

Foreword

The Advocacy and Policy Institute is a non-profit, non-governmental organization in Cambodia. It was established in July 2003 as a program of PACT Cambodia. It registered with the Ministry of Interior in 2007, and one year later, in 2008, became an independent organization. As its name indicates, API works to build capacity in the area of advocacy and policy by promoting the right to access to information, decentralization, and dialogue. The Institute has built its reputation over the last decade through advocacy training, research, and publications. Its primary aim is to help mainstream awareness about advocacy, right to information, as well as the decentralization and deconcentration policy of the Royal Government of Cambodia.

Executive summary

API is implementing the project on "Promoting Rights, Voices, Choices and decisions for Citizens (Pro-Citizens)" funded by Bread for The World and DanChurch Aid for period of 2017-2019. The overall objective of this project is to strengthen local governance and accountability by improving active citizenship. To support implementation of this project, this report identifies the current situation of citizen participation in local developing planning and functional transfer to the district level under the framework of the Government's National Programme for Sub-National Democratic Development [NP-SNDD 2010-2019].

Based on field research, this report shows that citizens' level of awareness and participation in local development planning is generally positive. The majority of the people are aware of development projects in their communes although far fewer people have knowledge of the commune fund. Similarly, the majority attended the last village planning meeting although less than half of them managed to speak in the meeting. The vast majority express favourable view of village planning meeting. These promising findings are not without challenges, though. Despite that fact that the majority of the respondents attended village planning meeting, their participation was a result of verbal invitation by the authority rather than a result of intrinsic motivation or awareness of their rights and duties. The structural issue of commune councils being incapable of responding citizens' demands is another a hurdle to broader participation. This means that the government still has many tasks to do to close the gap between policy goals and reality. Its success will depend greatly on the ongoing functional transfer, which promises to deepen citizen participation by enabling sub-national government to better address people's needs.

With greater decision making power and resources, sub-national governments can improve public service delivery to better meet people's needs. Yet, this report shows that a number of challenges need to be addressed before this goal can be fulfilled. Chief among them are the issues of partial decentralisation and the lack of trust on sub-national government's performance. Addressing these issues requires the willingness to allow sub-national government to have a greater space to exercise their delegated power and spend their allocated budget. This in turn requires genuine political commitment to see decentralisation reform succeeds as specified in the national plan.

Introduction

API is implementing the project on "Promoting Rights, Voices, Choices and decisions for Citizens (Pro-Citizens)" funded by Bread for The World and DanChurch Aid for period of 2017-2019. The overall objective of this project is to strengthen local governance and accountability by improving active citizenship to proactively influence local decision makers on issues related to democratic participation, social and economic development, and open budgets and processes. One of the key activities is the identification and development of analysis reports of thematic issues raised by district authorities concerning their increased roles and responsibilities as a result of transfer of selected functions from central ministries.

Purpose

Policy #1: The purpose of this policy analysis is to understand the role of local authorities (district authority and commune council) in rural sanitation in Samroang Toung district, Kampong Speu province. This analysis examines their responsibilities and interaction with NGOs to improve the situation of rural sanitation in the district and the challenges they face in the process. The analysis also explores the expectation and preparedness of the district authority regarding the upcoming transfer of the rural sanitation function from the Ministry of Rural Development.

Policy #4: The purpose of this study is to understand the knowledge, attitude and practice of citizens in local development planning and budgeting in Baribo district, Kampong Chhang province. Based on quantitative and qualitative data, the study aims to make policy recommendations to inform local decision making and to provide inputs for CSOs to promote citizen awareness and participation in local development.

Methodology

Policy #1: Data collection for this policy analysis was guided by three key questions:

1. What are the roles and responsibilities of local authorities in rural sanitation?
2. What challenges do they face in the process?
3. What is the view of the district authority in regard to transfer of the rural sanitation function?

Data were collected through semi-structured interview and focus group discussion (FDG) with all relevant stakeholders to ensure data richness and validity. Key informants for semi-structure interview include a deputy district governor, the chief of district administration and the director of the provincial department of rural development. Two focus group discussions were conducted for this study. One with local authorities and the other with civil society representatives. The local authorities FDG was held with seven participants including chiefs of the district office of rural development, health operating district and district office of environment and four commune chiefs.

