EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I. CIVIL SOCIETY CONTRIBUTIONS TO GOOD GOVERNANCE IN CAMBODIA

I.A. Introduction

i. Governance is recognized as the most critical challenge for development in Cambodia. Good governance requires not just government commitment but active demand from citizens and civil society. The government is currently involved in various initiatives to improve governance from the “inside”. The focus of this study is on the roles (rights and responsibilities) of citizens and civil society organizations (CSOs) in ensuring effective demand for good governance.

ii. 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. Examples of social accountability practices include citizen/CSO efforts to:

- be better informed about government programs, actions and budgets (e.g. by obtaining documents or attending public meetings);
- publicly communicate their opinions and needs (e.g. through public opinion polls, public forums or “talk-back” radio shows);
- analyze and provide feedback on key public documents (e.g. independent policy or budget analysis);
- track public expenditures (e.g. school budgets or commune council funds);
- monitor and evaluate government services (e.g. using social audits, citizen report cards or community scorecards);
- oversee government actions (e.g. investigative journalism or corruption surveys), and;
- contribute to processes of public decision-making (e.g. citizen/CSO participation in public boards or working groups).

iii. Such approaches aim not to replace but to complement and reinforce formal mechanisms of accountability. This study assesses current social accountability practices in Cambodia, identifies key obstacles and opportunities and proposes remedies and priority actions.

I.B. Key aspects of the Cambodian context

iv. Civic engagement and social accountability in Cambodia are framed and influenced by a number of underlying contextual factors. Recent conflict has weakened trust and social cohesion and resulted in low levels of associational activity, especially in rural areas. It has also led to a lingering fear of authority and a deep desire for peace and social harmony.

v. Political factors also have an important influence on civic engagement and social accountability. Multi-party democracy is emerging but is still new and partial. Although political structures are undergoing significant change, the Cambodian administration continues to be influenced by patrimonial traditions and patron-client relationships. Power tends to be personalized rather than institutionalized, making it difficult for citizens to rely on bureaucratic mechanisms. Strong traditions of “upwards” v. “downwards” accountability pose a challenge. On the other hand, current processes of decentralization and deconcentration offer an important opportunity for bringing government “closer to the people”.

vi. Social & cultural factors have an important influence and are currently also in a state of flux. Traditional Cambodian society is hierarchical, emphasizes deference to authority and tends to exclude women, and other less powerful social groups, from processes of public decision-making. Despite changing values and attitudes among younger people, approaches based on active citizen monitoring and oversight of government actions represent a challenging innovation.

vii. Citizen-state relations are also evolving but many Cambodians, especially older people and those living in rural areas, have a highly paternalistic view of government. As a result, there is little notion of citizen rights, citizen empowerment or the obligations of government officials as duty-bearers.

viii. Civil society in Cambodia is also a product of the country’s unique political and social history. 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. NGOs are highly donor dependent and most lack grassroots links. If civil society is understood in the sense of “the public arena where people freely associate to advance common interests”, then Cambodian civil society remains unarguably weak. There is little experience of institutionalized interaction between Cambodian CSOs and the state.

I.C. Social accountability practices in Cambodia

ix. NGOs have made important contributions to the emergence of a democratic culture in Cambodia, especially through awareness raising and training activities, but 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 newer and more challenging.

x. Though social accountability initiatives are still nascent in Cambodia, research identified a range of (small-scale) social accountability experiences at both local and national level aimed at:
- contributing to public policies and plans (e.g. efforts by NGOs to influence national policy-making or facilitate citizen participation in commune planning);
- monitoring public revenues (e.g. the nascent Publish What You Pay campaign);
- influencing public budgets (e.g. NGO Forum’s recently launched National Budget Project);
- monitoring public expenditures (e.g. efforts by the NGO Education Partnership to monitor public expenditures in that sector);
- improving public services (e.g. through KAP’s creation of citizens’ village health association committees), and;
- providing public oversight (e.g. commune monitoring committees supported by PACT, the introduction of Citizen Rating Reports by the CCSP and, parliamentary monitoring and corruption studies by the CSD).

xi. To date, the impact of social accountability initiatives in Cambodia has been limited. However research reveals evidence of considerable potential interest and willingness to expand and enhance citizen/CSO activity and impact in this area.
II. AN ANALYSIS OF CONDITIONS AND CAPACITIES FOR SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN CAMBODIA

xii. The study identified the following key elements of social accountability and found enabling/disabling factors and strengths/challenges in each area:

- **Information** – Can citizens access and generate relevant information?
- **Voice** – Can citizens voice their priorities and concerns (with the help of CSOs)?
- **Association** – Can citizens form associations and use those to aggregate and amplify their voice?
- **Participation and Constructive Dialogue** – Can citizens connect with and participate in processes of public decision-making?

