



Civic Engagement for Good Local Governance in Banteay Meanchey Province

This project will address the need for greater civic engagement and improved local governance at the grassroots through an innovative approach which combines community monitoring with capacity building of citizens and state actors. By strengthening citizen voice and creating space for dialogue with the state, we will empower communities to exercise their civic rights and demand better service delivery. In doing so, we will build an empowered and engaged citizenry and strengthen local governance.

BACKGROUND

A basic tenant of democracy is that state actors ought be accountable to citizens and responsive to their needs. In rural communities of Banteay Meanchey province, however, ordinary people have extremely limited influence over the state. There is little political participation by citizens and a real lack of “downward” accountability in state institutions. As a consequence, ordinary people’s perspectives and aspirations are rarely reflected in decision making and basic services are typically non-functional, corrupt or non-responsive to community needs.

Weak local governance negatively impacts people’s lives. These rural communities are deprived of adequate basic health and education services which affects their ability achieve a secure livelihood and ultimately deepens cycles of poverty. People are unhappy with their living situation but feel powerless to effect change.

While decentralisation reforms are occurring at national level, grassroots action is critical to achieving good local governance. There remains a need at the grassroots to build active demand for good governance, to expand opportunities for civic engagement and to make local state actors more accountable and responsive to citizens. Through a social accountability model we can address the many facets of this problem. We can empower communities for greater civic participation while bringing about improvements in local governance and service delivery.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The overall aim of our project is *to increase citizen participation for more effective local governance and public service delivery in Banteay Meanchey province* (BMC).

Our approach is to use a social accountability model in which citizens themselves hold the government to account and demand greater responsiveness. This is achieved by mobilizing citizens around pressing problems of local service delivery and empowering the community to

dialogue with government and push for improvements. Using this approach we will work in four rural communes to increase civic engagement in local governance and improve the responsiveness of local government and service providers.

RCEDO has applied this model in selected communes of Banteay Meanchey with outstanding success. We are now scaling up this project, extending to two new communes while also working to promote and sustain social accountability for good governance at provincial level.

ACTIVITIES

The Citizens Rating Report

This project is centred around a mechanism by which the community monitors service delivery: the Citizen’s Rating Report (CRR). We conduct the following process in each of the four target communes:

- We train community volunteers in good governance and social research practice.
- These Commune Research Teams then conduct community research which results in written reports appraising the public’s satisfaction with local governance and service delivery.
- Citizen feedback is shared with the government using the report as a credible evidence base.
- We hold a public forum, bringing together the community and all relevant state actors from commune to provincial levels. This enables direct dialogue and negotiation between citizens and the state, during which information is exchanged and state actors commit to improve services in line with community needs.
- Local service providers, Commune Councils and the Commune Research Teams then work together to ensure improvements are made.

Capacity building activities

The CRR process is supported by capacity building activities for the community and for government representatives.

- At a series of village awareness meetings, ordinary people gain knowledge and understanding of their rights and responsibilities as citizens.

- Government workshops at district and provincial levels result in understanding of good governance principles and practice.

Through these targeted activities and the first hand experience of engaging in the CRR and public forum we begin to change attitudes and behaviours both among community members and state actors. We empower the community to express their opinions and influence government and we build the capacity and willingness of state actors to engage with citizens and become more responsive to community needs.

Promoting good governance across the province

At provincial level we seek to promote, strengthen and sustain social accountability approaches through collaborative activities with other local organisations. This includes forming an NGO Working Group which will collaborate on peer training, provincial level advocacy, and supporting civil society actors to sustain their community advocacy efforts.

OUTCOMES

This project will result in sustained improvements to local governance in Banteay Meanchey province. In particular, it will directly benefit the 17,000 rural people living in Tapho, Treass, Ponley and Taen Kan communes.

It will achieve a range of very positive outcomes in terms of increasing citizen participation and improving local governance and service delivery.

Raised awareness of good governance among rural communities

People are aware that they have the right to express an opinion and understand the importance of civic participation for good governance. A network of community advocates has the capacity to continue raising awareness and advocating on the community's behalf.

Greater civic engagement

Community members are empowered by the process of successfully bringing about positive change. They have the

confidence and skills to engage with the state and contribute to future planning and monitoring processes.

Improved local service delivery

Local services are more tailored to community needs and community satisfaction with service delivery increases. Service providers understand that community feedback is important.

Increased transparency and accountability in local government

State actors are reminded that citizens can exert pressure on them to be accountable and transparent. Community members have information about correct processes and prices and so are able to assert their rights.

WHY IT WORKS

Our approach is effective because it is characterized by a commitment to the following key principles:

Partnering with citizens and the state

We work in partnership with both citizens and the government – because building citizen voice is not effective unless the government is willing and able to respond. At commune level we actively build long term partnerships between community advocates and the Commune Council.

Community empowerment

We build community awareness, confidence and skills for ongoing civic engagement. We empower the community by facilitating a process in which ordinary people engage with government and successfully bring about changes which will improve their own lives. We also build the skills of local volunteers for sustained community advocacy.

Sustainability

We achieve sustained improvements to local governance by focusing on capacity building, by engaging government stakeholders at multiple levels, by building community ownership of the project and by networking civil society and NGO actors across the province.



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Rural Community and Environment Development Organization (RCEDO)

RCEDO is an independent Cambodian Non Government Organisation which works to improve the lives of rural communities in northwestern Cambodia. We are motivated by a belief that all individuals are entitled to basic human rights and that, by working hand in hand with rural communities, we can empower people to bring about positive change in their own lives. Since 1998, we have supported rural people in more than 99 villages and 13 communes across Cambodia's northwest. In the past 6 years we have successfully implemented decentralisation and governance projects and have pioneered social accountability approaches in Banteay Meanchey province.