EXPERIENCES FROM API ON PROMOTING
SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN CAMBODIA
- A GUIDING DOCUMENT

Written by:

Advocacy and Policy
Institute

Cambodia-ASEAN Centre for
Human Rights Development

Sponsored by:

The United States Agency for
International Development

Results for Development
Institute

in Collaboration with:

Bandung Institute of
Governance Studies

Perkumpulan INISIATIF

Index

Acknowledgements

ABOUT API

The Advocacy and Policy Institute (API) is a Cambodian non-profit and on-governmental organization, which has a mission to serve the long term democratic and social development needs of Cambodia through the empowerment of people to interact with their government to protect their rights and provide for their needs.

ABOUT CACHRD

Cambodia-ASEAN Centre for Human Rights Development (CACHRD) is a non-profit and non-governmental organization in response to the needs of training and research in human rights in Cambodia.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

API	Advocacy and Policy Institute
CACHRD	Cambodia-ASEAN Center for Human Rights Development
CRC	Citizen Report Card
DM	Dialogue Meeting
DOE	District Office of Education
MoEF	Ministry of Economy and Finance
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PB	Program-based budgeting
POE	Provincial Office of Education
PETS	Public Expenditure Tracking Survey
PT	Provincial Treasuries
R4D	Results for Development
RGC	Royal Government of Cambodia
SA	Social Audit
SSC	School Support Committees

Introduction and overview

This guiding document was initiated and designed by Advocacy and Policy Institute (API), Cambodia. API is a Cambodian non-profit and non-governmental organization (NGO) with a mission to serve the long-term democratic and social development needs of Cambodia through the empowerment of people to interact with their government to project their rights and provide for their needs.

API is acknowledged as a leading advocacy capacity building institution, working on decentralization, policy dialogue and promoting access to information in Cambodia. API is committed to working together with all national and international institutions that share its values - advocating for positive and peaceful social change - and to improve the capacity and cooperation of all Cambodians. API seeks to build bridges between the Government, citizens and the private sector, consistent with its goal of increasing the democratic space in Cambodia by creating more effective advocates and responsive government institutions. API was officially registered with the Ministry of Interior on 17 July 2007.

API together with the Cambodia-ASEAN Center for Human Rights Development (CACHRD)[1] has been implementing the project "Promoting the Effectiveness Of Public expenditure in Local Education" funded by USAID through Results for Development (R4D) 2012-2014[2]. This project aims to promote public accountability and enhance the effectiveness of public expenditure in the education sector, particularly early childhood education through conducting evidence-based research and advocacy activities. The guiding document is an integrated project activity and will comprise knowledge and lessons learnt from three specific components of this project the Public Expenditure Tracking Survey (PETS); the Citizen Report Card (CRC); and the social audit (SA).

The objectives of the guiding document is:

1. To compile the practices and lesson learnt of API's project implementation employing social accountability tools.

2. To disseminate the guiding document to CSOs and government representatives and public service providers, to inform on social accountability.

The report will contribute to enhancing citizens and stakeholders capacity to increase the effectiveness of their advocacy activities and enhance the effectiveness of the social accountability efforts towards public service providers.

[1] Cambodia-ASEAN Centre for Human Rights Development (CACHRD) is non-profit and non-governmental organization in response to the needs of training and research in human rights in Cambodia.

[2] R4D is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to unlock solutions to tough development challenges that prevent people in low- and middle-income countries from realizing their full potential. Using multiple approaches in multiple sectors, including Global Education, Global Health, Governance, R4D supports the discovery and implementation of new ideas for reducing poverty and improving lives around the world.

The Aim of the guiding document

The rational behind the guiding document is to compile valuable and relevant experiences, lessons learnt and tips gained from API's social accountability initiatives throughout Cambodia. Sharing these practical empirical experiences will help knowledge sharing and build the capacity of a variety of stakeholders and both guide and promote citizens/stakeholders engagement.

Social accountability strategies and approaches vary across the different political contexts, authoritarian regimes, transitional democracies and autocracies. The suggestions contained in this guiding document are drawn on the experiences of API and should be carefully considered within the context of Cambodia.

The Guiding Document - Target groups and stakeholders

The target audiences of the guiding document include CSOs, development partners, community representatives, government representatives, public service provider representatives at both local and national level and the general population at large.

How to use the Guiding Document

Multiple stakeholders stand to benefit from applying the knowledge and lessons summarized in the guiding document and we hope this will provide relevant concepts, tips, tools, and strategies that organizations and individuals in Cambodia can consider as they plan their social accountability efforts.

