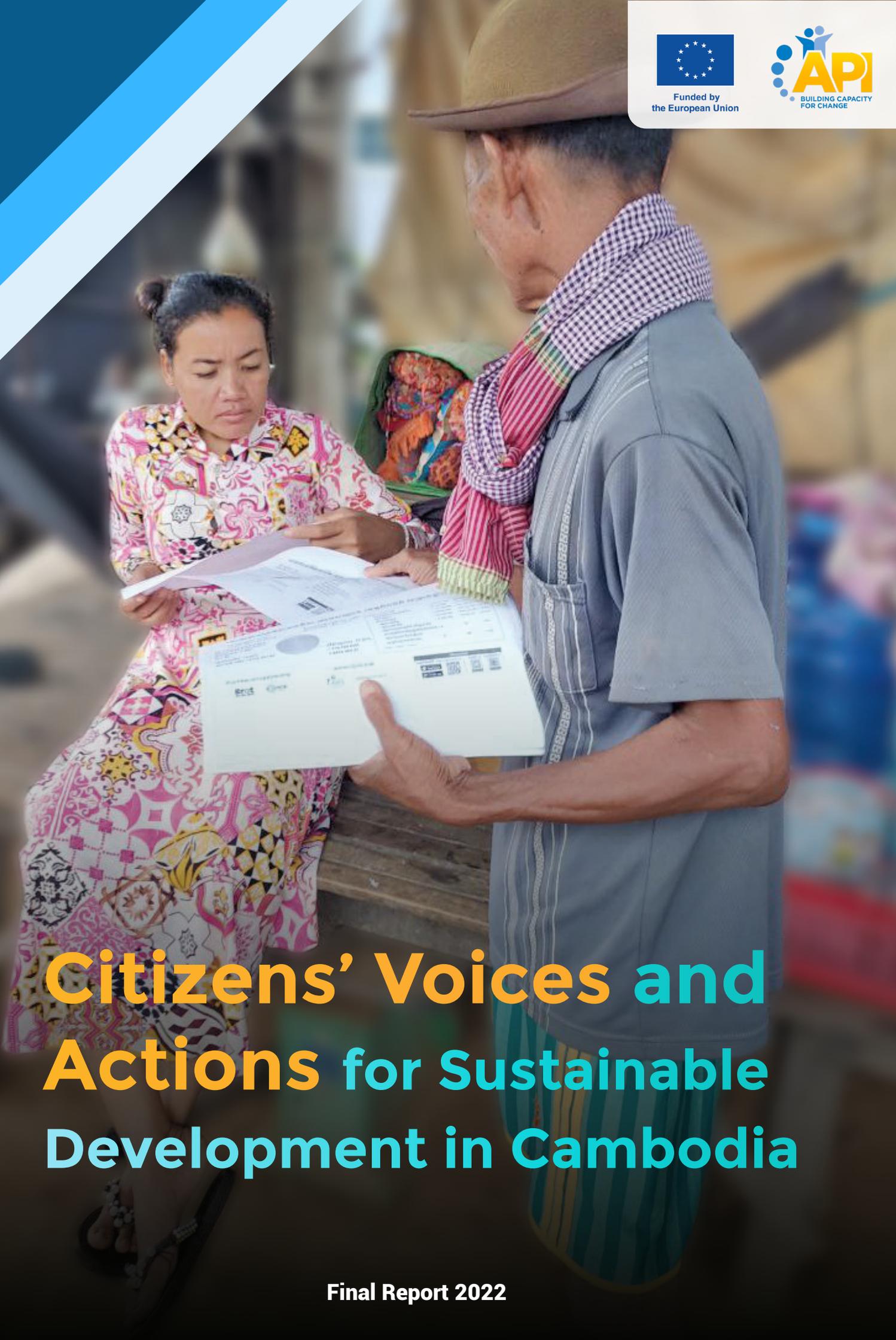




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Citizens' Voices and Actions for Sustainable Development in Cambodia

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PROJECT PROGRESS

A. Overall Assessment, Highlights, Challenges, Lessons Learned, And “Good Fit Practices”

Report 2020

The establishment of e-learning is imperative for a long-term strategic position of API. At the height of Covid-19 pandemic, this platform was essential to ensure public health safety and allows a friendly and realistic learning environment. API has adapted and encouraged the adoption of this approach in each of its project activities. To date, online templates, virtual meetings, online training, and coaching are adapted in order to ensure inclusive and continued learning of its target beneficiaries. Expertise and resources will be sourced and invested in order to improve its content and accessibility for a larger group of audiences.

