

Report Summary on Assessment of NGO¹ Participation and Representation in Technical Working Groups (TWGs)

The findings in this executive summary were extracted from a report on the assessment of the NGO Participation and Representation in Technical Working Groups (TWGs). The study was conducted by the Economic Institute of Cambodia in cooperation with the NGO Forum on Cambodia. The study reviews past performance of NGO representatives to upgrade and strengthen the role of sector NGO representation in this mechanism. Research findings suggest the Royal Government of Cambodia, with support from the Development Partners in the TWGs; jointly address the challenges faced by NGOs in engaging with TWG proceedings. Meanwhile, sector NGOs should reposition their participation as a core activity.

Technical Working Groups (TWGs), Government - Development Partners Coordination Committees (GDCCs), and the Cambodia Development Cooperation Forums (CDCFs) are the formal coordination mechanisms by which key development issues, policy reforms, and aid coordination for Cambodia are discussed. Aid is pledged and mobilized to meet government development priorities within these fora. Firstly, TWGs are a technical coordination mechanism to formulate action plans for each sector or key thematic areas by responsible Government ministries/agencies with support or in coordination with relevant Development Partners (DPs) or donors, and to mobilize external resources to implement the action plans. More importantly, these TWGs also develop and monitor the Joint Monitoring Indicators (JMIs)². Secondly, GDCCs are high profile meetings to coordinate the work of TWGs and through which to monitor agreed upon JMIs adopted together by the RGC and DPs at CDCFs. Finally, CDCFs provide the highest meeting level where government leaders and the donor community meet to discuss development issues and key reforms within Cambodia. CDCF generally reviews development progress against JMIs within an 18 month period between each meeting, endorsing new priorities, and receives aid pledge from donors. Also, this forum provides the ability to mobilize aid to meet policy priorities and key reforms.

Some NGOs have had limited involvement with the policy fora which the TWGs, GDCCs, and CDCFs provide. It should be noted that NGOs may sometimes lack the enabling environment for them to fully contribute to or engage in TWGs, GDCCs, and CDCFs. Hopefully, through continued commitment to these mechanisms these underlying engagement issues may be resolved. However at present, concerns exist about the capacity to share information on the progress made at these meetings with the wider NGO sector community. It is important to highlight here that the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) and Development Partners acknowledge NGOs comprehensive knowledge on local needs. Engagement at this level extends to the important role they perform when monitoring the implementation of development policy.

With these concerns in mind, the NGO Forum in partnership with other sector NGOs held a meeting on 2 September, 2009 to share challenges and concerns faced in engaging in the TWGs as well as to discuss on strategies or how to address those challenges together. As a result of the meeting, a consensus was reached with the decision to conduct an independent systematic assessment of NGOs' participation and representation in TWGs as a starting point for future initiatives to improve engagement, participation, and representation of NGOs in these fora. Economic Institute of Cambodia (EIC) was commissioned to conduct this study from October 2009 to January 2010. The assessment method focuses on three main capabilities of each NGO participating in the TWGs. The capabilities are: (i) the individual capacity, (ii) representational capacity, and (iii) capacity to engage at the national level policy and aid coordination levels, through the TWGs, GDCCs and CDCFs.

Field interviews conducted by the EIC showed that NGO participation in this mechanism faced a number of challenges. Some NGOs find their roles and duties unclear in TWGs (such as TWG on Gender and Agriculture) due to a lack of detail in the role and expectation while some NGOs (in the TWG on Partnership and Harmonization, Fishery and Agriculture) find the meeting environment too formal to freely express their opinions. One NGO raised that invitation letters to TWG meeting and relevant documents were usually received late, making preparation for these meetings very difficult. However, some NGOs and research institute (i.e. in TWG on Gender, Agriculture, and Planning and Poverty Reduction) considered their participation in this aid

¹ As research institute was included in the TWG and interview process, therefore, the result also included them.

² For details, please visit Guideline on Role and Functioning of TWG in CDC website at www.cdc-crdb.gov.kh

coordination mechanism to be an additional workload. By which it is assumed that it can only impact their representation and participation in making valued contributions to the progress of TWGs.

