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Report prepared by:

Name: Chheng Samuth

Role: Research and MEAL Specialist, Advocacy and Policy Institute (API)

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RESULTS

Objective 2: The Development, Implementation, And Monitoring Of Public Policies And Laws Is Inclusive And Democratic

Three (3) policy dialogues were conducted with relevant government ministries, NGOs, private actors, and CBOs on issues related to A2I, digital rights, environment, and climate change in the Phnom Penh Internet Forum on Draft Cyber Crime Law & Internet Censorship Monitoring Report; A Policy Dialogue on Draft A2I law; Policy Dialogue on Citizen Scorecard Analysis and Subnational Budget Analysis Report; University of Melbourne Smart Village-Model from India)

1. A policy dialogue on citizen scorecard analysis, subnational budget analysis reports, digital tools, and OWSO reports on Citizens' feedback.

The Policy Dialogue Workshop, organized by the Advocacy and Policy Institute (API) on December 6, 2024, at the Cambodiana Hotel, marked a milestone in promoting good governance, social accountability, and a smart village model. The event brought together stakeholders from various sectors, including government officials, parliamentarians, civil society organizations, development partners, the education sector, the private sector, and youth, both directly and online, with a total of 201 participants (55 females).

The main objectives of the workshop are: 1) Share the Smart Village Model of Melbourne University on Local Planning and address climate change and sustainable development. 2) To reflect the implementation effectiveness of the government policies and programs related to Sub-National Democratic Development 2020-30. 3) To improve public service delivery and implementation policy based on evidence-based reports. 4) Launching the API Research and Digital Platforms on Environmental Education; Local Budget; Local Fundraising, Mobilizing Support, and online M&E. The workshop has been highlighted as follows:

Strengthening cooperation between the government and civil society organizations: His Excellency Maon Ma Onat, Deputy Secretary of the NCDD Secretariat, praised the API for facilitating such a meaningful dialogue and stressed the importance of a strong partnership between government and non-governmental organizations to achieve this. National Development Goals.

Understanding the ISAF policy framework: The discussions highlighted the need to strengthen the implementation of the Social Accountability Framework (ISAF) with a strong policy expected in 2025. This will provide clear guidelines for strengthening governance at the sub-national level, ensuring accountability and citizen participation.

API research reports and digital tool presentation: The API showcased key research findings and digital tools, including Pidor Facebook Chatbot, One Window Service Office (OWSO), and Citizens' Forum. These tools are designed to improve access to public services, ensure transparency, and enable citizen feedback to ensure accountants are accountable.

Smart Village Model - The Road to Sustainable Development: Dr. Hemanta Doloi, Representative of the University of Melbourne, presented the Smart Village Model as a global strategy to address rural-urban inequality and climate challenges. Participants discussed the need to test this model in Cambodia, including local solutions for rural development, climate resilience, and livelihood improvement.

Gaps and challenges: The workshop addressed ongoing issues such as insufficient clarity between "services" and "service work", lack of concurrent funding for ISAF, and limited coverage of policies at the district and city levels. Stakeholders have recognized these challenges and figured out ways to address them systematically.

Commitment to budget transparency and accountability: Discussions on budget analysis tools emphasized the need for increasing the allocation of local funds. API tools are recognized for assisting citizens in monitoring costs and advocating for equitable resource distribution, especially for development and climate change efforts.

Citizen participation: The focus is on empowering people through participatory mechanisms such as Joint Accountability Action Plans (JAAPs) and community scorecards. These initiatives have demonstrated measurable improvements in the provision of public services and the strengthening of trust between citizens and the government.

Capacity building and resource mobilization: The workshop emphasized the importance of capacity building for local leaders and civil society organizations to mobilize resources independently. Training programs on local budget advocacy and fundraising have been identified as key tools for achieving self-sustaining governance at the grassroots level.

Presentation of monitoring and evaluation system: API has introduced its own monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system, a model that supports effective project implementation and ensures accountability. The system is identified as a resource that other NGOs can access to improve project monitoring and performance measurement.

Digital innovation for public service delivery: Participants appreciated innovations such as the OWSO mobile app and QR code system for a fixed price. These tools are recognized for making public services more efficient, transparent, and usable, especially in rural areas.