Report 2021

- Covid-19 community outbreak was affected by activities implementation and CBOs and authorities are limited space and time to engage.
- Most CBOs are not able to continually sustain themselves financially. It may be worthwhile including organisational development assistance for CBOs in future project activities.
- During Covid-19 situation, the online template is very important for communication and continuing to implement activities and is a good approach for both organization and beneficiary group.

Report 2022

Three-year period, project team continues supporting & coaching CBOs, CBOs representatives and their members to dialogue with the local commune and district councils but some of them still lack confidence to continue their advocacy efforts independently. There had been changes to meeting schedules of the monthly council meetings; it was challenging for CBOs to fully participate regularly. Then, the project team assisted with communication with the authorities for having clear monthly meeting schedules and district dialogue meetings. Moreover, the project team had learned and led to organize separated district meetings between CBOs, CBOs representatives and members and local authority (commune and district), provided CBOs spaces to raise their issues to the authorities directly with sufficient times and well facilitation/moderator. These had enabled the CBOs, CBOs members to advocate their interests once again independently with the local authorities.

In the period of 3 years project implementation from January 1, 2020, to December 31, 2022, API has completed activities by framework and achieved the objective of the projects. And all indicators were fully achieved to the intended target of the project, because through these activities had increased the understanding to local authorities, CBOs leaders/CBOs representatives and communities directly or indirectly respond to community issues effectiveness. Through these activities, the mind set of communities and local authorities were changed, they supported or opened space to CBOs leaders/CBOs representatives or citizens in community especially youths, women, and disadvantage groups to raised or concerns their community issues to be addressed and some of them are on process and to be follow up more.

B. Effects With Regards To Cross-Cutting Issues

Have there been any changes as a result of the project regarding gender relationships and/or the inclusion of people with disabilities?

Report 2020

An Implementation Social Accountability Framework (I-SAF) Demand Side operational Guideline and operational Guidelines for Implementing Partners Minimum Standards with inclusion of disadvantage group/disabilities were recognized, adopted, and launched for implementation by the Ministry of Interior.

Report 2021

Yes, of course, API strategy is working and focusing on women leadership at community level and youth women. API provided capacity building, coaching, and engagement in sub-national and national advocacy activities.

Right now, API is working with indigenous women in 12 communes in three districts across three targeted provinces. Those districts are Prasat Ballangk in Kampong Thom, Phnom Kravanh in Pursat, and Chit Borey in Kratie province where they are heavily resided by indigenous community and have a record number of Economic Land Concessions (ELCs) and access to budget information.

Report 2022

Voices of the most marginalized are most rarely heard in community discussions and local governance – so the needs and claims of members of these groups are easily not heard and not considered in local governance. Besides, children, people with disabilities, the poorest, and particularly women among these groups, face higher risks of harassment and abuse than others. API specifically targets women, youth (incl. older children), people from poor households and with disabilities to make their voices in local governance and advocacy for their issues heard. And the project focuses on women's empowerment in CBOs and

in broader advocacy and public debates on A2I. An intersectionality lens is applied by involving young women, indigenous women, and women with disabilities. Thus, the project has been working with indigenous women in 12 communes in three districts across three targeted provinces in Prasat Ballangk in Kampong Thom, Phnom Kravanh in Pursat, and Chit Borey in Kratie province where heavily resided by indigenous community and have a record number of Economic Land Concessions (ELCs) and access to budget information.

EVALUATIONS

Achievement of the project “Citizens’ Voices and Actions for Sustainable Development in Cambodia (CVASDC)” to date

The CVASDC project (2020 – 2022) has two strategic objectives/outcomes. Each outcome has set indicators/targets to be achieved.

CVASDC/Outcome #1 Strengthened engagement of citizens, especially women, youth, people with disability and/or ID poor in public planning, budgeting, and holding authorities accountable for service delivery and budget implementation.

Indicators/targets for CVASDC/Outcome #1

Indicator. 1.1 Sub-national and/or national government(s) respond to target CBOs’ advocacy actions for their main issues by solving at least 70% (56 of 80) of them (referring to one main advocacy issues per CBO define in advocacy action plan resulting from training)

Progress: 55 issues (41% of 134 issues) raised by citizens were solved by SNA/National government.

Indicator. 1.2. % Of CBOs that implemented their action plans, monitored, and reported their results (64 out of 80)

Progress: 128 CBOs (100%) implemented their advocacy action plans.

CVASDC/Outcome #2 Improved access to and disclosure of public information, especially on public budgets.

Indicators/targets for CVASDC/Outcome #2

Indicator. 2.2. 80% of the targeted district administrations significantly increase the disclosure of public budget information for greater transparency. (80% of 40 districts/ municipalities/khan)

Progress: 40 districts/municipalities/khan (100%) disclosed budget information to the public.

