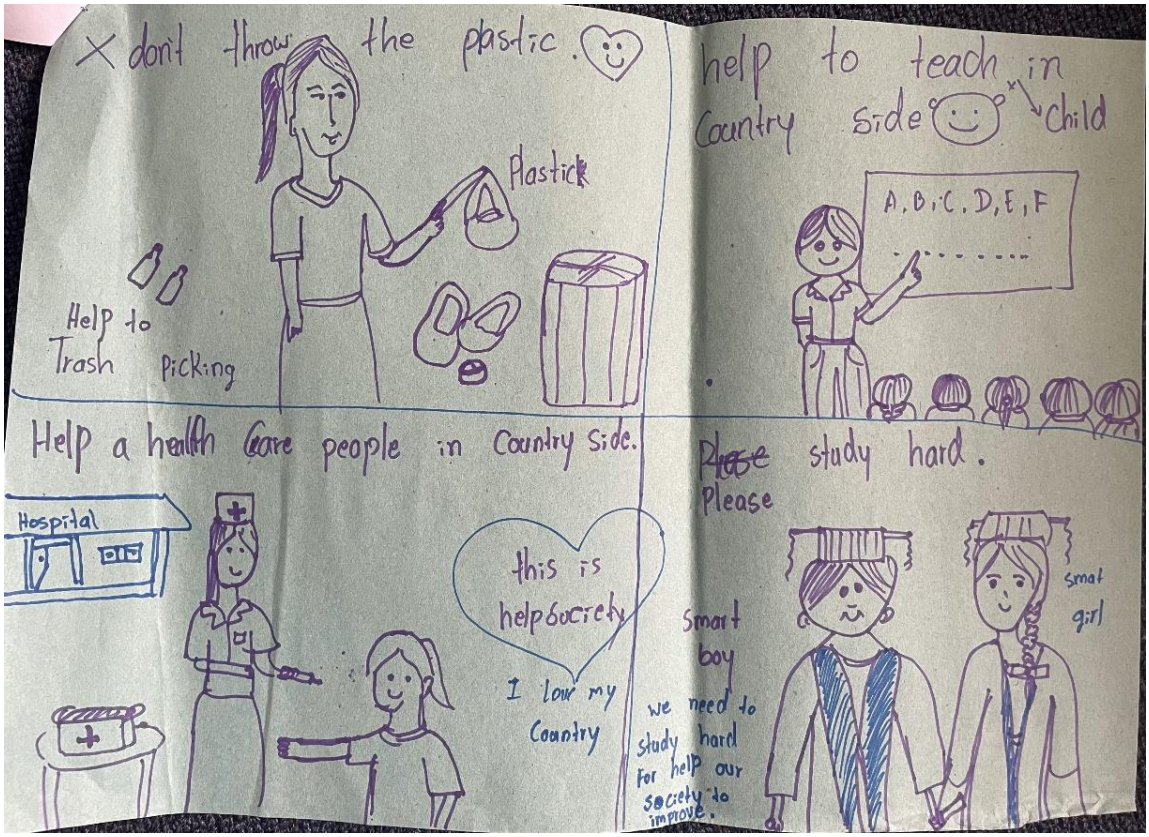
6.2.1 Access to Quality Education for Everyone

Concern for the quality of education in Cambodia was a topic that arose in both workshops. In the first workshop seven out of thirteen participants agreed that there should be more schools in rural communities. They recognised that young people having an education was fundamental for them to have a good future and building their skills and experience. Several of these participants also emphasised that if young people are well educated this also benefits their communities. They explained that people who have an education can have the skills and knowledge to bring development to their communities. Two separate responses indicated a similar sentiment that students needed to study hard. If they study hard, according to these young people they can become doctors or teachers and help their society and country to improve. One participant in this workshop group compared the difference between those who have an education and those who do not. In a description of their creation, they stated:

> For me… this picture is to show the dirty and the comparison between people living in the community. Such as, educated people and the ignorant people. For a flower that don't have value or beauty no one needs them. If that person didn't have a heart to help the community, it will be bringing a lot of difficulties and there will be no development in the community too. For the flower that has value and beauty everyone will want them. It's just like educated people they will help the community to improve and develop (Leang Dai youth participant, 14/08/2023).

This comparison says educated people are beautiful like a flower and those without an education are ignorant. The comparison of ignorance and lack of education as dirty or unwanted is insightful. This participant explained that those who are educated are wanted, helpful to others, and they are beautiful like a flower. Those who are educated have the heart to help others and those who do not are less valued. This conceptual distinction encourages youth to strive for an education which is a positive outcome. However, it also reinforces the stigmatisation of those who are unable to access an education and are therefore not valued or 'dirty.' Another participant drew the images in Figure 6.1 which displays two of these ideas for education. They wanted help for education and schools in the countryside. There is a quote on the image "we need to study hard to help our society improve" (Participant in Leang Dai Village). These young people associated studying hard with being of value to society.

Figure 6.1: *Ideas for Community Development from Workshop Participant in Leang Dai Village (14/08/23)*



The second workshop had some varying responses within the theme of education. There were six participants out of fourteen who stated that having schools in rural areas was important and two of these went on to say that an education would lead to a good future. However, in the second workshop there was also mention of the importance of quality education and school conditions. One participant when sharing about their idea to the whole group described their experience when visiting their local school:

> In my current local school, I went there before to check up on my brother in his studies and saw that the windows of the classrooms are very messy, not very hygienic, and the fans, just like only one fan per classroom, and the students inside might be feeling warm and crowded. So, I would recommend

> the school to have more space in class, and more support (Blue School youth participant, 16/08/2023).

They noted that cleaning bathrooms daily, providing places for students to wash their hands before eating, less crowded classrooms, stricter rules, and a good school environment would help motivate students. This highlights that they associated hygiene and their surroundings at school, as important factors in their ability to focus on study, and the quality of their learning. One participant said that if others see their school is beautiful, they will want to come and study here. This is another example of the comparison between education and beauty. The vision for what a good school environment could look like is shown in Figure 6.2 where this image depicts happy students with playground equipment, a trash can and a garden. Four young people also considered in their descriptions alongside their images that the cost of education was important. They suggested that free education or subsidised school costs for poorer families could help all children to access education. One participant described a situation where families could not support their child to study so they had to drop out early. However, they said with support for the family a child could have at least finished high school. This would help the community to grow well.

Figure 6.2: *Drawing of a 'Beautiful' school environment by participant in Blue School workshop (16/08/2023)*

Two participants from Blue School shared the idea of passing on knowledge and education between generations. The first suggested that if people had access to an education, then this knowledge could be passed to their children, and the next generation would value education. The other participant had a different idea, that perhaps groups of young people could go out to hard-to-reach rural areas and offer some training or skills to the villagers there. They hoped that whoever received training could then get jobs and even own their own businesses. It is interesting how these comments reflect the importance of intergenerational connections in Cambodian culture. The comments also indicate how young people perceive what

they have to offer, as both teachable and as teachers, and that both offer growth and development to the community.

6.2.2 To see Improvements in Environmental Quality in Cambodia

The importance of caring and better protecting the local environment was identified by participants in both workshops that would greatly benefit their communities. Two perspectives highlighted how caring for the environment was an indicator of community development. One perspective emphasised cleaning up the environment. In the first workshop, a focus on improved rubbish and waste management addressed the environmental concerns in their community. The creations of seven youth mentioned the theme of picking up rubbish, having more rubbish bins, and sending people out to pick up rubbish. One youth emphasised that the issue of rubbish around the community could also be addressed with more rubbish bins which they depicted in the clay creation in Figure 6.3. Another youth suggested reducing the quantity of plastic trash that is produced and used in Cambodia. There was a consensus in the responses from Leang Dai that less trash around the community would improve the environment and bring happiness to present and future generations. At Blue School in the second workshop, participants elaborated on the management of waste in the community. Six respondents agreed that rubbish needed to be cleaned up and better managed. However, they put responsibility on the government to take action to address this issue. Two participants stated that it was the governments duty to clean up trash and that there should be stricter laws about how trash is managed. One young person

also suggested that education was needed for households to know how to take care of their own rubbish so that it did not become an issue for the whole community.

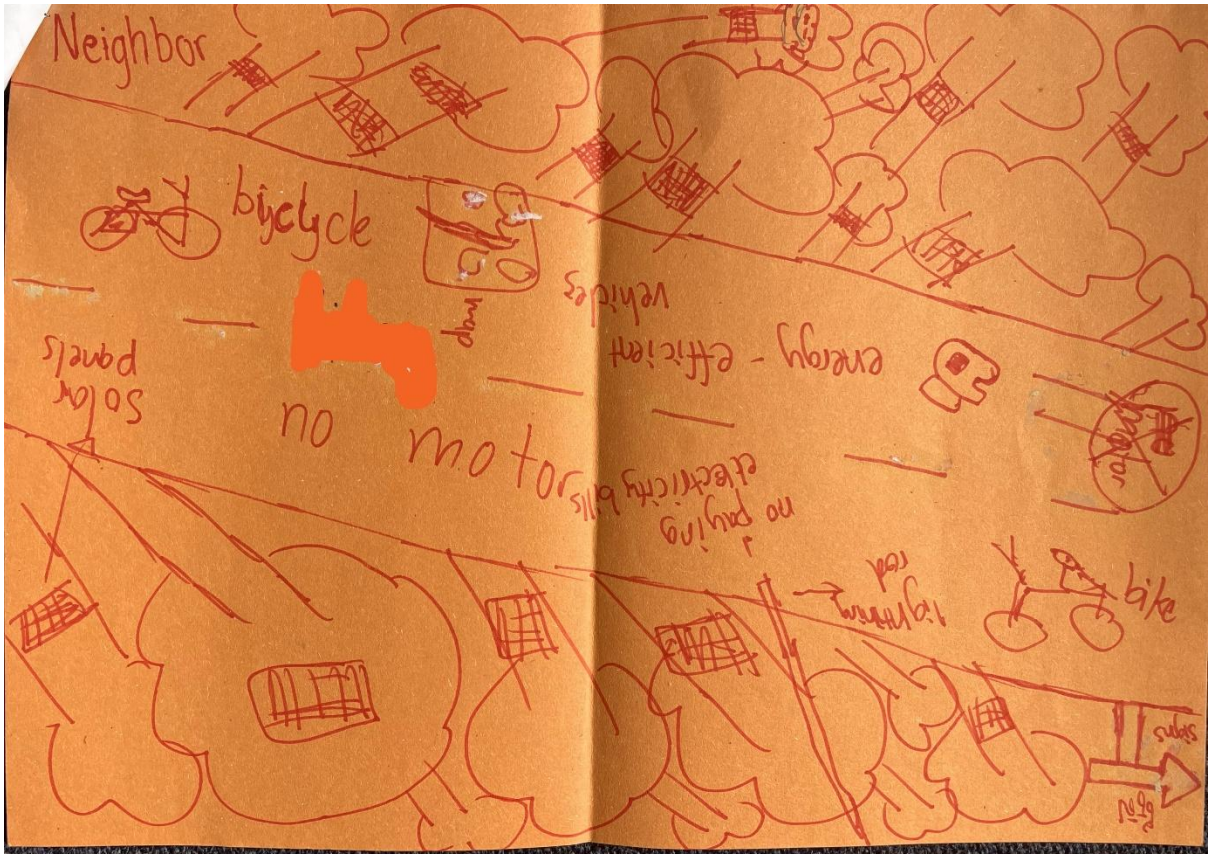
Figure 6.3: *Clay creation from Leang Dai workshop depicting person putting rubbish in the bin (14/08/2023)*

The second perspective on how communities could improve the environment was through preventative strategies. In both workshops young people proposed that environmental degradation could be prevented through planting trees. A youth in Leang Dai stated that trees provided shelter for birds, animals and people, reduced flooding, acid rain and other natural disasters, and they also can be used as timber for housing. Planting trees for disaster prevention was also recommended by two others in Leang Dai. At the Blue School workshop two participants elaborated their recommendation to plant more trees. The first described the importance planting but also ceasing

deforestation in Cambodia. The second stated that trees were beneficial for preventing the release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

Two other preventative strategies were mentioned at Blue School. Two young people wanted farmers to use non-chemical sprays on their rice crops so that it would be healthier for people and the environment. Figure 6.4 shows another proposition from a young person to use renewable energy sources in their community. Their suggestions were solar panels and energy efficient vehicles for households and schools. This participant presented their idea to the group and linked the environmental benefits of greening the community, e-vehicles, bikes and solar power, with economic benefits such as not paying electricity bills. This youth perceived bicycles as the better option and forward thinking, which is contrary to the common narrative for many people in rural Cambodia that bicycles are backward and what people use who cannot afford mechanised transport. The desire from young people in both communities was to see their environment improve and that they wanted to be a part of making it happen. A young person in Leang Dai summarised that they believed concern for the environment would benefit the community in the present through growth, pride in their surroundings and positive well-being improvements. They believed if these changes were made now then the benefits would be passed on to future generations. These Cambodian youth are thinking intergenerationally which reflects the connectedness of rural communities.