The workshop highlighted API leadership in addressing governance challenges, promoting transparency, and encouraging citizen participation. By presenting the results of research and digital tools, this workshop sets the stage for future collaboration between government institutions, development partners, and NGOs. The work of the API reflects the power of innovation, inclusion, and partnership in promoting good governance and social accountability. Participants recognized the importance of strengthening policies, increasing local funding, and testing sustainable solutions to bridge the gap between urban and rural communities in Cambodia. With a shared commitment to achieving sustainable development and promoting citizen-driven accountability, the workshop concluded with a vision for evidence-based, collaborative, and innovative growth.

2. A National Dialogue for Smart Village Lab and Model

The collaborative workshop held on Friday, 6th December 2024, organized by the Smart Village Lab at the University in partnership with the Advocacy and Policy Institute (API), was a significant milestone, that exceeded expectations in a number of areas. This event, held at the Hotel Cambodiana with a virtual component, brought together key stakeholders from across Cambodia, including government ministers, business leaders, educators, and international experts It was a joint event with policy dialogue for disseminating research reports and digital tools to promote governance and social accountability with 160 (85 females) participants.

The workshop was also designed to advance the API's mission to provide insights in the areas of democratic development, good governance, and citizen engagement. The presentation given was focused on enhancing Cambodia's leadership role on the global stage by providing an alternative path for economic, social, and environmental development. This is highly relevant, particularly in the context of sustainable development and climate action.

The workshop was a greater success than initially expected, not only in terms of the depth of engagement but also in its potential for long-term impact. The collaboration between the API and the Smart Village Lab created a highly effective platform for dialogue and action. The involvement of government ministers, business leaders, and community representatives ensured that the discussions were both comprehensive and practical. Feedback during and directly after the event from participants was positive, with some emphasizing the value of the collaborative approach and the inclusion of ideas from the audience.

The event has created the space for further discussions on policies that would support case study projects. Also, a vision was proposed, based on successful initial case studies, for a national rollout of the Smart Village Lab, which has the potential to have far-reaching international implications. For example, by providing a practical pathway to addressing climate change and supporting sustainable development in the Global South. This potential that Cambodia could be positioned as a leader in both policy and action was discussed during the interactive sessions. The lessons learned and the collaborations forged during this workshop will play a crucial role in shaping the future of the region, with continued efforts to establish initial case studies, which can then be potentially scaled at the national and even international levels.

3. Phnom Penh Internet Forum 2024

The Phnom Penh Internet Forum (PPIF) 2024, organized by the Digital Rights Working Group (DRWG) on 17-18 October 2024, engaged 174 participants, including 74 women. Attendees represented a diverse range of sectors such as professional journalists, citizen journalists, students, LGBT individuals, people with disability, ethnic groups, civil society organizations, and government ministry representatives, more than ten ministries. The forum focused on digital rights and security, addressing key challenges faced by various communities in Cambodia.

The forum successfully aligned with its objectives by featuring expert speakers from both national and regional organizations. Topics covered included the implementation of the Cambodian Digital Government Policy

(2022-2035), digital security, and the protection of personal data. These discussions highlighted the need for improved outreach and education on digital rights, particularly for marginalized communities.

Workshops on online fraud, harassment, and freedom of expression were conducted, emphasizing the risks and challenges faced by internet users in Cambodia. Additionally, the forum explored the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in digital rights, stressing the need for stronger legal frameworks and the involvement of civil society in AI governance. The event also underscored the importance of content creators in promoting digital literacy and fostering innovation. The Open Observatory Network Interference (OONI) Probe App, which tracks internet restrictions, was introduced to participants, showcasing tools that can enhance digital freedom.

Overall, the forum provided a platform for meaningful dialogue between civil society, the government, and development partners, ensuring ongoing collaboration for advancing digital rights in Cambodia. All participants will have access to the full report, which will be shared through the Phnom Penh Internet Forum's social media channels. The DRWG plans to continue this initiative in the coming year.

Celebrate International Day On Right To Information

On September 27, 2024, the A2I Working Group organized an Access to Information (A2I) workshop in Sunway Hotel with a total of 229 direct participants (104 women) and a total of 69 online participants (35 women). The workshop was held under the theme "The Right to Information Law is Promoting Investment and Economic Growth in Cambodia", focusing on 1) Reactivating the draft A2I Law agenda and influencing the policymakers, DPs, Government actors, Political Parties, the Private Sector, the Media, CSOs, and communities on the urgent need to pass and implement the A2I Law. 2) Increasing public awareness of the importance of Access to Information and demanding the adoption of the Access to Information Law.