Section 2 of the guiding document gives a general overview of the pillars and key concepts of social accountability, the responsibility of the public service providers, and the role of civil society in Cambodia.

Section 3 presents a broad summary of three social accountability tools of practice. The Public Expenditure Tracking Survey (PETS); the Citizen Report Card (CRC) and Social Audit (SA).

Section 4 provides a detailed account of components, lessons and approaches of social accountability. This section draws on the experiences of API.

Social Accountability – the Pillars and Key Concepts

Key concepts of social accountability

What is social accountability

The concept of "Accountability" in the Khmer language is often perceived as a difficult term. It becomes even more challenging when the focus is on social accountability. Often the concept of accountability is defined as the responsibility of people or institutions in power, such as Government and government institutions to be accountable for their actions.

> A fundamental principle of democracy is that citizens have the right to demand accountability, and public actors have an obligation to be accountable. Elected officials and civil servants are accountable for their conduct and performance

Social accountability refers to the broad range of actions and mechanisms, beyond voting, that citizens can use to hold the state to account, as well as actions on the part of government, civil society, media and other societal actors that promote or facilitate these efforts.

Citizen or civil society-led efforts to hold government accountable have in recent years expanded and now include a range of participatory data and analytical tools. The foundation of the tools is to gather, analyze and disseminate information to use in direct dialogue with government counterparts and public service providers at both sub-national and national level.

The importance of social accountability

When citizens are engaged in monitoring public service providers, research[3] shows that the effectiveness and delivery of the public services improves. Social accountability can be an effective approach for the public

sector, civil society and citizens to improve governance processes, service delivery outcomes and improving resource allocation decisions, thus making the public sector more responsive and accountable. Citizens and communities have an important role to play with regard to enhancing accountability of public officials, reducing corruption and leakage of funds, and improving public service delivery. Of the utmost importance when engaging in social accountability is constructive engagement with government partners and other relevant stakeholders.

The Role of Civil Society in Cambodia

A broad definition of Civil Society commonly refers to "as an arena separate from the family, the state and the market, where individuals voluntarily associate to advance common views and interests on their own or on others' account". Thus this definition embraces a broad spectrum of organizational forms ranging from professional NGOs and social mass movements to traditional structures and local and informal networks.

Historically, Cambodia has not had a strong and vibrant tradition of civic engagement. The must common civil society the social fabric is based on, are informal organizations such as pagoda (wat) committees. The fact that the vast majority of Cambodians are not used to engaging in active participatory interaction with the state presents a challenge for the work of introducing social accountability initiatives in Cambodia. However there can be little doubt that civil society and NGOs, in the current political climate in Cambodia play an important role in providing the social groundwork for enhancing accountability of public service providers, reducing corruption and empowering citizens.

[3] Public Expenditure Tracking Survey (PETS) In Early Childhood Education: API, Cambodia 2012.

Responsibility of the Public Service Providers in Cambodia

Initiatives to progress good governance and citizen participation in all provinces in the country by responding to the needs of citizens in an efficient, transparent, and accountable manner has become a national priority. The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) has in the recent years made significant strides to encourage good governance and improving public service delivery[4] . The RGC has actively initiated national processes of decentralization to develop democratic, participatory, accountable, and effective institutions of government at the provincial/municipal, district/khan, and commune/sangkat level[5] . Public service providers have a responsibility to work with civil society and citizens in ensuring the effective delivery of services, and stand accountable to the public.

Risks of Engaging in Social Accountability Initiatives

In approaching social accountability there are certain risks that should be understood and managed. Raising citizen's expectations is inherent in social accountability initiatives. Social accountability is possible when citizens are aware of their rights and expect and demand that public sector actors respect those rights and live up to their role as genuine public servants.

Social accountability initiatives should emphasize the rights of citizens and the duties of the public service providers. However it must also underline the responsibilities of citizens and care must be taken to ensure that the expectations of citizens and groups are realistic and reasonable. When working with social accountability there is always the risk of conflict between various opposing stakeholders. Social accountability initiatives must always promote constructive dialogue between involved parties.

If there is a lack of genuine political will, generating results from any social accountability initiative will be difficult. One strategy to overcome such a challenge can be to seek out individuals who are genuinely willing to support initiatives and measures and target these in the advocacy work. Great care most also be taken to ensure that the opinions and participation of marginalized groups and

individuals are accounted for. This includes poor, women, minorities, children and youth, and groups/individuals with special needs.

