I. CIVIL SOCIETY CONTRIBUTIONS TO GOOD GOVERNANCE IN CAMBODIA

I.A. INTRODUCTION

1. Beginning at the end of the 1980s and accelerating under the United Nations-supervised peace process of the early 1990s, Cambodia has embarked on a threefold transition from civil war to peace, from one-party rule to multi-party democracy and from economic isolation to (regional and global) integration. Over the last decade, far-reaching and challenging reforms in all sectors have resulted in important progress towards ensuring peace and security, rebuilding institutions and establishing a stable macroeconomic environment. Cambodia currently enjoys very good levels of economic growth and prospects for future growth and expanding government revenues are positive due to expected oil and mining revenues and ODA commitments (including by China). Whether these fortunes translate into sustainable and equitable development and poverty reduction depend largely on questions of governance and social justice, which are therefore regarded as priority areas by many commentators on Cambodian development, including in the donor community1.

2. Governance is widely recognized as the most critical challenge for development in Cambodia. While the country has made good progress in terms of the economy and poverty reduction, problems of corruption, weak accountability and other governance concerns continue to hamper development. (World Bank, Country Assistance Strategy 2005-2008:6-7) The government of Cambodia recognizes the need to tackle governance problems and both its 2004 “Rectangular Strategy” and its 2006 National Strategic Development Plan place good governance at the core of Cambodia’s development agenda. Over the past decade, a range of donors including the World Bank, have supported the government of Cambodia in its efforts to implement public sector reforms, strengthen institutions and systems of public management and develop better mechanisms of internal checks and balances. Although important progress has been made in many areas, most commentators agree that there is still a long way to go, particularly in changing the culture of service delivery and government authority that lies at the heart of governance deficiencies.

3. Global experience clearly shows that achieving good governance requires not just efforts on the part of government, but active demand for good governance from citizens. Citizens and civil society organizations (CSOs) have an essential role to play in helping the government to be effective and accountable. Democracy, government by and for the people, requires that citizens (and their organizations) play an active role, not only by voting for elected representatives, but also by communicating opinions, needs and concerns to public officials; providing feedback on policies and plans; monitoring and providing feedback on government actions, and; holding government accountable.

4. The term “social accountability” refers to the broad range of actions and mechanisms (beyond voting) that citizens can use to help the government be more effective and accountable, as well as actions on the part of government, civil society, media and other societal actors that promote or facilitate these efforts.2 Social accountability approaches are increasingly regarded as an important means to improve governance and development effectiveness, by promoting transparency, accountability and responsiveness in processes of public policy-making, budgeting, financial management and delivery of public services. Social accountability approaches also serve to empower citizens and contribute to the evolution of inclusive and cohesive democratic institutions. Social accountability approaches are not intended to replace but rather to complement and reinforce conventional mechanisms by which the

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1 See, for example, Donors’ Statements and Commitments at the Consultative Group for Cambodia Meeting, March 2006.
2 This report employs a number of concepts and terms related to “social accountability” and the “demand-side of good governance” that are quite new to the Cambodian context and may not be familiar to all readers. For this reason, a glossary of key terms is attached.
government itself tries to improve governance (i.e. “supply side” measures). International experience
suggests that social accountability mechanisms can be effective in detecting and preventing corruption at
all levels of government. In this sense, they represent a powerful addition to the government’s arsenal of
anti-corruption strategies.

5. The World Bank, alongside other donors, acknowledges the crucial importance of developing the
“demand” side of good governance and strongly endorses approaches aimed at promoting enhanced
civic engagement and social accountability. One key objective of the World Bank’s current Country
Assistance Strategy for Cambodia is to “Support Decentralization and Promote Citizens’ Partnerships for
Better Governance” in particular by strengthening ‘demand side’ approaches to good governance [to
complement] more common ‘supply side’ approaches…ensuring that the Cambodian people are able to
hold the Government and World Bank accountable for the assistance provided; and that the Government,
for its part, comes to see itself as accountable to its citizens, and not just to external donors.” The Country
Assistance Strategy also stresses the importance of promoting an “enabling environment for citizens’
partnerships” as well as constructive, free, and peaceful government-donor-civil society engagement.

I.A.1. Overview of the report

6. The purpose of this study is to investigate current social accountability practices in Cambodia,
identify opportunities, analyze obstacles and their underlying sources and propose remedies and
priority actions. It has been carried out in the context of broader World Bank efforts to support and
enhance citizen demand for good governance in Cambodia, including efforts to: promote an enabling
environment for social accountability; help the government to be more responsive and accountable to its
citizens; strengthen the capacity of citizens and civil society to engage with public authorities and develop
mechanisms for more constructive civic engagement. The study’s findings and recommendations are
intended to inform three key target audiences: the government of Cambodia, civil society actors and
development partners (DPs).

7. The report finds numerous challenges as well as exciting opportunities in the Cambodian context.
Compared with other liberal democracies, Cambodian citizens command relatively little influence over
processes of public decision-making and have limited opportunity to demand accountability from officials.
This is largely due to the newness of democratic principles and institutions in Cambodia and the recent
traumatic history of the country which has severely eroded trust and “social capital”. However, the rapid
evolution of democratic institutions and current processes of political reform, economic development and
social change offer important opportunities for enhancing civic engagement and social accountability in
Cambodia.

8. After outlining the study’s research methodology, the remainder of this first section of the report
describes some key aspects of the Cambodian country context of direct relevance to social accountability,
and; provides a brief overview of what citizens and CSOs are currently doing to help the government be
more effective and accountable. The second section of the report is devoted to identifying and analyzing
key factors that enable or disable social accountability in Cambodia and making recommendations about
what’s needed to enhance social accountability. This section is organized around the following four key
themes, identified as the principal elements or “building blocks” of social accountability: The study
identifies strengths and weaknesses in each area and makes recommendations for overcoming obstacles
and seizing opportunities with regard to each.