Indicator 2.1. Estimated 30% increase of citizens in target areas who exercise their legal rights to demand for public information, including budgets, from commune and district administrations and councils. Definition: $(\text{end line}\% - \text{baseline}\%) / \text{baseline}\% * 100\% = 30\%$; survey of representative random samples in the target areas.

Progress: 85 CBOs (71% of 120 targeted CBOs) implemented advocacy activities to demand SNA to disclose budget information.



RECOMMENDATION

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 NCDDDS should be discussed and clarified with the parties involved and the NCDDDS. Also, the roles of CPDD to proactively engage with the process of the formulation 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-SNDD phase 1 and the strength and constraints of the NP-SNDD phase 2. Secondly, to 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 NSDDDS to finalize the NP-SNDD phase 2 in response to the comments/inputs provided by the CPDD.

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 API mid-term evaluation report 44 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 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 responsibilities which are compulsory to perform to the best in responding to the concerns/needs of the citizens (the rights holders) and 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.

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 councils 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 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.

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 attract attention 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.

Sustaining 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 funders need to discuss together and develop sustainability planning for all existing digital platforms.

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.

Report 2022

Based on the Midline survey report in December 2022 of the project, entitled "Citizens' Voices and Actions for Access to Information and Accountable Local Governance," which funded by DanChurchAid (DCA) and Bread for The World (BfdW) in 4 districts of Pursat and Banteay Meanchey province. The Survey has three main recommendations that API should consider improving the project implementation to achieve its project objectives in 2023.

- To reduce the gap of the citizens' knowledge about budget information, API should increase citizens' ability to demand and use information on advocacy skills, citizens' right to information, and advocacy skills through training, awareness raising, and coaching to CBOs leaders, committee members and members.
- To improve the level of participation in commune and district meetings/forums, API should fully support CBOs members on financial and non-financial sectors, as well as build a good cooperation with the communes and districts level, especially the village level to encourage women, the poor, people with disabilities and marginalized groups to join the meetings.
- To take effective actions on CBOs' advocacies, API should provide the training and capacity skills on leadership and advocacy strategies to CBOs leaders and committee members. Moreover, to promote more responses from the communes and districts on CBO suggestions, API should create effective advocacy plans, approaches and mechanisms with CBOs members aligned with the districts' mandated annual plan. API should also work closely with CBO leaders to organize regular meetings with their members to update information about their requests and suggestions to the communes and districts.

A. PROJECT APPROACH

API has achieved to the project objective because API strongly support from the local authorities and from national to grass root levels, API have been built on existing relationships with district and municipal administrations and councils, as well as continue to foster engagement with NCDD-S, several ministries and target provinces and local authorities to orient about the project initiative clearly before the field work start, to sustain or build trust and relationship. Promote open dialogue on local service delivery, budgeting and strengthening sub-national functioning transfer processes and highlighting benefits for supply- and demand-sides while insisting on a rights-based process. API continued to be in close contact with key membership organizations and networks (CCC, NGOF, CPDD, Budget Working Group, A2I Working Group) and other CSOs on promoting and supporting open dialogue on legal frameworks and regulations.

B. CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT GOAL

API's strategic goal for 2023 is contributing to API's vision of "a Cambodian nation that through poverty reduction and the protection of human rights creates a national culture of harmony with sustainable democratic, political, and economic stability"; and to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 16: "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels."

C. RELEVANCE

Design And Deliver Capacity Development Programs To CBOs.

The objectives of Design and deliver capacity development program to CBOs were:

The participation opportunities and strengthening leadership skills of CBOs at community levels. Through its design and delivery capacity development program to CBOs, API has aimed to improve classroom training and systematic follow up and coaching to CBOs on mobilizing support, local governance, soft skills, OD and local fundraising. Two leaders of each CBOs had been selected to attend the training. Action plans were developed to support the trainees' CBOs initiatives to address their main advocacy issue and organizational needs; and activities to monitor local development plans and budgets and holding authorities accountable for service delivery and budget implementation.

These objectives are highly valid and align with the needs and strategies of the target groups (communities and local authorities), national policies and donor strategies.

For the target CBOs the objectives align with their needs, given that the vulnerability of CBOs increases when their issues/concerns/needs are not met, especially a lack of knowledge in issues of communities.

For target local authorities, the objectives aligned with their needs to have more community's participation in the development planning process, in order to strengthen collaboration and to ensure development in the community included a voice for CBOs/communities.



