

# DFGG Policy Note

January 2014

## The Strategic Plan for Social Accountability in Sub-National Democratic Development: A policy framework for social accountability at the local level in Cambodia

**A Social Accountability Strategic Plan for Subnational Democratic Development was endorsed by the Royal Government of Cambodia National Committee for Sub-national Democratic Development in July 2013. This policy framework was developed through a consultative process over a period of 18 months, involving government, over 80 NGOs and NGO networks and development partners. The core purpose is to empower citizens to hold government to account for local service delivery and resource allocation. Through this approach, transparency and accountability actions of government and civil society are collectively focused on transforming specific aspects of local governance. The framework envisions three areas of significant change – access to information, open local budgets and citizen monitoring – of sub-national administrations and local service providers. This note describes the primary elements of this Social Accountability Strategic Plan in the context of the decentralization reform in Cambodia.**

### Introduction

The legislative framework for sub-national government in Cambodia<sup>1</sup>, and the *National Program for Sub-National Democratic Development* (SNDD) (also known as the program for decentralization reform) require the establishment and restructuring of sub-national administration structures and systems to be based on the principles of local democratic governance. Accountability is established as an important principle in this framework. To date, efforts to strengthen accountability under the framework have focused primarily on political and administrative accountability. While citizen engagement and social accountability is also defined in law and considered an important element of the accountability system – it enhances engagement between elected councils, service providers and citizens – this aspect of the National Program needed further definition.

In order to address this gap in the program of reform activities, the National Committee for Sub-National Democratic Development (NCDD) worked with civil society organizations and other development partners, to develop and finalize a framework for targeted action – the Strategic Plan for Social Accountability in Sub-National Democratic Development.

The endorsed policy sets out key objectives, principles and strategies, as well as primary outputs. Most importantly,

it emphasizes that government institutions and local service providers, as well as civil society organizations and citizens, have critical roles to play to operationalize the strategic plan across 150 rural districts and over 1500 rural communes in Cambodia. This framework-for-action was jointly endorsed by government and elected representatives of civil society and came into force in July 2013. Efforts are now underway to finalize an implementation plan and operational guidelines. The content is described below.

**Objectives.** Social Accountability in the sub-national democratic development reform process aims to empower citizens and local communities, particularly women, youth and disadvantaged groups, to enhance the allocation and use of budgets and improve the delivery of local basic services, through improved access to and use of information, open budgets and citizen-led monitoring.



**Expected results.** Implementation of the *Strategic Plan for Social Accountability* aims to achieve:

- More responsive sub-national administrations as a result of interaction with citizens and/or citizen representatives.
- Improved capacity of citizens (women and men) and their representative organizations to engage with SNAs in enhancing democratic accountability.
- More effective, equitable, and accountable service delivery and allocation of resources.
- More empowered local communities and citizens, especially women and youth, acting with an understanding of their rights and responsibilities and able to engage with government service providers.
- Enhanced social capital and trust between citizens and local administrations and service delivery agencies and between community members which will lead to greater social cohesion.

<sup>1</sup> Specifically, the Law on Administrative Management of Commune/Sangkat, the Law on Administrative Management of Capital, Provincial, City, District and Khan.



## Social Accountability Strategic Plan for SNDD

### Principles guiding action

The 'social accountability framework', as it is known, is based on seven key principles:

- **Citizen-led.** Citizens will be able to determine the focus of activity and make it relevant to their needs. This might include communes, health and education services, water and sanitation, natural resources, agriculture etc.
- **Local issues – local action.** Activities will be focused at the local level so citizens can engage in dialogue and solutions about issues of local concern.
- **Constructive engagement.** To achieve intended results, civil society will take a constructive approach based on collaboration rather than confrontation.
- **Commitment.** Sub-national administrations, line departments and service providers will commit to participate meaningfully in social accountability activities with citizens and their representatives.
- **Partnerships.** Efforts will explicitly establish and strengthen partnerships between sub-national administrations and civil society organizations, state-state, and among civil society organizations.
- **Inclusiveness.** Activities will seek to include all citizens, particularly women, youth, poor households and ethnic minorities – to ensure their participation, to address their needs, and to empower these groups to engage in development processes.
- **Addressing gaps.** Activities will be focused on tackling the gaps in citizen engagement to change the scope and substance of the interface between citizens and local government agencies.

### Elements of social accountability

Because social accountability takes place at the interface between citizens and sub-national administrations, it has three dimensions:

- **The demand side - consisting of actions by citizens and civil society.** A broad spectrum of citizens and CSOs will utilize social accountability tools and instruments to constructively engage with sub-national administrations and service delivery agencies to improve their performance.
- **The supply side - consisting of actions by government.** National government will have a responsibility to facilitate social accountability by generating information and establishing the standards, regulations and processes that facilitate local level action. Sub-national administrations and service delivery agencies are responsible for engaging with citizens and their representatives.
- **Actions at the interface.** Mechanisms are needed to link citizens to sub-national administrations and service providers and jointly formulate and execute actions based on citizen feedback.

### Strategies for implementation

The social accountability strategic plan adopts five strategies to achieve the objectives. Three strategies define the scope and focus of action, and two define the process.

1. **INFORMATION:** Improve transparency, access to and use of information on standards, budgets, and performance.
2. **CITIZEN MONITORING:** Introduce facilitated citizen-led monitoring and reporting of local performance and service delivery.
3. **OPEN BUDGETS:** Open local budgets, improve budget literacy of citizens and strengthen understanding and knowledge of budgets.
4. **FACILITATED ENGAGEMENT:** Engage state and non-state actors and build skills to facilitate the engagement and social accountability process.
5. **LEARNING and MONITORING:** Learn lessons from local interventions and translate these into government policy and improved civil society practice.

...the focus

...the process

### Action Plan and Financial Resources

Moving forward, stakeholders will develop an implementation plan and operational guidelines to operationalize these strategies. The NCDD Secretariat is committed to integrating activities into annual work plans and budgets for government activity and to encourage development partners to support the demand side activities implemented by civil society organizations.

**The Social Accountability Strategic Plan for SNDD represents a third phase of social accountability activity in Cambodia – shifting from capacity building to trying things out, to deepening and embedding activity regular local governance process. The partnership formed between the NCDD and civil society to make this happen is a milestone in Cambodia's sub-national development, but implementation will be the final word on its success.**