3 The identification of these core building blocks draws from the Civic Engagement Analytical Framework, an
analytical tool designed by the Participation and Civic Engagement Group of the World Bank to assess the
conditions for civic engagement.
Information – Can citizens access and generate relevant information about issues of public concern, government decisions and actions, public policies, budgets, expenditures and programs?

Voice – Can citizens (with the help of CSOs) voice their priorities and concerns?

Association – Can citizens form associations and use those to aggregate and amplify their voice and their contributions to good governance?

Constructive Dialogue and Participation – Can citizens connect with and participate in processes of public decision-making?

Finally, the third section of the report offers conclusions and suggests a number of recommended priority immediate and longer-term actions for each targeted stakeholder group.

I.A.2. Research methodology

9. The study utilized a complementary mix of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. It drew on existing sources of theoretical and empirical knowledge and conducted its own primary research. In keeping with its central proposition which emphasizes the importance of citizen participation, the study adopted a participatory approach in its research which, in addition to collecting information and feedback from a wide array of different actors, also gave ordinary citizens, community leaders, CSOs and other stakeholders the opportunity to express their views, interact with one another and engage in collective reflection and analysis.

10. The research process began with a literature review, drawing on both published and unpublished works from Cambodian and international sources. The research team, in collaboration with staff from the Program to Enhance Capacity for Social Accountability in Cambodia (PECSA), also undertook a stock-taking of current social accountability experiences in Cambodia. Researchers from the Center for Advanced Study (CAS) gathered valuable qualitative information from interviews with key informants and focus group discussions (FGDs), conducted in four provinces and Phnom Penh. In order to collect quantitative data, the CAS research team also conducted two surveys: a public opinion poll (which collected responses from a random sample of 900 “ordinary citizens” on a range of social accountability-related issues) and a postal survey of NGOs involved in governance-oriented activities (which collected responses from 150 individuals representing 113 NGOs). Finally, the CAS research team also conducted five in-depth case studies aimed at obtaining a more detailed understanding of the motivations, experiences, successes and challenges of a range of social accountability initiatives. Recommendations and proposed actions were formulated by members of the joint CAS-World Bank team based on analysis of research findings as well as suggestions and feedback from key informants, FGD and PECSA workshop participants and members of an in-country advisory group. Preliminary drafts of the report were reviewed and improved by members of the in-country advisory group as well as a number of in-country and international reviewers.

4 This stock-taking exercise was by no means comprehensive but, nevertheless, identified close to 50 initiatives. A list of these is available on request.

5 The study team was also informed by some of the findings and recommendations resulting from a series of regional consultation workshops organized by PECSA in different regions of the country in October and November 2007.

6 Selected research findings are presented in this report. Copies of questionnaires, interview guides and survey data are available on request.

7 Advisory group members and peer reviewers are listed in the Acknowledgements. A list of participants in in-country focus group review meetings is available on request.
I.B. KEY ASPECTS OF THE CAMBODIAN COUNTRY CONTEXT

11. Civic engagement and social accountability in Cambodia are framed and influenced by a number of underlying contextual factors. These include the effects of recent conflict, political factors, sociocultural factors, the nature and history of relationships between citizens and the state as well as specific characteristics of Cambodian civil society and CSO-state relations. While most of these factors have been studied and described in the existing literature, they are also currently in a state of flux given ongoing changes in Cambodia (as a result of economic development, international integration, demographic changes including urban migration and changes in the attitudes and behaviors of younger people). The following is a brief overview of each of these factors as they relate to the themes of civic engagement and social accountability.

I.B.1. Post-conflict

12. Cambodian society is still recovering from almost three decades of civil war and tragic social upheaval. In addition to the tragic loss of countless human lives, years of war, genocide and dictatorial rule destroyed the country’s economy, physical infrastructure and, political and social institutions. While considerable progress has been made since the peace agreement of the early 1990s, Cambodia still faces high levels of poverty and poor social and human development indicators. Of particular relevance to social accountability, years of conflict have seriously corroded trust and weakened social cohesion. It has understandably resulted in a lingering fear of authority, worries of a return to violence and a deep desire for maintaining political and social stability. As discussed in section II.C.1, this historical context has led to very low levels of associational activity. Where associations do exist, there is a tendency for them to be: very traditional and local (for example, often linked to the local pagoda); very small in size (i.e. often limited to close personal acquaintances), and; quite isolated and unconnected (i.e. having few horizontal linkages connecting them with similar associations elsewhere).

I.B.2. Political factors

13. Multi-party democracy is emerging but is still new and partial in Cambodia. Democratic institutions are nascent and not yet fully functional or effective. Although executive power is ostensibly checked through the existence of a parliament and independent judiciary, in reality these institutions do not currently have the capacity to effectively perform their mandated functions. In practice, the executive tends to dominate other branches of government. One political party, the Cambodian Peoples’ Party, continues to dominate and there is a strong legacy of viewing the government as an instrument for implementing party policy. Political parties have not yet managed to fully integrate democratic principles of participatory decision-making and downwards accountability into their internal governance practices. (Un, 2004) Democratic principles and values are still emerging and concepts such as power-sharing, active citizenship, participatory decision-making and downwards accountability are still new and not yet fully practiced. Basic citizens’ rights and freedoms, such as access to information, freedoms of open expression and participation are acknowledged but not yet fully implemented or guaranteed.