II.A. Information

xiii. A key enabling factor for social accountability is for citizens to have accurate and relevant public information. Without the ability to access or generate information about public policies and procedures, budgets, expenditures, programs and services, it is difficult for citizens to formulate and voice opinions, contribute to public debates, monitor government actions, or effectively negotiate with public officials. Global experience shows that although governments are frequently initially reluctant to share information, the credibility and public trust they gain in doing so often serves to quickly convince them of the benefits of transparency.

xiv. Research found both important opportunities and challenges with regard to citizen information in the Cambodian context. Significant opportunities include the broad reach of radio and television and the fact that citizens express interest in public information (especially local-level issues that directly affect their physical well-being) and feel it is important to be informed. Key challenges include:

- **Lack of active demand for information** - Despite the interest and value they place on public information, citizen demand for public information remains largely latent due to a lack of awareness of information rights, reluctance to request “sensitive” information, and little sense of how to find information or how to use it to effect change. Research found a general feeling that governance issues are not a matter of concern for ordinary citizens and that problems of governance and poor public service delivery can only be resolved from the top down.

- **Lack of transparency and access to public information** - Lack of active demand is compounded by low government transparency and limited access to public information in Cambodia. There is no habit in Cambodian society of sharing public information in a systematic or formal manner and no law regarding access to information has yet been passed. As a result, government officials are not accustomed to sharing information and there is often a feeling of insecurity among civil servants, especially those at lower levels, in deciding what information can/should go out and high reluctance to release information that is perceived as ‘sensitive’. Research found that citizen access to public financial information (about revenues, budgets and expenditures of the Cambodian government) is particularly limited.

- **Low levels of citizen information & knowledge** - As a result, research found that levels of citizen information & knowledge about public issues are generally low and that citizen knowledge about public finance is particularly limited. At local level, although citizens’ general knowledge about commune councils is quite good, information about commune budgets and expenditures is low. Although participants in focus group discussions often expressed their interest in knowing about the commune budget and how resources were spent, they indicated that such information is seldom available and not meant for ordinary citizens. People's low confidence and disempowerment also serve to limit demand for such information.
xviii. Weakly developed CSO information roles - Contributing to the dissemination of relevant public information and educating citizens about key issues of public concern is an important core function of civil society. However, in Cambodia, the roles of governance-oriented CSOs in accessing, generating, using and sharing information are only slowly growing and are still underdeveloped. Only a small number of CSOs have developed expertise in the areas of IEC (information-education-communication) and media with regard to governance or social accountability themes. Systematic efforts to seek out and analyze government information, or to generate and disseminate information from independent research or citizen feedback are rare. Research found that, even among professional NGOs, levels of public information & knowledge are limited. Professional NGO staff surveyed felt they had little information/knowledge about public policies, procedures and budgets.

xix. Three recommendations are proposed to address these challenges.

Recommendation A.1 – Help foster active citizen demand for public information.
For example, by:
- Encouraging CSOs working at grassroots level (in different sectors) to incorporate a “public information” component into their ongoing programs (i.e. sharing with members and target populations information about public laws, policies, plans and budgets that relate to current activities).
- Enhancing interest in governance amongst ordinary citizens through targeted IEC campaigns that provide information about basic governance institutions and processes as well as basic principles of democracy and citizens’ rights and responsibilities.
- Expediting action to adopt Public Access to Information legislation and to proactively inform citizens about: their information rights.