Figure 6.4: *Depiction of Community using Renewable/Sustainable Resources by youth at Blue School Workshop (16/08/2023)*

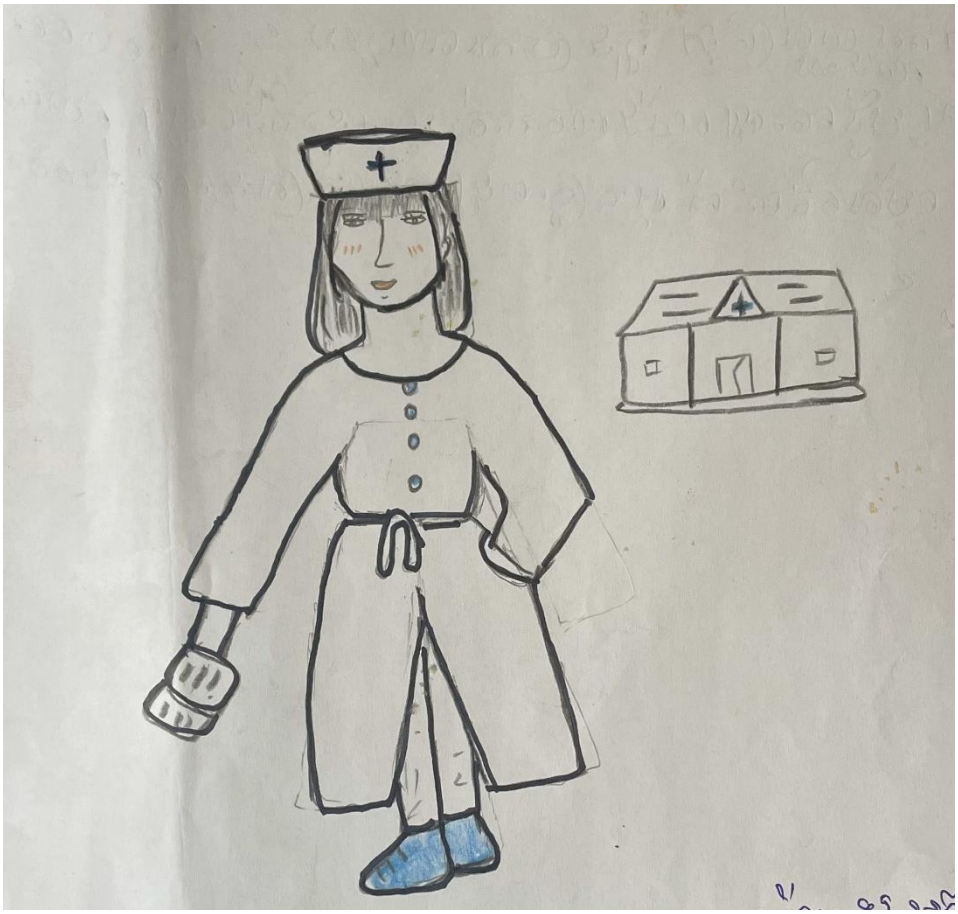


6.2.3 Improved Response to the Community's Health Care Needs

Cambodian young people in the workshops recognised that greater access and improvements to rural healthcare provisions is needed. The type of health improvements varied between the workshops, which may be due to differential access to health care in each of these communities. For example, in Leang Dai there were five ideas that included suggestions for more hospitals in rural communities. This suggests that there could be insufficient health care facilities in Leang Dai. Four of the five responses on health care elaborated that doctors and nurses needed to be skilful and able to offer the correct advice and medications to patients. It was also stated that health care should be efficient and accessible to everyone in Cambodian society regardless of

location or age. Figure 6.5 was a proposition for what health care could look like in their community. The image depicts a medical professional dressed neatly with their medical resources at the ready. In the background a hospital is close by. In their description of their image this participant recognised that “It’s really good to have a hospital in the community so it is really easy for the people who are living in the countryside. They can go fast when they get sick” (youth participant at Leang Dai). The emphasis on accessibility, quality, and greater presence of health care provisions in their community perhaps indicates a lack of existing options.

Figure 6.5: *Nurse and Hospital in the Community, drawn by youth participant at Leang Dai (14/08/2023)*



At the Blue School workshop, participants proposed the types of health care that would benefit their community. Of the five participants who mentioned health, they each proposed a different kind of health service. The first suggested hygiene education and described the importance of hand washing, support for those with smoking or drug addictions, and awareness for schools to provide healthier food options. One participant mentioned mental health support and having counsellors in the community to help prevent teen suicides. Only one youth mentioned that there was greater need for health care professionals in the community. This participant recalled an instance where serious illness could have been prevented with access to medical care. They recalled:

> There is one brother who was studying at High School, and he died from dengue fever. He thought his sickness was very simple so he waited until he couldn't get treatment. Moreover, may all of us take care ourselves from the mosquitos' bite and we need to sleep with mosquito net (Blue School youth participant, 16/08/2023).

The different ideas from young people across the workshops suggests the varying health needs in each community. Such as one community needs more hospitals, while in the other youth perceive other key health issues that need addressing.

6.2.4 To Provide Support for Job Development and Human Resources

Both workshops recognised that Cambodia has a wealth of human resources that are not fully utilised. Youth in both workshops stated rural areas have a lot of skilled

people with a desire to help their communities. In the first workshop at Leang Dai one participant elaborated that the next generation had a lot to offer:

> …the next generation they have resources that could improve the community and could improve the country of Cambodia. So, I want to see more human resources in Cambodia, especially also in the community because we have a lot. Different places have a lot of people who are very skilful, and they have a lot of resources (Leang Dai youth participant, 14/08/2023).

These young people expressed that they have a lot to offer their communities, and they wanted to use their skills and resources to help others. To fully utilise this human potential, two different approaches were suggested by the youth in each workshop, both emphasised the need for better employment opportunities and support for job development.

The first approach was job creation in rural communities. In Leang Dai two youth suggested that tourism could provide job opportunities in rural communities. They acknowledged that Cambodia's cultural and natural environments were assets that could attract tourists and bring income to rural households. Another participant in Leang Dai recognised that their rural location was optimal for farming enterprises. They wanted to see agricultural jobs created and exports from Cambodia reaching the global market. The second approach was training and support to enable rural people to gain employment. Two participants at the Blue School workshop advocated for the rural poor and that skills training and quality education could help the poor into employment. One young person said, "No beggars, and we need to encourage them, give them a job" (Blue

School youth participant, 16/08/2023). Another youth also used the word encourage, which indicates a belief that those in poverty would benefit from encouragement to get into more skilled employment. One young person emphasised, “all people need to know what belongs to themselves and know who they are, so that they can take care themselves and the society” (Blue School youth participant, 16/08/2023). This suggests knowing your personal identity and being confident in oneself was associated with helping society.

6.2.5 Development of Infrastructure and the Physical Environment to Build Safer Communities

Both workshops highlighted where improvements to the physical environment could contribute to greater safety in rural communities. The concern from both workshops was the poor quality of roads that created a barrier to safety and connectedness within the community. Seven participants across both workshops stated their desires to see better roads. One young person described the current situation in their village:

> Right now, my village’s road is a lot, it’s very bumpy and whenever it rains the water is really deep on the road and it’s not good. It causes accidents when they try to swerve from the water, they might hit some of the stones and bumps (Blue School youth participant, 16/08/2023).

This was something I witnessed first-hand when entering both villages for the workshops. The heavy rain had left the dirt roads flooded and muddy like clay making safe travel difficult. When waiting outside Blue School I witnessed how

many people got off their mopeds and walked over a particularly flooded section. One villager had placed a plank across the muddy clay to make it easier to pass. In Leang Dai one young person identified a correlation between the state of the roads and the quality of relationships within the community. They believed that community relationships would improve with safer roads. There was a consensus that better roads would make the community look a lot nicer and less dirty. Two participants at Blue School elaborated that they would like traffic lights and more signage around the community. “One thing would be for my community to have signs and maps to show where the houses are, and where the fields are. So, we won’t get lost in the community” (Blue School youth participant, 16/08/2023). These youth indicated that they want greater unity and connectedness in the community. They want their community to be welcoming, safe, and look nice for visitors.

In both workshops access and improvements to water resources, sewerage systems, and electricity arose as needed infrastructural developments. Two young people referred to the need to “have enough” of these basic resources: electricity and water. Several Blue School workshop participants suggested other public infrastructural developments. Five young people considered it important for there to be public library access for students and people in the community. One youth explained that:

> Some students are motivated to learn but they don’t have the equipment for study. So, with more libraries we can have more books and students will be more motivated. Other students might go to the library and study (Blue School youth participant, 16/08/2023).

This young person recognised that libraries add collective value to the community. Further suggestions included children's playgrounds and lightning rods to build community connectedness and increase safety. When discussing who was responsible for these infrastructural developments, one young person stated that it was the responsibility of the village chief as carer of their people. However, another young person maintained that children and young people should be involved in the decision-making processes.

6.2.6 The Community to Offer Support for Vulnerable Groups

Young people across both workshops identified certain groups who may have limited access to help or resources. These youth suggested that the community should support those from vulnerable groups. In the first workshop at Leang Dai, a young person illustrated this in terms of providing skills to others so they could provide for themselves and reduce their expenses. In Figure 6.6 a young person depicts a community member raising animals to provide for their family. This was again reiterated by another youth from the first workshop who also created the scene in Figure 6.7 where an individual has been supported to raise animals to "feed them for a family, for sell, for food" (Leang Dai youth participant, 14/08/2023). These participants explored in the descriptions accompanying their creations in Figure 6.6 and 6.7, that they wanted more training for community members to provide for themselves and more job opportunities. The vulnerable groups considered in this context were poor households and those who could not find work to support their family. These participants also wrote that help should be given without expectation of reciprocation,

and those who received help would not be indebted to anyone else in the community. These responses are contradictory to many models of financial support that are available in Cambodia. Often families and individuals take out loans that they are unable to repay and as mentioned above the young people are the ones who end up paying the price (Kobayashi, 2020). Young people in both workshops mentioned that in these situations they are expected to leave school or sacrifice a university qualification so they can earn money to repay their family's debts.

Figure 6.6: *Depiction of providing for family through raising animals Leang Dai youth participant, 14/08/2023)*

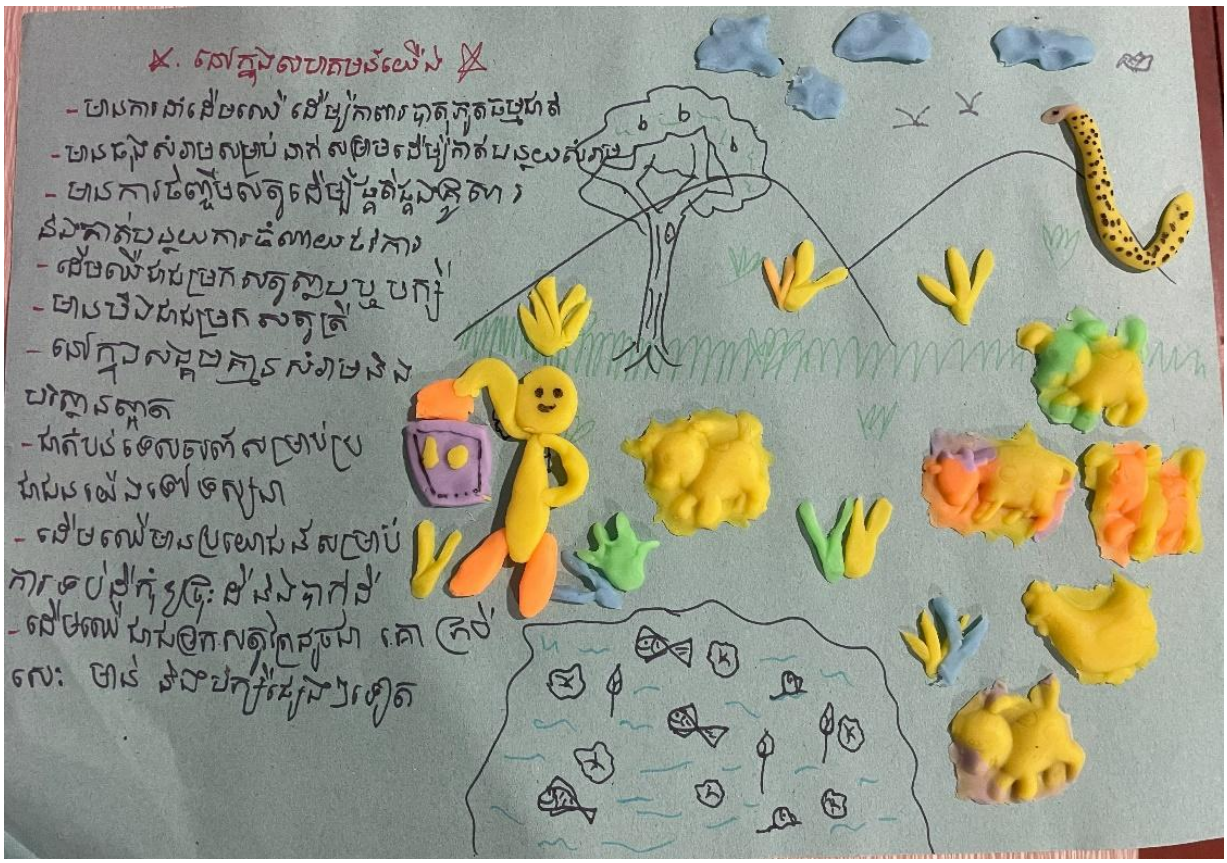
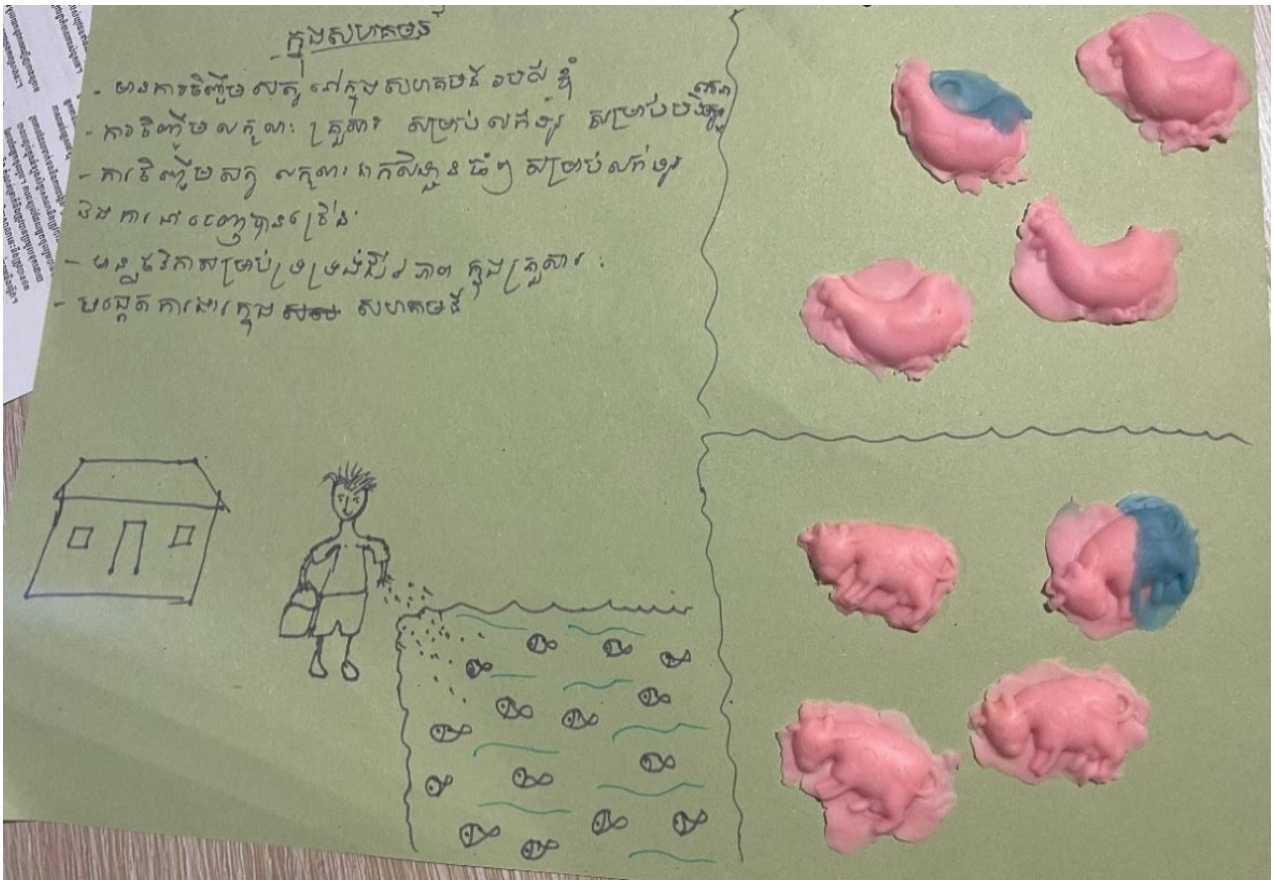


