ADVOCACY AND POLICY INSTITUTE

MIDTERM REVIEW
REPORT

2019 – 2021

Midterm Strategy Review 2019-2023

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1 SUMMARY FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on results of the mid-term strategy evaluation, 2019-23

Progress of outcome #1: Policy influencing

API applied a soft advocacy approach (i.e., engaging in dialogue, rather than confrontation) to advocate with the government to develop/amend 8 laws/policies. API selected 170 CBOs to build their institutional capacity and support them to do advocacy with sub-national administrations (SNA). 273 issues have been raised by CBOs, and 131 issues (48%) have been solved by SNAs and relevant government institutions.

Recommendations for outcome #1
- Ready for the next actions when the law on A2I is adopted.

Progress of outcome #2: Citizen engagement

Notably, 169 CBOs (out of 170) developed and implemented advocacy plans and 50 small-scale projects, implemented by the members of the provincial association of local council (PALC) to address prioritized issues/needs of poor and most vulnerable groups.

The baseline study (2019) indicated that 38.8% of the respondents were satisfied with the local government performance in providing faster and more reliable public services for citizens. The online survey (2021) revealed that 80% of respondents assessed the quality of the performances/services were improved, 96% of councilors reported that CBOs were involved in monitoring activities of the SNA. 81% of CBO representatives confirmed that they used to monitor the activities implemented by SNA.

Recommendations for outcome #2
- Support citizen representatives to obtain best options (include ICT systems) to effectively engage with the local governance   .
- Replicate/scale up the ISAF model of problem-solving.
- Continue to help building the CBO capacity for effective advocacy, and connect them with diversified networks
- Engage SNA in the CBO capacity-building programs for improved cooperation   .
- Seek funding to support SNA to scale up the mobile and online platform meetings and maximize the social media to promote communication with the citizens.

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Progress of outcome #3: Improve access to information

485,140 citizens (202,835 female) participated in awareness-raising, on different topics, organized by API. 31,711 citizens have access to public information at the SNA. All the targeted public institutions (678, 100%) disclosed information to the public. Through an online survey, 49% of respondents used to join CC meetings and 47% used to join district/ municipality meetings.

Recommendations for outcome #3
- Develop sustainability plans for all existing digital platforms.
- Request SNA to disclose critical information (including long-term priority community development plans), simplify and improve mean of disclosing information,

Progress of outcome #4: Organizational development

API was awarded the GPP certificate in 2019. API is governed by BoD that functions in accordance with the by-law and policies. In 2021, API contracted a MEAL specialist to standardize its MEAL template. API's fund was increased 56% in 2020 and 28% in 2021. API staff increased from 18 to 34 (89%) from 2019 to 2021 but high staff turnover rate remains as a challenge

Recommendations for outcome #4
- Update the by-law (or the BoD manual) and develop an independent mechanisms for BoD to have direct communication with stakeholders.
- Update HR policy especially the staff appraisal mechanisms   .
- Update finance policy to reflect online working approach, simplify procurement and logistic procedure (include an online request and clearance) and standardize allowances payment, along with development of a policy for shared cost allocation.
- Delegate more powers to staff in decision making.
- Engage field staff with the processes of standardizing the MEAL template including reviewing/ developing data collection tools serving specific purposes and engage them in a regular reflection
- Conduct feasibility study, and analyze effectiveness and efficiency of setting up API office at project sites.

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2 ACHIEVEMENT OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN (OUTCOMES) TO DATE

The API's SP 2019 – 2023 has four strategic outcomes. Each outcome has set indicators and targets to be achieved. The implementation of the API's SP and its projects has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. As mentioned earlier, the evaluation team obtained two main sources of data and information as the foundation of the evaluation team's analysis. The team triangulated the secondary data, extracted from desk review, with the primary data collected from relevant respondents through KIIs, FGDs, online survey, and the reflection meeting. The findings indicated the levels of achievements and attention areas that are recommended to be addressed for future planning and implementation.

Strategic objective/outcome #1: Policy Influencing

The desk review and online survey[1] tracked outputs that API's projects had been generating against its planned indicators. The results are shown in Table 4 below:

Table 1: Summary of Result of Outcome #1: Policy Influencing.

Outcome #1: To influence policy formulation and implementation to address the rights and needs of the most disadvantaged groups and secure democratic space for women and men to exercise their rights.	
Indicators to measure the outcome #1:	**Summary of Result Against Indicators (2019 – 2021)**
• Number of laws and policies that have been influenced for the best interests of youth, women and disadvantaged group are debated, adopted and implemented effectively.	• 8 laws/policies had been advocated to develop/adopt through a series of advocacy dialogues.
• Number of CBOs of youth, women and disadvantaged groups strengthened institutional and operation capacities and technical skills in monitoring the public fund, performance, policy implementation, public service delivery and private sector investment affected the communities' rights and livelihoods.	• API built the capacity of 170 CBOs in areas of advocacy, legal knowledge, local governance, and local planning and budgeting. • API supported those CBOs to do advocacy with local authorities to address their community issues and to monitor the public fund, policy implementation, public service delivery, and private sector investment affected the communities' rights and livelihoods.
• Number of community issues negatively affected by the law/policy implementation gaps identified and advocated for and by the youth, women and disadvantaged groups and solved/addressed by the sub-national and national government institutions.	• 274 issues have been raised and 131 issues (48%) have been solved by SNAs and relevant government institutions. • Through the online survey,[2] 69% of respondents had raised issues[3] to SNA and 82% of them said the SNAs addressed the issues raised, and they were satisfied with the acts of the SNAs in solving issues raised by the citizens.