Recommendation A.2 - Enhance access to information of direct relevance to citizen’s well-being, especially at sub-national (i.e. commune, district and provincial) levels.
For example, by:
- Introducing a Code of Practice on access to government information.
- Instructing local-level service providers (e.g. schools and health centers) to publicly disseminate information about the budgets and expenditures.
- Monitoring and supporting commune council compliance with existing provisions for participatory planning and budget transparency.

Recommendation A.3 – Strengthen CSO knowledge about public sector/government issues and their capacities to undertake independent research, analysis and IEC for purposes of social accountability.
For example, by:
- Organizing information-sharing workshops to help CSO practitioners enhance their knowledge of relevant laws, policies, public administrative procedures, etc.
- Promoting and supporting partnerships whereby CSOs work in collaboration with government ministries to simplify and disseminate important public information.
- Providing training for CSOs in research, analysis, communication and public education activities.
- Promoting and supporting stronger relations between CSOs and media actors.

II.B. Voice

xx. Citizens' abilities to voice their opinions, needs and concerns in order to make government authorities more aware of their priorities is another key element of social accountability. If citizens are dissatisfied with public services or feel that their rights have been violated but have no means to "voice" their
experiences and concerns, then there is little prospect for positive change in favor of citizens' needs. In the Cambodian context, research once again revealed a mix of opportunities and challenges with regard to citizen voice.

**xxi. Expression of citizen voice** - Citizens of Cambodia demonstrate interest and willingness to use their voices, for example by participating in commune council elections and meetings. Research, however, found that people are much more likely to participate if they are explicitly and formally invited and are reluctant to publicly question or criticize government actions or authorities. Although quite a large proportion of citizens have attended commune council meetings, this participation is mostly passive (i.e. just listening) and unorganized (i.e. attending as a private individual as opposed to representing a group/association). Lack of confidence (that what they say will be listened to or acted on) and fear of reprisals were identified as important barriers to citizen voice. Public officials are not used to being scrutinized by citizens or CSOs and are often unwilling to hear critical or questioning opinions. However, research also found that current processes of decentralization, if carefully handled, offer important potential for promoting change in the attitudes and behavior of both citizens and authorities.

**xxii. Citizen empowerment** - Due to cultural norms and socio-political realities, citizens are disempowered and have little confidence in their (individual or collective) capacity to influence decisions or effect change. Paternalistic attitudes, the logic of patronage and fear of reprisals contribute to feelings of citizen disempowerment and helplessness. Women, youth and poor people face particular challenges in obtaining information, speaking up and influencing change. Explicit and targeted efforts are necessary to empower and support these traditionally marginalized groups. Although, at the current time, only a small sub-set of NGOs are engaged in efforts at grassroots level to empower citizens and strengthen citizen voice, research identified promising examples from which to learn.

**xxiii. High reliance on local level leaders** - Because of low levels of citizen empowerment and the tendency to rely on personal relations and connections, ordinary citizens rely heavily on local leaders to raise issues and voice needs and views on their behalf. Grassroots and local level leaders have enormous potential to empower and mobilize citizens, shape attitudes and behaviors, facilitate relations with public authorities, elevate local concerns to a provincial and even national level and also to provide a living model of what responsive and accountable leadership looks like. Research found that, unfortunately, many leaders (from both government and civil society at all levels) have top-down, hierarchical attitudes and little notion of "leadership as service" or "downwards accountability".

**xxiv. Lack of mechanisms for citizen voice** - Research found that, beyond voting and participation in commune council meetings, there are few opportunities and mechanisms for citizens/CSOs to publicly voice their views and concerns. There was regret that public forums, which can be important occasions to openly express opinions and problems in the presence of state representatives, occur very rarely at local level. Locally-based media (for example, community radio) can be a powerful tool for informing the local population about issues concerning commune/districts developments and providing a platform for individuals and groups to publicly share their opinions and concerns. Although the Cambodia media sector has expanded remarkably over the past decade, it remains almost exclusively based in Phnom Penh and largely focused on national/capital city issues. As a result of the dearth of local-level media in Cambodia, citizens and CSOs in rural areas, and even in district and provincial towns, have almost no means to access local information or make their voices publicly heard. Aside from a few independent radio call-in shows, there are also very few examples in Cambodia of interactive media (whereby ordinary citizens can express views, ask questions and communicate and interact in the public sphere).