Many NGOs possess strong technical capability and reputation; having built this up from years of experiences. In addition, these NGOs in TWGs have a better relationship with Development Partners (DPs) than may be the case with Government counterparts. NGOs in the TWG on Gender and Agriculture face a difficult task in reaching government representatives for additional information because of formal bureaucratic and lengthy procedure.

Research findings suggests that NGOs and the research institute in the TWG on HIV/AIDs, Fisheries, Agriculture, and Planning and Poverty Reduction should engage more in TWGs, GDCCs or CDCF. The benefits here relate to the opportunity to engage either directly or indirectly in the drafting of the NGO position papers/statements in their relevant work areas. Importantly, almost all NGOs participating in this assessment viewed the NGO Forum on Cambodia format for papers/statements to be useful tools for drafting their contributions.

In terms of the TWG meetings, many NGOs (i.e. in the TWG on HIV/AIDs, Fisheries, Agriculture, and Gender) find it difficult to consult widely in getting inputs from all members and other NGOs working in the same field. This impacted their ability to arrange formal meetings with the entire network of NGOs (as some of them are based in provincial areas). The inputs usually come from a number of NGOs working closely with other NGO representatives in the TWGs (roughly about 5% of the network, according to the interview). It was also noted that meeting documents such as minutes and policy papers are shared more widely among network NGOs through e-mail.

Some recommendations³ are provided below to address the issues discussed above. Firstly, NGOs and research institute in TWGs (such as Planning and Poverty Reduction, Gender and Agriculture) could position their participation as a core activity. Secondly, NGOs should be informed of their expected roles and duties in TWGs so that they have a clear understanding of what is expected from them. The World Bank (Lead Development Facilitator) in cooperation with the Government counterparts are considered an ideal partnership to lead this in this role. To assist this, specific Terms of Reference for NGO participation and representation should be drafted and delivered. Thirdly, the Lead Development Facilitator should assist TWG chairs of each line ministry/agency in sending out letters and relevant documents to participant NGOs (e.g. such as the TWG on Agriculture and Water and Forestry and Environment) well in advance with sufficient time to prepare a considered response. Fourthly, TWG chairs and LDFs should enable the environment for NGOs to participate. Preferably, this could occur through informal discussions and dialogue which supports the free expression of ideas and shared grassroots knowledge to inform discussions on policy implementation at the grassroots level. LDFs should lead in the advocacy of more NGO representation in TWGs to strengthen the existing TWGs who currently have only one or two NGOs as either members or observers. These TWGs are Health, Fisheries, Land, Public Financial Management, Forestry and Environment. And finally, development partners, during interviews, suggest that line ministries and LDF should allow for NGOs to participate in TWGs that currently do not yet have NGO membership to take advantage of NGO knowledge, and experiences, in the development in these sectors. As such, NGOs act as a key development actor by bringing the concerns from the grassroots level to be discussed at these TWG meetings. These relevant TWGs include: Public Administration Reform, Decentralization & Deconcentration, Infrastructure and Regional Integration.

³ By the time this leaflet is printed, some of these recommendations were addressed already by the Royal Government and Development Partners especially the TWG-Partnership and Harmonization who initiated the revision of the Guidelines on Roles and Functioning of the TWG and had it endorsed at the 17th GDCC meeting on 18 October 2010. NGOs were invited to provide comments and some key comments were incorporated into the revised guideline. This guideline recognizes the full membership of NGOs in the TWG and allows NGO representative to participate in any capacity building activities available for TWGs.



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The NGO Forum on Cambodia

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Published by: The NGO Forum on Cambodia,
Aid Effectiveness Project of Development Issues Programme
Address: #9-11, Street 476, Sangkat Toul Tompoung 1,
P.O. Box 2295, Phnom Penh 3, Cambodia.
Tel: (855) 23 214 429
Fax: (855) 23 994 063
Email: ngoforum@ngoforum.org.kh
Website: www.ngoforum.org.kh