Figure 6.7: *Community member raising animals to feed their family and sell (Leang Dai youth participant, 14/08/2023)*

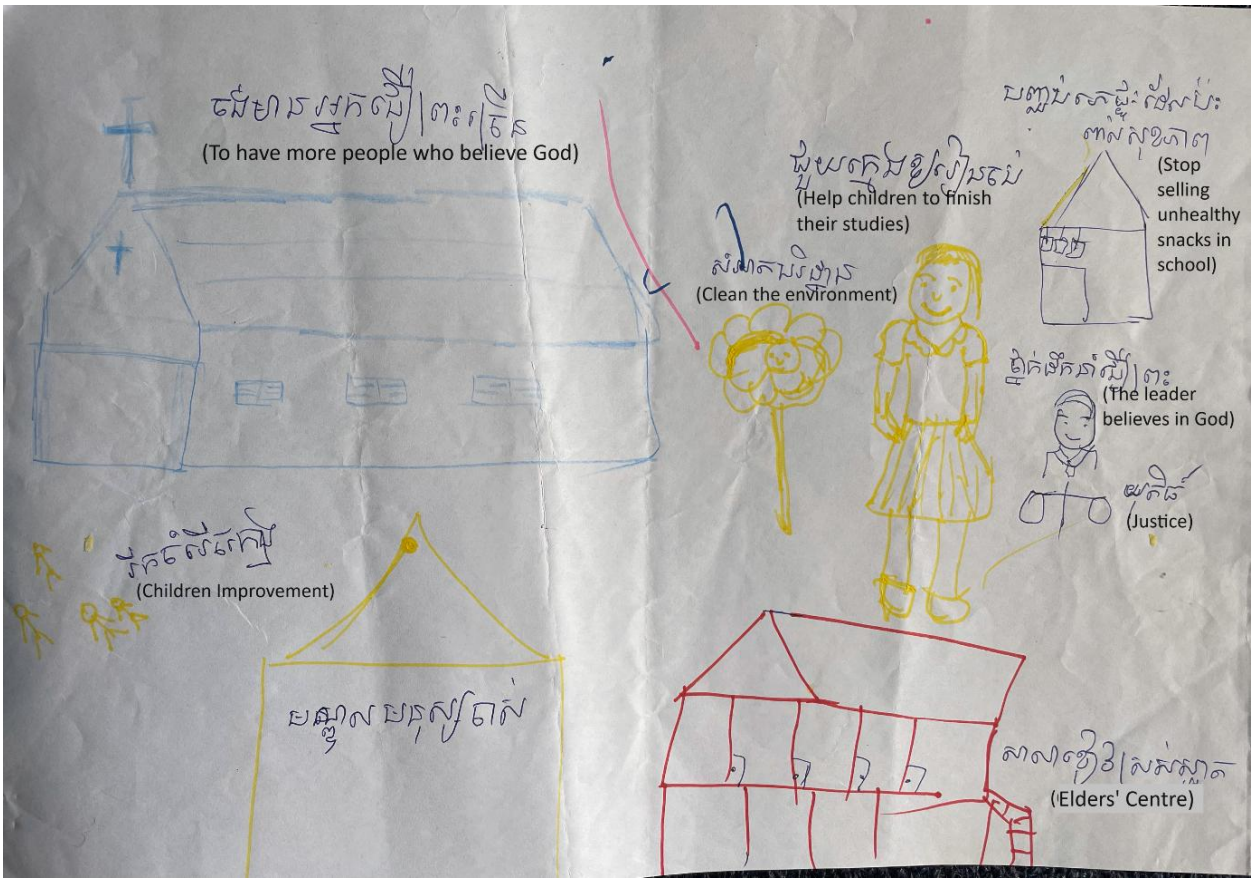


Youth at the Blue School workshop acknowledged that there were poorer families in their community who were not doing well, and they saw offering financial donations as one solution. They elaborated that children and young people are directly impacted when they cannot attend school because they are physically weak from hunger. If these families are supported now, it would benefit the wider community in the long term, as this would result in more educated individuals staying in the village and helping the community to grow well. Another participant in Pouk at the second workshop recognised other vulnerable groups they would like to see supported well by the wider community. This participant mentioned they want a centre for old people in the village,

like a retirement home where they could stay and live. They saw that in their area there are a lot of older people who do not have children to take care of them and are homeless. With a centre for elderly they would be taken care of by the community, which they drew in the bottom right of Figure 6.8. This same young person also had the idea to run more ministries for women in the village. They suggested training and life skills would benefit women to earn money and support themselves and their families. Another youth reinforced this by saying they wanted to "respect each other's rights, value women and older people" (Blue School youth participant, 16/08/2023).

Other groups they wanted to support were those with disabilities, children and those in domestic violence situations. Two participants wished for an end to domestic violence in their community. Two others stated that they also wanted no discrimination towards anyone in the community based on their class, religion, ethnicity or gender. One person summarised this desire to see the community support each other by stating, "I want to see unity when there are difficulties" (Blue School youth participant, 16/08/2023). Youth in the second workshop highlighted the strong desire to share each other's challenges. They felt that many of the solutions could be found in the ideas and resources already available in the village.

Figure 6.8: *Suggestions for community development which includes a centre of old people (Blue School Youth Participant, 16/08/2023)*



6.3 Help Needed to Achieve Youth Ideas – From Discussions with Youth Participants

After young people completed their creations and had the opportunity to present their ideas, I posed the question "Do you think that these ideas are something you can do by yourself, or do you need some extra help to do it?" (Question asked by researcher through translator into Khmer). At the first workshop there was a resounding "We need help!" Three different responses from the group discussions highlighted the importance of help being a collaborative effort. A participant from Leang Dai suggested "build more

relationships" (14/08/2023). Participants wanted unity, and for people to work with love. They felt that it was important for people to work with their heart, with genuine intentions. Community development is not the responsibility of a few, and young people see value in working together.

The importance of working with heart and love could be influenced by the religious context of these participants. I previously mentioned in Chapter 5 that YWAM's special character is their Christian faith. The values stated in Colossians 3:23 provide context for these participant's responses, "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men" ("The Holy Bible (ESV)," 2001). This explains the values of connectedness and working for the good of others. The participants acknowledged that greater engagement from others is still needed, and young people require support to share these ideas with others. They wanted good leadership to help organise ideas and see things implemented. Participants did not specify if they meant an existing village chief, leader, or themselves. Although, they elaborated that a good leader is faithful and dependable.

Furthermore, the importance of money was suggested multiple times by participants. They unanimously agreed that money would be the biggest help for community development in their village. Most participants' ideas are reliant financing, particularly the suggested infrastructure or building projects. Youth identified the support they would need to implement their ideas, and so in conclusion I encouraged them that in being able to see the needs they also have capabilities to take action. Some small steps to start with include: continuing to share their thoughts, being role models of sustainability in their community, and doing things with heart just as they want

others to do. The enthusiasm of these young people was contagious, and it will be exciting to check in with them again in the future.

The same question was posed at the workshop in Blue School. One young person's initial response was "I definitely need some help; I can't build an entire road by myself!" (Blue School Youth Participant, 16/08/2023). Soon after a few others joined in with similar expressions of requiring help. One also said, "for me I think we can do some parts and the leader of the community, or the government can do more" (Blue School Youth Participant, 16/08/2023). This focus on state responsibility was a contrast with the first workshop where people focussed on their own actions. This is indicative of the scale of some of the ideas brought forward in this workshop such as building libraries, fixing the roads, building retirement homes, and greening the village through solar panels and e-vehicles. Upon getting into further discussion surrounding more specific types of help needed, there were a few different thoughts. Collectively participants agreed that the community would be the biggest help to conceive a different future for themselves.

A young person who had made infrastructural recommendations put forth practical solutions for help. To build roads he said you need resources! For example, gravel, sand cement. He suggested that workers willing help and do the work are necessary. To see less waste around the community another participant said people need to stop throwing trash in the first place. They recommended a village manager to oversee waste management and put more public trash cans around the village. Participants in the second workshop also identified financial support as important. Having the money to fund ideas such as solar panels and energy efficient transport options would be beneficial. It was interesting that these suggestions in the second

workshop varied slightly from the first workshop. In the second workshop, young people thought more specifically about what might be needed to see their ideas practically realised and placed responsibility for different aspects of these ideas with different actors such as local and central government officials. As a result, they acknowledged some of their own boundaries and how to overcome these.

6.4 "If Khmer Youth Were Leaders"

Chapter 4 outlines in detail the concluding activity of the workshops. Young people split into smaller groups, and all chose to act out a scenario of what it would look like in an ideal world where youth were leaders. After time to plan and practice participants each acted out their aspirations to the wider group. Several key themes emerged across the plays (discussed below), but there were also some distinct differences between each workshop. In the first workshop, the three plays all touched on young people wanting to pursue further education. The first group acted out a scenario where a husband and wife call their child to tell her to stop studying because women do not need to study hard, it is expensive, and they need her to work around the house instead. In response the child goes to her teacher who advocates on her behalf to her parents and discusses the value of studying further. One quote from the teachers explains:

> Boys and girls have the right to lead, right to study, so you need to give them freedom to choose and decide what they want, because they have the right to work and have a good future.

The parents respond to the teacher, agreeing to let their daughter continue studying. This skit highlights the stigma towards education particularly for young girls seeking higher education.

The second skit in the first workshop depicted a similar scenario of a daughter approaching her mother to ask to study abroad. The mother was resistant, although this time the daughter decides to go overseas anyway without permission. A year passes and the mother receives a certificate in the post that her daughter has gained her qualification and will be returning to the village. The mother was angry with her daughter and asked her what she will do now to help their community develop. The daughter has brought a friend from abroad and together they present their ideas to help support the village. One idea they bring back from overseas is that education and healthcare should be free so that no one is financially prevented access. This group brought a lot of humour into their skit, which was enjoyed by the audience. The young person in this skit had decided that the best education was overseas and regardless of their parents they were going anyway. This attitude of independence and trust in foreign ideas was different from the other plays, although it was well received by the workshop participants. It reflects the status of Cambodian universities and schooling in comparison to foreign institutions, which are perceived to be better quality. This skit proposes that if the young people in the workshop were leaders, their desire is for basic services to be free of charge and accessible to all.

The final skit from this workshop depicted the ladies in the village gossiping about a young woman who was graduating from high school. One stated to her friend:

> Oh, aunty I want to tell you something, your daughter just finished high school so let's stop her to going study anymore because she is a woman. There is no need to go to study anywhere, at the end she won't have any good job, she will just get married and have kids and take care of the home.

The daughter presents her High School Diploma to her mother who tries to stop her studying further. The daughter pleads but ends up seeking counsel from her teacher for help talking to her mother. The teacher advocates for her, arguing to the mother that studying will increase the girl's opportunities and allow her to earn more money in the future. This convinces the mother who allows her child study further, and the play is concluded.

