



GOOD GOVERNANCE

LOCAL SOLUTIONS TO LOCAL PROBLEMS

After more than 30 years of protracted war and conflict, Cambodia has emerged as a peaceful, secure nation competing for a spot on the global stage as a credible international player. New economic momentum has played out in unprecedented growth that rivals the most robust regional markets and has resulted in an overall improved economy as well as a thirst for continued prosperity. However, Cambodia's weak governance has meant that only a small percentage of the populace has benefited from that progress, as a majority of Cambodian society remains mired in intractable, persistent poverty. Falling short in its efforts to address major governance challenges, Cambodia remains close to the bottom on most indicators of governance, according to recent World Bank and Transparency International figures, and the goal of providing its citizens access to a healthy, just and peaceful society remains elusive.

While the current administration has prioritized poverty reduction and improved governance as cornerstones to growth, development expenditures have thus far remained skewed toward high profile infrastructure projects, such as construction of roads and temples, intended to serve political ends. Meanwhile, pressing social issues including burgeoning drug use, domestic violence and sex trafficking, receive limited attention. Cambodian citizens remain marginal to decision-making, as development decisions often reflect a top-down, paternalistic style of governance.

Recognizing that positive, sustainable and inclusive growth requires an open and transparent government accountable to the people, Pact takes a comprehensive approach to advancing democratic reforms. Pact's good governance and accountability program combines capacity building at the local level with resources that can be leveraged by communes to tackle social challenges. Through grant-making that supports community initiatives, and trainings that hone skills and build knowledge, Pact creates opportunities for citizens to

effectively use the political process to push for reform. At the same time, Pact helps to promote a broadening of the government's development approach by expanding opportunities for citizen involvement in setting priorities and in ensuring that local governance is increasingly transparent and accountable.

TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Pact works in eight provinces through a vibrant network of 20 local nongovernmental organizations covering 356 communes to enhance Commune Councilors' ability to reach out to the community to encourage citizen input. In order to ensure the development of sustainable local capacity, Pact's cascading implementation model emphasizes intensive training for partner NGOs on key principles of a decentralized government, followed by more intensive partner work at the commune level intended to promote greater engagement of Commune Councilors and communities in developing local solutions to local problems. Whereas commune-level planning has traditionally been directed by provincial and district leaders, Pact's assistance provides a valuable opportunity for Commune Councils and communities to exercise real choice in deciding how development funds should be spent.

INDEPENDENT OVERSIGHT

A cooperative relationship between the people and its government cannot be built without trust. Trust is gained when processes are transparent and local leaders are held accountable. Pact addresses this innovatively through the formation of Community Monitoring Committees (CMCs), which are volunteer groups within each commune that serve as bridge builders between citizens and their elected Commune Councilors. CMCs ensure that councilors are responsibly spending community funds and considering citizens' concerns in policy decisions.

Because CMC members are not compensated, their work forms a foundation for significant social change in which a culture of volunteerism and ownership supplants Cambodia's customary attitude of individual survival.

GENDER EQUITY

Pact recognizes the need to engage more women in the democratic process to cement the ideals of a representative government. Already, the rising number of female Commune Councilors is a promising trend. Currently, about 14 per cent of total Commune Councilors are women, up by nearly 50 per cent from the first term in 2002. To encourage these women and promote retention, Pact works through the Female Councilor's Forum to strengthen their leadership skills by supporting regular forums and workshops designed to provide networking and mentoring opportunities. Additionally, Pact integrates its democracy work into its women's empowerment program, resulting in increased leadership within those groups, as well as assuring that at least 40% of the members of Community Monitoring Committees are female.

GRANT MAKING FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT WORK

Foreign aid in Cambodia has traditionally been funneled to projects that have either been requested at the national level or prioritized by the donor, most often some type of infrastructure. While this assistance is greatly needed, Pact's program is an unprecedented opportunity for communities to begin leveraging their own budgets along with donor funds to address a range of social needs they have identified. Pact effectively uses small grants as a tool to provide opportunities for Commune Councilors to take the skills developed during trainings—including budget management, record-keeping and financial monitoring—and apply them in a practical setting to creatively solve community problems.

Pact gives traction to grassroots projects conceived and managed by communities by making available small grants directly to Commune Councils, providing an impetus

for experiments in collaborative decision-making. As a result of this support, targeted Commune Councils have successfully developed citizen-driven projects that serve as examples for future development. Pact gives approximately \$6,000 to each of 356 Commune Councils as co-funds for social development projects, with at least 40% of project costs drawn from Commune Council budgets. These projects tackle a range of problems and involve activities including improved natural resource management, enhancements in health and hygiene, gang intervention, and access to potable water. Drawing upon new skills and increased capacity developed during Pact trainings, Commune Councilors themselves select, design and manage the projects with a high level of participation by citizens and civil society. Citizens, in turn, begin to recognize the responsibilities of government and begin to trust Commune Councilors' efforts to help them, further strengthening the bond between local government and its people.

NATIONAL LEVEL ENGAGEMENT

Grassroots level efforts often fail in the absence of receptivity to reform and innovation at higher levels of government. On the national stage, Pact works closely with the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Economic and Finance, and the National Treasury to help design procedures that make it easier for Commune Councils to access funding from the national treasury to support social development efforts. Prior to Pact's program, there were no standardized processes for Commune Councils to contract with service providers or realign funds in their budgets for the implementation of service projects.

Beyond direct support to government, Pact also works through national level committees, organizations and forums to bring stakeholders in the democratic process to the table. Pact is a preeminent member of the D&D (Decentralization & Deconcentration) Donor Group, a coalition of international players who meet to coordinate funding efforts. Pact is also a leading member of the Working Group for Partners in Decentralization, which helps keep decentralization at the forefront of discourse among civil society groups.



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