The maximum benefits of social accountability initiatives can only be achieved when all relevant groups and individuals are represented. Critical voices must also be presented with the opportunity to speak out and engage. Civil society actors who become too closely associated with government representatives can suffer a loss of legitimacy. Therefor care must be taken to ensure that the stakeholder dialogue is as open and transparent as possible.

Social accountability initiatives especially if not well explained and prepared in a participatory manner, can be demoralizing or threatening to public service providers and government. It is therefor important to constructively engage with these stakeholders. It is important to actively involve state actors in the design and preparation of social accountability initiatives. This will create a sense of ownership amongst all stakeholders and significantly increase the chance of achieving lasting results.

It should also be emphasized that there are potential risks that social accountability work pose to individuals or organizations that speak out. Citizens or groups that question or criticize government may do so at considerable personal risk. Therefor great care must be taken to, if deemed necessary, to protect the security of individual citizens.

4 In particular The Rectangular Strategy sets out Cambodia's long-term development vision. It sets out the Government's intention to build Cambodian society by strengthening peace, stability and social order, promoting sustainable and equitable development, and entrenching democracy and respect for human rights and dignity. Good governance is at the core of the strategy. The Rectangular Strategy was first launched in 2004, and updated in 2008.

5 http://www.ansa-eap.net/assets/77/57-1-5_Cambodia_Scoping_Study.pdf

Social Accountability in Practice

Several approaches and tools can be deployed as part of a social accountability process. The three social accountability tools that API has been utilizing as part of the PEOPLE project; Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys (PETS), Citizen Report Cards (CRCs), and Social Audits have provided valuable knowledge about the social accountability process. Jointly the tools can construct a comprehensive picture of a particular public service and provide an evidence base for advocating for change.

Three tools of practice

The applicability of the tools and the connection with advocacy elements can be viewed in the subsequent model[6] .
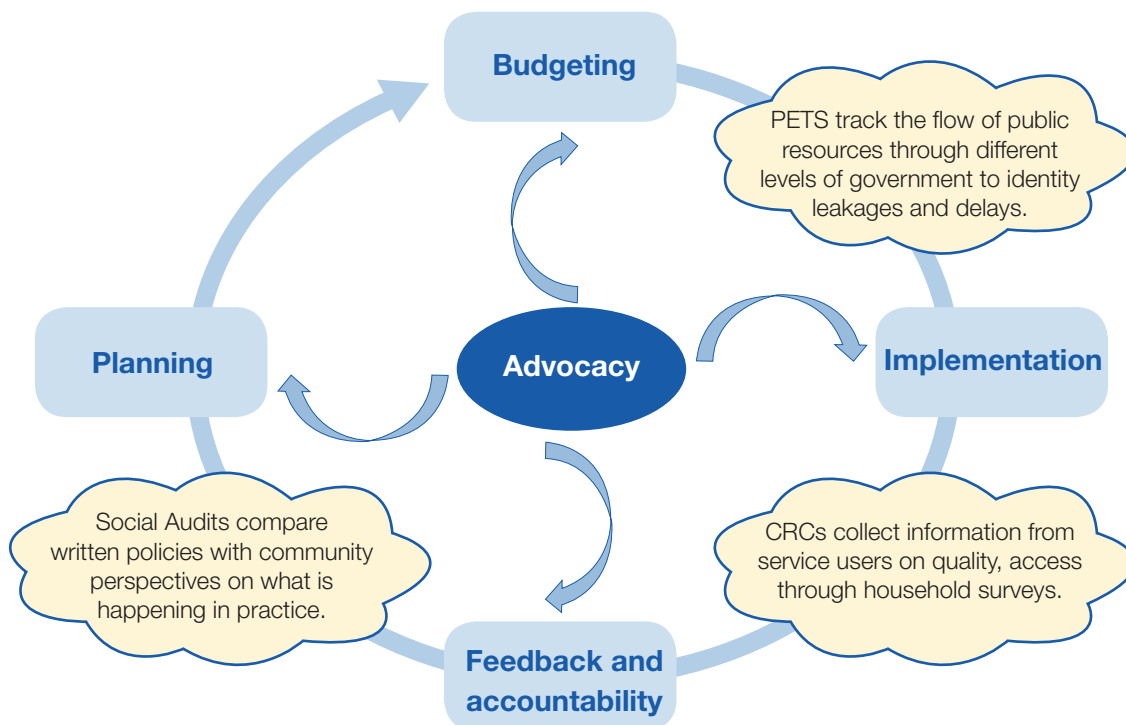
[6] Model designed by Results for Development (R4D).

