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Practice on Citizens' Participation in Governance

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1. Introduction

Promoting accountability in the public service is one of the key elements that make a significant contribution to strengthening governance in the public sector. It is argued that good governance is an essential actor for supporting an efficiency and effectiveness of public resources management and upholding sustainable economic development. In general, there are several principles of governance utilized as necessary instruments for managing economy, social affairs, and security and for protecting general interest of the people. Those include: rules of law, equity, responsiveness, efficiency and effectiveness, transparency, accountability and citizens' participation.

Citizens' participation plays a vital role in promoting public service accountability through bringing public servants to be accountable for their actions. Public servants are traditionally accountable for their actions to their senior officers and senior officers are accountable to the ministers or the government, who in turn, individual ministers or the government as a whole are accountable to the parliament and the public. Thus, a primary attention to uphold public service accountability has increasingly focused on public officials at the centre of government operations, especially career officials working in merit – based systems of public employment.

To hold public officials accountable for their actions, it is necessary to have an effective mechanism and tools to scrutinize those who deliver public service. In the case of Cambodia, a numerous mechanisms are established to scrutinize the actions of public servants to ensure that public services are provided within the framework of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Those mechanisms are: (i) Internal Audit Department, (ii) General Inspectorate, (iii) Ministry of Inspection and Parliament Relation, (iv) National Audit Authority, and Anti-Corruption Unit.

In addition, it is internationally recognized that citizens' participation is a special ingredient to promote accountability in the public service more effective. With this regards, this paper attempt to share Cambodia's good practices on citizens' participation in governance. The paper, therefore, will address some key issues of citizens' participation including (2) citizen information centre, (3) citizen office, (4) semester public consultation forum, and (5) annual citizen forum and (6) accountability box.

2. Citizen Information Centre (CIC)

The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) is committed to improving governance and stimulating demand for good governance. RGC has recognized the importance of strengthening governance in its National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) and in the Rectangular Strategy. The Citizen Information Centre aims to increase the public participation and ability of citizens and other non-state actors (NSAs) to hold the state accountable, and to make it responsive to their needs.

All stakeholders, including non-state actors, recognize the importance of information for good governance because information is crucial to transparency and accountability. Information dissemination mechanisms enacted by governments and civil society organizations can facilitate free flow of official information to the public. Such information disclosure and dissemination is a

step towards providing the public with an assurance that government is transparent in its operations and accountable for activities it does.

Currently, in Cambodia, there is no institutionalized regular flow of information to the citizens apart from the newspapers, radio and television. To fill this gap, the Royal Government introduces Citizen Information Centres (CICs) at the district/ municipalities where One Window Service Offices are located. The CICs will be established under Decision of the Chairman of the National Committee for Democratic Development (NCDD) at Sub- National Level.

These CICs will make a contribution to developing *“the capacity of citizens directly to hold politicians and government officials accountable for probity and effectiveness in the performance of their duties”*, which is considered an important element of Demand for Good Governance.

2.1. CIC vision

The CIC has its vision to enable citizen to access information of their interest in relation to Government’s policies, plans, budgets, services provided and results of its activities in all District /Municipalities/Khans in the country. This information provision will generate an increasing demand for accountability and transparency and will pave the way for citizens’ debate of the development of their District. The CIC will have become a place for citizens/community development and outreach / citizen discussions.

2.2. The CIC objective

The objective of the Citizens’ Information Centres is to raise Citizens’ awareness about Government’s policies, decisions, practices, regarding services and development outcomes through the provision of impartial and factual information.

2.3. CIC Services

1. The Citizen Information Centres will provide information through the following mechanisms:
 - a) Verbal communication, either face to face or by telephone or mail;
 - b) Leaflets, booklets, posters and brochures;
 - c) Notice boards in the Centre and the OWSO;
 - d) Internet;
 - e) Video program and TV.

2. The CICs will provide the following types of information to the Citizens:
 - a) Service provision
 - i) Verbal information on the services provided by OWSO and other state and non-state institutions as well as the DO’s and PAWG’s Complaint mechanism. This information may be collected in person or through telephone communication.
 - ii) Brochures, leaflets, booklets, posters on, among others:
 - Where to get which service?
 - How to apply for services at OWSO?
 - How to apply for services at district/municipal administration?
 - How to submit a complaint to the DO and PAWG?
 - iii) Internet (OWSO website and/or district website.)