These plays from this first workshop highlight several key themes. The most obvious is the desire for young people to seek a higher education to improve their job prospects so that they can help their families and communities. They acknowledge their parents are a barrier to their education. In all three scenarios, youth sought the approval of their parents, in particular their mother was a key decision-maker for her children's futures. This suggests and interesting gender dynamic. On the one hand young women are not encouraged to study further and instead are expected to help around the house and earn to support the family. However, once they become mothers, they have significant influence in the household and often control the money, although they are still subject to strong gender roles. Age is respected in Cambodian society and in these scenarios the opinions of the young women were less valued than those who are older. I also wondered if the examples of young women in all three plays were influenced by the higher number of female workshop participants. However, the

specific statements of women being needed to help around the house, and to get married and have children, do indicate that the expectations of young women are different to young men. A second theme from these plays involved youth leaders working in collaboration with others, and that the value of gaining an education is to help others. Teachers were acknowledged as key mentors and support for youth pursuing higher education. There was no specification of whether this involved government school teachers or teachers from the NGO. Overall, the right for young people to make their own choices was a huge theme from this first workshop and for them to have freedom over their own lives and futures.

In the second workshop there was more variation in the content of the plays from each group. The first group titled themselves “The Four Boys” and the title of their skit was “How to improve the community”. In their play the “four boys” are hanging out and discussing their desires for their community. One of the boys stated: “When I am bigger, I want to be prime minister and clean the trash”. The other three chimed in and agreed that they wanted to clean the trash, clean the water, and make the planet beautiful so that it could be enjoyed by all. The second play revolved around a young boy in the community who was too poor to go to school. A girl his age approached him and asked why he is no longer attending school. He says “My family is in poverty and in need of money. My family is in big need of help”. The same friend advocated on his behalf to his teacher who enforced that study is important for his future and that they will support him to finish. They summarised that you should never give up on study. The final group spilt their performance into four acts. In the first act, they acted a scenario of a teacher who really cares about his job and gave his students a quality education. The second act

outlined someone picking up trash. The third was about having respect for your parents, and the fourth was about manging conflict and loving one another.

The participants in this workshop included several students who attended an international high school and were extremely proficient in English. This may have influenced their interpretation of the question as these workshop groups had several differing themes. They seemed to interpret the concept of "if youth were leaders" as indicating leadership at a high position, with one group stating they wanted to be prime minister. The answers in these plays indicate that if they were influencers and leaders, they would want to see the environment taken care of, students who are well supported with a quality education, and healthy relationships within families and community members. It was interesting that this group perceived poverty as a bigger barrier to education than parents being unsupportive. This group had more of a mixture of girls and boys so perhaps this influenced the different perspectives. It is also possible that the boys in the groups may have had more dominant voices in deciding what to present, so if there were experiences unique to the girls, they might not have voiced these in front of their peers.

The themes from these plays across both workshops suggest what youth need to become leaders. This included having opportunities to further their education, equal rights for boys and girls, support from their teachers, opportunities to clean up the planet, and having role models to foster healthy relationships. Youth agreed they should be leaders, and opportunities should be available for them to do so. However, the question posed was "What would it be like in an ideal world?" and there was not many in depth descriptions or of what society itself would look like with youth in charge. When explaining the question to the translators there was a bit of confusion and perhaps the

instructions given to the participants varied slightly from the English. Alternatively, it could be that the concept of youth being leaders and having influence on shaping society in whatever way they desire could be an unknown concept. In Cambodian culture it would be unusual for a young person to have authority or creative control. So perhaps the question was interpreted and acted out as understood in their cultural context. For youth to be leaders they first must overcome some significant stigmas and advocate for themselves before they would be able to advocate for society and others.

6.5 Concluding Thoughts

The workshops with youth produced exciting data on their ideas for community development and their perceptions of youth in leadership roles in Cambodia. I was interested to see where the ideas and recommendations aligned in different villages, as well as the commonalities that were shared across these rural settings. I was encouraged by how the young people saw themselves as influential in their communities, and how they were able to recognise their limitations without feeling too overwhelmed to move forward. The potential unfamiliarity of youth being at the forefront of decision-making roles in Cambodia did not restrict their creativity or ability to conceptualise themselves in leadership roles. Furthermore, as youth participation evolves to fit the Cambodian context there is the possibility of young people's imaginations stretching, enabling them to see themselves as leaders, and to see the impact they would have if they were decision-makers.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

Where does Cambodia sit in the Context of Global Youth Participation?

7.1 Introduction

In the previous two chapters, I explored the ideas and experiences shared by Cambodian youth and NGO staff involved in community development work in Cambodia. This chapter builds on that analysis by engaging more critically with broader global models of youth participation. I use these models as analytical tools to reflect on how youth participation is understood and enacted in the Cambodian context, and to ask whether these global models fully capture the local realities, or if more context-specific interpretations are needed.

In Chapter Two, I introduced two widely cited frameworks that have shaped international understandings of youth participation: Hart's (1997) "Ladder of Participation," which conceptualises levels of youth involvement and empowerment in decision-making, and Lundy's (2007) framework for interpreting Article 12 of the UNCRC, which emphasises the interconnected elements of space, voice, audience, and influence. In this chapter, I return to these models to consider how they illuminate, and where they may fall short of, the diverse and evolving forms of youth engagement seen in Cambodia. By applying my data within these models, through a rights-based lens, this chapter will discuss the forms of youth participation that are present in the Cambodian NGOs I met with. This discussion seeks to answer my first research question and objective on the forms of youth participation present within Cambodian NGOs. I then

briefly consider the value added of applying these two models to the Cambodian context of youth participation.

7.2 How does the data sit within Hart's (1997) Ladder of Participation?

Hart's ladder of youth participation (see Figure 2.1, p.20) indicates the levels of youth empowerment through participation. Using this model, Table 7.1 below considers the types of participation present in the interview data. The lower three sections (or rungs of the ladder) in this model, are presenting manipulation to tokenism which are not meaningful youth participation. My research data did not reflect any examples of NGO staff framing their youth participation in any of these capacities. The only instance of potential manipulation in Cambodia was seen in the example of parental desires for their children to work not study; thus, taking away the basic right for these young people to choose their own futures. This is a very simplified explanation of the situation, and previous discussion of Cambodia's hierarchical social structures help to understand that there are layers of respect and authority present in the parent-child relationships in Cambodia (Puthkalyaney, 2017). However, when moving up the ladder, the data reflects instances of genuine participation taking place within these NGOs.

The fourth section, assigned but informed is also referred to by Hart (1997) as "Social Mobilisation" (p. 42). He suggests that social mobilisation is often an initial step towards greater participation with young people in the future. The nature of this category indicates that projects are passed on from adults, although young people are well informed and possess a real interest and concern for the subject (Hart, 1997). The two examples from my data are the peace-building initiatives run by the European

NGO's partner organisations, and the CCP selection of candidates for their programmes (Table 7.1). The first example sits within this category because peace-building work and intentionally working to ensure Cambodia does not repeat its history is a concern for all generations in Cambodia. The process had been initiated by staff who have listened to older generations who said that stories of the past conflicts are not shared, or that young people do not understand the trauma. The need for inclusion of youth has created an ongoing dialogue between generations which builds reciprocal and respectful intergenerational relationships. In this way youth participation and leadership are developed when young people act on issues of importance to the wider community (Teixeira et al., 2021). This example indicates that through mutual respect, youth are uniquely contributing to the challenge of processing generational trauma in Cambodia. Without youth consultation, the understanding and empathy may have been lost for future generations. The key principle of empowerment in an RBA is highlighted in this example from the European NGO. Telling stories and healing wounds of the past promotes human dignity and empowers the generations involved to create social improvements (Gready, 2008). The second example from CCP similarly reflects the process of assigning youth to projects initiated by NGO staff or community members. Youth are not excluded from decision making and youth have their own responsibilities, such as keeping up school attendance. As youth attending the programmes age, their ongoing participation becomes optional. This example may be indicative of middle rung participation on Hart's (1997) ladder, although the programme prepares young people to increase ownership of their lives in the future. CCP works with the whole community to meet basic needs for healthcare, hygiene, and education, and mentor young people to understand the numerous opportunities for their future.

Table 7.1: *Examples of Cambodian Youth Participation within NGOs as Positioned in Hart's Ladder of Participation (Author, drawing on Hart (1997))*

8. Child/Youth-initiated, shared decisions with adults: (1) Hagar's youth-led groups that meet regularly to discuss ideas important to them and present their recommendations to the NGO and community leaders. These groups come up with the strategies and take the lead but have the support and financial backing from the community investment plans and NGOs. (2) FLAME's monthly youth gatherings were initiated by the youth themselves when they suggested time for fun not just study. With the support of staff, they now meet regularly around 90-100 youth for fellowship. (3) YWAM's Friday night youth gatherings are now lead and run by the youth for the youth. These times are separate to in-class times and are optional. The youth lead singing, games, and share a short Bible teaching with their peers. Staff are present to support and offer advice or resources as needed.	Degrees of Participation
7. Child/Youth-initiated and directed: The young people at Global are starting to initiate and look into the possibility of running events at the church or conferences to gather together with others.	
6. Adult-initiated, shared decisions with children/youth: (1) Hagar training young people to do the community assessments during the COVID-19 lockdowns and report the needs of their village back to the NGO. (2) PATH programme at FLAME was developed from adults recognising that the current programme was not meeting the needs of young people. Therefore, in consultation and using the decisions from youth feedback the PATH programme was developed. (3) CCP follow up with youth once they have finished the programme. This looks like adults reaching out, but the ongoing mentoring relationship is determined by the young person's willingness to stay involved and connected. (4) In YWAM the school was set up by staff and youth volunteers are given suggested content and mentoring from staff, although the way they run their classes are as determined by the young people themselves.	
5. Consulted and informed: At Global youth, who are already active participants in the church are recognised and supported. This often looks like additional leadership roles, or paid employment to keep them involved and feeling valued.	
4. Assigned but informed: (1) The peace-building work being carried out by the European donor NGO who are involving youth to be a part of storytelling in their families and communities. This initial stage can lead to youth-initiated projects as they gain trust and become facilitators for conflict resolution in their communities. (2) The children and youth involved with the CCP ministry are selected due to their needs and living situations. This is determined by local leaders and site managers who are adults, although future participation is optional as the young person grows up in the programme.	
3. Tokenism	Non-Participation
2. Decoration	
1. Manipulation: The mentality of parents in Leang Dai village who do not want their children to continue study but instead to come and work for them or work to pay off parents' loans. The culture of respect for parents is used against the young person when they are pressured to please and obey their parents' wishes.	

Rung five on Hart's ladder is "consulted and informed" (1997, p. 43). In this instance projects are run by adults, although youth consultation becomes an embedded process. Youth are involved throughout decision-making, from the initiation of new ideas, to ongoing influence and participation in outcomes (Hart, 1997). My data from Global youth centre modelled this step through the structure and delivery of church gatherings (Table 7.1). Youth who attend regularly or enthusiastically serve at church are recognised and supported to be involved in various leadership capacities. At regular team meetings youth can present new ideas and offer to lead activities. The new room for church meetings was an example I was given by staff at Global. They used to hold services outdoors in the heat with only electric fans, but youth suggested to have a designated room for church services with air-conditioning. This led to the development of the new space we sat in for the interview. Young people at Global were genuinely consulted in the process of change and their ideas were taken seriously and actioned. Global recognises that young people in their organisation want to share ideas and provided the space for these to be voiced. Youth are becoming leaders within the church and some are now staff. This reflects the mobility of levels on Hart's ladder. Actions occurring on one level can become projects led and facilitated by young people in the future, as seen in this example from Global. Blanchet-Cohen and Bedeaux state that "rights-holders" must become key actors in their own development (2014, p. 75). Therefore, the actions of staff at Global are empowering youth by training and supporting their active role in decision-making, and increasing their self-confidence to recognise their abilities as key actors among community decision-makers (Finlay, 2010).

The sixth rung of the ladder introduces more equal relationships between youth and adults in decision-making. Hart refers to this rung as "adult initiated, shared

decisions with children" (1997, p. 43). He explains that most often those over 25 years of age have the dominant voice in making decisions. This may be because development projects do not always target specific age categories, instead they are shared by the wider community. By keeping youth engaged throughout the full process, they remain involved in all decisions (Hart, 1997). My interview data indicates several examples taking place at this rung of participation. The first was a Hagar project during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Due to the nation-wide shutdowns, adult staff members in the NGOs were unable to access the communities they worked in. Many Cambodians who had been working in Thailand were returning to their hometowns. The NGO had no way of assessing the needs of these communities and they turned to young people for help. Youth were trained to gather information and assess household needs. Youth became the voice of their communities for the NGOs who were then able to offer appropriate support and resources needed. Hagar sought out youth and shared decisions with them regarding the needs of their communities which led to greater trust of young people within their villages. This reflects that when given the opportunity young people are willing to step into roles of responsibility and work for the collective wellbeing. Through this example it can be seen how shared decisions with youth can challenge the inherent power dynamics within NGO structures and Cambodian communities (Camino, 2000).

Also on rung six, is the next example from my data which is the development of the PATH programme for youth at FLAME in Phnom Penh. Table 7.1 highlights that adults initiated the PATH programme, although PATH quickly developed alongside youth voice. The staff at FLAME consulted with young people, and students influenced the time for classes, what subjects they wanted to be taught, and how often they meet. McAuliffe (2022) mentions that policy and behavioural changes, such as the actions taken by

FLAME staff, are required to fulfil and protect rights-holders. Evidently, the youth at FLAME expressed their right to be heard. Similarly, the example from my interview at YWAM suggests that their youth volunteer teacher programme operates at this rung of the ladder. In both these examples the scope of the programme is already established. Youth know the boundaries of their input in decision making (Hart, 1997), and the goal is collaboration on programme delivery, based on youth needs. At YWAM the youth volunteer teachers were given the broad curriculum and were then empowered to prepare their lesson structure and content themselves. Staff support is available, and the volunteers are encouraged to consult with them when needed. At FLAME and YWAM the development of these programmes has led to other youth run activities operating higher up on Hart's (1997) ladder. The progression of youth leadership in these examples reflects how the RBA principle of participation challenges conventional relationships between youth and adults. RBAs support an enabling environment (Blanchet-Cohen & Bedeaux, 2014), which was evident in all three examples relating to the sixth run of the ladder. By fostering opportunities for youth leadership in safe familiar environments with adult support, the youth at these NGOs are taking initiative to start other projects of interest.