Public Expenditure Tracking Survey (PETS)

The Public Expenditure Tracking Survey (PETS) is a quantitative survey of the supply side of public services. The unit of observation is typically a service facility and/or local government i.e. frontline public service providers like schools and health clinics. The survey collects information on facility characteristics, financial flows, outputs (services delivered), accountability arrangements, etc. If carefully and competently collected, PETS data can have multiple uses. They can serve as powerful simple diagnostic tool in the absence of reliable public administrative or financial data. They trace the flow of resources from origin to destination and determine the location and

scale of anomaly. They are distinct, but complimentary to qualitative surveys on the perception of users to service delivery. They highlight not only the use and abuse of public money, but also give insights into cost efficiency, decentralization and accountability[7] . While there is no standard formula, typically some of the steps involved in such a survey are:

1. Identification of scope, purpose and actors
2. Design of questionnaires
3. Sampling
4. Execution of survey
5. Data analysis
6. Dissemination
7. Institutionalization

A PETS is used to study the flow of public funds to service providers and has successfully been applied in a number of countries where public accounting systems functions poorly or provide unreliable information. The results of PETS have been used to advocate for policy change and hold governments accountable for financial resource allocations.

The objective of the PETS is to provide detailed information on the flow and arrival of financial resources at the frontline and on the performance of service providers, and serve as an indicator on the quality of services. API has applied it to examine public expenditure in the specific area of early childhood education. The findings educed by conducting a PETS are important for the dissemination of information, ensuring satisfactory delivery of public services, safeguarding public financial accountability and when advocating for policy reform[8] .

The PETS applied by API had a strong "research" component aimed at informing and providing details of budget flow to frontline service providers in early childhood education and to identify the effectiveness of public expenditure, focusing on timely, adequacy, and equity[9] in the allocation of funds.

Key questions when conducting the PETS are:

1. Have funds allocated been received by the implementing agencies?
2. What volume of the allocated budget reaches the implementing agencies?
3. Are there any significant delays in allocating budgets? If so what is found to be the cause?
4. How is the allocated budget used for the delivery of decentralized public services?

PETS promotes:
- Dissemination of information
- Satisfactory delivery of public services
- Public financial accountability
- Policy reform

Practical tips to remember when conducting a PETS:

- ❖ Build capacity of stakeholders on how to carry out the PETS
- ❖ Ensure the permission and support from government's institutions
- ❖ Ensure multi-stakeholder participation during research design - conduct test of questionnaire
- ❖ Do a desk review on financial guideline and procedures from National to sub-national or public service providers
- ❖ Align scope and sample based on budget and timeline of the PETS
- ❖ Conduct questionnaire testing
- ❖ Gather secondary data on budget tracking as evidence base reference
- ❖ If necessary, involve additional resources persons in order to obtain missing information
- ❖ Ensure multi-stakeholder participation in meetings on preliminary research findings and project progress
- ❖ Publicize and disseminate the report and its findings to gain the attention from the policy makers and relevant stakeholders
- ❖ Monitor and document the findings and impacts from the PETS

[7] http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTSOCIALDEVELOPMENT/EXTPCENG/0,,contentMDK:20507700~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:410306,00.html

[8] Given the prospect of PETS promoting effective public financial management, in 2004 and 2005, the Royal Government of Cambodia willingly received financial and technical assistance from the donor community, especially the World Bank in diagnosing issues related to public expenditures in the health and education sectors in Cambodia. The results of the two surveys were well perceived by the Royal Government of Cambodia and included issues with rigidities, delays and uncertainties created by an over-centralized budget system. Research by the NGO Forum (2009)

indicated that there is a lack of clarity regarding allocation and the timely disbursement of program-based budgets. Also, as underlined by the WB Public Expenditure Tracking Survey (2005), social accountability mechanisms, especially involvement and knowledge of stakeholders about PB budget, were inadequate.

[9] It involved three early childhood education officials at provincial education office, seven officials at district education office, 37 pre-school principals and 85 teachers in five provinces including Kampong Speu, Kampong Thom, Kampong Chhnang, Pursat and Banteay Meanchey province.

Citizen Report Card (CRC)

Citizen Report Cards are participatory surveys that provide quantitative feedback on user perceptions on the quality, adequacy and efficiency of public services. They go beyond just being a data collection exercise to being an instrument to exact public accountability by systematically gathering and disseminating public feedback. CRCs serve as a "surrogate for competition" for state-owned monopolies that lack the incentive to be as responsive as private enterprises to their client's needs. They are a useful medium through which citizens can credibly and collectively 'signal' to public service providers about their performance, and pressure for change. CRCs are increasingly being used as tools for civic engagement to demand better governance.

