

Summary of Discussions

Virtual Policy Talk

“Social Inclusion in Local Planning Process and Emerging Opportunities for New Social Media Uses”

Co-hosted by The Asia Foundation (the Foundation) and the Affiliated Network for Social Accountability (ANSA) Cambodia

Thursday, 23 September 2021 @10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

Via Zoom

Agenda

Time	Agenda	
09:45-10:00	Zoom Platform Open	The Asia Foundation Team
10:00-10:05	Welcome	Mr. Prak Rathyrea, Program Officer The Asia Foundation
10.05- 10.10	Opening Remarks	Mr. Andreas Zurbrugg, Deputy Ambassador Australian Embassy
10:10- 10: 15	Brief Introduction of Panelists	Ms. Diya Nag, Governance & Legal Specialist The Asia Foundation
10:15-11:00	Panel Discussion	<p><u>Panelists</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr. Sarou Rathcheat, Office Head, Department of Municipal, District, Commune, and Sangkat Administration, Ministry of Interior Mr. San Chey, Executive Director, ANSA Ms. Chet Charya, Executive Director, STAR Kampuchea <p><u>Moderator</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ms. Diya Nag, Governance & Legal Specialist, The Asia Foundation
11:00-11:25	Q&A	Participants
11:25-11:30	Closing	Ms. Diya Nag, Governance & Legal Specialist The Asia Foundation

Highlights of the Study on Social Inclusion in Local Planning Process and Emerging Opportunities for New Social Media Uses:

- Social inclusion is the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society—improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged based on their identity.
- A study on “Social inclusion in Commune Investment Program (CIP)” conducted by the Affiliated Network for Social Accountability (ANSA) Cambodia focused on the need for the CIP to adopt a social inclusion lens and approaches. The study was completed in three provinces: Ratanakiri, Takeo, and Siem Reap, with a sample size of 335, to (1) identify critical socioeconomic and policy trends around social inclusion at the local level, (2) assess the actual practice of social inclusion within the current local planning process, and (3) suggest key areas for consideration, for instance, the use of social media to promote social inclusion.
- The first reason for selecting these areas is that in comparison to large urban centers, there are more challenges of social inclusion in CIP. Another reason is that people in these areas often migrate out, which reduces their ability to participate in commune meetings. This study is a starting point for ANSA Cambodia to understand social inclusion in CIP, and ANSA will consider conducting further studies in urban areas in the future.
- Key messages from the study:
 - o Participation of vulnerable people in CIP varies from one province to another
 - o Migration and Covid-19 are key challenges that reduce people’s participation
 - o Social media has the potential to promote social inclusion due to growing internet use among youth populations
 - o Civil society and local NGOs still play an important role in facilitating and coordinating the promotion of social inclusion
- Key Policies on Social Inclusion in Local Planning:
 - o The government, specifically the Ministry of Interior has developed several guidelines related to inclusion, such as a guidebook on the inclusion of people voices in governance and a guidebook on social service delivery at commune/Sangkat. Recently, the government has also developed guidelines on citizen participation in the process of commune budget planning. Training to local authorities on the guidelines has also been provided. The Ministry has also created a form for the citizen to list down their needs.
 - o The government has also encouraged local authorities to use alternative means to promote people’s access to information during the COVID-19. For example, they have been using social media (Facebook) as an online platform to collect feedback from citizens. In some communes, messages about COVID-19 prevention measures and the support to the vulnerable have been delivered through the loudspeakers during the pandemic to inform the citizens.

The Actual Practices of Social Inclusion in Commune/Sangkat Investment Program (CIP) in Cambodia

- Based on Commune/Sangkat guidelines, the CIP is prepared annually in January to ensure the planning is aligned with budget planning at the provincial level. Generally, CIP meeting is conducted during the commune’s working hours; however, to collect more information from the citizens, the commune has also been advised to hold meetings beyond their office hours or flexible to citizens’ availability.

- Regarding the commune budget, the commune administration has full authority to manage it based on the guidelines from the Ministry of Interior.
- Despite many policies in place to promote social inclusion in CIP, there are several challenges:
 - o Limited commune resources and capacity: at the commune level, the administration does not have a sufficient budget to tackle issues, suggestions, or comments from the citizen.
 - o After the spread of Covid-19, almost 2/3 of the commune budget has been decreased, for example. Some of citizens' needs were included in CIP but were not addressed. The lack of responses greatly affected people's trust in the commune council. Some commune council acknowledges that social media can be an effective platform to promote social inclusion in CIP. Yet, it can also be a challenge since some of them have limited knowledge of using technology.
 - o CIP meeting agenda: the agenda and timeframe of the meeting are not clear; this makes people hesitate to participate.
 - o People's limited access to information and fear: there were some gaps in promoting the inclusion of vulnerable people in CIP. For instance, based on the recent social accountability project implementation, citizens' voices were supposed to be included. Yet, in practice, there were still some limitations in their engagement in the commune budget planning process due to the lack of access to information and knowledge. Some vulnerable groups, such as the poor and those with disabilities, are not confident to participate.
 - o Social issue-related factor: migration and the spread of Covid-19 have been challenges for the people to fully participate in the CIP.

Recommendations to Promote Social Inclusion in CIP

- Allocating more budget to commune-level should be done. For example, the budget for Commune Committee for Women and Children (CCWC) should be increased as this committee plays a crucial role in encouraging citizens' participation, and the capacity of the committee in resource mobilization should also be strengthened.
- COVID-19 and migration have posed challenges in people's participation, so social media use can address such challenges because almost nine million people in Cambodia have access to the internet.
- Youth can play an important role in assisting commune council who lacks the technological capacity to manage social media.
- Since the majority of the citizens have limited education, information should be made available to people more widely.
- Commune meeting agenda should be specifically set, and schedule should be flexible for some provinces where there are more migrants to increase the opportunity for people to participate in local planning.