The civil society FDG was participated by one NGO representative and five CBO representatives. Efforts were made to involve more NGO representatives but to no avail.

Policy #4: Data collection for this policy analysis was guided by two key questions:

1. To what extent are citizens aware of and interested in local development planning and how the commune council allocates and spends its money?
2. What challenges do they face when participate in these processes?

The process of data collection involves two distinct phases:

Household survey

100 households out of 4203 households in the four communes were survey for this study. Due to the small sample size, the findings should be treated of as indicative of rather than representative of the population in the four communes.

Validation and probing of survey findings: key informant interview and focus group discussion

In this phase, 9 key informants including commune chief and one CC member from a different political party in each commune and chief of the district's commune/sangkat support office were interviewed. Furthermore, three FDGs, two with village chiefs and one with NGO and CBO representatives, were held. They were asked for their perception of the validity of the survey findings and probed for the political and cultural factors that underlie citizen attitude and behaviour.

The mixture of quantitative and qualitative approaches is useful to present the broad picture as well as thick description of the phenomenon in interest.

Conceptual framework

Key terms for this report are defined as followed:

Participation: Participation is defined as "...the process through which stakeholders influence and share control over priority setting, policy-making, resource allocations and access to public goods and services."¹ It "a means to" and "a goal of (successful) democratic decentralisation". Improved citizen participation and involvement in development planning and decision making help to direct the attention of elected officials to priority needs, thereby obliging them to become more responsive and accountable.²

¹ Öjendal, Joakim, Robin Biddulph, and Pak Kimchoeun. "Voice, Choice, and Decision: A Study of Local Governance Processes," 2015. <http://gup.ub.gu.se/publication/189652-voice-choice-and-decision-a-study-of-local-governance-processes>.

² Bergh, Sylvia (2004), "Democratic Decentralisation and Local Participation: A Review of Recent Research", *Development in Practice*, 14 (6), pp. 780–790

Decentralisation and deconcentration: Deconcentration is one of the models for transferring functions to local governments, the other being decentralisation. When a function is deconcentrated, the central ministry retains policy and fiscal discretions while subnational administrations are responsible for implementing the function and control the personnel transferred from the ministry. A function is a set of activities such as solid waste management, health centre management or rural water supply maintenance that contributes to the functioning of the larger governance system.³ The transfer of functions to subnational administrations in the current reform entails either assignment or delegation. Assignment refers to “the transfer of ownership of the function [and] all necessary responsibilities, power and discretion for managing and implementing the function.” Delegation denotes “the transfer of function [and] responsibilities, power and discretion for managing and implementing the function in the name of the delegators based on criteria of such delegation. The delegating authority retains ownership on the delegated function.”⁴ In other words, assignment is a strong form of deconcentration whereas delegation is a weak one. The former gives subnational administrations more power to exercise their responsibilities as delineated in a legal framework.

Policy #1: Functional delegation of rural sanitation⁵

Summary of key issues

The WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Program for Water Supply and Sanitation estimated in 2012 that approximately 8 million Cambodian people do not have access to proper latrines and the rate of open defecation is about 70 percent. Since then, major improvements have been achieved. According to the latest government report, 55 percent of the population have access to rural sanitation (latrines) by 2016 representing a nearly two-fold increase from 2012. Although the increase in access has been steady, nearly half of the population still live without proper sanitation. Therefore, more efforts are needed from the government as well as development partners to improve the livelihood and wellbeing of those living in rural areas.

The transfer of the rural sanitation function to local governments are necessary in this respect. Decentralisation reform in Cambodia has entered a new phase despite a history with mixed results. A revived emphasis on deep reform by the National Committee for Democratic Development (NCDD) following the Cambodian People’s Party’s setback in the 2013 general elections is pushing decentralisation forward. By 2015, districts and municipalities had embarked upon administrative renewal, marked by the transfer of various functions from line ministries to district and municipal administrations. As stated by the government, the goal of functional transfer is to

³ Pak Kimchoeun. 2011. Fiscal Decentralisation in Cambodia: A Review of Progress and Challenges. Working Paper Series No. 50. <http://cdri.org.kh/webdata/download/wp/wp50e.pdf>.

⁴ RGC. 2012. Sub-decree on the General Process of Transfer of Functions and Resources to Subnational Administrations.