D. SUSTAINABILITY

The Project has a high level of sustainability built into its design given that project activities aimed to improve knowledge, build confidence, and create ongoing behavioral changes within the target beneficiaries. The Project also was designed to enhance trust, networking and support within the community, authorities, and relevant stakeholders to care for and listen to their communities' voices and to have the capacity to address communities' issues which will all be retained and continue. Target beneficiaries (CBOs/communities, local authorities, and relevant stakeholders) were all very positive and optimistic that the impacts of the Project will be sustainable, given that knowledge has been increased and the beginnings of behavioral changes have been established.

E. LESSONS LEARNED

The district dialogue meeting between CBOs and local authorities and relevant stakeholders, it was good process to provide chances to CBOs/CBOs representatives raise the communities' voices/ issues to debate with local authorities for addressing these CBOs/communities' issues which happened in communities and the CBOs/communities' issues that is priority for local authorities will be discussed to integrate into CIP/DIP.

F. GENERAL SUMMARY

API completed the project framework, all activities requested have been done in the 3 years of project implementation from January 2020 to December 2022. The living condition of target groups recovered to be normal situation after the Covid-19 pandemic lightweight, the target groups could go to make business in whole country, some returned to work with existing jobs, and some found new jobs that could earn money to support their basic needs and have opportunity to raise their communities' issues and to be follow up. However, their income was not enough to support living because of high prices of commodities but they live off. Relating to CBOs, the mind set of authorities who always thought that community-based organizations that dare to raise issues are all opponents or opposition groups were reduced and believed on them. The communities and local authorities were fully active to respond to CBOs, communities' issues and supported target groups, because they understood about rights, laws and their roles and responsibilities. Some issues were in plan and not in plan were addressed by local authorities and had integrated these issues into CIP/DIP.



CASE STUDY

AND VIDEOS

Case Study No. 1



Dob Bath Development Agriculture Cooperative, Pursat Municipality, Pursat Province

Since 2022, the Dob Bath Development Agriculture Cooperative was struggling, because of its members' lack of knowledge about modern and efficient techniques of mixing fertilizer with vegetable soil, resulting in low yields, and about the techniques for farming chickens and fish.

This Community covers an area comprising 4 villages, 17 hectares of land and 68 families, divided in 8 committees. The issue affected people's ability to grow vegetables, resulting in low yields. The citizens realized that they needed to grow vegetables according to more modern techniques to obtain higher yields and increase the families' income. The issue was reported to the agriculture section of the Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries department, as well as to the municipal authority, but no solution was provided for a while.

Then the CBO leaders and representatives decided to contact API and request technical support and information on how to prepare a work plan to better lobby and participate in public forums, monthly district meetings, and commune meetings, to raise their issues face-to-face and request solutions from the sub-national level.

After they received training and coaching, API organized district dialogue meetings with all the relevant stakeholders. As a result of their advocacy, the community finally got coaching from the Agriculture Officer and was provided with vegetable seeds from the Department

of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, the municipal authorities pledged to cooperate with relevant offices and NGOs to provide further training to the community on planting and farming animals. Moreover, At the beginning of 2023, the ADRA organization arrived in the Kravanh district to implement their own aid project but did not manage to identify the right CBOs. API intervened and with the Pursat municipal administration and agriculture department, facilitated for the **Dob Bath Development Agriculture Cooperative** to become the beneficiary group. The Cooperative attended a capacity building course on business plan, leadership, marketing plan, and agriculture techniques like using fertilizer, the demand of use pesticides, and was provided by the administration 3,000 USD as a starting capital.

Case Study No. 2

EMPOWER THE YOUTHS TO WORK WITH THE GOVERNMENT

Youths Unity for Community Development

Citizens' Voices and Actions for Sustainable Development in Cambodia (2020-2022) was funded by Dan Church Aid (DCA) and Bread for the World, this ambitious endeavor has the overall objective of fulfilling the rights and enhancing the voices of citizens, to make the country's development more sustainable. On the one hand, we want to actively engage right holders, especially women, youth, people with disability, low-income citizens, and their community-based organizations (CBOs), encouraging them to get involved in the processes of public planning and budgeting at the district level. The latter has been playing a much bigger role since 2020. Citizens and CBOs should hold authorities accountable for service delivery and budget implementation. This project is implemented in 39 districts 8 provinces and 1 khan.



Youths Unity for Community Development (YUCD) is a newly created community in Mongkul Borey District, Banteay Meanchey Province, with a vision to have more youth participation in

community development. YUCD is led by Miss. Thlok Longdy with twenty members (twelve females). The formation of the group started in May 2023 by young people who used not to care about any public affairs and never participated in any commune council (CC) activities in the past. However, after living in a place where there were plenty of rumors about their corrupted community and after witnessing the ineffective practice of the CC in Commune's expenditures, those young people decided to do something together. Fortunately, there was training by API about Pidor Neak Phum Chlat Vey in the community. Those young people also participated in the training and had impressive interactions with the API's staff. By seeing the potential of the local youths, API decided to help those young people formalize the YUCD.