A CRC initiative is a process that goes beyond the execution of a survey. It is part 'science' - the technical aspect of running an efficient and credible survey – and part 'art' – the challenge of mobilizing an advocacy strategy that can foster debate and generate results.

A CRC normally entails the following stages:

1. Identification of scope, purpose and stakeholders
2. Design of questionnaire
3. Sampling (size and relevant groups)
4. Conducting the survey
5. Analysis of the collected data/information
6. Dissemination of findings and knowledge
7. Institutionalization

With the effective combination of citizen, political and bureaucratic action, CRCs could be the ideal catalyst for mobilizing demand for accountability and reform. Public service providers should be encouraged to use Citizen Report Cards for performance-based budgeting and link public opinion with actual public spending.

Practical tips to remember when conducting a CRC:

- ❖ Build capacity of stakeholders on how to carry out the CRC
- ❖ Ensure multi-stakeholder participation during research design
- ❖ Align scope and sample based on budget and timeline of the CRC
- ❖ Complete the questionnaire using stakeholder inputs
- ❖ Test the questionnaire on a small sample before putting it to use
- ❖ Utilize simple scoring or scaling during the interview (examples are smiley icon or numbers)
- ❖ Publicize and disseminate the report and its findings to gain the attention from the policy makers and relevant stakeholders
- ❖ Monitor and document the findings and impacts from the CRC

Social audit (SA)

Social audit is a social accountability tool where citizens mobilize to evaluate or audit the government (local/national) or the public service provider's performance and policy decisions. The social audit conducted by API focused on strengthening community awareness and active participation to monitor children and school performance[10] . A social audit can consist of several tools. The API study selected the Dialogue Meeting (DM) as the preferred method of approach. API chose this approach based on the perceived applicability within the Cambodian context. Social audit is based on the principle that democratic local governance should be carried out, as far as possible, with the consent and understanding of all stakeholders.

[10] The main objectives of the social audit (SA) were to: (1) create space for communities to have an open dialogue with service providers on the issue of teaching and learning materials and other necessary services of public pre-school education; and (2) enhance the involvement of the communities in monitoring the public pre-school service performance.

Social Audit is a process not an event.

If performed correctly conducting social auditing can create an impact on governance and the effectiveness of public service providers. It is particularly valuable for the purpose of enhancing local governance, particularly for strengthening accountability and transparency amongst the decentralized public service providers. The purpose of a social audit can be diverse, but some common factors are:

1. It focuses on assessing the physical and financial gaps between the needs and the available financial resources for public service providers

2. It contributes to creating awareness, understanding and a common platform among stakeholders

3. It contributes to the increased effectiveness and transparency of public service provision

4. It allows citizens and the civil society to scrutinize policy decisions, priorities and actions

5. It educates local communities on participatory local planning, local democracy and community participation

Important public documents for a SA include, but are not limited to:

- All budget allocations, beneficiary lists, muster rolls, bills, vouchers, accounts, etc. must be available for public scrutiny.

- All applications for licenses/permits and certificates issued by local self-government institutions must have a serial number. Registers indicating date of application and date of clearance in each case should be available for reference by any applicant. If possible, copies should be publicly displayed.

- Public assessment of tax, exemptions, grants, etc., to ensure there are no complaints of undue preferential treatment.

The process of a social audit can be outlined as follows:

1. Preparatory groundwork
   a. Define the scope of the audit
   b. Form a working group to implement and oversee the social audit
   c. Identify key stakeholders (beneficiaries, community members, local CSOs, public service providers, responsible government officials, donors and development partners)

2. Gather information and analyze
   a. Access all relevant public documents (such as accounting records, audits, technical project reports and managerial records)
   b. Gather data from relevant stakeholders about their perceptions and experiences of the service/project in question (through surveys, focus group discussions, interviews and community dialogues)
   c. Analyze collected data (this may require some specialized assistance)

3. Public disclosure and information dissemination
   a. Disseminate findings and outcomes (using, for example, public institution, CSOs, and other meetings or event)
   b. Use findings to undertake advocacy initiatives

Practical tips to remember when conducting a SA:

- ❖ Build capacity of stakeholders on how to carry out the SA
- ❖ Do a desk review on relevant documents and analyze how to apply the SA in the Cambodian context
- ❖ Ensure multi-stakeholder participation during research design
- ❖ Align scope and sample based on budget and timeline of the SA
- ❖ Ensure capable facilitation in the SA process
- ❖ Ensure the participation of both communities and service providers and/or local authorities
- ❖ Develop, implement and monitor the consensus plan agreed on by the stakeholders
- ❖ Publicize and disseminate the report and its findings to gain the attention from the policy makers and relevant stakeholders
- ❖ Monitor and document the findings and impacts from the SA

Social Accountability in Cambodia – Lessons Learnt

Social Accountability – Components, Lessons and Approaches

This section will examine the components, lessons and approaches of the aforementioned tools of social accountability and the experience of API in applying social accountability initiatives. Engaging in such activities and educating the general public are still to a large extent frowned upon.