⁵ Rural sanitation refers to the provision and access to proper sanitary facilities such as latrines

move service delivery closer to the people in order to promote local initiatives and shorten the accountability route.⁶ Against this backdrop, the new phase of decentralisation reform represents an effort to realise the promises of decentralised service delivery.

Since 2009 the decentralisation reform has shifted its territorial focus from the commune level to the district/municipal level aiming to transform district/municipal administrations from largely administrative centres into primary service providers at the local level. For rural sanitation, the Ministry of Rural Development issued a *prakas* in July 2015 piloting the delegation of rural sanitation to target districts in Kampong Speu and Tbong Kmum for two years from August 2015 to July 2017. The delegated responsibilities include: 1) awareness promotion, behavioural change, and community and family-led development; 2) development, promotion and coordination of community sanitation market, and 3) management of rural sanitation and other related data.⁷ In Kampong Speu, all districts are targeted except Phnom Srouch and Samroang Tong.

Findings and Analysis

Key local stakeholders in rural sanitation

District administration: Given its shoestring budget, the district authority does not have a direct role in rural sanitation. Samroang Toung's district fund for 2017 is about 970 million riels or 240,000 US dollars, in which about 240 million riels or 60,000 US dollars are allocated for development projects including repairing a dam and rural roads and constructing a water reservoir. The fund doesn't include allocations for social programs such as rural sanitation.

Commune councils: Both the district authority and civil society representatives concur that commune councils are the most important actor in rural sanitation because they are closest to the communities. Commune councils' involvement in this sector is supported by a meagre social budget line of about 2 million riels or US\$500. Some communes used this budget to buy latrine materials for a number of very poor families. But due to its limitation, the budget can only be used primarily for awareness raising activities. Chair of the commune council's women and children committee serves as the focal person liaising with NGOs. Despite their importance, NGO and CBO representatives think that commune councils' performance in this sector has yet reached the level their desire. Ideally, they expect commune councils to have more specific plan, allocate more budget and involve more closely in the sector.

NGOs: Because of their limited budget and capacity and heavy workload, commune councils' functions in the sector have been substantially supported by development NGOs such as World Vision, Mlup Baitong, WaterShed and Sovannaphum. Equipped with technical knowledge,

⁶ Sar Kheng. 2015. "Closing Remarks at the National Workshop on 2015 Activity and Budget Plan of the National Committee for Democratic Development (NCDD-S)," Phnom Penh, 4-5 February 2015.

⁷ Ministry of Rural Development. 2015. *Prakas on the delegation of rural sanitation function to target district administrations in Kampong Speu and Tbong Khmum.*

funding and participation from local authorities, NGOs have made significant stride in improving access to rural sanitation. According to the district authority, 70 percent of people living in Samroang Tong now have access to latrines. The most notable improvements have been achieved in communes with considerable NGO footprints. By contrast, in communes without NGO operation, the access rate is much lower. In this sense, NGOs have been playing a primary role although cooperation from local authorities especially commune councils is imperative.

Agencies of line ministries: Instead of a direct role, the district authority supports commune councils via the district office of rural development (with two staff), who is vertically accountable to the provincial department of rural development. The key role of the district office is to promote awareness of the benefits of latrines in cooperation with NGOs and commune councils. Other line agencies that involve in rural sanitation although less directly include the health operating district (OD) and district office of environment. The OD mainstreams latrine usage through its meetings with village health focal persons who are usually village chiefs. The focal persons in turn convey the messages when there are meetings with villagers. According to the OD chief, the ministry of health has sanctioned a new policy of having health centres separating toilets from bathrooms and make them accessible to patients. Similarly, the district office of environment focuses on awareness raising related to the control of latrine waste.

The attitudinal challenge of rural sanitation

After years of awareness raising primarily sponsored by NGOs to change people's attitude towards rural sanitation, a sizeable number of people in relatively remote areas remain accustomed to open defecation. Dense forest in those areas create 'ideal' condition for open defecation. Some are unwilling to construct their own latrines even though materials are provided. Some convert latrines into other uses after a period of time. Therefore, a sustained and concerted effort in awareness raising remains critical if universal access to latrines is to be achieved.