14. Cambodia has a long history as a patrimonial society, governed by authoritarian rulers often wielding absolute power (Chandler 1991:3-4). Although political structures are undergoing significant change, the Cambodian administration continues to be influenced by patrimonial traditions and patron-client relationships. Despite ongoing efforts to tackle the issue, corruption remains a pervasive and

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8 Typical in patrimonial societies, systems of patronage are established through interpersonal relationships and obligations. When a person does a favor for another person, the latter owes a 'debt of obligation' to the former. (CDRI, 2007:41). The most fundamental obligation of the client is to keep the patron rich and powerful, and thus able to maintain his authority, so that he can dispense favors back down (ibid. referring to Weber 1978).
widespread reality and a serious obstacle to development. The government’s difficulties in enhancing governance effectiveness, enforcing regulations, and improving public service delivery are in large part due to the specific ways in which informal patrimonial power structures have penetrated formal bureaucratic institutions. In recent years, the power of patrons and their networks of clients in Cambodia has merged with the formal structure of government to form what is referred to as a neo-patrimonial system of governance. Under such a system, public revenues (for example, from foreign investment, natural resources and development assistance) are “captured” and controlled as personal assets by powerful patrons. (CDRI, 2007:3; Hughes, 2003:15, 39-43) These national patrons maintain their position and influence by combining political, military, economic and administrative power through an "interlocking of pyramids of patron-client networks" (CDRI, 2007:58; Heder, 1995; Un, 2004). These obligations related to friendship, kinship and trust make public officials informally “accountable” to many players including political parties, influential business people, families and friends. In many cases the 'informal' accountability between a patron and his kin, friendship or political network is more powerful than the system of formal structures and bureaucratic rules. Under such circumstances, incentives to be transparent and responsive to citizens’ needs are undermined, activities with little potential for rents are neglected and, developmental functions of the state are jeopardized. (CDRI, 2007)

15. Power tends to be highly centralized, steeply hierarchical and personalized rather than institutionalized. Decision-making power and influence continue to be largely determined by social status and personal relations rather than institutionalized roles and responsibilities, rendering conventional (political, legal, bureaucratic and administrative) systems of accountability ineffectual and making it difficult for citizens to rely on formally established mechanisms of engagement with public authorities. Traditionally in Cambodia, power has been conceived in zero-sum terms and there is very little tradition of power-sharing among societal groups on democratic terms. As in many countries, there are strong traditions of those with less power (the governed) being “at the mercy of” and therefore accountable to the powerful (governors). The idea of political power-holders being accountable to those with less power is quite unfamiliar and runs contrary to traditional conceptions of political and social relations in Cambodia. The fundamental democratic principle of seeing power-holders as “duty-bearers” who have an obligation to serve the common public interest and account to ordinary citizens is a challenging one. In the Cambodian context, as in many countries, it demands quite a radical change from the current attitudes and behaviors of both citizens and state actors. The situation is exacerbated by a fundamental imbalance of power between the (powerful) state sector and a (relatively weak) private sector and civil society. Ultimately, the gradual growth and strengthening of civil society and private sector vis-à-vis the state are the best way to enhance social accountability in Cambodia.

16. Current processes of political reform and decentralization offer important opportunities for enhanced civic engagement and social accountability. The establishment of commune councils in 2002 offers strong potential for bringing the government ‘closer to the people’ and creating a formal interface between people and government institutions. Decentralization offers important possibilities to increase interaction of CSOs with local authorities by participating in commune council meetings, contributing to discussions about local development issues or the specific problems faced by communes/villages and, participating in decision-making processes. Research suggests that elected commune councils are beginning to change concepts and language regarding relations between citizens and the state. (Ojendal/Kim, 2007) Fieldwork found impressive levels of citizen participation in commune council meetings so far – but largely in a passive, listening role – and interest and willingness on the part of CSOs to build links and interaction with authorities. Supporting the ongoing decentralization process and

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9 According to CDRI, individuals within government do not need to hold positions of formal authority to be granted decision-making power and it is not uncommon, for example, for a secretary of state to wield more power than a minister (CDRI, 2007:54,59).

10 According to a traditional saying, “On a hill there cannot be two tigers”.
strengthening local government structures are an important strategy for promoting civic engagement and social accountability. Key challenges include developing the capacities and skills of commune chiefs and councilors and enhancing, over time, the authority and resources of local government structures. Specific priorities from a social accountability perspective include developing participatory mechanisms and skills of commune councils and working (through training, institutional reforms and incentives) to reverse the current situation in which the “upwards” accountability of local authorities to party leaders and central government authorities overrides “downwards” accountability to their own constituencies. (CDRI, 2007:59)

I.B.3. Socio-cultural factors

17. Issues of weak trust and low social capital, linked to recent conflict in Cambodia have already been discussed. Some long-standing factors linked to Cambodia’s social, cultural and religious heritage also influence social accountability-related attitudes and behaviors. **Buddhist philosophy and morality have a mixed impact with regard to notions of good governance, social accountability and justice.** Buddhism teaches that leaders must act morally (to gain religious merit) and respect traditional codes of virtuous conduct. It therefore places strong moral pressure on political and social leaders to behave responsibly and benevolently. On the other hand, Cambodian society is characterized by a high level of inequality and strong social hierarchy and some aspects of traditional Buddhist culture have tended to encourage deference to authority and the acceptance of one’s place in this hierarchy. Belief in karma and destiny also impact Khmer notions of accountability and justice. Some observers have remarked that Cambodian Buddhism places high importance on peace, harmony and reconciliation but in a way that does not necessarily require accountability or retribution. (Marks, 1999:716-717) At the same time, however, Buddhist institutions and practices are evolving and many faith-based organizations (such as Buddhism for Development, and Santi Sena) play a very progressive role in applying core Buddhist values to address key contemporary issues such as economic development, social justice and environmental protection.