Resulting from this event, Cambodian civil society organizations have urged the government and the National Assembly to urgently enact a new law on access to information to protect the rights of Cambodians to access information while attracting more investors to the Kingdom. More than a decade after the initial drafting of this important draft law, Cambodians remain concerned about their right to public information, as both national and sub-national authorities seem reluctant or unable to disclose or disseminate information.

On the days before the United Nations International Day for the Right to Information, civil society groups and youths urged the government, led by Prime Minister Hun Manet, to expedite the draft law on access to information, also known as the A2I Draft, which has been delayed for a long time. Samdech Techo Hun Sen, then Prime Minister and current President of the Senate, has promised that the draft law will be approved within the next two years after the national election in July 2023 or at the latest in 2025.

Many NGOs have signed a joint statement calling for the adoption of draft Access to Information laws in line with international standards and guaranteeing Cambodians' right to information. They also point out that the process of providing and receiving other public information remains limited, affecting the rights and interests of citizens, especially on key issues such as large-scale development projects, including national public procurement procedures, economic land concessions, land issues and forced evictions, and other disputes directly related to the rights and well-being of many citizens.

LESSONS LEARNED

Challenge

A significant challenge during the Phnom Penh Internet Forum (PPIF) 2024 was the limited involvement from the private sector and the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications. Their absence reduced opportunities for collaboration and hindered discussions on critical topics such as digital rights and security. The private sector's lack of engagement limited insights into improving digital literacy and access, while the Ministry's non-participation restricted dialogue on regulatory frameworks essential for the Cambodian Digital Government Policy. This challenge underscored the need for more effective strategies to engage these key stakeholders in future forums to address pressing digital issues in Cambodia.

The Policy Dialogue Workshop on December 06, 2024, is a collaboration and co-host between the National Committee for Sub-National Democratic Development (NCDD) and the Advocacy and Policy Institute (API). Due to the urgency of the National Committee for Sub-National Democratic Development, this responsibility has been shifted to the Advocacy and Policy Institute (API). With the administrative procedures of each ministry, in issuing invitations to government officials from relevant ministries and sub-national officials, there was a delay, and the date of the workshop was too close for inviting participants.

Lessons Learned

The limited involvement of the private sector and the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications during the Phnom Penh Internet Forum 2024 highlighted the importance of early stakeholder engagement. Future forums should initiate outreach efforts well in advance to encourage participation, emphasizing the value these stakeholders bring to discussions on digital rights and security. Developing partnerships and creating incentives for involvement can foster a more inclusive environment. Additionally, improving communication strategies to raise awareness about the forum's objectives can ensure that key players understand the significance of their contributions in addressing digital issues in Cambodia.

Organizing workshops to engage in dialogue on the model of smart villages is to draw the attention of participants involved in the intersection with national policy. The workshop provided an opportunity for participants, including government officials, development partners, civil society, the private sector, and youth, to study and see global strategies to address rural-urban inequality and climate challenges. Participants discussed the need to test this model in Cambodia, including local solutions for rural development, climate resilience, and livelihood improvement.

A good thing to learn is that the API has incorporated many of the topics that are the product of the API itself into the agenda of the workshop on policy dialogue on December 06, 2024. These include research reports, analysis reports, digital tools, online monitoring and evaluation systems, and demonstrations of smart village model strategies that enable participants to know and gain more at the same time. This is also the organization's long-term marketing strategy.

CELEBRATE INTERNATIONAL DAY ON RIGHT TO INFORMATION

A statement of the one-day International Day on Right to Information Workshop was publicly announced to media groups, API Facebook page, and submitted to HE. Preap Kol, Minister of attached Prime minister.

Resulting from this event, Cambodian civil society organizations have urged the government and the national assembly to urgently enact a new law on access to information to protect the rights of Cambodians to access information while attracting more investors to the Kingdom. Both private sector reporting EU and US and Australian who participated in the workshop strongly supported and the impact of A2I law.

Responding to demands from CSOs, the representatives of the government and national assembly expressed their support for having this law as Minister Attached to the Prime Minister reviewed and agreed to CSO statement to have A2I law for Cambodia and he informed the Prime Minister about the CSO demand for the A2I law. H.E Member of Parliament confirmed his support for A2I law, and he conveyed his support and other members of the parliament and their leadership to support this law too. CSO and Minister attached to Prime Minster is in the process of meeting arrangements with Prime Minster, President of National Assembly and President of Senate to lobby about A2I law in early 2025.