The mission of this community is to encourage more youths to engage in commune's affairs, to initiate various activities to support the community, and to raise awareness about Commune's investment and development budgeting. The first activity done by the group after it has been formalized was the training about Pidor Neak Phum Chlat Vey again. The training required the YUCD to recruit more youths to participate in the training and let them learn about public services available in the OWSO and OWSU and how to request the services. Later, there was an assignment from API to ask the group to do a fundraising activity to help poor people in Poi Pet City. This assignment could help the youths think of whom they should ask for the donation, including rice, noodles, and other seasoning products. The assignment was successfully achieved and has stimulated those youths to want to do more.

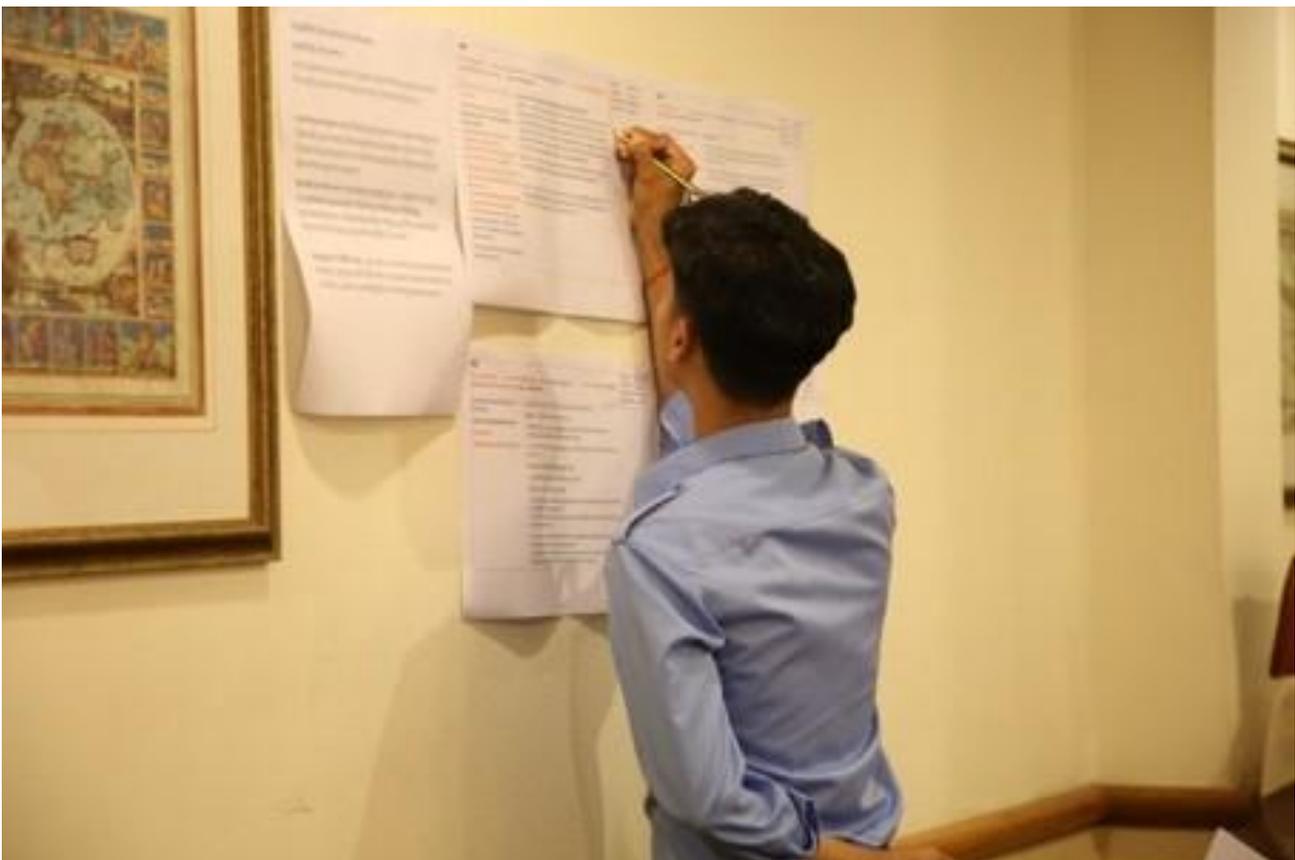
Youths Unity for Community Development was trained by the Advocacy and Policy Institute (API) on how to advocate their ideas, how to write reports, how to use facilitation skills, and how to write a budget plan for their commune. There were also trainings about how to use technology and how to take good photos to produce attractive videos. More than that, there was also some financial support (a transportation fee) for the YUCD to participate in their commune or district's meetings. With close supervision from API, each member of the YUCD could learn to communicate with government officials during the meetings very well.