To increase latrine access rate, some NGOs adopt a market approach by partnering with microcredit institutions to lend money to villagers to construct latrines. But this is not the practice encouraged by the authorities. They prefer that villagers construct low-cost and affordable latrines rather than become unnecessarily indebted in exchange for expensive, good-looking ones. The reason for this atypical behaviour, according to the district office of rural development, is social conformation. Some people—referred to by one key informant as “poor people with big ambition”—who decide to build latrines often look up to their neighbours who have spacious toilets and they tend to feel 'shameful' if they are not able to own the same structure. As such, they are driven to borrow money from microfinance institutions. This is therefore an attitudinal issue as much as a cost issue.

Commune council-NGO relations

Commune councils welcome the presence of NGOs in the sector and recognise their importance. Indeed, given their capacity and funding, NGOs' presence has created certain level of dependency among commune councils. Commune chiefs admit that should NGOs withdraw or end their projects, commune authorities' involvement in the sector would likely diminish too. Apart from the above mentioned issues of capacity and budget, another factor concerns development priority. The construction of rural roads has always been commune councils' top development priority since decentralisation began in 2002. Rural roads are considered "public" good while latrines are considered "private" good and are therefore less prioritised. As public good, the benefits of rural roads and other infrastructural projects such as canals are shared by the communes' residents. Allocating the meagre commune fund in this manner increases the perception of fairness and representativeness. The other factor relates to financial procedure. In practice, as the same amount of paperwork is required for all expenses, commune councils tend to concentrate their spending on expensive projects such as rural roads so that they do not have to involve in multiple financial settlements with the provincial treasury. For this reason, they are less willing to expand social spending in order to avoid the perceived cumbersome procedure.

The looming functional transfer

After concluding the experiment, the transfer of the rural sanitation function will be expanded to the remaining districts of Phnom Srouch and Samroang Toung. The pilot delegation began with training on behavioural change communication organised by a specialist NGO lasted from 2015 to 2016. In implementing the function, the pilot districts formed a committee consisted of district officials, commune officials and NGOs. The provincial department had little responsibility in function implementation. Its role was limited to providing support when asked for by the district authorities. But according to the department chief, district authorities find it difficult to ask for help because they don't have enough budget implying the need to cover the department's field expense when support is provided.

According the provincial department of rural development, the pilot functional transfer can be considered a success considering the annual rate of increase in the number of latrines: 5 percent in pilot districts compared to 3 percent in non-pilot districts despite the fact that the promised two million riels of grant from the Ministry of Rural Development for each pilot district has never materialised. When asked for the reason, the provincial department is not aware of it either. Hence, the success has been achieved through sheer commitment of the district authorities because they consider the delegated function to be their responsibility.

In light of the looming of the functional transfer, the Samroang Toung district authority expresses their optimism and confidence in implementing the delegated function even the grant issue remains unresolved. The coping strategy is to integrate the delegated function into their existing work. Data management, for example, would not incur additional expense because data have already been collected during the district's development planning process. For awareness raising, the district

authority plans to mainstream key messages related to rural sanitation in their existing meetings with villagers when a plethora of issues are discussed. In terms of capacity, the district authority rejects a long-held view among line ministries that local authorities lack the capacity to take on more responsibilities. For example, the chief of the provincial department of rural development commented that district authorities' capacity in the rural sanitation sector is inadequate because they only know behavioural change communication. He raised the importance of other skillsets such as sanitation marketing and community-led total sanitation and suggested that district authorities should be trained with all related skills before transferring the rural sanitation function to them implying that the transfer of technical officials to the district is not to be taking place. Yet, the Samroang Tong district authority maintain that in general as long as human and financial resources are transferred, they will be able to implement functions transferred to them. Rather, they believe that the view that local governments lack capacity is more an excuse to withhold power and resources at the ministerial level. Similarly, they dismiss the concern that local governments may become more prone to corruption when they have more discretion and resources. The reason is that the national government retains the power to discipline or fire misbehaved local officials.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Overall the situation of rural sanitation in Samroang Tong district has improved significantly with 70 percent of the population now have access of latrines. Nevertheless, universal access is still a long way to go considering people's attitude towards latrines is still a major issue to be addressed. Given its shoestring budget, the district authority does not have a direct role in rural sanitation. It primarily plays a supporting role to commune councils via the district office of rural development. Both the district authority and civil society representatives concur that commune councils are the most important actor in rural sanitation because they are closest to the communities. However, due to their limited budget and capacity and heavy workload, commune councils' functions in the sector have been substantially supported by development NGOs. The concern is that NGOs' presence has created certain level of dependency among commune councils, who admit that their involvement in the sector would likely diminish if NGOs withdraw or end their support. The looming transfer of the rural sanitation function to the district is expected to increase the role of the district authority in the sector. The district authority appears confident in their capacity to implement the function despite the conventional view that local governments lack capacity. Yet the implementation capacity hinges on the transfer of financial and human resources that commensurate with the function. Based on these findings, a number of broad policy recommendations are proposed as followed:

Ministry of Rural Development:

- To ensure the success of functional transfer, the ministry should make sure that resources are transferred along with the function. Furthermore, rather than a fixed amount of funding for each district, the ministry should explore a more flexible allocation by factoring into each district's population and geographical characteristics so that the most challenging districts can receive more fund to address their issues.
- Apart from funding, the ministry should ensure that district authorities are well-equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge. In addition to class-style training, provincial departments should play a role in providing on-going support to district authorities. This entails changing the mind-set by acknowledging that the lack of capacity on the part of local government is an issue that should not be problematized but normalized and that the ministry and its line agencies have to take responsibility to address this issue.

District authority:

- The district authority should disseminate widely information about the functional transfer to commune councils, village chiefs and citizens to promote their awareness and motivate their participation when the district begins to implement the function.
- Upon receiving the function, the district authority should consider delegating the whole function or part of the function to commune councils taking advantage of their experience in the sector and proximity to the communities. Considering the transferred budget is likely to be small, the delegation should target the most challenging communes.
- Despite the delegation, the district authority should provide on-going support for commune councils and hold regular meetings to understand their concerns and needs. The district authority should act as a bridge between commune councils and the ministry and line department to ensure that information related to functional transfer can be channelled on a timely basis to commune councils.

Commune councils:

- After receiving information about the functional transfer from the district authority, commune councils should further disseminate the information to citizens.
- For communes with lower access to latrines, the commune councils should increase the priority of rural sanitation in their development planning. Although the room for manoeuvre on the budgetary front will remain limited, the commune councils can improve their proactivity with more deliberation in commune council meetings and enhanced public awareness raising in village planning meetings.

- Addressing the attitudinal issue hinges on sustained awareness raising campaigns. Commune councils should keep and when possible strengthen their working relationship with NGOs who will remain pivotal in this process.

Civil society:

- Civil society organisations should continue to promote public awareness of rural sanitation through innovative methods.
- Civil society organisations should also consider incorporating rural sanitation into the on-going social accountability framework to enable citizens to raise their concerns and motivate commune councils to take the issue more seriously.

Policy #4: Knowledge, behavior and attitude of citizens in local governance system

Summary of key issues

In Cambodia, decentralisation reform began in 2002 with two main goals: (1) the promotion of local democracy and (2) the improvement of local service delivery, ultimately aiming at alleviating poverty. Through this reform, a certain level of discretion and resources have been delegated to commune councils so that they can represent the interests of their constituencies and become more accountable and responsive to their needs. Decentralisation has created a space for citizen participation whereby they can elect local leaders and express their preferences for local development.

Previous studies of citizen participation, however, found that participatory local governance is still a goal rather than a reality. A survey by NCDDs in 2011 shows that only 24.9 percent of the respondents attended village planning meeting and among those who attended 31.1 percent spoke in the meeting. The primary reason for not speaking was that there was no need to say anything. Meeting attendants generally have favourable view of the meeting.⁸ However, most citizens who attended the meetings did not have clear purposes and that was because their participation was a result of receiving instruction from village chiefs rather than of their intrinsic interest.⁹ Although the law requires 60 percent of villagers to hold village meetings,¹⁰ in practice these meetings often were held with far fewer people. The meetings often lacked interaction with village chiefs facilitating the meetings through one-way communication and thus failed to create the space for citizens to voice their concerns and express their opinions.¹¹

⁸ NCDDs (2011). Results of the IP3 2011 Local Governance Survey. Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

⁹ EIC (2010). Report of the second citizen satisfaction survey in target communes of the LAAR project. Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

¹⁰ NCDD, (2009). 'Commune/Sangkat Fund Project Implementation Manual (PIM).' Phnom Penh.