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The results from the desk review revealed that API has made progress against the 3 indicators for the first outcome of its SP 2019 – 2023. Firstly, API has been carrying out a series of advocacy dialogues and joined with other stakeholders to provide inputs as well as to debate for developing and/or improving 8 laws/policies to benefit the poor and marginalized groups in Cambodia. Those laws/policies include:

- Law on Access to Information (A2I):[4] aims to enable Cambodian citizens to receive accurate and reliable information to make better-informed decisions;
- Sub-decree on the Functional Transfer (to sub-national administration), the National Program for Sub-National Democratic Development (NP-SNDD) 2021-2030 and the National Budget Law 2021;
- Guideline on Implementation Social Accountability Framework (ISAF): to address key issues concerning people with disabilities (PWD);
- ISAF's operational guidelines for social protection service;
- National Youth Development Policy and the National Employment Policy;
- Guideline on function and service delivery of One Window Service Organization (OWSO); One Window Service Unit (OWSU) and District Ombudsman (DO);
- Amendment of Law on Association and NGO; and
- Road Traffic Law enforcement and adoption of the draft Alcohol Management Law.

Secondly, API has built the capacity of 170 Community Based Organizations (CBO) in areas of advocacy, legal knowledge, local governance, and local planning and budgeting. API has also supported those CBOs to do advocacy with local authorities to address their community issues, and to monitor the public fund, policy implementation, public service delivery, and private sector investment affected the communities' rights and livelihoods. Those CBOs include:

- 85 CBOs on sectoral issues with 6,800 members (include 4,590 females) in Pursat, Bantheay Meanchey, Kampong Thom, Kampong Speu, Kandal, and Kep provinces.

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- 35 Community accountability facilitator (CAF) groups (mostly indigenous youth) with 602 members (384 females), in 35 districts and municipalities in 6 provinces (of Ratanakiri, Mondulkiri, Stoeung Treng, Kratie, Koh Kong, and Kandal) and Phnon Penh to advocate on social accountability (for primary schools, health centers, commune/ Sangkat and Khan), and improvement of commune and social protection services.
- 33 CBOs with 90 indigenous women members in three districts include Chet Borei, Sala Visai, and Phnom Kra Venh (in Kratie, Kampong Thom and Pursat provinces).
- 8 youth ambassador groups with 108 members (including 72 females) in 5 districts (of Battambang), and 3 municipalities (1 in Kampong Chhnang, and 2 in Bantheay Meanchey) provinces, to raise awareness and monitor services provided by the OWSO.
- 4 Youth groups with 82 members (include 53 females) in local planning and budgeting (in 4 districts of Kandal, Phnom Penh, Kratie);
- 3 groups of young female street vendors with 59 members (in Phnom Penh, Battambang, and Siem Reap) to advocate/promote social economic rights for micro-business.
- 1 PWD group with 17 members (include 2 females) in Tram Kak (Takeo province).
- 1 youth network on Access to Information Law with 50 members (include 25 females) from all 25 provinces of Cambodia.

Thirdly, API has supported CBOs and citizen representatives to identify priority issues and to develop advocacy plans to raise those identified issues to all levels of the government institutions.[5] There were 274 issues have been raised and 131 issues (48%) had been addressed by the SNAs and relevant government institutions.

- 7/7 issues raised/addressed related to voice and physical needs of the PWDs;
- 96/69 issues raised/addressed related to quality performance/services at the OWSO/OWSU. The remaining 25 issues were not solved due to out of the OWSO/ OWSU's authority or not relevant.
- 16/16 issues raised/addressed related to priority actions in the commune-level action plans, and local funds raised (i.e. from private sector, UN/NGOs/CBOs and local authorities.
- 20/20 issues raised/addressed related to youth demanding to include social services in the CIP.
- 117/13 issues raised/addressed related to community issues affecting IP especially IP women.
- 18/6 issues raised/addressed related to Young Women Entrepreneurs (YWE).

Through the online survey,[6] 69% of respondents (who were youth, citizen and CBO representatives) indicates that they had raised issues[7] to sub-national and national government institutions. 82% of them said the SNAs and national government institutions addressed the issues had been raised, and 11% of them said they were very satisfied, 35% satisfied, and 36% moderately satisfied with the acts of the SNAs and national government institutions in solving issues raised by communities.

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Through the KIIs and FGDs, the API's BoDs, and representatives from CPDD, DCA, EWMI and NCDD-S appreciate the great contributions of API into the draft law on A2I.[8] The representative from NCDD-S appreciates API in working closely with the government in monitoring the progress of the SDGs[9] and the implementation of the ISAF-I and ISAF-II in partnership with the government and development partners.

During FGDs, majority of respondents confirmed that SNA, especially the commune council, is being more accountable and responsive to the citizens' problems/needs. The respondents who were PWDs expressed that about 70% of public building such as schools and health centers in Tramkak district (Takeo province) made better accessibility for the PWDs. More than that, 70% of the PWDs received material/equipment supports from the government.

Strategic objective/outcome #2: Citizen Engagement

The desk review and online survey identified level of satisfaction (of citizens on government performance), the numbers of events led/participated by CBOs (to hold SNAs to improve public services and account for their decision and action), and the level of citizens involved in monitoring decision/action of the SNAs. The results are summarized in Table 5 below:

Table 2: Summary of Result of Outcome #2: Citizen Engagement.