Even though the community is in the beginning stages of its existence, there have been some outstanding changes from the members of the community. The members of the YUCD could upgrade their soft skill capacity. They know what the process is for advocating an idea, how to discuss problems, how to communicate with local authorities, and how to make an insightful presentation. Some of them could take the opportunity provided by API to challenge themselves to be braver and talk in public. One youth reported that *"API used to invite me to join a forum in Phnom Penh City. It was a great opportunity. I told myself to ask at least one question in the forum, even though I was really shaking. I could make it! I asked a few questions. Those kinds of things have stimulated me to do more. I really appreciate that."* Such a kind of action not only gathers confidence in the youths but also attracts the local authority to trust in the youths' capacity and recognize their outstanding ability.

The project has also helped the members understand their rights and be brave enough to challenge the CC to publicly share Commune's budget. The YUCD is currently working on lobbying the CC to transparently share the yearly income and expenditure with the public. One youth member said, *"We are now asking how much the CC has spent over the year by printing out the detailed expenses on a piece of paper and sticking them in front of the*

Commune Administration. The CC agreed to do so, but I have never seen one so far. They said that the papers were destroyed by other people. We did not argue about that immediately because we could sense that the Mongkul Borey district's governor was not happy about our request. We did not give further suggestions but to listen to what the district could do about this budget transparency. Now they decide to put that paper surrounded by a glass wall in order to protect from any damages. We are waiting to see that."

Besides that, the implementation of the Pidor Neak Phum Chlat Vey activity is seen as very successful in the community. It helps the YUCD to understand what the services available in the OWSO and OWSU are and their actual fees. The YUCD keeps spreading the information and encouraging local citizens in their area to use Pidor Neak Phum Chlat Vey. Most people had no idea about those services before, but Pidor Neak Phum Chlat Vey could help them a lot. They could also learn about supported documents to bring along with the type of services they need to request. It is helpful and easy. Moreover, some other people used to pay more than the actual service fees before they knew about Pidor Neak Phum Chlat Vey. The YUCD's youth indicated that *"Pidor Neak Phum Chlat Vey is so convenient for people in my community because they can access all types of public services, plus service fees and duration for the completion of the services."*



Additionally, for the Pidor Neak Phum Chlat Vey activity, the public forum initiated by API is also fruitful in the community. Last time, API conducted a public forum with participation from the citizens and district's authorities. The YUCD's youths took the opportunity to participate and actively engage with the local authorities. The forum provided space for service providers and service demanders to advocate their ideas. They made the citizens aware of the services and fees listed in the OWSO and OWSU. They could also show their bravery by asking questions to the local authorities to recognize some under-the-table

fees that used to be paid by the citizen in order to get a service. The YUCD's youth specified that *"we had a chance to ask questions in the public forum. I asked the district's authorities about service fees for correcting information on the birth certificate. I got a reply that it was for free. We were so surprised to hear that. I frankly told them that some people used to spend more than hundreds to get the birth certificate. Yes, we gathered more information from our citizens and represented them to ask questions in the public forum. We dare to ask the kind of questions that our citizens do not dare to."*

To conclude, API's project on raising voices for the citizens and raising awareness to access public information in the local government conducted with the YUCD shows positive indication with clear activities and continuous support from API, plus strong commitment and the willingness to help the community from the youths, the project has generated a qualified community-based organization in Banteay Meanchey Province. The YUCD group that works as representatives of the local citizens could spread more information and actively assist with the needs of their people. The training provided by the API could enhance the ability of the members of YUCD to get full access to public information through the Pidor Neak Phum Chlat Vey App. The training has also improved their capacity to advocate for and present ideas to local authorities. They learn that to advocate ideas with other people, it is essential not to act aggressively but to talk with clear reasons, come up with certain purposes, and provide concrete evidence. The youths could also learn how to write a convincing budget plan.

The YUCD devotes themselves to continuing their jobs in the community. Their next plan is to gather as many youths as possible to build up a stronger team. The knowledge about writing a convincing budget plan will be used to ask for donations and to request some spare funds from their Sangkat to do other social activities. They plan to request around 100 million riels from their Sangkat's budget this year that could be transferred back to the national government to use for an environmental project. They want to raise awareness among the local people about the importance of a clean environment. More than that, they promise to keep sharing what they have learned with other youths through training programs. They will also keep working closely with their CC to discuss future challenges and find mutual solutions to develop their community.

