



Project#14: Enhancing the Institutional and Operational Capacity of the Provincial Associations of Local Councils, 2019-21

Objective:

Strengthen the institutional and operational capacity of the Provincial Associations of Local Councils (PALCs) and their members in target areas to contribute to promoting accountability, transparency and responsiveness to the needs of their constituents, particularly those of vulnerable communities.

Funding:

445,031 EUR of a total 977,938 EUR was funded by the EU, DCA and BftW provided matching funds.

Implementing Partners:

Aide et Action Cambodia, the Association of Local Councillors in the Pursat Province.

Target Areas:

Six target Provinces - Kampong Speu, Kandal, Kep, Kampong Thom, Pursat and Banteay Meanchey.





Activities and Results:

- 14.1 The capacities of provincial association of local council (PALCs) have been enhanced, and their members have become able to identify and address the issues and needs of the communities and vulnerable groups. We have achieved 97% of the cumulative annual target. There were 19 events conducted, including discussing the Capacity Building Framework, training courses on good governance and civil engagement, on PALCs' foundation, online meeting methodology, with a total number of 765 participants (193 female). The Provincial Associations of Local Councillors have developed specific operation plans for implementation and dissemination to their members. Six five-year strategic plans, six advocacy strategies and six communication strategies were developed and endorsed by all PALC management committees.
- 14.2 All six PALCs have approved the institutional capacity development plan and implemented it. After six physical and online coordination meetings with the PALC leaders, the capacity building frameworks were reviewed and developed, with the participation of a total number of 204 PALC leaders (55 female).
- 14.3 This project made progress, providing the six Provincial Association of Local Councils (PALCs) with capacity and technical documentation to carry out its mandate and permissive function. About 500 PALC leaders and members strive to build their capacity through multiple direct and online training. The most recent survey in two provinces (Pursat and Banteay Meanchey, Jan 2021) found that 96% of them confirmed their perception that they had an increased capacity to carry out their functions and responsibilities. A total of 101 members of PALC Women Committees, and Monitoring and Evaluation Committees fully participated in project training activities, and conducted surveys and field work to assess issues and needs of the vulnerable groups. More than 90% of them are now able to access the project online communication tool, as well as the online learning platform and Telegram group. Each provincial association produced its PALC organizational and operation plan through training and participatory approach exercises. The implementation of the new five-year strategic plans, advocacy and communication strategies demonstrated the improvement of their institutional capacity; and the close relationship with the National League of Local Councils (NLC) showed the strength of the association's performance, especially in the bottom-up approach to advocacy work, from the provincial to the national level.



14.4 45 e-learning video screens equipped with content have been installed in all target district offices and the six provincial association offices, as well as in the API and AEA offices, and key staff were oriented on how to use them. A total of 131 (43Female) technical staff were oriented and currently use online content daily. Project trainers produced online materials related to the association mandates and needs, and this content was uploaded to the platform. The five topics covered are: PALCs' Foundation Training, Monitoring and Evaluation and Project Management, Data Collection, Leadership, Good Governance and Civic Engagement, and Report Writing. There were 285 documents, 136 videos, and 119 audio files uploaded, many of which are relevant for members of commune councils and local authorities in their development work, while others are public information materials related to natural resources, education, and local governance. As a result, more than 17,271 visitors accessed the uploaded materials of the e-learning hub system. Two online trainings were provided to six the PALCs in the target provinces, which is part of the refresher effort. The training included good governance and civic engagement, which was attended by more than 92 participants (27 females) who are mostly members and management of the PALCs. Moreover, the other training, project management, was also provided and was attended by more than 90 PALC members (27 females). A total of 86 (26 female) PALC leaders participated in the strategic plan development training. And 71 (24 female) of them joined an online consultative workshop to improve the five-year strategic plans, communication and advocacy strategies. Six PALC Telegrams groups were created with 445 members in total, ensuring dynamic communication. Besides, six further M&E Telegram groups were also created, effectively facilitating communication among 63 participants.

14.5 At least 44 (12 female) PALC leaders in six provinces regularly attended online meetings with project staff to improve their performance on online communication. Three online meetings of PALC leaders in six provinces were organised in order to adapt the online meetings practices, as well as to reflect on the effective capacity building methodologies and find effective solutions to improve these methodologies, with a total number of 44 PALC leader participants (12 female) during Covid 19 period.

14.6 A total of 52 monthly physical meetings among the PALC leaders were held in all six provinces, as well as in 37 districts, where sub-branches of the provincial associations review their progress, solved internal issues, and set up plans for the next period. At least 1,139 PALC members attended project activities directly during the reporting period, and are well aware of what PALCs are, of their structure, roles and responsibilities, especially focusing on responding to people's issues through the launching events of the 21 districts based provincial association branches.



14.7 Nine policy issues were identified and raised by PALCs. They are 1) Pension funds for councillors who were re-elected for three consecutive terms, but who are not civil servants; 2) National Social Security Fund (NSSF) access for city / district councillors; 3) Honour awards / Medals / Certificates of Merit for the outstanding councillors of the year; 4) Uniforms for city and district council members; 5) Increasing women's participation in politics and the armed forces; and 6) A proper office space for the PALCs in Banteay Meanchey, Kandal, Kampong Speu, and Kampong Thom; 7) Incentives/allowances/per-diem for official travel missions such as gasoline to support the travelling of city and district councillors; 8) A budget to support a permanent secretary for the association in the Kep province; and 9) Joining the advocacy efforts of API and other CSOs for the national government and parliament to pass the Access to Information Law and promote public access to information and public participation, thus ensuring more transparency and accountability of the national and local government. All of these issues and advocacy actions were included in the advocacy plans of the six PALCs and endorsed by all six PALC's leaders and members. These policy issues were also discussed with the NLC during the coordination meeting between the project team and NLC, which was held on 27 November 2020 with the participation of 20 provincial association leaders (7 female) to discuss on the training curriculums and issues of the six PALCs.

14.8 PALCs were encouraged and supported in their efforts to develop innovative small-scale initiatives in order to better address priority issues and needs of both councils and vulnerable groups in target areas. The six PALCs have tabled 37 small-scale initiatives meant to directly support vulnerable citizens. Some of these projects were already implemented, such as an emergency food response to support vulnerable citizens during the first wave of the Covid-19 outbreak. Around 400 vulnerable families in Pursat and Kampong Thom benefited from this initiative. Responding to the problems and needs of the people is now a priority of the PALC members. A total of 585 issues and concerns of vulnerable groups and local residents were addressed during 96 district public forums with 11,761 participants (3683 females) from the respective communities.

Challenges:

14.9 The majority of PALC members do not own or have access to modern smartphones, still using the old models. Consequently, the connection to the Internet and the use online applications are quite challenging.

14.10 The digital divide and the lack of Internet and mobile phone service coverage remain the primary challenges for those in rural Cambodia. In this sense, their access to online learning materials and reporting platforms are significant more difficult than in urban areas.



The Way Forward:

- 14.11 Speed up the implementation of small-scale projects that benefit the vulnerable groups by early 2021.
- 14.12 Continue to support online learning and online meetings for broader dissemination and communication.
- 14.13 Enhance problem-solving mechanisms through public meetings and public forums.