- b) Information about Feedback to Government's service provision, that is generated by Social Accountability tools, such as Citizen Report Cards, Community Score Cards, Exit Surveys.
 - c) Central Government's policies and decisions
 - i) Updated information on RGC's policies and decisions for Decentralization and Deconcentration (D&D) such as D&D strategy framework, organic law, national programs and other legal documents.
 - ii) Leaflets and/or Flyers that will be prepared with support of Sub-Program 2 of IP3.
 - d) District's plans and decisions
 - i) District Council's decisions, which will be published on the notice board, including those related to District Strategic Development Plans and Budgets, Investment Programs and annual reports.
 - ii) Any other information that the District Council considers relevant.
 - iii) District's Administration's decisions. Results of DO/PAWG investigation and related decisions.
 - e) Development Results in the District

This type of information will cover all kind of demographic and socio-economic data of the District's population, such as health, education, employment, existing roads, irrigation, main crops as well as social infrastructure (such as number of schools, health facilities, public utilities). A starting point would be the District Data Books produced by NCDDES in 2009 and the Provincial Data Books produced in 2010. This information shall be updated (among others through NCDDES' Commune Database Online) and supplemented with information from the different line departments.
 - f) Miscellaneous:
 - i) When considered relevant by Mol and the District governors in consultation with the relevant line ministries, information that is part of a new function assigned to or assumed by the District, for instance on Information provision about Tourist Attractions, Labour Placement (demand for and supply of labourers) and Agricultural Extension.
 - ii) Any other information on policies and Prakas issued by the Line Agencies which they have requested NCDDES to disseminate through the CICs.
3. The CIC shall **not** provide information with the following characteristics:
- commercial information; and
 - information that has the sole purpose of promoting a political party.

2.4. Accessibility

1. The information provided by the CIC shall be user-friendly. The language used shall be understandable for laymen and the lay-out of the materials provided by the CIC shall be attractive.
2. The CIC will be accessible to all citizens, irrespective of their origin. Under no circumstance shall a request for information be refused because of the Client's place of residence, ethnicity, nationality, sex, religion or political conviction.

3. A request for information may be refused if it is either not existing, temporarily out of stock (brochures, leaflets etc) or proven to be unreliable. The CIC shall not provide information that is known to be incorrect.
4. Nevertheless, a message shall be displayed that the CIC cannot be held responsible for the outcome of decisions based on information provided by the CIC.
5. The CIC shall be open during the normal OWSO opening hours, which usually is from 7.30 – 11.30 and 14.00 – 17.30 hours.
6. In order to keep the information accessible to all citizens, irrespective of their income, the information shall be provided free of charge, with the only exception of the materials that need to be printed at the Centre.
7. The pricing policy shall be publicly announced at the walls at the entrance of the Centre.
8. To avoid disturbances of the users, maintain public order and ensure the quality of facilities, internal regulations will be prepared and displayed in the CIC.

2.5. Confidentiality

The Citizens requesting information from the CIC shall under no condition be forced to provide their name or contact details. However, they may occasionally be requested to provide such details on a voluntary basis for the purpose of evaluating the quality of the services.

2.6. Implementation Arrangement

A. Staff

1. The information Centers will be operated by staff appointed by the Councils of the D/M/Ks.
2. The CIC staff will ensure that (i) sufficient printed material is available, (ii) the information about the District's development outcomes are up to date, (iii) the equipment in the office is well maintained and (iv) visitors of the centre are treated friendly and politely. All CIC staff will receive training on the functioning of the CIC and their new roles.

B. Lines of Responsibilities

D/M/K Councils will be responsible for:

- a) Use of the building
 - i. The Chairman of the Council will ensure that the CIC will only be used for the purpose of providing information to the citizens as described in these Guidelines.
 - ii. He/she may delegate this responsibility directly to the main staff in the CIC.
 - iii. He/She has to regularly monitor and evaluate the way in which the CIC is used.
- b) Approval of information disseminated
 - i. The Chairman of the D/M/K council, or his/her representative formally approves of the information related to the Districts that is provided by the Centre.
 - ii. The CIC staff cannot be held accountable for the correctness of the information, as this is the responsibility of the information provider.

c) Reporting

The CIC staff submits a quarterly report about its activities to the Council (cc to NCDD and the Chief of OWSO). This report will discuss the use of the building, the number and type of visitors, the type of information in demand and the number of prints made (with the revenues of this printing). An appendix to this document will report on materials still in stock and those that need to be ordered again. This appendix will serve at the same time as a trigger for the liaison officer in the Office of OWS Support to provide new materials.

C. Cooperating Agencies

1. The CICs shall cooperate with the following Information providers:
 - One Window Service Offices;
 - Line Departments in the province;
 - D/M/K councils;
 - D/M/K administration;
 - NCDD;
 - Other line agencies (through NCDD);
 - Development Programs/Projects (through NCDD).
2. These partners shall provide the information at no cost to the CIC. At sub-national level, it is the DO's responsibility to inform these providers on a monthly basis which materials are out of stock and need to be replenished.
3. At national level, NCDD will act as a coordinator to collect and deliver the information to CICs.
4. NCDD will appoint a liaison officer who will coordinate with these national information providers when there is a request from CICs where materials are out of stock. He/she will also be the focal person for all NCDD (or Office for OWS support) activities related to the CICs.

2.7. Financing and Budget

The operational cost of the CIC is covered under the DFGG project and the regular budget of the D/M/K thereafter. The CIC staff will receive an incentive based on the government policy.

3. The Citizen Office (CO)

Citizen Office is a neutral unit which has authority to receive and resolve complains, and provided information to citizen, companies, enterprises and civil organizations in the case of irregularity or mistake made by public servants working at Municipalities/District administration.