Outcome #2: To empower citizens, especially youth, women and disadvantaged groups, to hold government accountable for responsive, inclusive decisions and actions to improve public services and policy implementation (at sub-national level).	
Indicators to measure the outcome #2:	**Summary of Result Against Indicators (2019 – 2021)**
• **Percentage of citizens (disaggregate by sex and vulnerable groups) satisfaction on government performance.**	• **Baseline study[10] report indicated that 38.8% of total respondents were satisfied with the local government and council performance in providing reliable public services and responding to their needs.** • **Online survey[11] revealed that 80% of respondents assessed "improvement" on the quality of the performances/services.**
• **Number of joint events/initiatives led or participated in by the CBOs, solidarity groups, and networks of youth, women, and disadvantaged groups that focus on demanding accountability, responsive, inclusive decisions, and actions to improve public services, and policy implementation at the sub-national level.**	• **169 CBOs (out of 170) developed and implemented advocacy plans.** • **50 small-scale projects,[12] implemented by the members of the provincial association of local council (PALC) to address prioritized issues/needs of poor and most vulnerable groups.**
• **§ Number of decisions and actions of public service delivery institutions and sub-national government monitored by citizens that take into account needs and priorities of communities, in particular women and youth and disadvantaged groups.**	• **Through an online survey: 96% of councilors[13] expressed that CBOs were involved in monitoring activities of the SNA and 85% said the citizens (representatives) were provided the opportunity to raise issues/suggestions during the councilor's meeting. 81% of CBO representatives confirmed that they used to monitor the activities implemented by SNA.**

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The baseline study report[14] revealed that 38.8% of total respondents disaggregated by sex and vulnerable groups (of which disability was 25.0%, youth was 40.3%, ID poor was 31.3%, and women were 35.9%) were satisfied with local government and council performances in providing faster and more reliable public services and respond to their needs.

Through the online survey,[15] respondents were asked to assess the levels of improvement on the performance of the district/municipality/Khan between 2019 and 2021. 80% of them assessed "improved" on the quality of the performances/services (scored between 3 and 5), 11% assessed as "very high improvement (scored 5)," 34% assessed as "high improvement (scored 4)" and 35% assessed as "moderate improvement (scored 3),".

The desk review discovered a total of 169 CBOs (among 170 CBOs who received capacity building from API) developed and implemented advocacy plans/activities between 2019 and 2021.

- 1 PWD group (in Tram Kak district, Takeo province): conducted snowball survey and score-cards and used results of survey/score-cards to advocate SNA to improve accessibility (to public services i.e. school/health center), livelihood, and social protection for PWDs.
- 8 Youth Ambassadors groups: conducted score-cards to advocate for improving services of the OWSOs (at 5 districts in Battambang, 1 municipality in Kampong Chhnang, and 2 municipalities in Bantheay Meanchey).
- 4 Youth Groups: advocated SNA (at 4 districts of Kandal, Kratie, and Phnom Penh) on issues related to drug, out of school, Covid 19, waste management, village safety, and local infrastructures.
- 33 CBOs (of 90 indigenous women members) advocated on issues related to deforestation and encroachment for personal property (15 cases), financial and material support for communities to patrol forestry (15 cases), water supply, and technical training for agricultural production (4 cases), Illegal fishing and the lack of financial/material support for community fishery patrolling in the conservation area (2 cases), rebuild and maintenance the old bridge and road (2 cases), and the need of kindergarten school in community (1 case).[16]
- 85 CBOs (on sectoral issues) advocated SNA on issues related to community forestry, land issues, budget disclosure, education, and communities' livelihoods.
- 1 Youth network advocated (with ministries and parliament) to adopt the draft law on A2I.
- 1 CAF group (in Khan Sen Sok) advocated for social protection service from the government (i.e. national security fund), and for improving social services of primary schools, health centers, and commune/Khan services.

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- 33 CAF groups (in 33 districts/municipalities) planned to advocate for improving services of primary schools, health centers, and commune services.
- 3 groups of young female street vendors (in Phnom Penh, Battambang, and Siem Reap) advocated Khans/municipalities, and market authorities to promote social economic rights, social protection package (such as equity card and NSSF), and market places/locations for selling for the female street vendors.

The desk review revealed that 50 small-scale projects[17] (with a total budget of US$ 213,250), were implemented by the members of the provincial association of local council (PALC) in six provinces, funded by API, to address prioritized issues and needs of poor and most vulnerable groups (total 1,027 families include 435 youths), who were directly or indirectly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Through the online survey,[18] 85% of respondents (who were district/Khan councilors) said that the citizens (representatives) were provided an opportunity to raise issues/ suggestions during the councilor's meeting. While 96% of respondents (who were district/Khan councilors) expressed that CBOs were involved in monitoring activities of the SNA, 81% of respondents (who were CBO representatives) confirmed that they used to involve in monitoring activities implemented by SNA.

During FGDs, all respondents who were CBO representatives confirmed that they used to involve in monitoring activities of SNA, i.e. local road construction, and services of primary school/health centers in response to the need of PWDs).

During FGDs and KII, all respondents (who were NGOs/CBOs representatives) expressed that the CBOs/groups who have specific agenda for advocacy (i.e. illegal fishing, deforestation, and land issues) and work within the good structures (such as

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NRM) were actively engaged with SNA. They were well prepared to participate in the commune/Sangkat meeting. They usually organized their internal meeting to identify progresses and challenges of their ongoing operation and identify their stances for further discussion with the commune/Sangkat or/and district councils. For example, the community fishery, at Prek Luang in Battambang province, worked with their networks in the neighboring provinces to jointly raise the issues on illegal fishing for the provincial governor's attention. Many discussions held with the Sangkats fishery and the Sangkats have provided helpful support which is put out by the provincial meeting. Consequently, the illegal activities have been significantly dropped down. The communes surrounding the fishery conservation areas have assigned the councilors to work closely with the community fishery and other CBOs for tracking and resolving the illegal fishing activities.