**xxv. Three recommendations** are proposed to address these issues and strengthen citizen voice in Cambodia.
**Recommendation B.1 – Support initiatives to empower and build the confidence of citizens.**
For example, by:
- Studying and publicizing examples where civic engagement/citizen participation have resulted in real change and concrete benefits.
- Building the capacity of CSOs (especially those already active at grassroots level) to implement people-centered, rights-based advocacy approaches.
- Ensuring that forums for citizen expression and citizen-state dialogue (such as commune council meetings, school support committee meetings, public forums) include clear provisions and mechanisms for response and follow-up.
- Supporting programs and activities that seek to build the knowledge, confidence and civic competencies of traditionally “marginalized” groups such as women, youth and poor people.

**Recommendation B.2 – Offer training and support to existing and emerging local level leaders.**
For example, by:
- Identifying and supporting existing and emerging leaders and opinion-shapers (especially at village, commune and district levels).
- Introducing a system for democratically electing village chiefs (to replace the current practice of appointing village chiefs according to political party quotas).

**Recommendation B.3 – Expand and enhance mechanisms for citizen voice at local level.**
For example, by:
- Ensuring that forums intended to promote citizen expression and citizen-state dialogue include an explicit invitation for citizens to participate, an explicit invitation to speak, a supportive and encouraging attitude and environment (especially for less confident or less educated participants), and a facilitated process of dialogue.
- Supporting the development of local-level and interactive media, in particular community radio.
- Developing and supporting mechanisms of voice that are adapted to the specific characteristics and needs of women, youth and other marginalized groups.

II.C. Association

xxvi. Social accountability approaches are based on the collective actions of citizens and their ability to *associate* with one another in order to advance their interests and needs. The strength of civil society is largely determined by the breadth, depth and quality of this associational life. The size, scope and level of organization of CBOs and CSOs, their legitimacy, representativity and accountability to their own members as well as their capacity to build networks and alliances are all central to the success of social accountability activities.

xxvii. *Citizen mobilization/association* - Research revealed low levels of citizen mobilization/association as a fundamental weakness in contemporary Cambodia and identified weak trust/social capital as a key influencing factor. Among the relatively small percentage of people (23%) who belong to an organization, a majority (66.2%) belong to a traditional (often, pagoda-related) association. Although traditional associations have not typically engaged directly in issues of public governance and accountability, current processes of decentralization create potential scope for developing the role of such associations as aggregators of citizen voice and facilitators of relations between citizens and commune councils. Research found the scope and impact of “modern” CBOs (such as farmers’ associations and women’s groups) to be quite limited, with only 12.3% of public opinion poll respondents reporting belonging to such a group and most such groups remaining very small in size (due to low social capital and a preference to keep associations personal and informal). Donors have only quite recently begun to channel support to grassroots associations – and this almost exclusively through intermediary NGOs, only a limited number
of which have the requisite grassroots linkages, on-the-ground presence and skills. Some initiatives (such as CEDAC farmers’ associations) have achieved impressive results and offer important potential opportunities for learning, replication and scaling-up.

xxviii. **Civil society’s internal governance challenges** - For civil society to play a meaningful role in helping government to be transparent, responsive and accountable, CSOs must themselves strive to become models of the values and practices they preach. Research found that, unfortunately many CSOs in Cambodia, at all levels, suffer from a lack of internal democracy, participation and “downwards” accountability. As top-down leadership models and paternalistic attitudes prevail in Cambodia, civil society leaders (and members) often fall into patterns of governance that unwittingly create and sustain dependency and fail to encourage and empower members to speak and act on their own behalf, participate in decision-making and seek accountability. Relationships with donor institutions pose their own challenges as they often also mirror the dynamics of top-down “patronage” and place much more emphasis on “upwards” accountability (to donors) rather than “downwards accountability” (to clients/members/target populations). Research, however, found some very promising examples, both at grassroots and national level, of efforts to develop models of responsive, participatory and accountable leadership.

xxix. **Civil society networking** - Although impressive efforts have been made in the last decade to develop CSO information sharing and networking at all levels, research found that the effectiveness and impact of these networks remains limited (especially at sub-national levels). Only a few networks operating at national level (such as CCC, NGO Forum, Star Kampuchea, MediCam and NEP) have managed to develop well-organized systems and structures for regular information exchange and coordination. Provincial level networks are more nascent and, in many cases, struggling with very limited (financial and technical) support. At commune level, links between and among CBOs and CSOs are also very limited and these groups often face even more pronounced capacity and resource constraints. Research, however, found some successful and promising examples of network-building at local level.

xxx. Three recommendations are proposed to address these fundamental issues.