Case Study No. 3

GOVERNMENT'S BUSINESS IS NOW NO LONGER NONE OF MY BUSINESS

Otkov Community

Citizens' Voices and Actions for Sustainable Development in Cambodia (2020-2022) was funded by Dan Church Aid (DCA) and Bread for the World, this ambitious endeavor has the overall objective of fulfilling the rights and enhancing the voices of citizens, to make the country's development more sustainable. On the one hand, we want to actively engage right holders, especially women, youth, people with disability, low-income citizens, and their community-based organizations (CBOs), encouraging them to get involved in the processes of public planning and budgeting at the district level. The latter has been playing a much bigger role since 2020. Citizens and CBOs should hold authorities accountable for service delivery and budget implementation. This project is implemented in 39 districts 8 provinces and 1 khan.

Otkov Community is located in Thmor Bi Dom village, Sangkat Roleap, Krong Pursat, Pursat Province, Cambodia. The community was formed in 1999 by the community members to protect trees that were destroyed so much in the area. A sense of community exists in the village. The community consists of 678 families who gather and work together to safely save all types of resources in the village for the next generation. The community worked mostly on protecting public properties, especially when the properties were hardly destroyed by people who came to get benefits from the village. However, even though the community has a purpose to protect resources, only some of the community's representatives were outstanding enough to stand up and make a voice. Additionally, when it comes to the point that local citizens should be involved in establishing a communal development environment, their participation was quite limited.

People's voices were less heard in the community because local people chose to mind their own business. They treated all public affairs as jobs that should be done by government officials alone. Moreover, people were not brave enough to share ideas and had limited participation in any public affairs offered by their Council Sangkat (CS). People assumed that the government officials were all smart and knew well what to do in the community. Besides, most people were always busy with their own businesses. They did not want to spare time to join any public meetings at all.

Mr. Leang Kimthon, leader of the Otkov Community, stated that *"talking about the villagers, most of them did not dare to use public services at all in the past. They were afraid to go to the public hospital and were always afraid to talk to the doctors."*

Mr. Kimthon added that *"later, people joined the public meetings, but they rarely raised any concerns because they believed that their voices would never be heard. It was easier for them to just listen and accept everything suggested by the officials."*

Koet Sophal, a 42-year-old local citizen, echoed the idea of the leader of the community that *"I never expressed my ideas in any public forums. I never dared to talk to any government officials. I felt like those people would never value my speech."*



It can be understood that the public participation in the commune budgeting and expenditure in Thmor Bi Dom village was lower. It is common to see such problems exist in the local government of Cambodia. Arnaldo Pellini and David Ayres (2007) argued that there was no tradition of promoting public participation in public affairs. People initially have little general knowledge of how to interact with the commune councils¹. Similarly, the Cambodian National Budget (2021) also illustrated several key challenges of public participation in budgeting, including the limited sharing of quality information among the public, especially women, people with disabilities, and indigenous people, and the lack of a clear process to promote citizen participation in budgeting.²

Understanding such existing challenges in Pursat Province, API has conducted the Citizens' Voices and Actions for Sustainable Development in Cambodia Project for two years to improve access to information and increase citizens' engagement in public planning and budgeting. The project involved three main activities. Firstly, API provided capacity development programs to the community representatives. The program was about how to address community issues in Sangkat, especially in the Sangkat's Development Plan, the Sangkat's investment budget plan, and the access to public services in the OWSO and OWSU through Pidor Chatbot. Secondly, API provided some funds (transportation fee) to the community's representatives as the focal people to share what they had learnt from the programme and conducted the dissemination of budget information and Pidor Chatbot

¹ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09614520701337004>

² https://www.cambodianbudget.org/files/publication_file/9f5653d8b64cb409b-82032bee19f91b0-Summary%20of%20National%20Public%20Forum%20on%20Citizen%20Engagement%20in%20Budget%20Formulation%20and%20Monitoring%20on%20Public%20Budget%20Expenditure%20Process%20in%20the%20Covid%2019%20Context%20-%20En.pdf

to CBOs members and citizens in their area. Finally, API initiated the Public Forum and invited the citizens to join and to raise their concerns to their local authorities.

The project's implementation was on the right track because it could not only provide soft skills to the community's representatives but also provide some funds to motivate people to pass on their knowledge to others. It also helped to change some people's mindset from "it is none of business" into "it is my business." People started to advocate their ideas with their CS. They know what to request and which type of development they prefer. There is a significant change in the villagers' behaviors toward participating in their Sangkat's investment and development plans. Participation has slightly increased. More people become braver to share their opinions with government officials. Their demand for information from their local authorities has increased because their interests in local affairs have also increased.