During FGDs, the majority of CBOs respondents (include PWD, NRM, IP group, youth group) expressed that most of the communes/Sangkats in their target areas recognize the important roles of citizens especially the most vulnerable, women and youth groups and they have tried all possible ways to get them involved especially during the monthly meeting. Most of the commune/Sangkat councils are open for more participation and the progress and challenge in the communes/Sangkats (including the budget preparation and executions) have always been included in the meeting agenda.

Strategic objective/outcome #3: Improve access to information

The desk review and online survey revealed a massive number of citizens who participated in awareness-raising sessions, organized by API, assessed and provided feedbacks on public information, and numbers of institutions who disclosed information to the public. The results are summarized in Table 6 below:

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Table 3: Summary of Result of Outcome #3: Improve access to information

Outcome #3: To improve access to and disclosure of public information on critical issues.	
Indicators to measure the outcome #3:	**Summary of Result Against Indicators (2019 – 2021)**
• Percentage of the level of citizens increased understanding on rights to public information and exercise their legal rights to demand and use public information on critical issues for improving public participation and livelihoods.	• 485,140 citizen days[19] participated in awareness-raising, on different topics, organized by API. • 31,711 citizens accessed to public information at the SNA and provided feedbacks to improve public servcies.
• Number of public institutions at national and sub-national advocated by the project activities increased the disclosure of public information on critical issues for greater transparency.	• 678 public institutions disclosed information about annual income and its expenditures, see at ISAF App & Citizen Budget App. • Through online survey[20], 49% of respondents used to join CC meetings and 47% used to join district/municipality meetings

The results from the desk review revealed that API has made progress against the indicators for the third outcome of its SP 2019 – 2023. Firstly, API has been carrying out awareness-raising involving a massive number of citizens include:

- 5,000 women and people from disadvantaged groups increased understanding about citizen rights to public information i.e. commune budget formulation and implementation and commune investment plan (CIP).
- 4,051 citizens (2,675 females), in Koh Kong, Kratie, Ratanakiri, Mundulkiri, and Stung Treng, were aware of citizen rights, public service standards, and budget information.
- 166,089 citizens (86,660 females) in 15 targets communes improved their right to information (about daily Covid-19 information and prevention measures.)
- 310,000 people were reached by social media on social accountability and public services. These include 56,709 Facebook users who accessed a series of short educational videos about the services of local administrations and local service providers.

Secondly, through API interventions, there were massive of citizen accessed and provided feedbacks on public information:

- 11,553 citizens (3,453 female) accessed district budget information

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- 10,000 citizens accessed/assessed OWSO services (in Battambang, Bantheay Meanchey, and Kampong Chhnang) through IVR and Facebook_Chatbot.
- 7,271 people (4,923 females), in 24 communes/Sangkats, directly accessed information on the budgets and standards of service for health centers, primary schools, communes, and police posts.
- 2,887 citizens (include 464 PWDs, 423 people in Phnom Penh, and 2000 people in Bantheay Meanchey, and Kampong Thom Provinces) provided feedbacks to improve public service delivery both service standard and its information procedures.

Thirdly, there were 678 public institutions[21] that disclosed public information on budgets and the standard of service information. They have been monitored by API's trained citizen representatives.

Through the online survey,[22] 49% of respondents (who were citizens, youth, and CBO representatives) indicated that they joined commune council (CC) meetings and 47% used to join district/municipality meetings. 52% confirmed that SNA disclosed information (about budget, services, and commune development plan) in public.

Through KIIs/FGDs, all respondents (100%) confirmed that SNA disclosed information that they feel comfortable to share in public, i.e. information about commune budget, and standard services and fees provided by the commune, police post, health center, and school, etc.

Strategic objective/outcome #4: API's Organizational Development

The desk review and online survey identified a great improvement in the API capacity. The results are summarized in Table 7 below:

Table 4: Summary of Result of Outcome #4: API's organizational development.

Outcome #4: To enhance API's organizational capacity and sustainability.	
Indicators to measure the outcome #4:	Summary of Result Against Indicators (2019 – 2021)
• % of organizational funds diversified and increased annually.	• API's fund was increased 56% in 2020 and 28% in 2021.
• % of increased human resources and skills and % reduced rate of staff burnout and turn-over.	• API staff increased from 18 to 34 (89%) from 2019 to 2021. • API continues to face a high rate of staff turnover.

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• Number of regular organizational management (BoD and Executive Committee) meetings, learning feedback with stakeholders to improve project, and organizational accountability, transparency, growth and sustainability.	• API was awarded GPP certificate in 2019. • API is governed by BoD. The members of the BoD have diversified/relevant skills for supporting API. • API's BoD and EC conducted regular meetings, in accordance with the by-law and policies.
• Online systems for planning, and monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL) are established, and implemented for all projects.	• In 2021, API standardizes its MEAL template and is in process of developing a MEAL online database.

The evaluation team assessed five key areas to measure the progress made against the fourth strategic outcome of the API's organizational development. Those key areas include governance and leadership, organizational policies, operational structure and staff management, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) guidelines, and resources mobilization.

GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

API is governed by BoD which has 5 members (include 2 women). Based on the by-law, the BoD meets twice a year to review the progress and function of the organization as well as to make a critical decision on policy and change within the organization. However, in reality, the API's BoD has made more extraordinary meetings to address urgent organization issues, in addition to the routine meeting set in the by-law.

