

## Partnerships III: Empowering Local Actors

### Lessons from the Field

Partnerships between national and sub-national state actors and non-state actors were a key part of the Demand for Good Governance (DFGG) project. They aimed to ensure the transfer of social accountability skills and practices, to leverage existing resources to support accountability and governance activity, and to explore the ways that state and non-state actors could work together. This note draws on the experiences of NGOs that implemented partnerships in the DFGG project, and includes lessons that can be applied in the design of future initiatives.

#### Setting the Stage for Partnerships<sup>1</sup>

One of the important contributions of the DFGG project was to establish a network of practitioners among state and non-state actors. Prior to implementing social accountability tools, organizations introduced language on social accountability and associated principles and mechanisms at shared workshops. Such events established a platform on which to develop partnerships, introducing particular governance principles, such as accountability, which traditionally has not been employed in the local discourse. In some instances, activities fostered joint implementation, drawing on government resource people in order to implement or facilitate workshops helping to build coalitions by creating a sense of roles and responsibilities and fostering mutual respect.

#### Promoting Mechanisms for Collaboration

**Fostering partnership requires a dual strategy.** This generally includes establishing a defined mechanism for partnership as well as informality in day-to-day affairs. One local Cambodian NGO, Ponleur Kumar, for instance, conducted joint trainings on good governance concepts prior to implementing a citizen report card on local water resource management. Ponleur Kumar agreed with the Provincial Governors' offices in Banteay Meanchey, Pursat and Battambang to share resources in the provincial office (e.g. sharing facilities). This enabled trust to build between actors as it outlined a parameter for the partnership where roles and responsibilities were explicitly outlined.

**A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) can support greater informality in day-to-day work.** The Democracy Resource Center for National Development (DND), which signed a MOU with the One Window Service Office (OWSO) noted that a formal framework allowed them to collaborate with more informality. DND reported that initially they had to seek permission from the municipal

authority or OWSO before conducting an activity, however over the course of the project, they no longer had to request formal permission. In other cases, a letter of support from a partner agency helped improve relationships with a wider set of state actors. Mechanisms of partnership, such as ones employed by DND, can lead from collaborations to more integrated partnerships, as they provide a mechanism to jointly manage resources.



*Shared training events on good governance and social accountability*

**Joint committees are another mechanism for collaboration.** Phnom Srey Organization for Development (PSOD), for instance, established a joint committee to review the performance of communes. The committee administered grants to communes to improve service delivery. To further strengthen such arrangements, it is important to assess the capacities of each of the members, make sure they are aligned with their responsibilities, and provide ongoing support as needed.

#### Developing Complementary Roles

**Local level partnerships are effective.** State and non-state actors alike noted that partnerships that were the most meaningful were those that supported the development of sub-national governance. The DFGG partnership assessment noted that many of the activities implemented under DFGG enhanced the existing mandates of subnational government, including: (i) better representing the needs of local citizens; (ii) coordinating among local service providers; (iii) enhancing accountability and transparency; and (iv) improving the quality of service delivery. As described above, many of the partnerships were at the level of coalition-building or tied to particular activities. However, as they were directly linked to the mandate of sub-national authorities, there is the potential to further the partnership.

<sup>1</sup> See LN 15 for a lengthy discussion on the definitions of partnership.



**Hybrid approaches.** The evidence from DFGG further suggests that project models that support service-delivery and accountability functions can create strong partnerships. DND monitoring of the OWSO, created a body of evidence regarding unacceptable practices that enabled the OWSO to take action. In another initiative in Battambang, school principals followed up on the NGO monitoring of primary schools by the local NGO, Amara, by ensuring that teachers were punctual, and that teacher communication with parents was improved. These projects that included these two partnership functions seemed to reinforce agendas of sub-national government and non-state actors alike, reinforcing the value of constructive engagement. Based on the DFGG experience, combined service delivery and accountability approaches is highly effective for deepening the nature of partnerships as they support the state's sub-national governance and service delivery agendas, fulfill CSO mandates, and meet the needs of citizens.



Partnership activities for citizen engagement and government accountability.

**Multi-sector activities.** Partnerships focused on more than one sector also seem to promote a more meaningful form of partnership as they focus on the mechanisms of collaboration as opposed to the ends of a particular project or intervention. Those partnerships fostered by multi-sectoral projects are often more sustainable over a period of time. In order to transform the coalitions developed by DFGG into deeper collaborations and integrated partnerships, it is necessary to strengthen mechanisms, such as the implementation of a multi-sectoral community scorecard and to systematize it at the subnational level. Institutionalization of such mechanisms ensures that the implementation of such approaches is not only tied to personal connections between non-state actors and their contacts in local government, but also ties these interventions more closely to the local development cycle of communes and services. Accordingly, monitoring tools such as the community scorecard incorporated in the Implementation Plan for the Social Accountability Framework (ISAF) create space for state and non-state

actors to interact and a potentially powerful mechanism to promote integrated partnerships.

### Moving forward - empowering Local Actors

In order to transform nascent coalitions into meaningful collaborations and integrated partnerships, it is necessary to empower both state and non-state actors so they are able to develop partnerships without requiring formal platforms.

Although it is difficult to develop trust through short project activities, some of the strategies used in the DFGG grants that had an impact in the context of Cambodia included:

- developing a common language and practices around social accountability in order to build respect through mutual roles and responsibilities;
- leveraging both formal and informal partnership mechanisms;
- supporting both service-delivery and accountability partnership functions simultaneously;
- promoting multi-sectoral platforms;
- strengthening existing local planning mechanisms; and
- empowering local actors to pursue more meaningful collaborations and integrated partnerships.

To further leverage partnership strategies, future implementation should target key subnational actors who can play substantive roles in leading and facilitating partnerships. DFGG has created a cadre of local NGO staff and citizen volunteers that have facilitated the implementation of monitoring tools, mobilized interface meetings, and liaised between subnational authorities, citizens, and non-state actors. Future initiatives should build on these experiences and include specific roles for local state actors, such as commune chiefs and service providers in activities such as monitoring and planning mechanisms. District level state actors should also be incorporated to effectively support ongoing partnership strategies. Further developing the capacity of these actors, particularly through the roll out of the Social Accountability Framework should enhance the sustainability of partnerships beyond individual projects.

*The DFGG Learning Note Series provides quick summaries of lessons learned in the DFGG project. Learning Note 17 is based on the experiences of the Non-State Actor Component and draws on the consolidated independent evaluation by PRIA and SILAKA. Written by Mehr Latif and Gavin Murphy. Series editor, Janelle Plummer.*