**Recommendation C.1  – Support the emergence of grassroots-level citizen associations.**
For example, by:
- Bringing together grassroots representatives and leaders with relevant practitioners and specialists to reflect on underlying reasons for lack of grassroots association in Cambodia and brainstorm on actions to promote association among Cambodian citizens.
- Studying existing initiatives (such as CEDAC farmers’ associations, ADHOC communities, local labor unions and village networks) to identify lessons about which approaches are most successful/sustainable (such as, the success of “interest-based” rather than “concept-based” approaches, the usefulness/necessity of linking economic and political empowerment, and the need for long-term engagement and ongoing accompaniment).
- Channeling more support and resources to grassroots-oriented CBOs and CSOs.

**Recommendation C.2  – Support CSOs to become models of transparent, responsive and accountable governance.**
For example, by:
- Supporting ongoing efforts by Cambodian CSOs (such as those led by CCC) to establish a common code of ethics and a system of self-regulation.
- Supporting organizational development and capacity-building initiatives aimed at improving the internal governance and management practices of CSOs.
- Donors “practicing what they preach” and “setting an example” by enhancing their own transparency and “downwards accountability”.

Recommendation C.3 – Support and facilitate more effective information-sharing, networking and coalition-building among CSOs.
For example, by:

- Supporting opportunities for CSO leaders and staff (especially those at sub-national levels) to learn about best practices in this area and to experiment with new approaches and techniques in information-sharing, networking and coalition-building.
- Funding and supporting emerging social accountability networks; province-level CSO networks; linkages among grassroots/local level associations and between grassroots-level groups and CSOs working at higher (district, province, national) levels.

II.D. Constructive dialogue & participation

xxxi. The ultimate goal of social accountability is not only to enhance citizen information and voice but to elicit a response from public officials and actions that enhance government effectiveness and accountability. In order to influence government decisions and actions, CSOs often rely on unilateral strategies of criticism, persuasion and pressure - such as, advocacy, lobbying, public demonstration, protests or denouncements. The chances of effecting real change are much greater, however, when citizens and CSOs can interact directly with government counterparts and engage in constructive dialogue. Opportunities and mechanisms for citizen-state dialogue and citizen participation in processes of public deliberation and decision-making are slowly growing in Cambodia, but still limited in scope and effectiveness.

xxxii. Creating an enabling environment and institutionalizing citizen/CSO rights - Research revealed limited awareness of notions of citizen rights and responsibilities (among both citizens and government actors) and a lack of consensus regarding legitimate and “appropriate” roles for civil society. Due to the lack of an enabling environment, civil society actors engaged in (mostly unilateral and confrontational forms of) advocacy assess their impact as being “limited” and regret that they have often met with government resistance (v. the desired responsiveness).

xxxiii. From “advocacy” to constructive dialogue - Research found a large gap between apolitical and unquestioning (service delivery-oriented) organizations at one end of the spectrum and “attacking” (advocacy-oriented) CSOs at the other end. The study found that social accountability approaches offer strong potential to enhance advocacy activities and to fill in the “middle ground” (between advocacy and service delivery) with activities that seek to interact with (and even question, criticize and challenge) state actors but in a manner that is constructive, realistic, evidence-based and solution-oriented. In the Cambodian context, moving beyond unilateral and confrontational advocacy approaches to also develop possibilities for constructive dialogue and participation is a key challenge. Such a development challenges both CSOs and government officials to adopt a constructive attitude and to be willing to interact with one another despite important conflicts and differences of opinion and despite feelings of suspicion and distrust. It challenges CSOs to always back up claims with evidence and to propose solutions rather than just point out problems.

