



Summary Result of Civil Society Dialogues Apropos to the Global Week of Action & Global People’s Assembly in Cambodia

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Phnom Penh, Cambodia

The United Nations’ General Assembly (UNGA) provides a unique forum for multilateral discussion of the full spectrum of international issues within its competence. Every year, during the second half of September, the UNGA meets to review progress, challenges to the world and set future directions for more peaceful and sustainable development in the world. Civil society organizations (CSOs) also plays a significant role in bringing current issues of critical importance to the international community from all across the globe. CSOs mobilized masses and organized weeks of actions to highlight the challenges and suggest solutions for the attentions of leaders from all around the world who gather at the high-level thematic debate and forum of UNGA. Like previous years, Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP), Action for Sustainable Development (A4SD) and other stakeholders joined hands in solidarity to organize national, regional and global assemblies for public sensitization, gathering & mobilization to address their national concerns on politic, economic, and social and legal burden for people-oriented reforms and agendas.

As a national coalition of GCAP and A4SD, the Cooperation Committee for Cambodia (CCC) also joined the global movement to enhance voices and solidarity to commence the assembly. We coordinated civil society, especially membership-based organizations and NGOs network, which consist of the Coalition for Partnership in Democratic Development (CPDD), Cambodia Center for Independent Media (CCIM), Star Kampuchea, Advocacy and Policy Institute (API), and World Vision International – Cambodia, representing more than 300 Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) at both national and sub-national level to address national critical issues in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

The national theme titled “Access to information and partnership dialogue for inclusive societies” become our key tool for advocacy in Cambodia this year. Due to the community outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, CSOs coordinated Online Dialogues which were broadcasted via radio station and Facebook live simultaneously. Through Sarika, an educational & popular radio station, our discussion has capacity on air to 15 provinces, targeting youth and other marginalized groups, in Cambodia. In addition, our social media channel, especially Facebook pages, has approximately 1.5 M likes and followers in combination.

Relevant to access to information and partnership dialogue for inclusive societies, civil society discussed on three importance aspect: 1). Progress on the rights to information and partnership; 2). Challenges to implement the right to access to information (A2I) and partnership; and 3). Suggestion and recommendation on prioritized direction. The key results are the following:

1. Progress on the Rights to Information and Partnership

1.1. The government expressed commitment to promote multi-stakeholder dialogue at all level. The RGC facilitates cooperation with development partners and CSOs at all levels which is positive thing to do for encouraging public engagement;

1.2. Through the Development Cooperation and Partnership Strategy (DCPS), government lays down key mechanism to inspire partnership at both national and sub-national level, notably three new partnership arrangements including the sectoral multi-stakeholder dialogue, the Government and NGOs Consultative Meeting and Sub-National Partnership Dialogue;

1.3. The RGC expresses commitment and has demonstrated significant progress on de-concentration and decentralization reform. Major institutional requirements, such as authority, resource, and capacity building, have been delegated to sub-national level; and

1.4. An increase of annual budget for commune/Sangkat, functional transfer for health, education sector, and increase public service outreach to citizens and its communication mechanisms are in place to promote civic engagement, enhance out-of-court dispute settlements, and a gradual increase of women taking leadership role in the public affairs at all levels.

2. Challenges to Implement the A2I and Partnership

2.1. CSO role has been narrowed down and down and mainly neglected and the fundamental human rights and freedom are being seriously violated by the local authorities. We observe the lack of mechanism to collect data and check for statistical consistency to provide feedback to relevant government ministries/institutions;

2.2. CSOs working on social issues/services, livelihoods etc., had no problems in undertaking activities or organizing events in communities. Those working on right and advocacy issues or identified (by authorities) as being critical, often could not get the “permissions”, or they would not be given the go ahead, so couldn’t or wouldn’t go ahead with activities in communities for fear of confrontations or reprisals;

2.3. The Law on Access to Information has not been adopted, and the Law is a very important legal instrument as it stipulates the government bodies to share and receive information for decision making and good governance guaranteeing for development in Cambodia;

2.4. The public engagement in either budgeting or spending is also limited. CSOs’ engagement is on extreme challenge. Trust building between the CSOs and the sub-national government is essential to ensure transparency and accountability of budget implications and this endeavor remains to be considered;

2.5. The CSOs are not inclusively involved or consulted in the legal regulation process, resulting a lot of concern on its transparency, respecting the fundamental human rights and equity. The instrumentalities of various laws potentially raise the spectre of “rule by law”; and

2.6. While protected by international Law and the Constitution the ability to freely express one view is now considered to be curtailed. As there are now numerous examples of people being prosecuted for expressing dissenting views.

3. Suggestion and Recommendation on Prioritized Direction

3.1. Fundamental freedom, especially the freedom of expression, is a key principle to foster important roles of citizen and the functioning of democratic society. Therefore, everyone shall have the right to freely express their concern and opinions without interference from the government;

3.2. The Law to Access to Information (A2I) should be promulgated to ensure that no one will leave behind to freedom and fundamental rights. Inclusion of public engagement initiatives in the public finance system law and the final draft law on access to information should be given a high emphasis as entry point for governance reform;

3.3. Fundamental human rights and democracy (freedom of expression, assembly, and association) as articulated in the Cambodia Constitution should be attentive through demonstrated development of policies, strategies, and other legal instruments - operational guidelines;

3.4. The government should speed up the amendment of the LANGO to enable CSOs to perform their roles in promoting the sustainable development in Cambodia. In this respect the RGC should ensure space for all citizens to exercise fundamental freedoms of expression, respect freedom of association, and prevent assembly monitoring by authorities at all levels;

3.5. We call for restoring the CSOs and Government dialogue partnership to make our voice heard by addressing common challenges and implication caused by Covid-19 on national policies, legal compliance and reform, and beyond; and

3.6. To suggest a mechanism to accept inputs from CSOs and to provide opportunity for further discussion and feedback in equal manner to enhance civic space and enabling environment.

Finally, civil society is committed to continue working together in partnership, professionalism and enabling environment to advocate for civic space through freedom to access to information and partnership for inclusive societies in Cambodia.

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