Youth-initiated and directed projects sits at the seventh rung of the ladder (Hart, 1997). At the time of conducting my field research I could see evidence of one example at this rung starting to take place in the data. The regular gatherings of students at Global have created space for youth to bring forward suggestions for initiatives they would like to run. Staff informed me of young people's visions to run conferences across the city as well as leading and speaking at church events. These are big picture ideas which extend beyond what these youth are seeing and partaking in weekly at the

regular activities. This space where young people can dream together and work towards running such events, suggests that Global are empowering them to be innovative. A key feature of this stage on the ladder is that supportive adults learn how to help without taking over and allow young people to give it a go (Hart, 1997). Adults can play the role of allies and help to facilitate young people drawing on their own experiences and knowledge (Checkoway, 2011).

The eighth and top rung of the ladder is "child/(youth)-initiated, shared decisions with adults" (Hart, 1997, p. 45). Youth may be confident and capable of initiating and undertaking projects on their own, although there will be points where it is necessary to engage with adults in positions of power. For this type of participation there needs to be a foundation of trust between young people and adults. Youth need to know that consulting with others does not look like giving over control. Adults who are engaged need to be active listeners and respond to young people's questions through a lens of mutual respect (Hart, 1997). Three examples of these shared decisions with adults presented in the interview data. The first was in Hagar's youth-led groups who have been meeting within five different provinces in North-West Cambodia. Hagar has worked with these groups for a period of three years and youth are actively discussing and brainstorming recommendations and ideas for their communities and provinces. The initial support and capacity development with Hagar has resulted in young people in these Cambodian provinces undertaking projects that operate at Hart's (1997) top rung of meaningful participation. These young people have taken on roles that are bigger than themselves, which in turn has contributed to a change in mindset and attitudes of the wider community towards youth, community development, and the environment (Saythalat, 2022). Youth in this example are enacting the right to self-

determine their needs and goals which is an embedded process within RBAs (O'Leary, 2017).

The next two examples on rung eight from my data are very similar and reflect meaningful participation. They highlight a trend of Cambodian youth wanting community and fellowship with other young people. In both these examples youth wanted to build strong relationships of trust with their peers who share the same values and beliefs. The desire to develop relationships could reflect that the next generation of Cambodian youth want to rebuild the trust within their society that was broken down during the Khmer Rouge (Future Forum, 2023). My data reflects how the youth at FLAME initiated a group for fun and socialising to have a community outside of study. The initial opportunities for young people to participate in decision-making with adults on the formation of PATH, as outlined in more detail in Chapter 5, suggests a change in their confidence to initiate new ideas. Therefore, this example reinforces that participation is not stagnant and there are opportunities for mobility among rungs of the ladder.

The second occurrence of young people taking initiative and consulting adults to develop a new programme was at YWAM in Leang Dai village. While interviewing a YWAM ministry leader, I was told about youth taking the lead on running a youth group for their peers. These same youth who have been empowered to teach other children in their community were also wanting help to run a youth group every Friday night. The youth wanted the opportunity to run games, sing some worship songs and have a discussion or teaching on a topic from the bible. Youth's ideas are not only heard, but are given due weight, meaning their voices are central to decision-making as required in the UNCRC (McCafferty, 2017). The ministry leader told me that she offers support and

resources, while the youth run most of the group themselves. In both examples from FLAME and YWAM I had the impression that staff members were excited to see young people taking initiative. The staff recognised that young people knew best what other young people like and that it was best to offer support rather than lead. This aligns with evidence that suggests programmes for youth are more effective and efficient at meeting youth needs when they are in fact engaged in the planning and delivery of the programmes (Head, 2011).

7.2.1 Effectiveness of Hart's Ladder (1997) at Understanding Cambodian Youth Participation

Hart's model (1997) encapsulates intergenerational relationships as an essential element of meaningful participation. Youth participation does not occur in a void where adults do not exist. Therefore, adult consultation and facilitation help to ensure that youth are equipped and confident to participate. In Cambodia the effectiveness of participation is reliant on intergenerational relationships based on trust and reciprocity. The hierarchical social structures in Cambodia influence the interactions between young and old (Mysliwiec, 2005). The top rung of the ladder states that decisions must be shared with adults (Hart, 1997). When youth initiate community development in Cambodia, they should be willing to foster a spirit of solidarity between generations. In this way young people can gain the respect of others in the community and motivate all ages towards collective action (Mysliwiec, 2005). Hart's ladder (1997) also highlights the mobility of meaningful participation. If participation occurs at a lower rung this does not mean that it is stuck there. The data reflects through the examples from FLAME and YWAM's youth volunteer programmes that participation at one rung can be a starting

point for more youth-initiated projects in the future. In this way Hart's (1997) model is useful for understanding the intergenerational and transient nature of youth participation in the Cambodian context.

However, social mobility of young people may be difficult in Cambodia when processes of equipping and empowering youth remain in the early stages. Systematic reform and development processes are also slow which limits youth potential (Mysliwiec, 2005). The ladder also assumes a willingness from adults to want youth participation and to change their thinking about youth. For the success of youth engagement, policymakers and local commune leaders must see young people "as valuable, untapped resources rather than as a problematic and marginalised portion of the population" (Saythalat, 2022, p. 67). The staff member from EDP stated in his interview that even as an adult he did not feel he had free speech or the ability to actively participate in certain decisions. This indicates that Cambodian adults should not only want to engage with youth, but they themselves must also feel confident in participatory processes. An atmosphere without coercion, fear, or intimidation is ideal for meaningful participation (ADB, 2012). However, the data suggests this is not the case yet in Cambodia which is a significant barrier for the implementation of this model (Hart, 1997).

7.3 Examples of Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence in Cambodian NGOs

Lundy (2007) theorises another model of youth participation, using the notions of space, voice, audience, and influence, which I described in detail in Chapter 2. This section explores how Lundy's model applies to the data from a Cambodian context. The

interview data allowed me to discover the scope of youth participation activities that are taking place within and around NGOs in both Phnom Penh and Siem Reap. Table 7.2 indicates how several of the activities and programmes are protecting and honouring children and young people's rights under the UNCRC (1989). There were many examples both from interviews and observations, in my field journal, of activities that are facilitating opportunities for young people through space, voice, audience, and influence.

7.3.1 How is the Concept of 'Space' Present in Cambodian NGOs?

'Space' includes facilitating an environment for freedom of expression (Lundy, 2007). The examples from the data in Table 7.2 indicate three key commonalities across the space category. The first element of making the space safe for young people was familiarity. Familiarity looked like a person or people, such as the presence of known staff, family, or community member. Familiarity also meant meeting in a place where young people were already present and met regularly. This was seen in the dormitory students at Global and the formalisation of a youth hang-out group at FLAME. Therefore, for a space to feel safe or comfortable to Cambodian youth, an important factor is existing relationships with people and places. The second observation was that safe spaces also involved equipping and training. Young people can enter a safe space and be left to themselves, although for their views to make it all the way to having influence they may require some assistance. This connects to the eight rung on Hart's ladder (1997) where youth-initiated projects can still involve shared decisions with adults. Particularly in the examples from Hagar and YWAM where young people went on to have influence in their communities because there was space for growth, learning and

support. This support was offered by staff and leaders within their communities and the NGOs. Capacity development and confidence building is important to accommodate when considering the hierarchical nature of Cambodian society (Frewer, 2013). Typically, young people have not been acknowledged as trustworthy in Cambodia. Youth have been taught not to speak out and share their views, instead they must defer to parental authority or to senior members in their community (Mysliwiec, 2005). For Cambodian youth this must be considered when engaging with them in decision-making processes. Their rights must be explained to them, such as the right to have a voice and be shown respect (UNCRC, 1989).

Lastly, I observed in the data that youth gathered in these spaces due to a common need or want that they expressed. The interviews highlighted examples of youth wants such as the development of new programmes, social time with friends, study support, peace-making, employment opportunities, or volunteering. These wants indicate that it is important for Cambodian youth to feel sharing their ideas is purposeful, prior to using their voices. A key factor of successful youth participation are mutual partnerships among young people and those in positions of influence, such as NGO staff, community leaders and policy makers (Lundy & O'Donnell, 2022). The three commonalities in the data that reflect fostering safe spaces for Cambodian youth included familiarity, training and equipping, and a uniting over a common purpose. These considerations are not far removed from wider research on effective engagement with young people. It is important that young people are well informed and equipped, that they are given time to explore at their own pace and that they are able to focus on issues that are of importance to them (Feely et al., 2022). In this way Lundy's model rightly connects

space as a prerequisite for the expression of views as indicated in these results in Table 7.2.

7.3.2 How is Youth 'Voice' Expressed Within Cambodian NGOs?

The data in Table 7.2 indicates that when youth were in safe spaces, they had a lot to say. Facilitating opportunities for young people to use their voice looks like providing them with accurate and age-appropriate information to allow freedom of expression (Lundy & O'Donnell, 2022). There must be consideration of suitable engagement methods that offer opportunity for youth to creatively share their ideas in ways that feel natural and comfortable to them (Cummins et al., 2022). In the Cambodian context, building trust is a factor that carries through all the elements of Lundy's (2007) model. This was mentioned in the interview with a staff member from EDP who said that the young people in the youth groups at Hagar had gained a lot of confidence to speak openly with each other after three years of the NGO walking alongside them doing capacity development work. Taking the time for both the cultural and specific needs of rural Cambodian youth allowed them to feel comfortable to share and express their voice. The data in the voice column of Table 7.2 highlights three different ways youth chose to express themselves within these NGOs.

The first was FLAME's development of their PATH programme and the regular youth group meetings. These examples indicate that youth made suggestions while attending other programmes at FLAME. FLAME youth utilised existing relationships and the safe space (Lundy, 2007) to informally talk to trusted staff about programme improvements or new ideas. Being present in the programmes and feeling comfortable

to give feedback means that the FLAME staff had fostered this culture where youth voice was welcomed in their structures. These trusting and reliable relationships with adults are fundamental for enriching youth participation (Kennan et al., 2018a). It also reinforces the idea that young people's knowledge can be constructed through social interactions and relationships, and therefore make them the best experts on identifying their own needs (Lundy & McEvoy, 2011). The second scenario in the data facilitated youth voice through intentionally meeting in structured groups. The data shows two examples: the groups that met at Global who discussed new ideas; and the Hagar youth-led groups who met to plan and pioneer community development projects in their provinces. These structured spaces allow for intentional expression of youth voice, although there needs to be caution around inclusivity or lack of. It is important to not perpetuate social structures that exclude seldom heard voices and instead remove barriers for participation as far as possible (Feely et al., 2022).

The last example is when youth were directly asked for their feedback or involvement in specific projects. The first case was Hagar's collaboration with youth in hard-to-reach Cambodian provinces during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Through existing relationships, they were able to equip youth to engage with their village and then give feedback on needs of the area to Hagar. Hagar could then send suitable support more efficiently where required. These young people gained confidence and then went on to gain the respect and trust of their communities. Another case where adults approached youth for their input was the European donor NGO (name not included by request of the interviewee). The NGO created intergenerational dialogue for peacebuilding. This built on young people's existing positionality in their families and communities to initiate conversations about the past, which deepened connections based on mutual respect and

understanding of what others have been through. Both these examples have commonalities with the sixth rung of Hart's (1997) ladder which is "adult-initiated, shared decisions with children/(youth)" (pp. 43-44). This aligns with his suggestion that community development projects are not necessarily planned for only one generation (Hart, 1997). The impact of both Hagar's COVID-19 response and the donor NGO's peacebuilding work are not targeted specifically to benefit only young people, but they are for the shared benefit of whole communities. Facilitating youth voice is important because opportunities for youth to express themselves are often lacking. This is not because youth voices are the only ones that matter in development (Hart, 1997). Society has the most to benefit when youth participation is an integrated aspect of public affairs rather than a disconnected process (Head, 2011).

7.3.3 What 'Audiences' are Listening to Youth Voice in Cambodian NGOs?

It is one thing for NGOs to facilitate and consult youth, but it is another to listen and action youth views. An important factor for youth voices to be heard is that they have an active and open audience who listen. This could be an established platform where youth know they can bring forth ideas (Lundy & O'Donnell, 2022). As mentioned above this is evident in the regular meetings held with Global students to hear what they have to say, or in the youth groups who meet regularly, such as those facilitated by Hagar. Alternatively, for the audience of youth ideas to be meaningful there needs to be someone present who has the authority to make decisions or who holds power within the organisation (Lundy & O'Donnell, 2022). Audience is presented in two ways in the data in Table 7.2, where either youth are sharing their ideas with NGO staff, or they are meeting regularly in groups and bringing their voice to the commune council. The

development of these networks for audience is important as it increases power and voice as observed in an RBA (Noh, 2021). In the first case youth talked to trusted adults, because they had existing relationships with staff and knowledge of the NGO's structures. In the second instance, youth in rural areas have operated within existing power structures and worked collaboratively to ensure their audience were those who would listen. In an RBA these audiences are considered the duty-bearers (McCafferty, 2017). The duty-bearers are those whose actions impact on the rights of others. They are the policy-makers, state and local government leaders, and in the context of this research the NGO staff (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004). The data shows that there are duty-bearers who are taking their responsibility to listen and uphold rights seriously. At a societal and political level greater accountability is necessary to ensure duty-bearers are meeting their responsibilities in Cambodia. Perhaps it would be helpful in some NGOs and communities to develop the capacity of duty-bearers (Blanchet-Cohen & Bedeaux, 2014). This could be through training in participatory processes, accountability, and raising awareness of youth rights to have a voice in decision-making.