In general, the members of the Board are active in providing support and raising critical questions to the API. The Board members have diverse skills and experiences including finance, fund-raising, program management, and gender mainstreaming. The Board took critical roles to introduce API to relevant donor/funding agencies. The Chair of the Board is very active in providing technical assistance to the ED and finance unit i.e. responding to audit matters.

API's Executive Director is very active in engaging with broad networking and has excellent communication and interpersonal skills. His leadership skill grows very well shown in his capacity in managing the growths of API within the few years of his leadership.

The extensive capacity of API in looking for funding, especially maintaining a long relationship with donors i.e. BfdW/DCA, reflected the strong governance and leadership. This was confirmed by API's BoD and key API's donors/funders.[23] API was awarded the certificate of compliance with the governance and professional practice (2019).

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ORGANIZATIONAL POLICIES

API has foundational operational policies and strong mechanisms to guide the implementation of the current strategy. Key organization's policies include By-law, BoD, and executive committee manuals, complaint mechanisms, Personnel/staff policy, Financial guideline/manual, Monitoring and evaluation guidelines, Anti-corruption policy, Conflict of interest policy, and Child protection/ safeguarding policy. API complies with all relevant government regulations.

The API advisor (also a member of the EC) has confirmed, through his email, that the financial guideline/accounting procedures and the personnel manual were under review and expected to be finalized and approved by the API's BoD in February 2022. Similarly, the IT/ICT policy is being drafted and expected to approve by the API's BoD in February 2022 too.

OPERATIONAL STRUCTURE AND STAFF MANAGEMENT

API grew into a large organization since 2020 (almost double size if compared with 2019). API has a head office in Phnom Penh and operated its projects countrywide. In a few projects, API staff have been able to share/use partners' offices for their daily work at target areas. It has diversified programs, staff, target areas, and target beneficiaries. Over the period of 3 years (2019 – 2021), API staff increased from 18 to 34 (include 14 women). In addition, API employed 2 part-time staff (all male) and 6 volunteers (3 women).

In general API staff like the working environment within API and the relationship between staff. They felt they got opportunities for capacity development through their work, learning by doing or on-the-job practice, in addition to the in-house and external training/capacity building programs provided by API. API organized annual staff reflection regularly at the end of each year. In the reflection all staff come together to review the progress and achievement of the year, to reflect on challenges and ways to overcome, draw learning, and plan for next year. API conducts staff appraisal once a year for all staff to improve their performance. API staff were also provided the opportunity to participate in meetings, i.e. network/partner meetings, that were relevant to their work/position.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION (M&E) GUIDELINE

API has a M&E guideline to be used to track/accumulate data for reporting (to different stakeholders) and strengthening internal learning. On the project level, API has done a decent job in developing tools to collect data with relatively good quality called API Monitoring, Evaluation Accountability and Learning (MEAL) Templates. API conducted regular meetings (staff, EC, and partner's meetings) and project reflections to follow up on the progress of its project intervention.

This year (2021), with support from a MEAL specialist, API standardizes its MEAL template (in Excel) and is in process of developing a MEAL online database.

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RESOURCES MOBILIZATION (TO SUPPORT PROGRAM AND ORGANIZATION OPERATION)

API developed a fund-raising strategy to guide them to look for a diversity of donors/ funders to support project/core fund for the organization and to avoid dependence on one or two donors/funders. The fund-raising strategy also identifies potential donors/ funders and strategy to approach those donors/funders for cooperation.

To ensure transparent and accurate financial management, API contracted external qualified firms to conduct financial audits regularly (both project and global audits) and collaborated with key donors/funders to assess the financial management system of the organization.

The result of the desk review indicated a rapid growth of funds from year to year.

Table 5: API Financial Statements 2019 – 2021:

Description	Amount in USD		
	2019	2020	2021 (estimated)
Income	732,165	1,142,048	1,458,480
Expense	510,322	813,235	1,034,368 (as of Dec 2021)
Balance	221,843	328,813	440,759
% annual income increase		156%	128%

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Key lessons

It is possible to extract a number of lessons from the work of API over the period 2019 to 2021. Many lessons are incorporated within the findings presented above. This section of the report, however, is to bring out what the evaluation team has found to be key lessons.

WORKING WITH EXISTING CBOS

Although many CBOs have been existed traditionally in the connections to the socio-cultural and socio-religious origins in Cambodia, for instance, the dish and pot exchange group, the funeral association, and the Pagoda Committee, the CBOs have mushroomed over the last decade in the new fields which affected their communities ranging from environment, service delivery, human rights, and democracy. These CBOs, with their long existences, may have the specific mission and strong internal governance. Cooperation with the existing CBOs is very important as they represent the majority of the community population. This also assures the sustainability of the good interaction and the advocacy introduced by the API.

WORKING WITH BOTH SUPPLY AND DEMAND SIDES

It is sensible for API to keep focusing on the right-based approach to development which develops the capacity of duty-bearers to meet their obligations and encourages rights holders to claim their rights. A strategic task for the NGOs, of course, is the strengthening of the CBOs and the citizens at the grassroots level so that they are strong in advocating for a more enabling environment as well as in response to a specific and local issue affecting their lives. This requires the duty bearers to act accordingly to meet their obligations. However, as the capacity of the duty bearers is still limited due to the insufficient capacity development and the frequent changes of their memberships in every election, the strengthening of the capacity of the SNA councilors and officials is critical. When the rights holders understand their rights to claims and can exercise it in the proper way and the duty-bearers perform their functions to meet their obligations, the interaction between them would become more meaningful. The trust-building and good working relation between the supply side and demand side would also bring about positive changes at the SNA level. Therefore, getting them involved in all joint events such as the annual reflection, the regular partner meeting, and the exposure visits would contribute significantly to this.