18. According to the traditional, hierarchical social order in Cambodia, women are considered to be of lower status relative to men. **The resulting unequal gender relations are an important constraint.** They both diminish the well-being of women and limit the country’s development. Women in Cambodia are disproportionately poor and under-educated. (UNIFEM et. al., 2004) Gender-based violence, including domestic violence, rape, violence against sex workers and trafficking, is a major concern. With regard to governance, Cambodia’s Gender Empowerment Measure is among the lowest in Asia, reflecting the extremely low representation of women in government and parliament. Gender relations in Cambodia, however, are undergoing tremendous change. Recent elections have seen a significant rise in the number of female candidates and elected political representatives, especially at local levels. While the culturally defined behavior norms for women, known as the Chba’p, continue to constrain their opportunities outside of the household, economic, social and political developments are opening up new possibilities. As discussed in subsequent sections of this report, the specific interests and needs of women must be taken into account in order to achieve effective civic engagement and social accountability in Cambodia.

19. **Conflict avoidance and a culture of "saving face" serve to reinforce social hierarchy and maintain the status quo.** Traditional Cambodian culture emphasizes the importance of behaving appropriately and graciously and avoiding creating conflict or giving offense. An overriding social norm is

11 A strong belief in the Buddhist concepts of karma and fate (i.e. the notion that everyone has a natural, pre-determined place and cannot change one’s destiny) serves to preserve the existing social order by making feel that social change is unlikely or impossible (Chandler, 1991:4). Based on ideas of fate, poorer people tend to take their lower status as a given and expect those with higher status to redistribute wealth in order to gain merit. (CDRI, 2007:54; Legerwood/Vijghen, 2002:144)
to “maintain the balance of things”. (Luco, 2003:26) This cultural background, combined with the trauma of recent war and conflict, means that most Cambodians place high value on maintaining peaceful and harmonious relations and avoiding conflict, especially with those who are considered powerful. (CDRI, 2007:55) There is a strong inclination to keep social interactions non-binding and low-key and to choose to exit strategies over confrontation if conflicts arise. These social norms are closely connected to the high importance of saving face, both of oneself and of others. The practice of saving face is also an important characteristic of politics and, if not respected (or intentionally disregarded), can have serious consequences both in terms of damaging personal relations and causing the permanent rupture of political alliances and/or patronage ties. These socio-cultural characteristics may in part explain the limited effectiveness of civil society advocacy approaches that openly attack or adopt an aggressive stance towards government. As discussed in section II.D, such approaches have sometimes succeeded in effecting positive change, but very often they have failed to attract or sustain popular support (from deferential and conflict-averse citizens) and have tended to result in increased antagonism rather than collaboration between government and civil society.

I.B.4. Citizen-state relations

20. Power relations between state officials and civilians are characterized by steep power differentials which inhibit the ability of civilians to claim rights and freedoms in the face of official highhandedness. (Hughes/Conway, 2004:30) Many Cambodians, especially older people and those living in rural areas, have a highly paternalistic view of government. In a survey conducted in 2000, for example, 56% of the respondents considered local authorities as “parents” and ordinary citizens as “children” (CAS/TAF, 2001:26). Recent research on land conflict resolution in 2005/06 (CAS/World Bank, 2006) and field work conducted for the present study confirmed the continued prevalence of such viewpoints at the grassroots level. Ordinary citizens, especially in rural areas, expressed a deep-rooted feeling of being “at the mercy” of public officials and power-holders. As a result, there is little notion of citizen rights, citizen empowerment or the obligations of government officials as duty-bearers. The democratic obligation of the state to account to the people and the right (and responsibility) of citizens to seek information and accountability are not commonly understood/acknowledged in Cambodia as basic underlying principles of social accountability. Due to feelings of inferiority and helplessness, citizens are traditionally quite reluctant to question (let alone confront) authorities and have little expectation that the voice of "the little man" could have any influence on government actions or decisions. The traditional saying, "Don't hit a stone with an egg", expresses the view that it is hopeless for the weak to confront the powerful.

21. Despite the important influence of traditional political and socio-cultural norms, it is important to acknowledge that public attitudes, values and levels of awareness are also clearly changing in Cambodia. (Hughes, 2001; Hughes/Ojendal, 2006; Ojendal/Kim, 2006; CAS/World Bank, 2006) Cambodia has a very young population that is increasingly exposed to a wide range of non-traditional ideas due to higher mobility (significant levels of urban and international migration) and growing access to radio, television and (to a lesser extent) the internet. As described in this report, field research found some significant differences in attitudes, expectations and behaviors between younger and older

12 In one case, for example, angry villagers openly accused the commune chief of not being a responsible father to them because he had allocated village land to an external investor without consulting the concerned villagers (J4P, 2006:32). During an interview with the leadership of a farmers association in Kompong Thom province (Santuk district) the village chief was also referred to as father of the villagers who demonstrates care for his children by regularly attending the farmers association's meetings. He was also largely responsible for mobilizing villagers to establish the association by calling them repeatedly to meetings acting as a liaison to CEDAC. In a focus group discussion in Kompong Cham province (Prey Chor district), participants referred to the provincial governor as the father of the district governor, who was in turn considered the father of the commune chief and so on.

13 70% of the population is under 30 years of age.
generations of citizens. As a result, young people are potentially important drivers for change with regard to reshaping state-citizen relationships and promoting social accountability and good governance in Cambodia.

I.B.5. Civil society

22. Cambodian civil society is also a product of the country’s unique political and social history. Observers have noted that throughout Cambodia’s history, independent social groups who sought to express their opinions in the public sphere and question or influence government decisions were severely suppressed by the state. (Yonekura, 1999) In the wake of the peace agreements in the early 1990s, the international community saw the development of “civil society” as an important guarantee against the recurrence of state repression in Cambodia. (Hughes, 2003:138) UNTAC (and, over time, a large number of international organizations) supported the emergence of a range of NGOs mandated with promoting democracy, human rights, poverty reduction and social development. As a result, most professional NGOs in Cambodia today owe their existence more to the influence and financial support of international donors than to the gradual opening up of democratic space, the natural scaling up of grassroots organizations, the emergence of a culture of volunteerism/social activism or the organized charity of an established middle class.

