III. STRENGTHENING SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN CAMBODIA

III.A. CONCLUSIONS

136. Fighting corruption and enhancing government accountability in Cambodia are key priorities. Strong public accountability is a crucial ingredient in achieving key goals of good governance, effective public service delivery, sustainable development and citizen empowerment. In addition to ongoing efforts to strengthen “internal” (supply-side) mechanisms of accountability and good governance, it is crucially important to enhance and expand “external” (demand-side) mechanisms of social accountability.

137. There are many weak links in the chain connecting citizens to government and many challenges relating to underlying political, socio-cultural factors, but also many important opportunities. Initial experimentation with social accountability approaches (including independent policy analysis, applied budget work, participatory monitoring and evaluation, advocacy and citizen-state dialogue) have served both to demonstrate the strong potential of social accountability practices and to reveal limitations and obstacles that currently impede their success and impact. This study has proposed numerous recommendations targeting government, civil society and development partner stakeholders and aimed at creating a more enabling environment for social accountability in Cambodia, developing necessary capacities and skills (within both civil society and government), and; expanding and institutionalizing spaces and mechanisms for citizen-state dialogue and negotiation. The report has also emphasized the timeliness of fostering a culture of “downwards accountability” at all levels and attitudinal and behavioral changes on the part of all key stakeholders. For example, government actors are challenged to be more open and tolerant of criticisms and alternative viewpoints, civil society actors are encouraged to be more constructive and solution-oriented, citizens are urged to be more publicly active and engaged and donors are exhorted to use their international experience to support in Cambodia the types of policy reforms and social accountability mechanisms and practices that have proven effective elsewhere.

138. While all the recommendations outlined in the report are considered important by the study team, the following actions (selected for their strategic impact) are strongly suggested as (immediate and longer-term) priorities. The prioritization of these recommendations was helped by the focus group discussions on an earlier version of this report. They are addressed to each of the study’s target stakeholder groups – the government of Cambodia, CSOs and Development Partners – respectively.

III.B. PRIORITY ACTIONS

III.B.1. Priority Actions for the Government of Cambodia

In the immediate term:

139. Government priority action 1 - Instruct (and support) commune councils to convene biannual public forums. (Recommendations A.2, B.3 and D.3)

Research shows that commune councils hold great (and, as yet, undeveloped) potential as a platform for citizen-state dialogue. The government is encouraged to introduce a practice of regular (biannual) public forums at commune level as an opportunity for citizens to engage with government authorities on issues of priority concern.

140. Government priority action 2 - Make clear provisions for citizen/CSO participation in newly created district and provincial councils. (Recommendations A.2, B.3 and D.3)

As present there are few opportunities for civic engagement at the district and provincial levels. The government is encouraged to issue prakas that make clear provisions for meaningful citizen and CSO
participation in the new district and provincial councils (to be established according to the recently adopted Organic Law).

In the longer term:

141. **Government priority action 3 - Instruct schools and health facilities across the country to publicly share budget information.** (Recommendation A.2)
Research found that citizens lack access to information about basic public services that directly affect their well-being. In order to promote transparency and social accountability, the government is encouraged to instruct schools and health facilities across the country to publicly share budget information, allowing users/citizens to be informed about the allocation of public funds (and other resources) to these facilities and how these resources are used. It is recommended that annual financial statements be publicly posted and presented at an annual public forum.

142. **Government priority action 4 - Establish ministerial advisory groups.**
(Recommendations D.1 and D.3)
Regular forums for exchange between civil society and state actors are lacking. It is recommended that the government encourage (or instruct) all major ministries to establish a standing advisory group (comprised of relevant representatives/advisors from civil society, academia, private sector, etc.). These groups would meet on a regular (e.g. quarterly) basis and, according to clearly defined terms of reference, contribute to raising/discussing issues of key public concern, providing feedback on key documents and facilitating processes of public consultation on major new laws/policies.

III.B.2. Priority Actions for CSOs

In the immediate term:

143. **CSO priority action 1 - Expand grassroots level mobilization/empowerment initiatives.**
(Recommendations B.1 and C.1)
Building the knowledge, confidence and power of ordinary citizens (including women, youth and other marginalized groups) is an important element of social accountability. Lack of citizen empowerment at grassroots level is arguably the principal reason why donor support over the past decade has not been more successful in generating active demand for good governance. Empowerment efforts should build on the experiences and lessons of initiatives, such as CEDAC-supported farmers’ associations and KAP village health associations, that aim to address citizens’ practical needs while also strengthening their political voice and influence.

144. **CSO priority action 2 - Introduce “downwards” transparency/reporting practices.**
(Recommendation C.2)
In order to become effective agents of social accountability, CSOs must themselves seek to become models of good governance by improving their own internal governance practices and systems of transparency and downwards accountability. An important aspect of this is to proactively share program and budget information with clients and target populations, and encouraging their active oversight.

In the longer term:

145. **CSO priority action 3 - Develop expertise in participatory, “people-centered” advocacy approaches.** (Recommendation B.1)
CSOs have a crucial role to play in empowering citizens to act and advocate on their own behalf. It is considered a priority for Cambodian CSOs to build their capacity and expertise in participatory, people-centered approaches to advocacy and development.