7.3.4 What 'Influence' are Cambodian Young People Having on Decision-Making Within NGOs?

The final concept in Lundy's model (2007) ensures that the views and ideas shared by young people have been taken seriously. Taking youth views seriously means acting on them as appropriate (Lundy & O'Donnell, 2022). The right for youth voices to be influential corresponds with Article 12 of the UNCRC, which states the importance of "the views of the child being given due weight" (UNCRC, 1989, p. 4). Table 7.2 outlines the examples from the data where youth ideas were given due weight. Three different

levels of impact (individual, NGO and community levels) are useful to examine these examples from the influence column (see Table 7.2). Influence at the individual level evident at FLAME, Hagar, and YWAM. Through capacity development youth in these NGOs have gained confidence and felt safe to express their views to others. The impact of empowering individuals through participatory processes and upholding their rights is the foundation for higher levels of impact. For example, youth shared their needs for computer and English classes at FLAME and the time of day that suited them best to come to class. At FLAME perspectives of youth have been reconfigured and participation has become the norm (McCafferty, 2017). Empowerment of these youth led to actions that impacted at an NGO level through changes to one of their programmes.

At YWAM the impact of youth influence at the NGO level was young people starting new classes and programmes. YWAM fostered youth leadership through volunteer opportunities that led to the young people's confidence to share other ideas. These youth ideas resulted in a youth group to benefit their peers and other students. One young person was also running a sewing skills class that taught others how to sew bags and earn some additional income for their families. Ramasamy and Pilz (2019) discuss how vocational training such as sewing skills, are a tool for rural people to enter the informal sector. Sewing as a form of alternative employment improves opportunities for rural young people to have influence on the economic outcomes of their households.

The next level of impact seen in the data is at the community level. The examples from Hagar reflect the impact of youth influence on the community. Through Hagar's support, young people were conducting household and community needs assessments during the COVID-19 lockdowns in Cambodia. These youth have become respected decision-makers in their communities. Their participation was formalised through

regular meetings with other youth and active roles at the commune level. Theis (2007) explains how this process of expanding youth participation is facilitated by enabling and supporting structures that lead to the growing influence of youth over decisions.

The European donor NGO fostering peace-building work has also formalised the influence of Cambodian youth at the community level. Young people were involved in consultation and sharing stories from Khmer Rouge survivors across generations. In this way they are recognised members of community development and facilitators of initiatives for building a peaceful future in Cambodia. Intergenerational partnerships, such as those seen in this NGO's peace-building work, are described by Camino (2000) as an innovative approach to community development. Youth-adult partnerships gain credibility through the opportunities they provide for youth to uphold their rights and realise their potential (Blanchet-Cohen & Bedeaux, 2014). Therefore, the varying levels of impact are all influential and indicate that youth participation in these examples has been meaningful. It is evident that these NGOs are preparing and equipping the young people they are working with so that these youth have greater autonomy in decision-making processes. The opposite of this would be dependency and manipulation (Kennan et al., 2022) which was not seen in any of the examples.

Table 7.2: *Examples of Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence in the Data (Author drawing on Lundy's Model (2007))*

NGO (Activity or Programme)	SPACE	VOICE	AUDIENCE	INFLUENCE
FLAME - PATH programme development	Youth were consulted, had existing relationships prior, and felt safe to admit what they were struggling with. "Bong [older brother or sister], I can't read and write".	Youth were given voice to speak up about they wanted to do after grade 1-6 after noticing a drop off in attendance.	FLAME staff and programme leaders actively listened.	PATH programme was developed to include English and Computer studies, and the time of day is suited to the needs of the youth.
FLAME - youth clubs	Youth requested a social place to hang out.	Youth asked for the space and suggested the topics and activities.	FLAME staff and programme leaders actively listened.	The demand has grown so much they now have youth clubs twice a month and young people are able to socialise and discuss difficult subjects as chosen by them (e.g. sexuality, money management).
Youth Participation in Global	Since hosting the dormitory for university students, they create space once a month for them to share their thoughts and ideas.	Young adults are given the safe space to share how they are doing and make suggestions for things needed in the dorm or at Global's facilities.	Global staff are present at meetings so they can hear and help action ideas.	Global now has a student library, as well as a separate indoor space with air-conditioning that gets used for church services as well as socialising and studying during the week.
Hagar's response to COVID-19 lockdowns	There was an influx of Khmer nationals returning to rural areas, and a need for more volunteers to evaluate how people were coping during the lockdown.	Young people were willing to help, and this gave them some credit and influence in their communities when adults saw their competence.	Community members, Hagar staff members, and commune leaders saw how helpful and effective young people were at reaching others in their community.	Young people were given more responsibilities. They were also consulted and trusted with some decision-making in the communities and were then able to initiate and organise projects that they were passionate about post-lockdowns. Since the lockdowns, the abilities of youth are well-recognised in the area's Hagar is working and some have positions within the commune councils or local school. Their skills and authority have been acknowledged.

Hagar youth led groups	Children and youth meet regularly in a safe space and receive capacity development.	Youth from these groups are active participants with Hagar in the Northwest provinces. They discuss, and brainstorm ideas together and have confidence to speak in this familiar group setting.	Recommendations from the children's and youth groups are shared in front of the commune council and sometimes at a subnational level at annual provincial meetings which consult children and youth.	In some provinces children and youth are allocated from the commune councils to implement their ideas.
Dialogue and Peacebuilding initiatives from European donor NGO	Young people are informed of Cambodia's history leading to opportunities for youth to be involved in reconciliation work with Khmer Rouge survivors and their families.	Young people can use their role and positions within their own families and communities to initiate dialogue and storytelling about the past.	Due to young people's openness to learn and their duty to share stories of the past they are received by their communities and families as there is an existing relationship and trust formed.	Young people can share the stories of their family members and other Khmer Rouge survivors to bring awareness to Cambodia's painful past. This sharing of oral histories and the testimonies of the older generation helps the next generations to remember and avoid repeating the same mistakes.
YWAM Youth Volunteers	They are equipped and supported to feel confident in their positions.	They make decisions for their classes, do the planning and preparation and have a voice in group activities.	The staff team and leaders walk alongside in supportive roles as needed, but the ideas of volunteers are heard and listened to.	Youth volunteers are responsible for running their classrooms and have influence over the weekly youth group and other fun/social activities that are planned. Some of the youth volunteers have also initiated and taught classes they enjoy such as sewing. Young people in these leadership roles are showing their communities what youth can do and that they can be leaders and have an influence.

7.3.5 Benefits and Limitations of Lundy's Model in the Cambodian Context

There are several key features of the Lundy (2007) model of participation that are beneficial when examining the context of youth participation in Cambodia. The progression of space, voice, audience, and influence highlights the importance of investing time in the process. Time is important when engaging youth in a participatory way in Cambodia. In the interview with the PATH programme coordinators at FLAME they discussed how existing relationships with youth were a pre-requisite for youth voice in their NGO. Loyal and trusting relationships are valued in Cambodian society where political and social structures are restrictive and discourage participation (Research Team in Cambodia, 2016). The attributes of audience and influence are also important features of accountability in the Lundy model (2007). Increasing political accountability is essential in Cambodia when the government is a key duty-bearer in upholding citizen rights. There is currently a divide between youth voice and local authorities which is maintained by the electoral authoritarian state in Cambodia (Vuković & Babović, 2018). Applying Lundy's framework as informed by RBAs and the UNCRC adds the value of accountability. This looks like not only fostering safe spaces and listening, but giving youth voice due weight (Lundy et al., 2011; UNCRC, 1989).

One limitation stands out when examining the data through this model. It outlines the responsibilities of adults, although there is a lack of intergenerational collaboration. This model encourages duty-bearers to offer intentional support for young people to express themselves freely and confidently (Lundy et al., 2011). However, tensions arise between generations when there are conflicting interests or disagreement surrounding whose rights matter most. RBAs regard all rights as equal through the principle of non-discrimination (Noh, 2021), although power-imbalances between age-groups leads to

the assumption that adults are more knowledgeable and should maintain authority (Teixeira et al., 2021). Lundy's model (2007) is limited by adults holding the final decision-making power. Youth in Cambodia have shown they are innovative and are key voices in shaping the future of the nation by taking the lead on issues such as climate change (UNDP, 2025). A recognition of young people's existing agency and capabilities is perhaps missing from this model. A study by Dennehy et al. (2019) similarly found the presence of adult-researchers when implementing Lundy's rights-based model may have influenced youth responses. Kennan et al. (2018b) found that there is limited guidance on implementing space, voice, audience, and influence, but that common practice involves using an advocate to bring youth views to the attention of decision-makers. Instead of maintaining adult authority, a model of collaboration and partnership could be beneficial in the Cambodian context.

7.4 Hart and Lundy's Models in a Cambodian Context: What is the Value Added?

My analysis Hart's model (1997) helped to highlight the mobility of participation, and as mentioned above how participation can migrate through rungs of the ladder to become more meaningful. Lundy's model (2007) prioritised facilitating safe spaces and trusting relationships as pre-requisites to meaningful participation, which staff at FLAME and YWAM found necessary in their youth engagement processes. These findings were relevant to the Cambodian context where youth participation is emerging as a valued practice (Chansambath & Chantarasingh, 2017). An assumption of these models is the existence of a suitable environment and a willingness to involve youth voices. Youth-led movements and projects are often stronger in nations with a well-established adult civil-society (Theis, 2007). Chapter 3 outlines the NGO landscape in

Cambodia, and although there are a large proportion of NGOs, Cambodia's restrictive political climate limits the space for NGOs to operate (Edwards Jr. & Brehm, 2016). The difficulties recognising youth voices in the context of state repression, highlights the need for a youth participation discourse that encapsulates the challenges faced by many Southeast Asian authoritarian states (Theis, 2007). For the space to be safe for youth to freely express their ideas (Lundy, 2007), Theis (2007) proposes that the Southeast Asian context requires a combination of national frameworks and grass-roots movements. Cambodia's electoral authoritarian regime strategically mimics democracy, but realising meaningful legislative changes to incorporate principles of participation and transparency seem distant (Morgenbesser, 2020).

A key youth and community development strategy is emerging that focuses on intergenerational collaboration (Zeldin & Petrokubi, 2006). I proposed that perhaps in the Cambodian context, Lundy's model (2007) could applied with an integration of intergenerational partnerships. Incorporating strategic relationship building, seeks to rebuild trust, and overcome the systems of patronage and oppressive hierarchies present in Cambodian society (Balvin & Miletic, 2020). My research indicates that young people want to be involved in developing their skills and knowledge to best support community development. Youth participants recognised their leadership potential and would participate in decision-making positions if given the opportunity. Therefore, a model of mutual partnership between adults and youth could legitimise youth leadership opportunities and enrich intergenerational learning (Camino, 2000)

7.5 Concluding Thoughts

Both Hart's ladder of participation and Lundy's model were useful for understanding the existing opportunities for youth participation within Cambodian NGOs. The examples in Table 7.1 and Table 7.2 highlight the ways community development NGOs in Cambodia are engaging youth in decision-making processes. There were many examples of youth influencing positive change within NGOs and communities. The attention to fostering safe spaces and maintaining accountability of duty-bearers were benefits of the Lundy model (2007). Hart's (1997) consideration of intergenerational connectedness and adults as mentors and facilitators is helpful for youth empowerment and building capacities.

However, there were some limitations in the application of these frameworks without consideration of local contexts in Cambodia. Perhaps a combination of the two models would be more relevant in Cambodia. This could include the relational, safe spaces, and the value of youth as rights-holder. Incorporating intergenerational aspects would also be important as youth do not exist in isolation from their communities. Youth participants in the workshops reinforced this notion that community development is a team effort.

CHAPTER EIGHT:

Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

Through a rights-based framework, this research explored the inclusion of youth voices in Cambodian community development NGOs. As a cross-cultural researcher, I sought to take an RBA by remaining open, listening, and learning from the NGO staff and youth participants who shared their ideas and experiences with me. This final chapter will reiterate the importance of allowing the local culture and context to shape the frameworks for youth participation in Cambodia. I will then consider how my findings can practically influence development within Cambodia and how young people can become future leaders and change makers.

8.2 Allowing Culture and Context to Shape Youth Participation

This research explored the types of youth participatory activities occurring in community development NGOs in Cambodian. Youth participation is a right under Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989), and can be understood as empowering youth to be engaged in decisions, projects, and institutions that impact their lives. This involvement should be meaningful and allow young people to have real influence (Checkoway, 2011). Two key conceptual models of youth participation framed this research. The first was Hart's (1997) ladder of participation that outlines a spectrum of youth participation from tokenistic to youth-led. The second model was Lundy's (2007) framework of space, voice, audience, and influence. Within the scope of this study these models were both

useful for identifying and analysing the types of participation occurring in the Cambodian NGOs. Chapter 7 outlines the benefits and limitations to these approaches when applied cross-culturally in Cambodia. This discussion concluded that a combination of the two models represents the diverse realities of youth participation in Cambodia quite well. The data suggested that youth participation in Cambodia would require an investment in relationship building, creating safe environments, and holding duty-bearers accountable to include youth voice. These findings align with the notions of space, voice and influence from Lundy's model (2007). Evidence suggested that for youth participation to be meaningful, with real influence in Cambodia, there needed to be partnership or support from adults. In this way, an intergenerational approach could be useful. The top rung of Hart's ladder of participation, youth-initiated, "shared decisions with adults" (1997, p. 45), encourages youth participation in the context of the wider community. This is relevant for Cambodian society where rural communities are led by local authorities and hierarchical structures dictate decision-making processes (Vuković & Babović, 2018). There is need for greater participatory policies to include youth voice. However, youth are not working to develop communities in isolation from adult authority figures. Therefore, contextualising models when attempting to understand youth participation in Cambodia is important. It is helpful to have these models as academic guidelines, but they must be incorporated with local understandings and ways of knowing. Researchers should always be cautious about universally applying knowledge and understandings from the Global North. This can help prevent development practices that become irrelevant or meaningless for local participants (Narayanaswamy, 2017). The next section will discuss the recommendations for what a framework for participation could look like in Cambodia.