23. The “donor-driven” nature of Cambodia’s NGO sector limits, in a number of ways, its effectiveness as a promoter of good governance and a catalyst of meaningful civic engagement and social accountability. Because they have been externally created, rather than internally ‘grown, most NGOs lack grassroots links and social embeddedness. With the (notable) exception of trade unions, most CSOs in Cambodia beyond the community level are not membership organizations and have no active constituency or social base – leading one analyst to refer to the Cambodian NGO sector as a “civil movement without citizens”. (Un, 2004:272) This disconnect from the masses and inability to demonstrate popular support undermines NGOs’ credibility and influence and has caused government officials to question their legitimacy and representativeness. Its donor orientation is also likely to have caused the NGO sector to be more Phnom Penh centered than had it been driven by more endogenous pressures. While current decentralization reform has stimulated both donors and NGOs to focus more attention on community-based organizations (CBOs), efforts to empower citizens, promote grassroots participation or build civil society from the bottom-up are still limited in scale and scope. Due to their high dependence on donor funding (which some observers see as mirroring the dynamics of traditional patron-client relationships), NGOs currently have strong incentives to cater to donors’ programmatic priorities and reporting requirements and weak incentives to respond and account to grassroots constituencies. Finally, NGOs’ dependence on external donor funds also makes their financial sustainability uncertain and creates challenges in terms of reconciling foreign concepts and agendas with local (cultural, political and social) realities. As discussed in this report, both donors and Cambodian CSOs have important roles to play in addressing these issues. Box 1 provides an overview of principal categories of CSOs in Cambodia.

<table>
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<th>Box 1 – An overview of civil society organizations (CSOs) in Cambodia</th>
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<td>Civil society organizations in Cambodia fall into the following principal groups:</td>
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<td>1. <em>Traditional associations</em> – Traditional associations, committees and self-help groups, frequently linked to pagodas, represent the most common, long-standing and widespread form of associative life for ordinary citizens. While such associations exist in most villages in Cambodia, as discussed in section II.C.1 of this report, they involve only approximately 15% of villagers.</td>
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<td>2. <em>“Modern” community-based organizations (CBOs)</em> – 8,000 of Cambodia’s 13,000 villages have a Village Development Committee, intended to engage rural people directly in local development and bottom-up planning. In practice, however, such committees tend to be dominated or strongly influenced</td>
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by donors, INGOs or party or local government officials and, due to this lack of autonomy are not considered genuine organizations of civil society. As discussed in section II.C.1 of this report, other types of CBOs (such as women’s, youth, farmers’ or fishermen associations) are, for the most part, a more recent phenomenon, usually created as a result of external (NGO) support. They are estimated to involve only about 12% of the population.

3. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) - A recent survey (CDC for Danida, June 2006)) indicates significant recent growth of the NGO sector in Cambodia, although it suggests that many registered local NGOs are not significantly active. The survey found 1495 registered national NGOs and 337 international NGOs (at end 2005). Only an estimated 45% of national NGOs (668 in total) are considered active while 93% of registered INGOs (314) are. An estimated 100 national NGOs dominate the NGO sector, of which “about 30-40 can be considered strong” (Khlok, Nil et. al, August 2003). NGOs employ about 24,000 Cambodian staff and about 1,200 international staff. NGOs are concentrated in urban areas and especially in the capital. 70% of national NGOs have their base in Phnom Penh and half the rest are in Battambang, Kandal and Siem Reap. NGOs concentrate on service delivery, though there are signs that they are diversifying. In their registration documents, 70% of national NGOs describe their purpose as providing services in social affairs, while only 7% declared a purpose of democracy and human rights.

4. Trade unions - Under the People’s Republic of Kampuchea, trade unions were officially recognized mass organizations and were regarded as part of the state apparatus. During and after the UNTAC period, independent trade unions became permitted but there was not an immediate impetus to take advantage of this associational freedom. It has been the rapid growth of the garment industry in recent years that has spawned the explosion of trade unions (which are typically established at the individual factory level) and union federations. While there were just 20 registered unions in 1997, there were 245 by January 2002 and about 370 by August 2005, comprising approximately 15 federations. It is estimated that approximately 40% of the formal work force is unionized, of which a vast majority are women working in the garment sector (Makin 2006: 25). Trade unions are largely dependent on external funding sources rather than membership dues (it is estimated that only 10% of union “members” actually pay dues); their funds largely come either from domestic political sources or from donors and international labor union organizations.

5. Youth organizations – In Cambodia, a country where 70% of the population is under 30 years of age, youth organizations play an important role, especially in addressing issues of particular concern to young people and in building the capacity of young people to contribute to social development. There are approximately a dozen strong and dynamic youth organizations involved in social development issues, volunteerism, youth participation in political and democratic processes, networking and advocacy. In addition, there are also a growing number of student associations and clubs throughout Cambodia that have been established for multiple purposes including education and awareness raising on certain issues.

6. Other categories –There are growing numbers of “think tanks” and independent research organizations, mostly in Phnom Penh, which have increasing influence, particularly with donors, the media and NGOs. Independent institutions of higher learning and students’ associations are also important civil society actors, but with weaker links to the development community. There are also a few independent media organizations and associations, though these do not currently have a strong influence (see II B 4). There is a set of powerful business associations, but these may be more usefully discussed in a study of the private sector, although they increasingly engage, alongside civil society actors, in discussion of policy and governance related issues.
24. Cambodian NGOs have made, and continue to make, extremely important contributions to Cambodia’s political and social development.\(^4\) The development of a professional NGO sector should not, however, be equated with the emergence of a broader, indigenous Cambodian “civil society”.\(^5\) (Yonekura, 1999; SIDA, 2006:16,18) If civil society is understood in the sense of “the public arena where people freely associate to advance common interests”\(^6\), then Cambodian civil society remains unarguably weak. As discussed in section II of the report, levels of citizen association at grassroots level are low, autonomous space where individuals can freely come together to express opinions and organize collective action is limited and the institutional rules and culture that characterize that space are not necessarily conducive to citizen association, expression and engagement. Efforts to “strengthen civil society” should not, therefore, be equated with developing the capacities of NGOs but should emphasize the creation of public space and an enabling environment for collective citizen action. Opening up political space and creating an enabling policy environment is largely in the hands of the government of Cambodia. Development partners have an important role to play in advocating for and supporting such processes. According to Hughes and Conway (2004:30), “It is difficult to find evidence of ‘civil society’ in Cambodia, in the sense of an arena in which individuals feel free to stake out a political position independent of that of the state official with whom he or she is conversing, and to scrutinize official actions on that basis”. This said, recent case study research has identified promising evidence of an increasing “willingness for villagers to claim openly, even against the powerful, in cases where they feel that they have been unjustly dispossessed…[due in part to]…the emergence of a more open society.” (CAS/World Bank, 2006)