3.1. Objectives

The Citizen Office has the following objectives:

- Make local administration more efficient, transparent, accountable, reduce corruption, and increase public credibility of the people

- Create mechanism for citizen's participation

3.2. Roles

Citizen Office acts as a neutral organization to receive complaints from the people about Municipalities and Districts administration and solving those complaints. Those complaints can be made by the following conditions:

- Decisions which are contradictory to the principles of laws and regulations
- Objection to receive applications made by the people
- Failure to deliver results or appropriate solutions within the limited time frame and so on.

3.3. Functions

The Citizen Office performs the following functions:

- Ensure that problems of the people are solved by Municipalities/ Districts public servants in line with laws and regulations and with not many administrative procedures and with no extension of defined timeframe
- Protect citizen and enterprises and other business activities
- Disseminate and provide information about services of One Window Service Office, development of Municipalities/Districts, and information related to decentralization and deconcentration guiding principles and regulations, and
- Anti-corruption.

3.4. Organization and authorities of Citizen Office

The Citizen Office is organized by one head of citizen office who is a neutral representative of citizen. He/she is supported by a secretary who acts as an assistant. The head of Citizen Office has five years' mandate. The head of Citizen Office is elected by Local Election Committee. The Committee consists of:

- All Councilors of each Municipality / District
- Three representative members of local business community
- Three representative members of local NGOs listed in each Municipality/ District.

The Citizen Office has the following rights and authorities:

- To convene public servants to question after receiving complaints from citizen and business community
- To seek explanation in writing from public servants or their supervisors on their decisions or unacceptable behavior within seven days
- To check some necessary documents related to the complaints
- To disseminate complaints and related documents to the public with the consent of citizen or representatives of enterprises who lodge the complaints.

4. The Semester Public Consultation Forum

The Semester Public Consultation Forum is organized to seek feedback from the public in order to improve public service delivery through One Window Service, Citizen Office and Municipality/District administration. This forum is informally organized.

4.1. Participation

Targeted participants are:

- Governor/vice governors of each Municipality/District (MD)
- Head of One Window Service Office
- Head of Citizen Office
- Representatives of MD councils
- Administrative director and relevance chiefs of offices
- Citizen representatives
- Business representatives
- Other stakeholders

4.2. Objectives

- To provide an opportunity to citizen and business representatives to express their opinion and recommendations related to the process of One Window Service, Citizen Office and MD administration
- To gather feedbacks and recommendations
- To promote closer relationship and cooperation between MD administration, citizen and business community.

5. Annual Citizen Forum

Annual Citizen Forum is an annual meeting between citizen and MD administration to strengthen close relationship, to promote quality of public service and to improve local democratic participation.

5.1. Participation

Targeted participants are:

- MD citizen, NGOs, development partners, business people, vulnerable monks, MD councilors, pressmen and relevance stakeholders.
- MD Governor and vice governors
- Head of One Window Service
- Head of Citizen Office, and
- Involved public servants

5.2. Objectives

Annual Citizen Forum is organized to:

- Provide information to citizen on public service delivery of M/D administration
- To gather opinion and recommendations from the people to improve M/D administration and service provision
- To increase credibility and closer relationship between citizen and M/D administration.

6. Accountability boxes

Accountability boxes are introduced by Anti-Corruption Unit to pave the way for citizen to lodge complaint against public officials who attempt or intentional over use their power and commit corruption by using their authorities and power. Accountability box is considered to be one of the most effective mechanism participated by citizen to combat corruption activities committed by

public servants. Furthermore, this mechanism has been significantly contributed to promoting governance in the public sector participated by the public.

Accountability boxes are installed at Capital City, Provinces, Municipalities and Districts to enable citizen or the public to put an anonymous complaint against the public officials. Those complaints are collected by the Anti-Corruption Unit from accountability boxes and then take investigative measures to identify that the complaints are credible or incredible. If some complaints are accounted to be credible complaints, then the Anti-Corruption Unit would take more concrete measures to solve complaints made by those citizens or the public. Those concrete measures would be as follows:

- Serious investigation is conducted
- Direct and indirect warning to the identified public officials for correcting their mistakes
- Arresting and questioning
- Processing the cases through the Court System.

7. Conclusion

This paper argues that citizens' participation is one of the most effective contributory instruments for promoting public service accountability. The citizens' participation plays a significant contributory role in holding public servants accountable for their actions. Additionally, this paper introduces some Cambodian practical mechanism of citizens' participatory approaches to promote public service accountability in Cambodia. The first approach highlights the importance of using citizen information centres at the grassroots organizations which raise citizen awareness and enable them to access to information related to government policies, decisions, and development affairs, and which increasing their capacity to demand for accountability and transparency in public service provision.

The second approach illustrates local citizen office which is neutral mechanism aimed at promoting public credibility, transparency and accountability, and reducing corruption. The third is a semester and annual public consultation forum which lay foundation for citizen, business community and civil society organizations to express their concerns, to take part in local development activities, and to provide their opinions and recommendations to improves M/D administration and public service delivery. Finally, the utilization of accountability boxes which is a key citizen participatory mechanism to fight and reduce corruption in society.