8.3 Towards a Framework for Meaningful Intergenerational Youth Participation in Cambodia

As mentioned above the frameworks for youth participation were not perfectly suited to the Cambodian context. Perhaps in Cambodia an intergenerational model could provide a landscape for more meaningful youth participation. Intergenerational networks and community-based livelihoods are not a new concept in Cambodia. However, urban migration, pressures from parents, pursuit of higher education and socioeconomic challenges have more recently impacted the social support systems (United Nations, 2018). My research findings also discovered that it is not only Cambodian young people who would benefit from greater participatory freedoms. Adult interviewees expressed that they felt unsafe and uncertain speaking up on some contentious issues. Strengthening intergenerational collaboration could be an outline for a broad framework of youth participation in Cambodia. Some recommendations include:

1. *Incorporating international approaches to development:* This means recognising the diverse voices across and within generations, and negotiating outcomes so that all ages can meet their needs without compromising the needs of others (SOIF, 2021).
2. *Youth mentoring and coaching:* Mentoring relationships are beneficial at bridging generational gaps. When formalised in a development context a mentor can pass on necessary skills and knowledge, and the mentee can provide a fresh approach from a youth perspective (Dickson-Hoyle et al., 2018).
3. *Formalised Pathways for Youth Voices:* The findings from Hagar highlighted the success of youth-led groups and their formal platform to share at a commune

level. Then youth know when and where they will have opportunities to share and can prepare and allocate roles during their group meetings prior.

4. *Ongoing/Long-Term Opportunities Participation:* Youth participation should not be a one-off event. Ongoing participation can become an instinctive process within an organisation or programme.

These recommendations are not meant to replace the other models outlined in this research. Instead, they are in addition to and supplementary to Hart and Lundy's frameworks, when considering local contexts in Cambodia. Youth participation is a process of mutual learning between young people and adults (Lundy & O'Donnell, 2022). Participation should evolve and be encouraged with keeping the appropriateness of youth cultures and contexts in mind.

8.4 Final Thoughts

This research sought to understand the existing opportunities for youth voice in community development NGOs in Cambodia and to explore possibilities to expand their participation in decision-making processes. In my interviews with NGO staff, I discovered that participatory practices are empowering youth voices in Cambodia. In Chapter 5 I analysed how these opportunities for youth within NGOs are being outworked. Examples include volunteering, leadership roles, implementing new programmes, and shaping NGO policies. The creative workshops with youth I outlined in Chapter 4 and analysed in Chapter 6, answered my second research question and the corresponding objectives. This explored the ideas Cambodian youth have for community development and how their voices can be strengthened. Young people who participated

in the workshops had many ideas for developing their communities. Some ideas focused on improvements to existing structures such as the quality of education and healthcare. Other participants want to see infrastructure develop through building libraries, retirement homes, and improving the roads and signage. There were also several innovative suggestions. One participant wanted to map their village so it would be more welcoming to visitors, and another wanted every home to have solar panels so villagers could save money on electricity and be more sustainable. These young participants reiterated that when asked, young people want to have a voice in development and decision-making. In Cambodia people under 30 years old represent around 70% of the population (World Population Review, 2025, para. 1). This is a huge portion of society who will be the next generation of leaders. Cambodia has come a long way since the devastating Khmer Rouge civil war (Mysliwiec, 2005). They have reclaimed culture and religion, as well as seeing rapid economic growth over the last 30 years (Future Forum, 2023). There is now the opportunity to embrace the wealth of youth potential in their nation.

Young people are often at the forefront of developing and producing new technologies and media (United Nations, 2018). Youth are overcoming barriers of social exclusion and marginalisation to raise their voices on global causes such as climate change, discrimination, and repressive political regimes. They are using ever evolving tools like social media and protests as mechanisms to be heard (United Nations, 2018). Therefore, will this new generation of leadership in Cambodia (Hutt, 2024) take up the challenge of greater youth inclusion in society and harness the innovative potential? Will they partner with young people for a more inclusive society that is influenced by diverse voices? I hope to see greater freedoms for Cambodian youth to share their

creative knowledge and ideas with others, so that youth can take the lead realising their dreams for a better society for all.

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APPENDICES:

Appendix 1: Interview Information Sheet

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

"Chum reap suor! My name is Esther and I am a student at Massey University in New Zealand. I am in Cambodia to do some research towards my Masters of International Development. "

YOUTH & DEVELOPMENT

"Exploring opportunities for Youth Participation in Cambodia"

What is my research about?

Through this research I hope to understand the opportunities for young people to participate within Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) in Cambodia. This research will also explore possibilities to grow young people's participation in decision-making processes.

I hope to hear directly from young people through creative workshops and from NGO staff/leaders in interview catch ups:

- What opportunities youth have to participate in a Cambodian context;
- The ways organisations are involving young people in decision-making;
- What commitment there is to youth participation within community development NGOs in Cambodia;
- The ideas young people have for their communities and the NGO they are connected to;
- and, ways to strengthen young people's voices in their community/NGO.

Rights as a Participant:

There is no pressure to accept the following invitation. If you do choose to join this research:

- You can withdraw from the workshop at anytime, no explanation necessary
- You do not have to answer every question or complete every activity
- You can ask to stop the voice recording or for photos not to be taken of your work
- You are welcome to ask questions any time
- You can provide any information knowing that your name will not be used
- You have access to the summary of my findings from this research and/or the full thesis if you would like

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher (s), please contact Prof Craig Johnson, Director, Research Ethics, telephone 06 356 9099 x 85271, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz.

The Invitation:

If you are a staff member or leader in an NGO working with young people, you are officially invited to take part in this research. If you would like to be involved, please get in touch with me or a staff member from your organisation.

I will then be in touch to organise a time that works for you that we can meet for an informal interview style catch up. The interview should only go for about 1 hour and can take place at a location where you feel comfortable and won't be overheard. You will be able to share your experiences and your organisation's values on youth participation. You are free to speak in Khmer or English during the interview.

During the interview notes will be taken and the conversation may be voice recorded if you are happy with this. Your identity will be kept confidential.

When my research is finished I will write up a summary of what I found out, which I can email or send to you if you would like. Any information from this research will firstly be used for my Masters thesis, but may also be used for conference presentations or related publications. If you would like a copy of the full thesis once completed please also let me know.

Your experiences and ideas are important and will help to understand the roles young people have in decision-making processes and ways that youth voices in Cambodia can be strengthened.

Contact Details:

If you have any questions about this research you are welcome to contact me or my supervisor.

My contact details:

Esther Pickering - [redacted]

+64 [redacted]

My supervisors contact details:

Dr Alice Beban - A.Beban@massey.ac.nz

+64 6951 6851

Appendix 2: Interview Consent Form

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

Exploring opportunities for Youth Participation in Community Development NGOs in Cambodia

INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

I have read, or have had read to me in my first language, and I understand the Information Sheet that has been provided to me. I have had the details of the study explained to me, any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

1. ***YES I agree / NO I do not*** agree to the interview being sound recorded. *(circle your answer)*
2. ***YES I would / NO I would not*** like to have my recordings returned to me. *(circle your answer)*
3. **I agree** to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Declaration by Participant:

I _____ hereby consent to take part in this study.

(please print your full name above)

School of People, Environment and Planning
Private Bag 11 222, Palmerston North, New Zealand
06 356 9099 | http://pep.massey.ac.nz

Appendix 3: Workshop Information Sheet (English)

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

"Chum reap suor! My name is Esther and I am a student at Massey University in New Zealand. I am in Cambodia to do some research towards my Masters of International Development. "

YOUTH & DEVELOPMENT

"Exploring opportunities for Youth Participation in Cambodia"

What is my research about?

Through this research I hope to understand the opportunities for young people to participate within Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) in Cambodia. This research will also explore possibilities to grow young people's participation in decision-making processes.

I hope to hear directly from ***young people over the age of 16*** through creative workshops:

- How they view youth participation in a Cambodian context;
- The ideas young people have for their communities and the NGO they are connected to;
- And, ways to strengthen young people's voices in their community/NGO.

Rights as a Participant:

There is no pressure to accept the following invitation. If you do choose to join this research:

- You can withdraw from the workshop at anytime, no explanation necessary
- You do not have to answer every question or complete every activity
- You can ask to stop the voice recording or for photos not to be taken of your work
- You are welcome to ask questions any time
- You can provide any information knowing that your name will not be used
- You have access to the summary of my findings from this research and/or the full thesis if you would like

The Invitation:

If you are a young person between the ages of 16 and 24, you are officially invited to take part in this research. If you would like to be involved, please get in touch with me or a staff member from your organisation.

You will then be sent the details to join a creative group workshop session! Workshops will run for about 2.5 hours and there will be around 15 people total at each workshop. You will be able to share your experiences and ideas for youth participation in your community and organisation. Workshop activities include space to create, draw or build what youth participation looks like by yourself, and then brainstorm ideas in small groups. You are free to speak or write in Khmer or English during the workshop.

Photos will be taken of any creations or drawings completed during the workshop, but not of people. Written explanations by participants and notes may also be collected by the researcher. Workshops will also be voice recorded if all group members are happy with this. All participants identities will be kept confidential.

Of course there will be some food and drink provided throughout the workshop, and small gift from New Zealand at the end.

When my research is finished I will write up a summary of what I found out, which I can email or send to you if you would like. Any information from this research will firstly be used for my Masters thesis, but may also be used for conference presentations or related publications. If you would like a copy of the full thesis once completed please

Your experiences and ideas are important and will help to understand the roles young people have in decision-making processes and ways that youth voices in Cambodia can be strengthened.

Contact Details:

If you have any questions about this research you are welcome to contact me or my supervisor.

My contact details:
Esther Pickering - [redacted]
+64[redacted]

My supervisors contact details:
Dr Alice Beban - A.Beban@massey.ac.nz
+64 6951 6851

Appendix 4: Workshop Information Sheet (Khmer)

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

ការអញ្ជើញឲ្យចូលរួមក្នុងការស្រាវជ្រាវ

"ជំរាបសួរ! ខ្ញុំឈ្មោះ អេសធើរ ហើយខ្ញុំជានិស្សិតនៅឯសកលវិទ្យាល័យ Massey នៅក្នុងប្រទេសនូវែលហ្សេឡង់។ ខ្ញុំមកប្រទេសកម្ពុជា ដើម្បីធ្វើការស្រាវជ្រាវខ្លះៗឆ្ពោះទៅរកថ្នាក់បណ្ឌិតផ្នែកការអភិវឌ្ឍន៍អន្តរជាតិរបស់ខ្ញុំ។"

យុវជន និងការអភិវឌ្ឍន៍

"ការស្វែងរកឱកាសសម្រាប់ការចូលចូលរួមរបស់យុវជននៅកម្ពុជា"

តើការស្រាវជ្រាវរបស់ខ្ញុំនិយាយអំពីអ្វី?

តាមរយៈការស្រាវជ្រាវនេះ ខ្ញុំសង្ឃឹមថានឹងយល់អំពីឱកាសសម្រាប់យុវជនក្នុងការចូលរួមជាមួយអង្គការក្រៅរដ្ឋាភិបាល (NGos) នៅក្នុងប្រទេសកម្ពុជា។ ការស្រាវជ្រាវនេះក៏នឹងស្វែងរកនូវឱកាសដើម្បីបង្កើនការចូលរួមរបស់យុវជននៅក្នុងដំណើរការនៃការធ្វើការសម្រេចចិត្តផងដែរ។

ខ្ញុំសង្ឃឹមថានឹងបានឮថ្លាល់ពីសំណាក់ ***យុវជនដែលមានអាយុរវើសពី១៦ឆ្នាំ*** តាមរយៈសិក្ខាសាលាច្នៃប្រឌិតអំពី៖

- របៀបដែលពួកគេយល់ឃើញអំពីការចូលរួមរបស់យុវជននៅក្នុងបរិបទនៃប្រទេសកម្ពុជា
- គំនិតដែលយុវជនមានសម្រាប់សហគមន៍ និងអង្គការក្រៅរដ្ឋាភិបាលដែលពួកគេមានទំនាក់ទំនងជាមួយ។
- របៀបក្នុងការគាំទ្រសម្លេងរបស់យុវជនទាំងនៅក្នុងសហគមន៍ និងអង្គការក្រៅរដ្ឋាភិបាលរបស់ពួកគេ។

សិទ្ធក្នុងនាមជាអ្នកចូលរួម៖

សូមកុំមានសម្ពាធក្នុងការទទួលយកនូវការអញ្ជើញខាងក្រោមប្រសិនបើ លោកអ្នកជ្រើសរើសចូលរួមក្នុងការស្រាវជ្រាវនេះ។

- លោកអ្នកអាចដកខ្លួនចេញពីសិក្ខាសាលានេះបានគ្រប់ពេល ដោយមិនចាំបាច់តម្រូវឲ្យមានការបកស្រាយ