1.B.6. CSO-State relations

25. There is little experience of institutionalized interaction between Cambodian civil society and the state. Prior to decentralization, there was very little possibility for CBOs to engage with public authorities. Current reforms represent a crucial opportunity to build institutionalized relationships between citizen associations and state actors at local level. With regard to CSOs working at provincial and national level, government attitude has been described as “basically skeptical” (SIDA, 2003:12) - with relations with individual organizations ranging from collaborative to hostile depending on the nature of their mandate and activities. Government representatives sometimes speak in terms of “good” NGOs (i.e. those involved in the delivery of social services) and “bad” NGOs (i.e. who question or criticize government actions or are involved in advocacy activities). With the possible exception of NGOs who focus exclusively on service delivery, relationships between government and CSOs, in particular those working in the democracy and human rights fields, tend to be characterized by mutual suspicion and distrust.

26. The notion of CSOs contributing to good governance by seeking and disseminating government information, participating in processes of public deliberation and decision-making and holding government accountable is new and challenging in the Cambodian context. As described in Box 1, among registered Cambodian NGOs only a very small sub-set (approximately 7%) are involved in democracy, advocacy and policy dialogue activities. Governance issues and processes are highly politicized in Cambodia and efforts to obtain government information, raise questions or concerns in the public sphere or scrutinize government actions tend to be viewed as challenges to government authority or acts of “opposition”. There is no doubt that over the last ten years, NGOs have contributed positively to the emergence of a democratic culture in Cambodia especially through awareness raising and training

\(^4\) Since UNTAC, international donors and INGOs have been an important source of development resources and strong and influential advocates for good governance reforms. In future, however, the influence of these actors is very likely to dwindle as public revenues (e.g. from mining and oil revenues) grow and the need for development assistance is reduced.

\(^5\) In Cambodia, “civil society” [sangkum civil] is frequently understood as referring to NGOs.

activities. Human rights NGOs, along with a variety of other advocacy-oriented groups, have developed a vibrant community, undertaken high-profile, public campaigns on important issues and begun to strengthen links with the government and local communities. However, CSO efforts to directly help the government be more effective and accountable, for example by engaging in policy dialogue, monitoring and evaluating government actions, providing feedback and “constructive criticism” and seeking accountability are nascent and fragile. The development of these social accountability roles will help civil society fulfill its role as a vital player in helping Cambodia complete its passage to becoming a fully functioning democracy able to effectively and equitably serve the interests of all its citizens.

I.C. SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY PRACTICES IN CAMBODIA

27. Social accountability encompasses a broad array of practices and approaches. Social accountability activities can be initiated by a wide range of actors (e.g. citizens, CSOs, government officials or public service providers), use diverse strategies (e.g. research, monitoring, advocacy, participatory planning, civic education, media coverage, coalition building) and, as illustrated in Figure 1, be applied both at the local and national level and at all stages of the public policy and expenditure management cycle. Though social accountability initiatives are still nascent in Cambodia, research identified a range of (small-scale) social accountability experiences and found evidence of considerable interest and potential to expand and enhance citizen/CSO activity in this area.

Figure 1– Examples of social accountability practices in Cambodia (and the institutions supporting them)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Local&lt;-------------------------------&gt; National</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Policies/plans</strong></td>
<td>Participatory local planning, citizen/ commune council dialogue and partnership (Commune councils, PACT, CCSP, GTZ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public revenues</strong></td>
<td>Public dissemination of financial transfers to commune councils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public budgets</strong></td>
<td>Monitoring the management of commune council budgets (Provincial accountability committees)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public expenditures</strong></td>
<td>Monitoring local expenditures (monitoring of Priority Action Program budgets by school support committees)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public services</strong></td>
<td>Citizen monitoring and feedback on local level public service delivery (Krom Aphiwat Plum)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I.C.1. Contributing to public policies and plans

28. Social accountability can be enhanced upstream through citizen/CSO participation in formulating public policies and plans. Such activities can be initiated by government or by civil society. For example, recent decentralization reforms and provisions for participatory local planning by commune councils, though not yet fully implemented, represent an important opportunity for upstream social accountability. Some NGOs and donors (such as PACT, CCSP, GTZ) are playing an active role in building capacities and mechanisms for effective engagement between citizens/CBOs and commune councils. See, for example, Box 2 for a description of the Local Administration and Reform (LAAR) program. At national level, a growing number of civil society organizations and coalitions have attempted to push for the introduction of new legislation or policies or influence their content - for example, the Coalition for Freedom of Information, the CLEC, NGO Forum and, in the environmental field, Conservation International, World Wildlife Fund and World Conservation Society. There are also a growing number of examples where CSOs have been invited by government to participate in technical working groups and multi-stakeholder forums where key public policy issues are debated. Because of the exclusive character of these forums, however, only the largest and most professional (donor-supported) CSOs participate (e.g. MEDiCAM, NEP, CLEC, NGO Forum).