¹¹ Plummer, J. and G. Tritt (2011). Voice, Choice and Decision: A Study of Local Governance Processes in Cambodia, World Bank.

Nevertheless, major social and political changes have unfolded since these findings. The ruling CPP has suffered an unexpected decline in its popularity in the 2013 national election. The internet, smart phones and new communication technologies have penetrated very segment of the society with huge potential to promote people's awareness and attitude towards political issues. It is therefore interesting to study whether there are changes to the ways people perceive and behave in relation to local development planning.

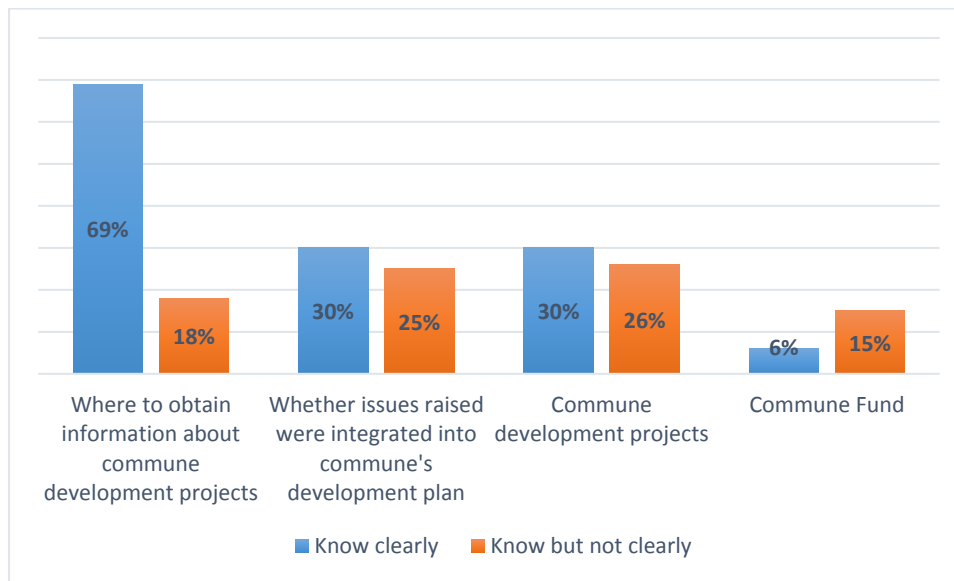
Findings and Analysis

According to the Law on Administration and Management of Commune/Sangkat (2001), CCs shall facilitate citizen participation in commune development planning. The Sub-degree on Decentralization of Powers, Roles and Duties to Commune/Sangkat Councils (2002) specifies that CCs are empowered to choose and implement any activities that are within the scope of their general mandate and resources. CCs shall promote and coordinate the democratic processes in their respective communes by setting up mechanisms for consultation with residents and civil society organisations. CCs need to ensure that citizens' view are taken into account in their decision making and civil society organisations play an important role in this process. Aligning with the legal framework, the 3-Year Implementation Plan Phase II (2015-17) outlines the government's targets to improve democratic accountability of CCs. The main instrument is social accountability initiatives. The mechanisms ensure that information related to CCs is provided to citizens in an accessible manner. Yet in practice various challenges remain to be addressed. We examine these challenges in four communes in Baribo district, Kampong Chhang province.

Awareness

Respondents in the four communes show limited awareness of commune development planning as it is officially referred to. When asked if they are aware of "commune development plan" (CDP) and "commune investment program" (CIP), 40 percent of them said that they are aware of the former whereas only 27 percent of them said that they are aware of the latter. The awareness of CDP and CIP are slightly better for those who have taken part in village planning meeting. Participants in FGDs explain that this is because the term 'investment' is too technical and thus not well understood by people with low education. Instead, the word 'development' is more familiar to villagers as they can relate it with tangible outputs such as roads and bridges. As a result, when village chiefs and other village leaders inform villagers to attend village planning meeting, they use common terminologies that can be easily understood. Words like "needs," "local development," "road building" are used in combination to refer to the meeting.