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USING ONLINE PLATFORMS/SOCIAL MEDIA AND OFFLINE INTERACTION

From API's program/project implementation during the widespread of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is very clear that Information and Communications Technology (ICT) plays a very critical role in this digital era. It helps API's staff and management in daily communication, operations, and enhances the quality of project implementation amidst the restriction imposed by the government for the prevention of the widespread COVID-19 pandemic. At the field level, the use of ICT leads to more reach out to the involved people in a faster, accurate, and cost-effective way. However, it requires the users to have some basic knowledge of the ICT platforms and devices and also requires uninterrupted internet services and electricity. The online platform is not so helpful anyway and it appears to be less productive than the offline since it is not the face-to-face interaction and it must go through the platform which is sometimes not favorable for the communication. Therefore, the combination of both online and offline interaction would be productive.

PARTICIPATION OF BOTH MEN AND WOMEN

Observation throughout the FGDs, the women can express their ideas/opinions freely only within their women group. When they are mixed with men, men will dominate the discussions. This reflects the reality that more women are more active at the activity level but less at the decision-making level. Therefore, it is wise for NGOs to work with both men and women, with more focus on women, to achieve gender transformation, either simultaneously or sequentially, with single-sex groups and mixed-sex groups. It is important to provide both men and women with safe spaces where they can discuss and reflect on the ways in which gender norms shape their lives and the lives of others.

WORKING WITH YOUTH

To fill the gaps of the absence of API's field offices, API manages to work with the interns and volunteers/part-time staff who are the youth at the field level and with different backgrounds, vulnerabilities, and ethnicity. This appears to be effective and efficient in helping deliver the achievement of API against its expected outcome/impact set forth by the API's SP and projects. They are subsequently recruited as full staff when their capacity fully fits with the required jobs. This is really good not only for the injection of the new blood to API but also to illustrate the comparative advantage of API in working with the most promising actor for future Cambodia. Building youth capacity contributes to the building of active citizens which would be eventually promising for the future rate of return.

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SOFT ADVOCACY

API employs the Soft Approach in its advocacy for policy influencing and also in the local problem-solving process. The soft advocacy brings no harm to API's partners including the NGOs and CBOs and it has been strongly appreciated by the government. However, using the soft advocacy approach is not likely strong for policy influencing as shown in the formulation process of the draft law on A2I which took almost 10 years for the formulation and finalization. As such, working collaboratively with other partners[2] who have the capacity to apply other forms of advocacy and with the CBOs and citizens to demand policy changes would be more useful.

3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE

Building on the analysis of the achievements, attention areas, and key lessons the following are recommendations for API to focus, when designing the strategic plan in future.

POLICY INFLUENCING

It is worthy to note the great contribution of API for the finalization of the draft law on A2I which is now ready to send further to the cabinet council and legislative bodies for final review and adoption. When it becomes a law, there are some critical regulations that need to be formulated, discussed, endorsed, and put into practice. API should work with relevant government agencies, and relevant UN agencies, NGOs, and CBOs to provide inputs to make sure that the law would be applied for the benefits of the whole society especially at the community level. The application of the law to enable the processes of the budget disclosure at both the national and sub-national levels should be a high priority for API.

As host/secretariat of the CPDD, it is critical for API to ensure the independence and capacity of the CPDD to represent the CSOs in the D&D sector. The seat of the CPDD at the NCDDS should be discussed and clarified with the parties involved and the NCDDS. Also, the roles of CPDD to proactively engage with the process of monitoring the implementation of the second NP-NSDD 2021-2030 should be strengthened. Firstly, API will need to support CPDD to raise common understanding among the CPDD members and CBOs about the achievement and challenge of the NP-SNDDD phase 1 and the strength and constrain of the NP-SNDD phase 2. Secondly, build on a common understanding of the NP-SNDD, API will need to support CPDD to elicit more comments and inputs for improving the NP-SNDD phase 2. Thirdly, API will need to support CPDD to maximize its current networks with UN agencies, NGOs, and CBOs and its relationship with key government ministries/institutions to influence the NSDDS to finalize the NP-SNDD phase 2 in response to the comments/inputs provided by the CPDD.

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CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

There are two critical tasks to do to open for citizen engagement that is primarily based on the active citizens (the rights holders) and the competencies to fulfill roles, duties, and responsibility of the SNAs (the duty bearers). Working with these two actors would help boost active engagement from the citizens in SNA governance. They have to work collaboratively with each other in the context of the rights-based approach which leads to developing the capacity of duty-bearers to meet their obligations and encourages rights holders to claim their rights.

API should facilitate the best choices for citizens' participation in SNA governance through the introduction of the working approaches for enhancing participation. The working approaches include the local planning and budgeting process for both CIP and CDP, the monthly meeting, community awareness meeting, and the public forum. API has a good strategy in working with the voiceless/marginalized groups such as women, IPs, and PWDs to enhance their voices for sustainable development. Other voiceless/marginalized groups should also be identified to work with such as survivors of violence, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons, and the elderly. API should involve them as local volunteers equipped with more knowledge and skills so that they could work effectively to solve their own problems as well as their groups and their community's concerns. Where and when possible, API should also select them to be the API's staff to show the strong comparative advantages of API as an organization working with the voiceless/marginalized groups for sustainable development.