To address this issue and ensure positive engagement of all relevant stakeholders, it is important to consult and sensitize throughout the social accountability "process". A constructive and positive dialogue, rather than being confrontational should often be preferred. By actively involving the relevant stakeholders through a positive approach, ownership and commitment can be achieved amongst all relevant stakeholders. A constructive and positive dialogue, rather than being confrontational should often be preferred when involving with key stakeholders.

Three main elements are paramount when working with social accountability practices:

1. Understand the context and environment in which you work.
2. Work with targeted programs and projects, with clearly defined objectives.
3. Be sure to monitor, assess and evaluate all interventions and activities to gain knowledge and understanding

> Always remember that the social accountability process needs to fit with the capacity and resources of the local community to ensure sustainability.

The Right to Information

1. The Cambodian Constitution safeguards the right for every citizen to access information from the public service providers. The means that all citizens have the right to acquire information from the Commune Councils and the public service providers regarding (but not limited to):

   - Procurement,
   - Public service fees
   - Birth, dead, married certificate
   - Budget information
   - Other information related to livelihood

2. Mechanisms for information disclosure must be in place at the various sub-national government levels and public service providers that allows for citizens to access the information. Various API projects and initiatives have found that accessing information is often a challenging and lengthy process.

3. The Cambodian Commune Law clearly states that all citizens have the right to attend Commune council meetings and publicly express an opinion. This right should be emphasized to all stakeholders, and all relevant parties should be encouraged to attend these meetings and express their opinion.

Citizen Engagement and Participation

4. Any advocacy efforts must capitalize on the fact that commune council has action plans on improving on access to information and information disclosure. The work of integrating issues and inputs from civil society and citizens into commune council action plans is important and is an effort that must be prioritized.

5. The use of a generic checklist is an approach designed for community representatives and CSOs during dialogue meetings as part of a social accountability initiative. The checklist is a valuable tool for ensuring transparency and consistency. The checklist ensures that issues of importance are raised by relevant parties and can be addressed and hopefully solved jointly by all adhering parties.

6. It is not uncommon that accessing clear and consistent information in many instances can be a challenge and public service providers can delay any information request. Also it is also a challenge that basic commune services can have "undefined" costs that may be applied as a consequence of requesting information.

7. Also in many cases both the public service providers, other relevant authorities and local communities have received no training or information and have no clear understanding of citizen's rights to access public information. Even though Commune councils are held regularly, little information is shared and in many instances only verbal communication is used.

8. Accommodating for the effective dissemination of information through written IEC[11] materials are recommended to promote transparency and access to information for stakeholders and citizens. Disseminating information materials and informing/training all stakeholders will challenge irregular practices, in particular the application of unwarranted costs.

1. Promoting and working to include public participation is a vital part of the social accountability initiative.

2. The Citizen Report Card (CRC) is an effective quantitative measure to capture user perceptions of public services. API draws its experiences from a Citizen Report Card project implemented across several provinces in Cambodia within the pre-school context[12] , public services and action research initiatives[13] . Data regarding user perceptions is gathered through a questionnaire with fixed answer categories (e.g., yes/no) and a graded point system for answers.

3. The use of the CRC can produce valuable information on user perceptions that can be used in a range of advocacy initiatives towards public service providers and government stakeholders. The quantitative approach – a questionnaire – will provide valuable information from a significant number of individuals. Allowing for a significant number of respondents through a quantitative approach potentially sends a powerful message to the public service providers regarding the adequacy of the service provided. The strength in numbers is one of the main assets and advantages of the CRC as a tool for addressing social accountability in the Cambodian context.

4. It is important to keep in mind that a CRC initiative is more than a survey. The technical aspects of conducting the CRC go beyond the execution of a survey and entails gathering credible and contextualized information. Such information is paramount in an effective advocacy strategy that will generate credible results and spur debate.

5. The process of a SA is also a constructive option to engage and facilitate dialogue between public service providers and citizens. The experience of API is that a successful and transparent SA process involves communities and stakeholders who actively ask questions and raises concerns/issues, provides

[11] Information, education, communication.

inputs, explanations, clarifications, and responses. The result of such a process is establishing consensus and drafting a unified approach for improving public services.