Figure 1: Awareness of local development and budgeting (n = 100)



The majority of respondents are aware of their communes' development projects in the last year (30% know clearly, 26% know but not clearly) and know whether or not issues raised in village planning meeting were integrated into commune councils' development plan (30% know clearly, 25% know but not clearly). Their awareness of the amount of money spent by commune councils on development projects, on the other hand, is much lower (6% know clearly, 15% know but not clearly). According to the local authorities, villagers typically do not pay attention to this information despite putting it on information boards and disseminating the information in public forums. Fortunately, most of them (69% know clearly, 18% know but not clearly) know where to go if they want to access information about development projects. Expectedly, those who have participated in village planning meeting demonstrate more knowledge of the above issues. This suggests that those who have attended village planning meeting are more likely to follow the later stages of the planning process when commune councils decide which issues should be prioritised and allocated with development fund.

Behaviour and attitude

The majority of the respondents (55%) have taken part in the last village planning meeting and almost all of them who did so were told to attend by the local authority. Although the law specifies 60 percent of villagers as the minimum meeting quota, the number of attendants is lower at around 40 to 50 percent. Due to the exodus of youth and adults to work in cities and outside the country, most meeting participants are old, stay-at-home women. Commune councils generally are not satisfied with the rate of participation and express the intention to improve it.

Mobilising villagers to attend the meeting remain a major challenge. One factor relates to the desire for immediate material benefits. Some villagers expect to receive money from attending the meeting. There is a view that village chiefs mobilise their own people to meetings where money

is given but invite others to meetings where money is not available. Some engage in calculation about income loss if they close their businesses to attend the meeting. Some complain that development projects do not benefit them directly. Another factor concerns their satisfaction with commune councils' performance. Villagers may lose interest in the meeting overtime when commune councils fail to respond to their needs. Village chiefs said that villagers tend to expect quick responses. They do not understand the difficulty in spending the commune fund, which is not as simple as spending one's own money.

Overall, there is an agreement that people who have experience attending the meeting are more likely to attend again. Also, attendance depends a lot on intrinsic motivation: those who are eager to know are more likely to attend the meeting.

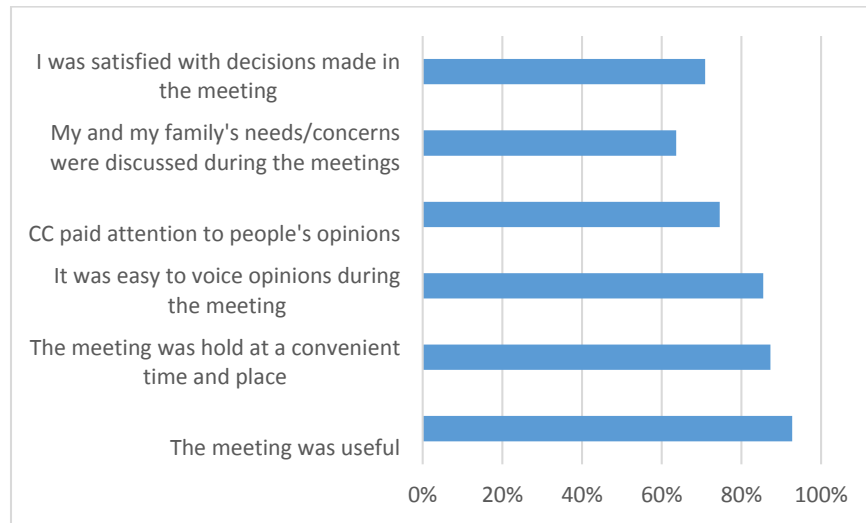
Among those who attended village planning meeting, 40 percent managed to speak out during the meeting. For those who did not, the reasons were fear (8%); not allowed to speak (12%), not having an opportunity to speak (38%) and what they wanted to say were spoken by others (41%). It is a positive finding that only a small number of respondents did not speak due to fear. This means that most people want to voice their opinions. According to FDG participants, the fear factor may be caused by a belief that to speak out is to be against the authority.

For those who said that they did not have the opportunity to speak, a reason was due to short time period allocated for commenting and consequently only a few people were able to speak or villagers leaving the meeting early. In some cases, villagers were also advised not to repeat what had been said in order to not to waste time. Local authorities tend to think that it was because villagers themselves not feeling brave enough to speak.