CBOs are best to represent local interests. API should make use of the existing CBOs who are self-organized, have specific agenda for advocacy and work within their well organizational structures such as NRM, IP groups, PWD groups, street vendor groups, and youth groups to influence the decision making process at NSAs especially at the district/municipality/khan level. For meaningful engagement, API should build the CBOs' capacity in identifying concerns/problems from their community for the attention of the SNA. The good model of problem identification used in ISAF should be employed in other non-ISAF communes/Sangkats for effectively solving the problems. Some soft skills should be considered for training or refresher training to the CBOs such as problem-solving, communication, facilitation, negotiation, and presentation. They should also be equipped with ICT skills such as the use of online platforms and social media for their day-to-day communication. Organizational skills such as administrative and financial management, project management, and proposal development should also be considered for providing to the CBOs.

In addition to the capacity building, API should consider engaging CBOs with diversified networks in order to strengthen the bargaining power for CBOs to demand SNA to respond to the critical issues raised by the citizens. There were provincial and national

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platforms such as social accountability working group (SAWG), National League of Local Councils (NLC), National Association of Capital and Provincial Councils (NACPC), and Associations of Sub-National Administration Councils (ASAC), that can influence on the accountability of the commune/Snagkat and district/Khan authorities.

Building the capacity of the SNA especially the commune/Sangkat and district/ municipality/khan (the duty bearers) would enable them to fulfill their accountability especially with the citizens who are their constituencies. The SNAs need to know well their own roles, duties, and responsibility which are compulsory to perform to the best in responding to the concerns/needs of the citizens (the rights holders) and also the rights and responsibility of the citizens so that they could interact meaningfully. API should work with other partners who could build the capacity of the duty bearers effectively or it could explore funding opportunities with any potential donor(s) in doing so within its own operational programs/projects.[3]

API should also guide the commune/Sangkat councils and district/municipality/khan councils in organizing their meetings/forums effectively. They should work closely with the CBOs in identifying local issues/problems before the meeting/forum and to make sure that every issue has been identified and brought for the meeting/forum. Like CBOs, the commune/Sangkat councilors and district/municipality/khan councilors should also be equipped with some soft skills for better performing their roles, duties, and responsibility such as problem-solving, communication, facilitation, negotiation, and presentation, and also some ICT skill such as the uses of online platforms and social media for their day-to-day communication. Their mobile monthly meetings directly with the community should be encouraged. API should also help build their capacity in making use of ICT, online platforms, and social media to fully communicate with all concerned people especially the CBOs and citizens.

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IMPROVE ACCESS TO INFORMATION

For the SNAs (commune/Sangkat and district/municipality/khan councils), the methodology applied for increasing meaningful engagement with the citizens should be improved.

- On-site monthly meetings, as initiated/implemented by the Pursat municipality of Pursat province and the Tboung Krapeu commune of Kampong Thom province should be replicated in other locations.
- Online platforms include social media (i.e. official Facebook page of the commune/ Sangkat and district/municipality/khan) should be created, functional and active for promoting communication and participation from the citizens. API should be able to assist them in the creation and function of these Facebook pages.
- Setting up at least one noticed board at each village chief house or at any appropriate location where people could access it easily should be proposed, by API or CBOs. The information to be displayed on the notice board should include the long-term priority commune development plan and should be clear and precise so that it is easy to understand and attraction from the readers. In addition to it, other ways for information dissemination, for example through mobile loudspeakers should also be applied.
- Officials from SNAs should be encouraged to participate in self-initiative community meetings/gatherings in order to get the real pictures of the problems that happened and to intervene when and where possible.

Sustain the existing digital platforms, in the long run, will be fundamental for the API to ensure effective mechanisms for citizens to have real-time access to provide and receive reliable information from SNA as well as to engage meaningfully with the SNA services. API, NGOs partners, and funder need to discuss together and develop sustainability planning for all existing digital platforms.

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API has to do more in terms of building awareness and understanding about the services of SNA and the necessity for SNA to disclose critical information to the public. Besides working with the CBOs and local citizens, the university student, researcher, academia, and in-service training center should also be explored. API should work with the universities and in-service training centers (such as the Royal School of Administration, National Institute of Education, and the National School of Local Administration) to include some key subjects related to public service delivery especially the SNA, the rights-based approach, the pro-poor budgeting, social accountability, and some other topic related to improving government's accountability. The lecture series by the key topics mentioned above should also be organized targeting the youth from the universities, researchers, and academia.

STRENGTHEN CREDIBILITY OF THE ORGANIZATION

It is critical for API to show the public that the organization has strong governance and management functions and resources to support its programs.

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Leadership should not just rely on an ED. Strong leadership is at least partly coming from a group of people not tied up in the operation of the organization. The responsibility of the Board should be strong leadership. If there is a step-up in the standard of the API Governance Board, there would be an argument that (if they implemented a solid role) they receive "sitting fees" to compensate them for being an active and competent board. It is recognized that being on the Governance Board is a difficult and important role.

The roles and functions of the API Board should be upgraded to fully lead the API organization such as the Board should manage the audit and entire organization/strategy/program evaluation in addition to its routine tasks set in the current by-law. Mechanisms for Board making direct communication and obtaining direct feedback from API staff, beneficiaries, and key stakeholders should be developed and operated by the Board. Follow-up on Board decisions and action need to be done consistently.

The Board also needs funds to be made available to implement its function effectively such as hire consultants base on need review the By-law, organizational operational structure, human resource management, logistic and procurement procedure, and salary scales situation within API.

