

Pro-Active Civil Society – an ICC Strategic Focus



To ICC, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) such as NGOs, associations, and religious institutions like local churches and pagodas, play a very crucial role in assisting the Cambodian government in realising their national development strategies and grass-root improvement. According to ICC's Strategic Focus II "pro-active civil society", ICC's aim is to see that CSOs have the needed competence and dedication to mobilise, engage, and respond to civic challenges in a timely manner. The ICC-VIDP (Village Integrated Development Project) is an example of a development intervention designed to work directly with local churches within their larger community, in order for churches to actively contribute to the improvement of villagers' livelihood and their civil society.

VIDP project is applying two core approaches in order to empower and mentor pro-active CSOs. One approach is the tool of a national Community of Practice (COP), which is organised yearly by the VIDP team. A national COP is a platform where local leaders, such as church leaders, can share their ideas, knowledge and best practices with each other, for inspiration and reflection to generate more local initiatives for community improvement. The COP concept has been applied by VIDP since 2013. In the beginning, it was at a smaller scale, with mostly local church leaders attending for cross sharing and learning with each other. The national COPs have grown, and now include participants from local authorities, such as village chiefs and others with an interest in the development of their own community. At the latest COP conference held in September 2019 (see photo above), church leaders were more engaged in facilitating and leading the conference, which is also a positive development of the COP approach.

One participant attending the recent COP conference expressed as follows: "I feel that local church leaders are knowledgeable about the community development and a

self-sustainable livelihood. It is also very encouraging and motivating to see that one of the youth leaders made an effort to mobilise youth from different churches in his area for community improvement."

The second approach used by VIDP project is the establishment of the Church and Community Mobilisation Cambodia (CCM-Camb) committee. The purpose of CCM-Camb is to ensure that the support now provided by VIDP to target communities will be maintained after VIDP's work is completed within a few years. CCM-Camb is already playing an active role in maintaining fruitful dialogue and collaboration within target religious institutions and their communities. CCM-Camb is contributing to stronger commitment, sustainability and collective ownership of the improvements made in target communities. CCM-Camb is also utilising their network with CCM at a regional level, so that knowledge and experience can be exchanged within Southeast Asia, as well as to facilitate training across borders. Furthermore, CCM-Camb establishes linkages locally, with other NGOs, for additional assistance and support.

The work of CCM-Camb specified above, is carried out based on CCM-Camb's own identified vision, mission, and values for their work. CCM-Camb is aiming to see that church and local community can live and work together harmoniously through joint cooperation, rooted in integrity.

Moving forward into the future, ICC is confident that CCM-Camb has the competence and dedication to fulfil their vision and mission. CCM-Camb will be a key facilitator of pro-activeness for local CSOs working for sustainable community development, as well as resilience to overcome any future civic challenges.