146. **CSO priority action 4 - Develop roles as facilitators of citizen-state dialogue.** (Recommendation D.2)
Experience shows that citizen-state dialogue benefits greatly from third party facilitation. CSOs have a crucial role to play as “bridges” between citizens and government authorities and are encouraged to place priority on developing and expanding these roles (especially at local level).

**III.B.3. Priority Actions for Development Partners (DPs)**

*In the immediate term:*

147. **DP priority action 1 - Support training and coaching for existing and emerging local level leaders.** (Recommendation B.2)
For ordinary citizens, grassroots and local level leaders play a crucial role as organizers, educators, advocates and intermediaries. Because of these multiple roles, investing in the capacities and skills of local leaders to be responsive and downwardly accountable is considered a priority. DPs should both enhance support to CSOs currently engaged in grassroots leadership training and support capacity-building in this area.

148. **DP priority action 2 - Introduce “downwards” transparency/reporting practices.** (Recommendation C.2)
DPs are encouraged to “set an example” by systematically applying social accountability practices to their own operations (i.e. ensuring that end-users are informed about the allocation and use of development funds and, ideally, are involved in monitoring and evaluating these). By becoming models of downwards transparency and reporting, DPs will not only enhance public oversight of their own funds and programs but also help citizens see what social accountability looks like in practice and, potentially, raise citizen expectations regarding government transparency and accountability.

*In the longer term:*

149. **DP priority action 3 - Expand support for grassroots level initiatives.** (Recommendations B.1 and C.1)
Citizen mobilization and empowerment is essential to the development of civil society and social accountability. Till now, only a very small portion of DP support has been devoted to directly supporting the education, organization and empowerment of citizens at grassroots level. DPs should enhance support to those CSOs working directly at grassroots level and encourage and support national CSOs to adopt more bottom-up approaches and engage more effectively with the grassroots.

150. **DP priority action 4 - Advocate for and support a more enabling policy environment for citizen/CSO participation.** (Recommendation D.1)
Encouraging and supporting the RCG to introduce policies, regulations and guidelines that create public space for citizen association, affirm and protect fundamental citizen rights and set the ground rules for meaningful citizen-state dialogue and participation is considered a priority role for DPs.
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GLOSSARY

**Accountability** is the obligation of power-holders (those who hold political, financial or other forms of power) to take responsibility and answer for their actions. Power-holders can include officials in government, private corporations, international financial institutions and civil society organizations.

**Citizen Empowerment** is the expansion of assets and capabilities of citizens to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives.

**Citizen Participation** is the process through which people and/or civil society organizations (CSOs) influence and share control over priority setting, policy-making, resource allocations and access to public goods and services.

**Citizen Report Cards (CRCs)** are participatory surveys that solicit user feedback on the performance of public services. CRCs are accompanied by extensive media coverage and civil society advocacy in order to exact public accountability.

**Civic Engagement** is the participation of civil society organizations and citizens-at-large through direct and indirect interactions with government, multilateral institutions and business establishments to influence decision making and share control over priority setting, policy making, resource allocations and access to public goods and services.

**Civil Society** is the public sphere, outside of government, market and the family, where citizens and a wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations associate, express their interests and values and seek to advance the common good.

**Community Score Card (CSC)** is a community based monitoring tool that solicits user perceptions on quality, efficiency and transparency. In addition, the CSC process involves an interface meeting between service providers and the community that allows for immediate feedback. Hence, it is an instrument to exact social and public accountability and responsiveness from service providers as well as a means for citizen empowerment.

**Downwards Accountability** refers to the accountability of societal power-holders (e.g. government, private corporations, donors, etc.) to those who are less powerful (e.g. ordinary citizens). Downwards accountability is a core principle of democracy.

**Good Governance** is the government's ability to: 1) ensure political transparency and voice for all citizens, 2) provide efficient and effective public services, 3) promote the health and well-being of its citizens, and 4) create a favorable climate for stable economic growth.

**Independent Budget Analysis (IBA)** is a term used to refer to analytical and advocacy work by civil society and other independent organizations aimed at making public budgets more transparent and at influencing the allocation of public funds. IBA work mobilizes public opinion by showing how budget figures relate to everyday needs.

**Participatory Budgeting** is a mechanism or process through which citizens and/or civil society organizations participate directly in the different phases of the budget formulation, decision-making, and monitoring of budget execution.

**Participatory Expenditure Tracking** is a mechanism or process in which citizens track financial flows and goods throughout the public expenditure cycle, from the source to the destination.
**Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PM&E)** is a process through which stakeholders at various levels engage in monitoring or evaluating a particular project, program or policy, share control over the content, the process and the results of the M&E activity and engage in taking or identifying corrective actions.

**Participatory Policy Formulation** is a process through which citizens and/or civil society organizations participate directly in formulating public policies and plans.

**Social Accountability** refers to the broad range of actions and mechanisms (beyond voting) that citizens and their organizations can use to hold societal power-holders (Such as the state) to account, as well as actions on the part of government, civil society, media and other societal actors that promote or facilitate these efforts.

**Social Audit** (sometimes also referred to as Social Accounting) is a process through which information on the resources (of a project, program or organization) and their use is collected, analyzed and shared publicly in a participatory fashion. The central concern of a social audit is how resources are used for social objectives.

**Transparency** is a state in which the objectives of a policy, its legal, institutional and economic framework, policy decisions and their rationale, data and information related to monetary and financial policies and the accountability of the policymaking body are provided to the public in an understandable, accessible and timely basis.