xxxiv. Enhancing the effectiveness of existing accountability mechanisms through civic engagement - Current processes of decentralization and deconcentration create important but, as yet, largely undeveloped opportunities for citizens and CSOs to engage with government authorities and public service providers at the commune, district and provincial levels. Existing mechanisms intended to facilitate citizen participation and accountability (such as citizen involvement in commune council meetings, school support committees and “accountability boxes”) have had little impact and need to be rendered more genuinely participatory, publicly visible and user-friendly in order to achieve effectiveness.
Expanding opportunities and mechanisms for dialogue and participation - Research found limited evidence of alternative opportunities or mechanisms allowing citizens to interact and engage meaningfully with government authorities. At commune level, there have been some encouraging experiences with public forums but such initiatives are rare. At national level, opportunities for dialogue between CSOs and government actors have expanded in recent years (for example, in the form of joint forums or working groups). Such forums, however, are still limited in number and non-state participants regret the lack of clearly defined terms of engagement as well as the perceived lack of follow-up and impact.

Three recommendations are proposed to address current challenges and take advantage of identified opportunities.

Recommendation D.1 – Create/support an enabling policy environment for constructive dialogue and citizen/CSO participation.
For example, by:
- Bringing together key actors from both government and civil society to build consensus on fundamental principles of social accountability and the respective rights and responsibilities of citizens, CSOs and state actors.
- Creating a task force (made up of identified “champions” of social accountability from government and civil society) to propose and implement policy reforms and institutional rules aimed at promoting citizen information, voice, association and constructive dialogue and participation in governance processes.
- Exploring and developing mechanisms whereby major issues/disagreements/complaints on the part of civil society actors can be arbitrated.

Recommendation D.2 - Promote and support the use of facilitation and social accountability tools to make existing mechanisms for dialogue and participation (such as commune council meetings and school support committees) more effective.
For example, by:
- Encouraging and supporting CBOs/CSOs to develop their “bridging” role as facilitators/intermediaries between citizens and authorities.
- Providing training and capacity-building in social accountability approaches and tools for Cambodian practitioners.
- Using third party facilitators for commune council meeting; supporting pre-meeting citizen organization and, making use of social accountability tools and participatory techniques. Developing the role of commune councils in representing people’s concerns to central government and holding central government accountable on behalf of citizens.
- Providing training in facilitation and social accountability techniques to leading members of school support committees (SSCs) and; supporting efforts by SSCs to utilize social accountability methods (such as “school scorecards” and expenditure tracking techniques).

Recommendation D.3 – Introduce new opportunities and mechanisms for direct and regular dialogue and “negotiation” between citizens and the state (at all levels).
For example, by:
- Encouraging (or instructing) commune councils to organize regular facilitated public dialogue on issues of priority public concern (such as health, education, security, domestic violence, land, forests and fisheries).
- Introducing new institutionalized mechanisms of citizen feedback and oversight in sectors of key public interest (such as the management of public revenues from extractive industries).
- Creating more opportunities for government and civil society actors to meet face-to-face in both formal and informal settings and build mutual trust.
III. STRENGTHENING SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN CAMBODIA

III.A. Conclusions

xxxvii. Research found 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. This study proposes a range of recommendations, targeting government, civil society and development partner stakeholders. These are 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, especially at the local level. The report also emphasizes the timeliness of fostering a culture of “downwards accountability” at all levels and attitudinal and behavioral changes on the part of all key stakeholders. 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 priorities.

III.B. Priority Actions

xxxviii. Suggested priority actions for the Government of Cambodia are to:

In the short term:

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.

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:

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.

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 ask all relevant ministries to establish a standing advisory group (comprised of relevant representatives/advisors from civil society, academia, private sector, etc.). These groups should 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.
xxxix. Suggested priority actions for CSOs are to:

In the short term:

**CSO priority action 1** - Expand grassroots level mobilization/empowerment initiatives.  
(Recommendations B.1 and C.1)

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. 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.

**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:

**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.

**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).

xl. Suggested priority actions for development partners (DPs) are to:

In the short term:

**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 crucial roles as organizers, educators, advocates and intermediaries. Hence investing in the capacities and skills of local leaders to be responsive and downwardly accountable is a priority. DPs should both enhance support to CSOs currently engaged in grassroots leadership training and support capacity-building in this area.

**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 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:

**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.

**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.