6. Multi-faced stakeholder forums serve as a valuable arena for sharing information, knowledge and establishing trust among stakeholders and should be promoted and applied in any social accountability processes.

[12] The provinces were Kampong Thom, Kampong Chhnang, Pursat, Kampong Speu, and Banteay Meanchey. Secondly, pre-schools were randomly selected from the list of pre-schools in seven districts of the five provinces derived from the NCDD database (2010) and MoEYS Database (2011). School principals and teachers recommended caretakers (parents, grandparents, siblings or uncles/aunts) for the interviews. The total sample consisted of 33 public pre- schools and 359 caretakers of pupils enrolled in pre-school in the academic year 2011-2012. Caretakers are used as proxy respondents and each represent one pre- school child.

[13] Action research paper by API in collaboration with Khmer Youth Association, May 2014 and the Citizen's Feedback Services at One Window Service Offices Chhbar Morn, Kampong Chhnang, Pursat Municipalities, November 2012

> **Lessons from API: Open consultative meetings with all relevant stakeholders on the findings of PETS were crucial and improved the quality of both data and information (reliability and validity of findings). By involving government stakeholders and public service providers, consultative meetings are an excellent opportunity to build trust and confidence.**

1. The experience of API clearly indicates that public service providers, government representatives and citizens acknowledge the value of dialogue meetings as an arena for information sharing. Regular meetings build relations, trust and transparency, and is an important aspect of fostering community involvement.

2. It is important that all relevant stakeholders are invited and encouraged to participate in such meetings. When inviting government officials, be sure to extend formal invitations.

3. Also ensure that roles and responsibilities in relation to the meetings and processes are clearly defined and allocated.

4. API has gained valuable experiences in conducting dialogue meetings with a variety of stakeholders. In addition, dialogue meetings presents opportunities to mobilize relevant stakeholders to discuss issues/concerns and find solutions and jointly designing strategies to tackle identified challenges – both empowering and establishing ownership.

5. One important lesson is that most community representatives hesitate and lack confidence to raise and discuss issues/concerns with public service providers and do not want to be perceived as critical. For this reason it is of great importance that community members are informed and that capacity building of the community members takes place prior to engaging in dialogue meetings with government officials.

6. Using a checklist to ensure that issues of importance are addressed and due process is upheld is important. However often the checklist might not be applicable because of illiteracy amongst citizens. The checklist must therefor be supplemented by other means of communication to ensure that issues are raised in an appropriate manner and tackled through a transparent approach.

7. Promoting social accountability may sometimes be sensitive or difficult. In the process of strengthening the influence of the voices of those who have traditionally been excluded can therefore be socially, economically and politically delicate, and there are sometimes risks involved

> **Lessons from API: Data and information from the highest/top level is often much more difficult to access than from lower levels of the bureaucracy. As a result API, deliberately approaches the grass root level in order to obtain information and build relations.**

> **Lessons from API: API has also actively sought out national conferences as an alternative and additional channel to disseminate research results and stimulate the national debate. Also the dissemination of relevant reports to appropriate government agencies, stakeholders and the public are an important aspect of any advocacy strategy.**

> **Lessons from API: Another advocacy strategy found effective by API is to conduct meetings with development partners/NGOs, policy makers on the result and findings of social accountability initiatives. Often these entities are able to influence policy reform.**

Tracking and Monitoring

1. Evidence gathered by API shows that to be effective, any social accountability initiatives must access registers and documents relating to all relevant activities undertaken by the public service provider. This provides relevant information for advocacy purposes regarding the public service provider. The information should entail details regarding decision-making, budget, activities, priorities and mandate.

2. The main experience of API of tracking and monitoring financial flow stems from conducting a PETS in the pre-school sector in a range of Provinces in Cambodia. Evidence insinuates that the public service providers, in line with national laws and regulations, adhered to the guidelines and payment procedures, and that the knowledge of the guidelines were adequate. However findings also clearly indicate that installments of cash from central government institutions to decentralized public service providers often are unpredictable. As a result of such uncertainty, the budgets are rarely applied in the most effective manner.

Tracking of Public Expenditure

1. It is unfortunately not uncommon that there is limited capacity amongst public service provider representatives. Neither is it uncommon that flawed reporting and/or technical mistakes on invoices can prolong the budget liquidation process and interrupted subsequent financial installment from the Provincial Treasuries. A cash shortage at provincial level is not an uncommon challenge.

