

Local Governance in Cambodia

The Paris Peace Accord in 1991 put an end to the civil war in Cambodia and paved the way for the establishment of democracy in Cambodia. Since the 1993 UN sponsored election, Cambodia has made efforts to rehabilitate governance in various sectors, including local governance. In 2001 Cambodia enacted two laws pertinent to local governance – a law on the administration and management of communes and a law on commune council elections. The commune council is the lowest level of the Cambodian public administration system and ensures good governance at the local level. With these laws Cambodia successfully held three commune council elections in 2002, 2008, and 2012.



CHALLENGES OF LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN CAMBODIA

Since the 1993 elections Cambodia has also experienced challenges in creating a stable and mature democracy. To promote stability after years of civil war, the increased centralization of authority has led to a fracturing of civil society. Due to traditional views of authority coupled with people's general cautiousness to express opinions or concerns in front of government officials, the country continues to witness a narrowing space for citizen participation in the political process.

Despite some progress with the performance of commune councils, few communes have successfully adopted and implemented their mandated functions. Part of the reason is that commune councils are appointed by the dominant political party and often answer to their party rather than their constituents. Higher level authorities from political parties also check on the commune activities once a month to ensure continuity of party policy, planning, and decision-making in each commune.

In this climate, the relationship between non-governmental organizations (NGOs), acting on behalf of civil-society, and government has become increasingly strained. A lack of trust between government and NGOs has diminished cooperation and partnership between civil-society and authorities. This lack of trust erodes civil society's ability to effectively support inclusive development at the subnational and national levels. Common issues are often dealt with in silos, where the by-product is not only inefficient use of resources but also weak governance.

APPROACH

Extensive research over the last two decades shows that the quality of governance, including the control of corruption, has a significant impact on economic growth and poverty reduction. Findings show that on average, countries with good governance grow faster than others.

The Royal Government of Cambodia has recognized the importance of strengthening governance in its National Strategic Development Plan 2006-10 and in the Rectangular Strategy 2004-08. The



CAMBODIA

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In Cambodia, the Foundation has conducted 44 projects to enhance good governance and social accountability in more than 600 communes in 21 provinces.

Asia Foundation has been working with the government to promote ongoing political reforms to strengthen democratic practices, decentralize decision-making processes, and build the capacity of the government to be transparent and responsive to citizen needs. The lion's share of this work has been to facilitate decentralization and de-concentration policy reforms and to further strengthen the role of subnational authorities in Cambodia, including at the commune and district levels.

The Demand for Good Governance project (DFGG) is a landmark, five-year good governance project that began in June 2009 and is funded by the World Bank. The Asia Foundation is the implementing agency of the Non-State Actor Component of DFGG. By supporting both state institutions and non-state actors to develop support for governance reform, the project aims to foster citizen demand for good governance by supporting social accountability initiatives (the capacity for citizens to work together to hold the state accountable) and other innovative governance approaches, which in turn enhance the capacity of the state to become transparent, accountable, and participatory. The project is designed to enable citizens to access government resources and increase citizen participation in the public sphere and strengthen partnerships between state and non-state actors. It emerges directly from the government's reform agenda that places good governance at the heart of its reform strategies.

ACTIVITIES

The Asia Foundation's DFGG program in Cambodia focuses on strengthening the social accountability capacity of Cambodian citizens and local authorities. This includes supporting Cambodian and international NGOs with activities, such as:

- Conducting studies and learning activities to strengthen the understanding of the factors that contribute to decision-making processes in politics at the local level, and best practice implementation of social accountability activities within Cambodia.
- Strengthening citizens' capacity to work together to collectively voice concerns on local development issues.
- Strengthening citizens' awareness of governance issues.

- Building capacity of local authorities on good governance concepts to promote engagement with citizens on local development.
- Implementing monitoring and social accountability tools to support citizen monitoring of key local services, such as primary schools, health centers, or water-management groups.
- Working with government partners to provide a range of good governance capacity-building workshops.
- Supporting increased coordination and partnership between civil-society and government agencies.
- Developing and disseminating learning materials on good governance and social accountability best-practices within Cambodia.
- Developing best practice training manuals on specific social accountability and good governance tools.
- Ensuring space for citizen participation and engagement in the commune council planning and decision-making process.
- Improving civil society capacity in social accountability and good governance.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- More than 100,000 citizens were educated about their right to hold government accountable.
- 44 projects conducted to enhance good governance and social accountability in more than 600 communes in 21 provinces.
- More than 100,000 citizens have participated in public forums and meetings with government officials to increase understanding of rights and demand greater accountability of government service.
- Facilitated citizen monitoring of over 120 health centers and 200 primary schools.
- Increased partnerships between NGOs and government agencies.

EXPERIENCE

The Asia Foundation has a nearly 60-year history of supporting democratic practices across Asia. Since 2001 in Cambodia, the Foundation has demonstrated experience in improving local governance, while strengthening partnerships between the Royal Government of Cambodia, civil society, and development partners.

The Asia Foundation is a nonprofit international development organization committed to improving lives across a dynamic and developing Asia. Headquartered in San Francisco, The Asia Foundation works through a network of offices in 18 Asian countries and in Washington, DC. Working with public and private partners, the Foundation receives funding from a diverse group of bilateral and multilateral development agencies, foundations, corporations, and individuals.



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