



Bridging authorities and civil society

Cambodian media and social media, often paint the picture that national authority and civil society stand a far distance from each other, especially when it comes to human rights, law enforcement and development issues. This may in many cases be true, but there are exceptions. It is these exceptions that motivate civil society organisations not to give up, but rather to seek collaboration with the authorities for the betterment of livelihood for local citizens and communities.

ICC has had particularly good success in bridging local authority and civil society in Preah Sdach district, located in the south of Prey Veng province. Based on years of involvement with community development work in the district, goodwill and valuable relationships have been built with the local authorities on village, commune and district levels. When ICC began to empower local civil society organisations to play a key role in their own community development, they also established useful collaboration with the local authority.

During the last years, ICC's project PARCE (Poverty Alleviation through Rural Community Empowerment) has trained and empowered a civil society organisation recognised by the national authority, called Agricultural Cooperative, to be one voice on behalf of their members towards the local authority. Four Agricultural Cooperatives in Preah Sdach district have built up respectful and useful collaboration with the local Commune Councils and Village Development Committees. Together they are addressing needs in the local villages, and are jointly improving the livelihood of poor farmers. Also, they come together to improve farmers' knowledge and skills, so that they can respond to, for example, climate changes and new supply and demand in the agricultural sector. PARCE project was completed at the end of 2016, and the four Agricultural Cooperatives are now operating successfully on their own.

Beginning 2017 ICC started a new development project in Preah Sdach district, called Trafficking Response. The focus of this new project is to reduce labour trafficking and combat human trafficking and modern-day slavery in the district. Due to economic, social and agricultural changes many young men and women see no other options than to migrate for work outside of the district or to neighbouring countries. A majority of Preah Sdach's labour migration to neighbour countries is done illegally, which makes migrants extremely vulnerable to human trafficking.

A research was conducted prior to designing the Trafficking Response project, and both local authority and civil society were asked to share their knowledge and concerns about labour trafficking. Both sectors are worried about the risks connected with migration for work, and they urge intervention. Hence, Trafficking Response will utilise existing civil society organisations already established under PARCE, to fight labour trafficking. Furthermore, the goodwill previously established between local authority and civil society in the district, will enable advocacy towards higher levels of authority, to ensure safe migration and law enforcement.

Local authority and civil society in Preah Sdach district are now beginning to fight labour trafficking together, and it is expected that this model of collaboration in the future can be duplicated to other districts in Prey Veng province.