People who speak usually are "important people" in the villages such as pagoda committee members, *achars*, group leaders and those with experience of public speaking. What these important people said were very likely to broadly reflect the general sentiment and perspective. That is perhaps why 41 percent of the respondents said that they did not express their views because what they wanted to say were spoken by others.

Local authorities and civil society preventatives disagree with the findings that there were cases of people not allowed to speak. If it did happen, which is rare, it was because of what they said was irrelevant to the meeting or defamatory to particular individuals or political parties.

Figure 2: View on local development and budgeting (n = 55)



Villagers who have attended village planning meeting agree that the meeting was useful (93%) and hold at a convenient time and place (87%). They agree that it was easy to voice opinions (86%), the commune council paid attention to people’s opinions (75%), their needs/concerns were discussed (64%), and that they were satisfied with the decisions made (71%). Commune authorities agree that it is very difficult to make everyone happy with decisions from the meeting. Commune councils have limited resources for development, so needs of the majority are prioritised.

The vast majority of the respondents (88%) have contributed money to development projects. But some of them (18%) report that they did so not voluntarily but were told to do so. This reluctance can be attributed to several factors. First, people complain that the concerned development project does not meet their needs or that its quality is low. Second, they think that they should not be asked to donate when commune councils’ already have the money. Third, they hesitate when they do not get sufficient information about the project from those coming to collect the money. Finally, some better-off villagers complain that as they have never received gifts from the local authorities, donation should only be solicited from those who have referring poorer villagers. In some communes, donations are solicited in religious ceremonies rather than house-by-house.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on the findings, it is concluded that the level of awareness and participation in local development planning of villagers in four target communes in Baribo district, Kampong Chhang province is promising. The majority of respondents are aware of development projects in their communes although far fewer people have knowledge of the commune fund. Similarly, the majority attended the last village planning meeting although less than half of them managed to speak in the meeting. The vast majority express favourable view of village planning meeting in terms of its time and place, usefulness, quality of discussion and ease of expression. These promising findings are not without challenges, though. Despite that fact that the majority of the

respondents attended village planning meeting, their participation was a result of verbal invitation by the authority rather than a result of intrinsic motivation or awareness of their rights and duties. Although fear as a cause of not speaking up is minimal, the view that speaking up is a sign of opposing the authority is still a barrier to be overcome. The structural issue of commune councils being incapable of responding citizens' demands is another a hurdle to broader participation.

Based on these findings, a number of broad policy recommendations are proposed as followed:

NCDD:

- NCDD should ensure that commune councils can implement the new guidelines on CIP and CDP effectively by providing them with sufficient training and on-going technical support.
- Knowledge of commune support offices at the district level should be continuously strengthened to ensure that they can support commune councils fully.

Commune councils:

- Commune councils should widen access to information by publicizing detailed information about commune fund especially non-infrastructure budget lines.
- Commune councils should consider exploring more effective ways of disseminating information about village planning meetings, how development priorities are set and final decisions after village meetings. This is necessary to increase the level of awareness and participation.
- Commune councils should tap more into the potential of CBOs who are closer to and interact more with villagers to promote public awareness of local development planning. For some CBOs, there are regular meetings among their members. This is an ideal forum in addition to other council-organised meetings where key messages related to local planning can be mainstreamed. For this to work, commune councils will need to engage CBOs more constructively in local governance including council monthly meeting and PBC meeting.
- Commune councils should consider the feasibility of organising more than one planning meeting in different locations of the village. This is particularly relevant for communes where there are substantial number of people living far away from village centre where village planning meeting is typically held. Holding a separate planning meeting at a location closer to them can cut down their travel cost and thus encourage broader participation.

- In village planning meetings, commune councils should make the period for discussion long enough to accommodate those who want to express their opinions. Also, those who want to speak but have to leave the meeting early should be given the option to write down their view on a piece of paper to be reviewed later by the commune council.

Conclusion

The policy analyses aim to promote understanding of the status of citizen participation and functional transfer based on quantitative and qualitative data from two districts in Cambodia. Their overarching purpose is to make policy recommendations to inform national and local decision making and to provide inputs for CSOs to promote citizen awareness and participation in local development. The significance of this report is that it sheds light on the institutional, cultural and economic factors that affect processes of citizen participation, public service delivery and the overall decentralisation reform. We hope that it can serve as a useful input for further policy deliberation.