2. The financial allocations for the fiscal year are usually disbursed in four installments to the public service providers from the Provincial Treasuries. Each quarterly disbursement could consist of one or more payments depending on cash availability. When the cash is received the allocation of funds should be conducted in accordance with the actual amount, official budgets and special needs. This should be a transparent and open process.

3. Studies conducted by API within the education sector and with a limited sample, exposed that there was no significant delay in disbursement from the provincial authorities to the district authorities. The challenge was disbursing the funds from the district to the commune/ school level.

4. Official guidelines/ regulations states no timeline for the disbursement of funds from the Provincial Treasuries to the Provincial Office of Education (POE) to the District Office of Education (DOE) and finally to pre-schools. As a result the process of financial disbursement is not transparent or predictable for the end users. This is a challenge that also affects several other chains of public service provision.

5. Also many public service providers are challenged by the complexity of budget allocation, timely financial installments, and the payment processes encountered at provincial and district level.

6. Even though most communities and stakeholders are committed to implement action plans, some of them remain passive and reluctant to carry out their

their roles and responsibilities. Action plans should be agreed upon and a specified plan of action to follow up on the commitments of all stakeholders must be emphasized and clearly defined.

7. In many instances the reasons for dissatisfaction with public services, is in particularly caused by the longer duration and higher prices of the public services than guidelines permits.

> APIs experience and knowledge clearly shows that there are many different types of initiatives and interventions, which can be employed to enhance the principles of social accountability. Choosing the right approach is an important process and depends on context, goals, area of intervention and stakeholder involvement and commitment:

The objectives might include:

❖ Strengthening civil societies ability to engage in policy processes
❖ Civic education
❖ Strengthening media
❖ Facilitating public consultations and dialogue meetings
❖ Support citizen engagement in advocating for improved service delivery

Challenges to Social Accountability

Historically, Cambodia has not had a strong and vibrant tradition of civic engagement. The must common civil society the social fabric is based on informal organizations such as pagoda (wat) committees. The fact that the vast majority of Cambodians are not used to engaging in active participatory interaction with the state presents a challenge for the work of introducing Social Accountability initiatives in Cambodia.

Access to data on public finance from all levels is still a major concern as it is still considered confidential by many public service providers. Often lower ranking public service provider representatives are reluctant to release any information until official permission is granted from the top of the bureaucracy. This is often a lengthy and unclear process. Expect to encounter difficulties in meeting subordinates and representatives from technical departments, unless equipped with an official letter granting authorization for such meeting/s.

As mentioned earlier, one significant challenge is the lack of confidence amongst citizens to raise and discuss issues/concerns with government officials and public service providers.

Another main challenge is framing the objective and scope of the social accountability initiatives to be feasible and aligned to the context and culture in Cambodia.

Furthermore effectuating effective social accountability measures depends upon the commitment of resources and time from individual citizens. If this is not achieved the initiatives looses effect and can become less relevant as a tool for monitoring public service providers and achieving changes. Through encouragement and support, communities can become more active in raising issues/concerns and take part in jointly addressing issues of concern.

Resources

Websites for further information

- http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTSOCIALDEVELOPMENT/EXTPCENG/0,,contentMDK: 20509424~menuPK:1278120~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:410306,00.html

- http://www.sa-intl.org

- http://www.ansa-eap.net/networking/geographic-focus/civic-alliance-for-social-accountability-cambodia/

- http://www.socialaccountability.net

- http://kindcambodia.org/2013/06/cambodian-youth-and-social-accountability/

- http://open.org.kh/en/social-accountability

- http://seekideal.com/companies/coalition-for-integrity-and-social-accountability-cisa/

- http://www.racha.org.kh/what-we-do/community-health-mobilization/social-accountability

- http://ticambodia.org/index.php/news/pressrelease/CISA-partnership-pr

Suggested reading

- Briefing Paper: Public Expenditure Tracking Survey (PETS) on Early Childhood Education in Cambodia; API, Cambodia 2012

- Report: Citizen´s Feedback Services at One Window Services Offices Chhbar Morn, Kampong Chhnang, Pursat Muncipalities: API, Cambodia 2012

- Report: Citizen´s Report Card (CRC) Survey in Early Childhood Education: API, Cambodia 2013

- Report: People´s Access to Public Information (PAPI) Project Reflections Report; API, Cambodia 2013

- Report: Public Expenditure Tracking Survey (PETS) In Early Childhood Education; API, Cambodia 2012

- Report: Social Audit Report In Early Childhood Education: API, CAmbodia 2014