A Policy Dialogue On Citizen Scorecard Analysis, Subnational Budget Analysis Reports, Digital Tools, And OWSO Reports On Citizens' Feedback.

There are positive responses from the key government representatives to research recommendations on OWSO, social accountability, subnational budget, and digital scorecard such as:

- His Excellency Maon Ma Onat, Deputy Secretary of the NCDD Secretariat, praised during the opening speed that API for facilitating such a meaningful dialogue and stressed the importance of a strong partnership between government and non-governmental organizations to achieve this. National Development Goals.

- H.E Khiev Hok, Head of Department and representative of Ministry of Health that responsible on ISAF focus person recognized there are still lacking as the finding report in digital scorecard. However, Ministry of health are working hard to ensure all health centres provide service by equitable, transparency with high quality of service to citizen. This commitment was expressed during the monthly monitoring meeting of Minster.

- H.E Ly Yasak, Head of Department of Administration work of district/municipal and Sangkat/commune, recognized the budget at sub-national level are still limit and lack budget I-SAF into commune and district budget especially lack of allocation to social fund and environment & climate change. So, in 2024 government will include ISAF budget to sub-national budget and allocated budget from development budget to social fund and environment climate change line.

- H.E Keo Ratana Eung, Acting Head of Department Resource and Function (OWSO) recognized the finding result and recommendations of OWSO service. However, OWSO of MOI are going to solve the issues and will take it to improve. Moreover, MoI are discussing transfer on roles, functions, budget from other ministries to sub-national authorities and improving the public services by through developing the digital Application.

A National Dialogue For Smart Village Lab And Model

The workshop was a greater success than initially expected, not only in terms of the depth of engagement but also in its potential for long-term impact. The collaboration between the API and the Smart Village Lab created a highly effective platform for dialogue and action. The involvement of government ministers, business leaders, and community representatives ensured that the discussions were both comprehensive and practical. Feedback during and directly after the event from participants was positive, with some emphasizing the value of the collaborative approach and the inclusion of ideas from the audience.

- H.E Sok Sokhan, Secretary of state of Ministry of Land were very interested to engage with API works on Smart Village Model of Melbourne University shared in the workshop.

They requested to API to coordinate next meetings with high level visiting of Australian Delegates to Cambodia in March 2025. API is communicating on this agenda now.

Phnom Penh Internet Forum

The results of the two-day forum will be submitted to the relevant institutions, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Information, and the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications, as well as development partners, to know the results of the forum and continue to cooperate with civil society organizations and the private sector, including companies. Also provides internet service. For all participants, the report can be downloaded through the social network, Pak Phnom Penh Internet Forum. The team will continue to organize this forum next year.

Important message from the Working Group to the Cambodian Government on the Draft Law on Information Technology Crimes the Law on Cyber Security must comply with international human rights principles. Share and protect yourself in using the new technology responsibly and safely. In the work of digital rights, we will continue to try to disseminate to the public the knowledge or development of new laws on digital, as well as work with all stakeholders, including the Cambodian government, relevant ministries, and development partners, to provide input on the draft law. Involve this digital.

PPIF opened space for CSOs to provide inputs on personal data protection law and cybercrime law. The CSO inputs on both laws were reviewed by the government as part of consultation process that the government ministry of telecommunications now. it is expected that govt accepted some CSO inputs to improve draft laws and pass them with higher standards law that respect digital rights and person data protection effective.

DRWG actively engaged government, parliament and private and development partners and embassies to support and conveys CSO policy inputs and concerns on current draft laws to Public Information, Cybercrimes and Personal Data Protection and improving digital rights and right to info and addressed the issues of internet censorship and civic spaces. These policy dialogues have created a higher level of partnership dialogues between CSO, and government led by the Deputy Prime Minster and Minster of Interior, that contributed to improve to some extent of engagement and partnership between CSO and government at national and provincial levels and reduced tensions between CSOs and government on the civic space in early 2025. Provincial authorities have started to have partnership dialogues with CSOs in provincial level such as Battambang and Siem Reap provinces and other provinces.

ADVOCACY AND POLICY INSTITUTE

**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 acclaim 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 the Cambodian 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 supporting the most disadvantaged in their efforts to make their voices heard.

CONTACT US

Phnom Penh Villa, #26, 2nd Floor, Room 206, Street 388,
Sangkat Toul Svay Prey 1, Phnom Penh, Kingdom of Cambodia.

Tel: +855 23 213 486/ +855 99 288 800

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