Mr. Thon Rattanak, who is a 23-year-old shy farmer, has shared his experiences after participating in the project. One day in 2022, at the leader of the community's house, API conducted a training. Rattanak was there to just see and observe what the project was about. After seeing several trainings from the API's staff, Rattanak was so impressed. He liked how the staff worked with the citizens. He then decided to be a member of the project. He challenged himself to join because, before, he had never been involved in any social activities at all. Rattanak admitted that the project has turned him from a shy and silent person into a more passionate and braver person. Rattanak shared that *"at first I just silently observed how the API's staff did the presentation. They were really active, and their presentation was really interesting. I observed the way they presented. I tried to mimic their ways, step by step. Now I can do it."*



Another story is that Mr. Keot Sophal, who is a community member, initially participated in the project because he would like to see his community improve. At first, he volunteered for the project to be the assistant of the community leader, but now he is promoted to be the deputy leader of the Otkov Community. Mr. Sophal emphasized that he did not like to talk much with other people, but the experiences he had with the project have made him an inspiring person. He is able to influence other people in his village. Mr. Sophal clarified that

"my personality is someone who does not like to talk much. I am poor at expressing myself. I prefer listening more than talking. However, after working on the project, I could explain the reasons to my people. At first, when I invited them to join the meeting, they always asked if there were any gifts from the meeting. After explaining to them the intangible benefits of joining the meeting from time to time, I could now see that some people do not

ask for gifts anymore. They participate better, even though sometimes they have to leave the meetings early. I think it is already a good start for them."

The project has encouraged more people to turn their interests into their Sangkat's affairs. The project has helped to encourage more people to actively participate in public forums and Sangkat's meetings. During a monthly meeting in Sangkat Roleap last September, the community's representatives raised their concerns regarding deforestation in their community and requested the local authorities to take action on protecting it. The CS accepted their request and agreed to join the forest patrols with the community. With the commitment from the local authorities and great participation from the community, there have not yet seen any other unusual tree loggings. By seeing such great result, the community continues its vision by participating in other meetings to build a stronger community forestry network with other communities. The community drafted the regulations of its network and is submitting the draft to Pursat Provincial Forestry Committee to officially approve its network.



Besides the achievement in protecting deforestation and building network in the community, there is another great outcome accomplished by the community in using the advocacy technique. The leader of the Otkov Community could lobby his CS to spare Sangkat's development budget on building a 7,000-meter red pebble road in Otkov Village in 2022 and another 3,300-meter road in 2023. These road constructions have a lot improved the connectivity and accessibility of the people in the community. The community's representatives could realize

the project's objectives and considerably commit to carrying out the project's activities in the future. The community's leader dedicated that he would need to keep doing it to attract more similar NGOs that have similar visions as API to come and help his community. He wanted to show others that he has a strong commitment to his community's development. The other community's representatives also shared a similar opinion that they would try their best to keep the project's activities alive.

However, there were also some suggestions for the project. People wanted the project to have another phase because the project seemed too short for them. They took time to get to know the project well. Once they started to be deep into the project, the project has come to an end. Mr. Sophal conveyed that *"I felt the project was too short. I am now learning and practicing. I think I am changing step by step. My change is still at*



the starting point, and I need to make further improvements. If the project could continue, it would be best. Even though I am committed to continuing the activities, I am not sure how much I could achieve. I will try my best."

In short, the project seems to be effectively implemented in the Otkov Community. There was a clear indication that the project has significantly contributed to raising local people's voices. Initially, the project has improved the capacity of the Community-Based Organization (CBO) in advocacy and communication skills. It makes them able to share knowledge with other people, especially the knowledge of Pidor Neak Phum Chlat Vey. More people in the community come to understand their voices and start to stand for what is right. They participate and show a willingness to solve problems in their community.

Despite the notable improvement of the community's representatives after engaging in the project, there are also a few challenges. First of all, their beneficiaries could not pass on the information they got from the training to their family members or friends because they did not have enough time to do so. After training, most people would have to go back to their household choir. They are usually busy and forget to share what they have learned. Moreover, they choose what to share. If the issues affect their family, they will definitely share. But if the issues do not affect their interests, they do not pay much attention to them. However, the CBO believes that these challenges could be overcome from time to time. Therefore, the extension of the project in Thmor Bi Dom Village is important to make the project's activities realizable in the long run.



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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 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 opinions. At the same time, we are especially committed to supporting the most disadvantaged in their efforts to make their voices heard.

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