MANAGEMENT FUNCTION

The chain of command among the top and middle line managers with front line officers should be reorganized to mitigate the complicity in organizational and operational orders. The top line and middle line managers should be clear on the strategic direction to lead/ manage the whole organization to move forwards and the middle line managers' roles should be more effective in delivering successes for the organization. This also links to the reorganizing of the over workloads of the ED and the EC so that they are able to provide sufficient support and monitor the work of the subordinates resulting in the meeting of deadline and the accuracy of the API's reports. The complaints/feedbacks from staff should be systematically tracked and solved to make sure that the organizational and operational issues have been solved in an effective and efficient manner. Explicitly, there is a need to:

- Strengthen delegating responsibilities/tasks, staff ownership, and participation in decision-making in their respective projects. Backed-up support and coaching, by management or external technical expertise, need to be provided to individual staff, based on need. In addition, regular weekly program coordination meetings among members of the EC need to be promoted to update and coordinate the file project activities.
- Strengthen communication that goes beyond a top-down approach, and that focuses more on listening and encouraging team members rather than instructing them.
- Consider reducing the pace of innovations and intended changes - to not demand too much from (changing) staff.
- Provide internal opportunities for development on the job - taking over new tasks, a new position, a new project, based on interests of staff.

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POLICIES

API has a large number of policies. There is a need to re-introduce those policies to staff regularly and should have regular sessions with staff to refresh/review policies.

It is recommended that API have technical persons to work with them for a certain period, i.e. 4-6 months to help API review/update necessary policies as follow:

- By-law (or BoD manual), to reflect an increased role and function of the API Board and to have necessary mechanisms to support Board functions.
- HR policy (personnel manual) to manage staff performance for optimum effectiveness and productivity. The HR review will look at the appraisal mechanisms (specifically to focus on an ongoing dialogue between staff and line manager i.e. to jointly identify areas of need for capacity development and motivate staff to grow,[4] and on a systematic review of staff performance and development link with potential organization growth and changing development context affecting individual staff work), and the salary scale (to reflect the annual rise of the cost of living as well as to standardize the rate of salary increase from one level/tier to another).
- Finance policy to reflect online working approach include simplifying procurement and logistic procedure (include an online request and clearance) and standardizing allowances for the community who participated API events.
- Develop a policy for shared cost allocation.

A greater effort in orientating (or inducting) new staff to API policies is required. Orientation should not just involve the first day for new staff, but a check-in after one week, one month, and end of probation period.

Regular meeting (bi-annually or annually) of API's donors for joint reflection on any part of the policy hindering the operation of the API should be organized since API has many donors for different projects and the donors try to inject their policy differently which bring more difficulties for the API's compliance.

OPERATIONAL STRUCTURE

The current operation, of having an only office in Phnom Penh, seems not able to make API running and managing its projects (which mostly operate in rural areas) effectively and efficiently, especially during the Covid 19 pandemic. For some provinces, API can maximize partner office for its project staff which proves to be a good model in the API operation.

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API may need to make a thorough study and analysis on related costs and effectiveness and efficiency of its project management in association with an option of setting up a regional or provincial level office.

MONITORING, EVALUATION, ACCOUNTABILITY AND LEARNING (MEAL) FRAMEWORK

It is important that the organization can monitor what is happening and makes changes if required. This is an important aspect of the MEAL framework within an organization. A comprehensive MEAL framework will enable API staff to track and accumulate data (on both progress and challenge) throughout the program implementation. The MEAL framework would also help staff to steer their activities as well as address problems when they occur.

API has contracted a MEAL specialist to standardize its MEAL template. It is necessary for API to involve project staff in the processes of standardization of the MEAL template. The processes should include clarification and amendment on data collection tools for specific purposes and ensure all staff are familiar with those tools. It is also necessary for the MEAL specialist to provide coaching support to API project staff to develop and apply the right tools to collect the right data (specifically the data related to the outcome/impact of their project activities) and analyze the attribution of the data or result from each project to the outcome and impact set in the API's SP. After the MEAL template is finalized/approved, genuine support for staff implementing the template (especially the online database), and the data collection tools and engaging staff in a regular reflection (i.e. on processes and results) and reviewing/revision of the MEAL framework is critical.

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A leading Cambodian NGO active in advocacy, policy influencing, capacity building, good governance and dialogue facilitation between citizens and state actors

The Advocacy and Policy Institute (API) is a Cambodian non-governmental organisation active in advocacy, policy influencing, good governance and civic engagement. Capacity building and dialogue facilitation are at the heart of our efforts towards democratic and sustainable development.

We have received widespread aclaim from both local and international organisations for our reliability, relevance and professionalism. Over a time span of almost two decades, API has helped institutionalise advocacy skills and has been striving to make local democratic and accountable governance a reality. To these ends, we have been conducting more than 300 training courses for over 10,000 participants affiliated with civil society and community-based organisations, local councils, media outlets, trade unions, Government institutions and the Cambodian Parliament.

API is unique in Cambodia's civil society in serving as a connector and facilitator for citizens' empowerment in their interaction with government at all levels. API has acquired first-hand experience on policy issues like access to information (A2I) through its grassroots work. Based on this vast experience, we are in the best position to make the voices of ordinary citizens count in policy-making at the national level. Here we have been trying to support government actors serve citizens according to the law and contribute to an enabling environment for citizens and civil society to express their concerns. Finally, we have been playing an important role in helping citizens understand their rights, access to information and make use of the opportunities for engagement offered by various laws and government policies.

Our programmes are guided by a human rights based approach. API serves all Cambodians and values the diversity of gender, sexual orientation and identity, (dis)ability, ethnicity, faith and political opinons. At the same time, we are especially committed to support the most disadvantaged in their efforts to make their voices heard.

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