លិខិតអញ្ជើញ៖

ប្រសិនបើលោកអ្នកគឺជាយុវជនដែលមានអាយុចន្លោះចាប់ពី១៦ ដល់ ២៤ឆ្នាំ លោកអ្នកត្រូវបានអញ្ជើញឲ្យចូលរួមជាផ្លូវការនៅក្នុងការស្រាវជ្រាវនេះ។ ប្រសិនបើលោកអ្នកចង់ចូលរួម សូមទំនាក់ទំនងមកកាន់ខ្ញុំ ឬ បុគ្គលិកដែលមកពីអង្គការរបស់លោកអ្នក។

បន្ទាប់មកទៀត លោកអ្នកនឹងត្រូវបានផ្តល់ពត៌មានលម្អិតដើម្បីចូលរួមវគ្គសិក្សាសិក្ខាសាលាក្រុមច្នៃប្រឌិត។ សិក្ខាសាលានេះនឹងប្រព្រឹត្តទៅរយៈពេល ២ម៉ោងកន្លះ ហើយនឹងមានមនុស្សសរុបប្រមាណ១៥នាក់នៅក្នុងសិក្ខាសាលានីមួយៗ។ លោកអ្នកអាចចែករំលែកពីបទពិសោធន៍ និងគំនិតរបស់លោកអ្នកចំពោះការចូលរួមរបស់យុវជននៅក្នុងសហគមន៍ និងអង្គការរបស់លោកអ្នក។ សកម្មភាពសិក្ខាសាលារួមមានកន្លែងដើម្បីបង្កើត គូរ ឬសាងសង់នូវលក្ខណៈនៃការចូលរួមជាក្រុមរបស់យុវជនដោយខ្លួនអ្នកថ្លាល់ បន្ទាប់មកទៀតបំផុសគំនិតនៅក្នុងក្រុមតូច។ លោកអ្នកមានសេរីភាពក្នុងការនិយាយ សរសេរជាភាសាខ្មែរ ឬភាសាអង់គ្លេសអំឡុងពេលនៃសិក្ខាសាលា។

រូបភាពដែលទាក់ទងនឹងការបង្កើត ឬគំនូរណាមួយដែលបានបញ្ចប់ក្នុងអំឡុងសិក្ខាសាលានឹងត្រូវបានថត លើកលែងតែអ្នកចូលរួម។ ការពន្យល់ដែលអ្នកចូលរួមបានបានសរសេរ និង កំណត់ត្រាក៏នឹងត្រូវបានប្រមូលទុកដោយអ្នកស្រាវជ្រាវផងដែរ។ សិក្ខាសាលានេះនឹងត្រូវបានថតជាសម្លេងដែរ ប្រសិនបើសមាជិកក្រុមយល់ព្រមនឹងធ្វើវា។

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- លោកអ្នកមិនចាំបាច់ត្រូវឆ្លើយនូវគ្រប់សំណួរ ឬ បំពេញនូវគ្រប់សកម្មភាពនោះទេ
- លោកអ្នកអាចស្នើរសុំឲ្យបញ្ឈប់នូវការថតសម្លេង ឬ ការថតរូបភាពរបស់លោកអ្នក
- លោកអ្នកអាចសួរសំណួរបានគ្រប់ពេល
- លោកអ្នកអាចផ្តល់ពត៌មានអ្វីក៏បាន ដោយព្រោះថា ឈ្មោះរបស់លោកអ្នកនឹងមិនត្រូវបានបញ្ចេញនោះឡើយ
- លោកអ្នកមានសិទ្ធចូលប្រើការសង្ខេបទាក់ទងនឹងអ្វីដែលខ្ញុំបានរកឃើញតាមរយៈការស្រាវជ្រាវនេះ ឬ និតេ្តបបទពេញលេញ ប្រសិនបើលោកអ្នកចង់បាន។

អត្តសញ្ញាណរបស់អ្នកចូលរួមនឹងត្រូវបានរក្សាជាការសម្ងាត់។

ក្រោកដណាស់ យើងនឹងមានផ្តល់ជូននូវម្ហូប និងភេសជ្ជៈខ្លះៗ អំឡុងពេលសិក្ខាសាលា ហើយក៏មានកាដូបន្តិចបន្តួចមកពីប្រទេសនូវែលហ្សេឡង់នៅពេលបញ្ចប់ផងដែរ។

នៅពេលដែលការស្រាវជ្រាវរបស់ខ្ញុំត្រូវបានបញ្ចប់ ខ្ញុំនឹងសរសេរសង្ខេបអំពីអ្វីដែលខ្ញុំបានរកឃើញ ហើយបើសិនជាលោកអ្នកចង់បានវា ខ្ញុំក៏អាចផ្ញើរតាមអ៊ីម៉ែល ឬផ្ញើរផ្ទាល់មកកាន់លោកអ្នកបានដែរ។ ជាដំបូង ពត៌មានណាមួយអំពីការស្រាវជ្រាវនេះនឹងត្រូវបានប្រើសម្រាប់ជានិតេ្តបបទថ្នាក់បណ្ឌិតរបស់ខ្ញុំ ប៉ុន្តែក៏នឹងប្រើសម្រាប់ការធ្វើបទបង្ហាញក្នុងសិក្ខាសាលា ឬ ទាក់ទងនឹងការបោះពុម្ពផ្សាយនានាផងដែរ។ បើសិនជាលោកអ្នកចង់បានក្រដាស ឬឯកសារចម្លងអំពីនិតេ្តបបទពេញលេញនៅពេលវារួចរាល់ សូមទាក់ទងមកកាន់ពត៌មានខាងក្រោម

បទពិសោធន៍ និងគំនិតរបស់លោកអ្នកពិតជាសំខាន់ ហើយនិងជួយដល់ការយល់អំពីតួនាទីដែលយុវជនមាននៅក្នុងដំណើរការនៃការធ្វើការសម្រេចចិត្ត និងរបៀបដែលសម្លេងរបស់យុវជននៅក្នុងប្រទេសកម្ពុជាអាចទទួលបានការពង្រឹង និងគាំទ្រ។

ពត៌មានលម្អិតទំនាក់ទំនង៖

ប្រសិនបើលោកអ្នកមានសំណួរអំពីការស្រាវជ្រាវនេះ លោកអ្នកអាចទំនាក់ទំនងមកកាន់ខ្ញុំ ឬអ្នកគ្រប់គ្រងរបស់ខ្ញុំបានគ្រប់ពេលវេលា។

ពត៌មានលម្អិតទំនាក់ទំនងរបស់ខ្ញុំ៖

Esther Pickering- [redacted]

+64 [redacted]

ពត៌មានលម្អិតទំនាក់ទំនងរបស់អ្នកគ្រប់គ្រងរបស់ខ្ញុំ៖

Dr Alice Beban- A.Beban@massey.ac.nz

+64 6951 6851

គម្រោងនេះត្រូវបានវាយតម្លៃដោយមានការពិនិត្យឡើងវិញពីសំណាក់មិត្តរួមការងារ និងត្រូវបានវាយតម្លៃថាមានហានិភ័យទាប។ ដូច្នេះហើយ វាមិនទាន់បានទទួលការពិនិត្យមើលឡើងវិញពីសំណាក់គណៈកម្មការសីលធម៌មនុស្សនៅក្នុងសកលវិទ្យាល័យនៅឡើយទេ។ ឈ្មោះរបស់អ្នកស្រាវជ្រាវនៅខាងលើមានទំនួលខុសត្រូវចំពោះក្រមសីលធម៌នៃការស្រាវជ្រាវនេះ។ បើសិនជាលោកអ្នកមានចម្ងល់អ្វីអំពីការធ្វើការស្រាវជ្រាវនេះ ប៉ុន្តែលោកអ្នកចង់ជួបជាមួយអ្នកផ្សេងក្រៅពីអ្នកស្រាវជ្រាវ សូមទំនាក់ទំនងមកកាន់ លោកសាស្ត្រាចារ្យ Craig Johnson ដែលត្រូវជានាយកនៃក្រមសីលធម៌ស្រាវជ្រាវ តាមរយៈទូរស័ព្ទលេខ 06 356 9099 x 85271 ឬ អ៊ីម៉ែល email humanethics@massey.ac.nz.

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Appendix 5: Workshop Consent Form (English)

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

Exploring opportunities for Youth Participation in Community Development NGOs in Cambodia

YOUTH WORKSHOP CONSENT FORM

I have read, or have had read to me in my first language, and I understand the Information Sheet that has been provided to me. I have had the details of the study explained to me, my questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

1. I understand that I have an obligation to respect the privacy of the other members of the group by not disclosing any personal information that they share during our discussion.
2. I understand that all the information I provide will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law, and the names of all people in the study will be kept confidential by the researcher.

Note: There are limits on confidentiality as there are no formal sanctions on other group participants from disclosing your involvement, identity or what you say to others in the workshop. There are risks in taking part in focus group research and taking part assumes that you are willing to assume those risks.

3. I agree to participate in the focus group under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet attached provided to me.

Declaration by Participant:

I _____ hereby consent to take part in this study.
(please print your full name above)

Signature: _____

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Appendix 6: Workshop Consent Form (Khmer)

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

ស្វែងរកឱកាសសម្រាប់ការចូលរួមរបស់យុវជននៅក្នុងអង្គការអភិវឌ្ឍន៍

សហគមន៍ NGOs នៅប្រទេសកម្ពុជា

ទម្រង់ការយល់ព្រមពីសិក្ខាសាលាយុវជន

ខ្ញុំបាទ/នាងខ្ញុំ បានអាន និងយល់អំពីពត៌មានដែលបានផ្តល់មកកាន់ខ្ញុំបាទ/នាងខ្ញុំ។ ខ្ញុំបាទ/នាងខ្ញុំបានអានពត៌មានលម្អិតទាក់ទងនឹងការសិក្សា ដែលត្រូវបានពន្យល់មកកាន់ខ្ញុំបាទ/នាងខ្ញុំ ហើយសំណួររបស់ខ្ញុំបាទ/នាងខ្ញុំក៏ត្រូវបានឆ្លើយតបទៅតាមការពេញចិត្តរបស់ខ្ញុំបាទ/នាងខ្ញុំដែរ ហើយខ្ញុំបាទ/នាងខ្ញុំក៏ដឹងទៀតដែរថា ខ្ញុំបាទ/នាងខ្ញុំអាចសួរសំណួរបន្ថែមទៀតបានគ្រប់ពេល។ ខ្ញុំបាទ/នាងខ្ញុំត្រូវបានផ្តល់ពេលវេលាឲ្យគ្រប់គ្រាន់ក្នុងការពិចារណាថា តើគួរឲ្យចូលរួមនៅក្នុងការសិក្សានេះដែរឬអត់ មិនតែប៉ុណ្ណោះ ខ្ញុំបាទ/នាងខ្ញុំក៏យល់ដែរថា ការចូលរួមគឺជាការស្ម័គ្រចិត្ត ហើយខ្ញុំបាទ/នាងខ្ញុំអាចដកខ្លួនចេញពីការសិក្សានេះបានគ្រប់ពេល។

1. ខ្ញុំបាទ/នាងខ្ញុំយល់ថា ខ្ញុំបាទ/នាងខ្ញុំមានកាតព្វកិច្ចក្នុងការគោរពនូវឯកជនភាពរបស់សមាជិកដទៃទៀតនៅក្នុងក្រុម ដោយមិនបង្ហាញពត៌មានផ្ទាល់ខ្លួនណាមួយដែលពួកគេបានចែករំលែកនៅក្នុងអំឡុងពេលពិភាក្សារបស់យើងឡើយ។
2. ខ្ញុំបាទ/នាងខ្ញុំយល់ថា ពត៌មានទាំងអស់ដែលខ្ញុំបាទ/នាងខ្ញុំបានផ្តល់ឲ្យនឹងត្រូវបានរក្សាជាសម្ងាត់ក្នុងកម្រិតមួយដែលច្បាប់បានអនុញ្ញាតិ ហើយឈ្មោះរបស់អ្នកចូលរួមក្នុងការសិក្សាទាំងអស់នឹងត្រូវបានរក្សាជាសម្ងាត់ដោយអ្នកស្រាវជ្រាវ។

កត់ចំណាំ៖ ការរក្សាជាសម្ងាត់មានដែនកំណត់ ដោយសារតែមិនមានការដាក់ទណ្ឌកម្មជាផ្លូវការទៅលើក្រុមអ្នកចូលរួមដទៃទៀតអំពីការបង្ហាញទាក់ទងនឹងការចូលរួម និងអត្តសញ្ញាណរបស់លោកអ្នក ឬអ្វីណាមួយដែលលោកអ្នកបាននិយាយទៅកាន់មនុស្សដទៃទៀតនៅក្នុងសិក្ខាសាលានោះឡើយ។ វាក៏អាចនឹងមានហានិភ័យនៅក្នុងការចូលរួមក្នុងការផ្តោតការស្រាវជ្រាវជាក្រុមផងដែរ ហើយការចូលរួមនេះត្រូវបានសន្មតថា លោកអ្នកស្ម័គ្រចិត្តក្នុងការទទួលយកនូវហានិភ័យទាំងអស់នោះ។

3. ខ្ញុំបាទ/នាងខ្ញុំយល់ព្រមក្នុងការចូលរួមក្នុងក្រុមនេះក្រោមលក្ខខណ្ឌដែលមានចែងនៅក្នុងតារាងពត៌មានដែលបានផ្តល់មកកាន់ខ្ញុំបាទ/នាងខ្ញុំ។

សេចក្តីអះអាងពីសំណាក់អ្នកចូលរួម៖

ខ្ញុំបាទ/នាងខ្ញុំ _____ យល់ព្រមចូលរួមនៅក្នុងការសិក្សានេះ។

(សូមសរសេរឈ្មោះពេញរបស់លោកអ្នកនៅខាងលើ)

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