Box 2 – Promoting partnership between commune councils and CBOs - The LAAR program

The Local Administration and Reform (LAAR) program, managed by PACT and supported by USAID, aims to reach over 300 communes in seven provinces. LAAR reinforces the government’s decentralization reform process by building the capacity of elected commune councils and promoting constructive partnership with CBOs. Specific goals of the LAAR program are to increase citizen participation in commune development; strengthen commune council transparency, accountability and partnership; and; improve awareness of gender, youth and natural resource management issues within communes. Also substantial decentralization progress has been made since the commune council elections in 2002. LAAR acknowledges that there is a continued need to increase citizen participation in council activities (beyond commune planning) and to develop additional transparency and accountability mechanisms in line with the government’s rectangular strategy. It identifies inadequate budgetary resources, limited staff capacity, and lack of decision-making authority as major challenges. LAAR takes a multi-dimensional approach to addressing these needs. It provides capacity building, coaching and mentoring opportunities for both civil society organizations and commune councils focused on increasing public participation in council affairs and improving transparent and accountable management of council funds. The program offers social development grants as an incentive for councils to incorporate socially-focused investments into commune planning and one-time grants to innovative commune councils, local NGOs, CBOs and village networks to support projects that aim to increase citizen involvement and civil society partnerships with commune councils. The program seeks to promote transparency and accountability at the sub-national level by employing a Commune Council Performance Assessment (CCPA) process that includes a citizen evaluation survey and commune council self-assessment. The program also supports mechanisms to increase the flow of information and dialogue between government and civil society. These mechanisms include civil society and commune council networks, provincial-level, thematic public forums, D&D working groups, inter-commune associations, the NGO Liaison Office, and regional decentralization associations. LAAR also implements an integrated media strategy to raise awareness around partnership best practices, citizen participation in commune activities, citizen and council rights, and D&D policy initiatives.

Source: www.pactcambodia.org/Programs/Program_LAAR

17 The government of Cambodia has not as yet circulated a draft of its Public Access to Information policy, which was an undertaking committed to the Government-Donor Coordination Committee. This process, and issues related to access to information legislation and practice, are discussed in section II.A.4.
I.C.2. Monitoring public revenues

29. Public finances are the means whereby government policies and plans are transformed into concrete actions, programs and services. **Citizen monitoring of public financial management is therefore an essential aspect of social accountability, and possibly the most challenging in the Cambodian context.** In order for citizens to monitor and oversee public expenditures, they must be able to access information about government revenues - still, for the most part, considered and treated as confidential by the Cambodian administration, though there are recent signs of some opening and progress. See Box 2. Recent provisions to publicly disseminate information about financial transfers to commune councils are a step towards introducing financial transparency at the local level. At the national level, the government’s willingness to consider joining the global Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, and corresponding efforts on the part of CSOs to join the global Publish What You Pay campaign, represent important opportunities to enhance transparency and accountability with regard to future oil and mining revenues.

I.C.3. Influencing public budgets

30. **Citizen involvement in formulating and analyzing public budgets is another important category of social accountability practices.** Participatory budget formulation is most common at the local level. At the national level, more common examples of budget-related social accountability practices include efforts by civil society (and government) to analyze the impact and implications of budget allocations, demystify the technical content of the budget, raise public awareness about budget-related issues, expose discrepancies between stated government policy priorities and resource allocations and undertake public education campaigns to improve budget literacy. Such activities, however, are thwarted by the general paucity of reliable information about public budgets.

31. In Cambodia, given the newness of decentralization reforms and the extremely limited financial resources of commune councils, participatory local budgeting has not yet had meaningful opportunity to develop. “Accountability boxes” intended to receive citizen complaints about misuse or mismanagement of commune budgets are a government-initiated measure to promote public oversight of local financial management. As discussed in section II, however, this mechanism has had little effectiveness to date. With regard to the national budget, the most notable social accountability initiative is that of the NGO Forum’s recently introduced National Budget Project, an initiative that seeks to inform the general public about budget issues and influence national budget formulation. See Box 3.

I.C.4. Monitoring public expenditures

32. As described above, an important aspect of social accountability is for citizens to be able to hold government accountable for how it handles public funds. In recent years, many governments around the world have been prompted by civil society to enhance their financial transparency by publicly disseminating information about accounts and expenditures. Efforts to track public expenditures or to monitor the distribution of public goods (such as medicines or school books) are examples of social accountability practices that can be applied at the national level, with the aim of analyzing the flow of financial (or physical) resources from allocation to destination and identifying leakages and/or bottlenecks in the system. This approach often involves the comparison of information received from disbursement records of finance ministries, accounts submitted by line agencies and information obtained from independent enquiry (using, for example, tools like social audits). Information is disseminated through the use of media, publications and public meetings.

33. In Cambodia, although information about public expenditures is still difficult to access, there are a number of nascent efforts to track and monitor government spending. At local level, for example, school support committees are officially mandated to oversee school budgets and expenditures.
(even though, as discussed in section II, this rarely occurs in practice). Members of the NGO Education Partnership have also made attempts to monitor expenditures by the Ministry of Education but, again, with limited success. Two PETS have been undertaken in Cambodia by the World Bank in collaboration with government (for health and education spending) but with little CSO involvement and only limited efforts to make findings available to the general public. In future, undertaking PETS in a more participatory manner and disseminating findings in the public sphere (in simple, user-friendly language and format) would render them a more effective tool of social accountability.

**Box 3 – NGO Forum’s National Budget Monitoring Project**

Based on increasing civil society concerns about how upcoming oil and gas revenues (which some say may total between 500 and 1,500 million USD per annum\(^{18}\)) will be used, NGO Forum (with the support of the International Budget Project) has recently launched a project to monitor the management of the national budget. The National Budget Monitoring Project seeks to address the current lack information related to government budgets and expenditures and to increase civil society’s capacity to engage in policy and budget discussions with the government and its development partners. In order to do so, NGO Forum has begun to organize regular meetings of the recently created Trade and Economic Development Network (TEDN), comprising approximately 18 NGOs interested in budget-work, and to develop a small resource center and database on the National Budget and relevant publications from government, donors, academia and the NGO community. In close cooperation with the (independent) Economic Institute of Cambodia (EIC), efforts have been made to analyze the 2007 budget, to assess trends in sector allocations and revenue mobilization and to develop a layman’s guide to the national budget. NGO Forum has also begun to establish working relationships with key actors in the budgetary process such as the Ministry of Economy and Finances, sectoral ministries, the budget committee in the parliament, the Auditor General, the technical working group on public finance management, donors and research institutions. Demand for public financial transparency of the government is new and challenging in the Cambodian context and NGO Forum acknowledges that achieving meaningful dialogue, consultation and cooperation with regard to processes of public financial management will take time. Access to financial information is still partial and unpredictable and often requires the use of personal relationships with well-disposed government officials or contacts with influential donors. Another key challenge is the lack of relevant knowledge and skills within Cambodian civil society for this type of work. Ongoing training and capacity building is required to help civil society actors acquire an understanding of public budgeting and financial management processes and to develop their capacity to analyze public budgets and other key financial documents.

*Source: NGO Forum, 2007.*

I.C.5. **Improving public services**

34. Another category of social accountability practice aims to enhance the relevance, accessibility and quality of public services. Typically, this involves citizen participation in the monitoring and evaluation of priority services. At the national level, methods such as public opinion polls, public hearings or citizens’ report cards can be used to solicit citizen feedback that can be disseminated and presented to government officials to elicit accountability and lobby for change. At the local level, a variety of participatory tools can be used (both by service providers and civil society) to help citizens monitor, evaluate and seek accountability for the effective delivery of public services. Community scorecards, for example, allow both users and service providers to independently evaluate public services, and then come together at interface meetings to share their findings, discuss problems and seek solutions.

\(^{18}\) Compared to a government budget of approx. USD 900 million
35. In Cambodia, groups like KAP (see Box 4) have sought to improve the quality of local public services through civic engagement, for example, through the creation of citizens’ village health association committees. At national level, NGO participation in sectoral working groups can create opportunities for civil society actors to provide feedback and raise issues with regard to priority services. By participating in the Education Sector Working Group, for example, the NGO Education Partnership network and its members have had the chance to raise issues regarding the late provision of PAP (Priority Action Program) resources to rural schools, low teacher salaries and the sale of textbooks selling (intended for distribution to rural school). Unfortunately, to date, such engagement has only occasionally resulted in concrete corrective actions.

Box 4 – Village Health Associations – Krom Aphiwat Phum (KAP)

KAP is a community development and poverty reduction-focused NGO, based in Battambang province. Poor people in the rural areas targeted by KAP identified poor health conditions as a priority problem. To respond to this expressed need, since 2005 KAP has provided technical support to help villagers form “village health associations” as a means to access public medical services at low or no cost. Members of such village health associations, which now operate in 37 villages of 14 communes in Battambang province report being more informed and empowered and therefore better able to negotiate access to public health services. KAP provides only technical guidance. It is the villagers themselves who identify priority needs, mobilize people to form the associations, elect association committees and set rules and by-laws. The associations, once established, have the opportunity to go on study tours to visit district and provincial hospitals and meet with directors and service providers. The study tours, organized by KAP, aim to help the associations become better informed about health services and regulations and to communicate directly with relevant health care workers and managers. Representatives who participate in the study tours are mandated to report back to and share all relevant information with other association members. The associations work with hospitals to forge an agreement to provide low or no cost health services to those association members who are too poor to pay. For identification and accountability purposes, each association member is issued an ID card and hospital staff agree to wear name tags while on duty. If hospital staff do not follow the terms of agreements or provide unsatisfactory service, association members can take note of staff names and report on it at a later stage. On a monthly or bi-monthly basis, KAP conducts meeting with associations to gather feedback from health service users, which it then uses to negotiate further improvements with health services for the association members.

Source: CAS/WB, 2007b.

I.C.6. Public oversight

36. A final category of social accountability practices are those that aim to improve public oversight or enhance the effectiveness of conventional oversight mechanisms. All states have some form of internal mechanisms in place to promote or ensure accountability of public servants. These include: (i) political mechanisms (e.g., constitutional constraints, separation of powers, the legislature); (ii) fiscal mechanisms (e.g., formal systems of auditing and financial accounting); (iii) administrative mechanisms (e.g., hierarchical reporting requirements, norms of public sector probity, public service codes of conduct, rules and procedures regarding transparency and public oversight), and; (iv) legal mechanisms (e.g., corruption control agencies, ombudsmen and the judiciary) (Goetz and Gaventa, 2001). In the case of Cambodia, internal mechanisms of accountability are in place but, as discussed above, their effectiveness is compromised by a number of factors including entrenched patronage structures; dominance by the executive and weak capacity of the National Assembly and the judiciary; and the paucity of government information in the public domain. Civil society has made some efforts to address these weaknesses. For example, the Center for Social Development has undertaken parliamentary monitoring, instigated a “court watch” program and publicly disseminated corruption studies. At local
level, the Commune Council Support Program has utilized Citizen Rating Reports to monitor and evaluate the performance of local government authorities.

37. Social accountability initiatives in Cambodia are limited in size and number but current experimentation combined with ongoing processes of democratization and decentralization promise potential for future development. **To date, the impact of social accountability initiatives has been limited and concrete outcomes in terms of improvement in citizens’ well-being are lacking.** The following section of the report analyzes some of the key factors influencing social accountability and, given the enormous potential of social accountability approaches to contribute to good governance in Cambodia, recommends actions for overcoming current obstacles and building on strengths and opportunities.