

Pro-active civil society - an ICC Strategic Focus



There is a Khmer proverb that says: “You can break one stick, but you cannot break a bundle of sticks”. This means that as individuals, people are vulnerable. But as a group of citizens, people are stronger. Likewise in development work, it is hard for individuals to address social problems alone and to achieve significant impact. But when groups of people are working together and being united, changes can be made for the betterment of Cambodians. This is the principle of the Cluster-concept, which ICC-VIDP (Village Integrated Development Project) initiated in early 2018, in order to group local churches together. A cluster will make churches stronger in the civil society, and at the same time churches can learn from each other, find solutions to both religious and community problems, and help each other when needed.

The VIDP project has been working directly with a number of local churches for more than 6 years, and empowered them to be involved in social issues and development activities in their local community. Last year the Cluster-concept was developed and introduced, because the VIDP team saw that many local churches would need a network after the VIDP project is completed in a few years from now. Additionally, the VIDP teams want to empower churches to feel ownership of what they do for their communities, and in the future to have a larger collaboration and network for support and commitment.

Currently, in each Cluster-network, churches take turns leading their own group discussion on various issues; however the VIDP team is still coaching them on how to facilitate the meeting.

So far, five Cluster-networks have been established by VIDP project: one in Phnom Penh, three clusters in Takeo province, and the last one is in Kampot province. What is

unique about these clusters is the learning and synergy between churches and communities, by using a "Take-Back" strategy. The idea with this strategy being used in the Cluster-network is that churches within a Cluster get to know each other, and can go to visit other churches from the network to learn and get inspiration. This new learning is afterwards taken back to their own church and members to learn from. One example: a church in Taloeung village had collected around USD12,000 through fundraising to build a road. The construction was finished in February 2019. The local church in Pres Krom village heard about this amazing achievement via the Cluster-network, and now wants to visit and learn from Taloeung village. Hence, the Take-Back strategy is useful for cross-church/village learning.

Local churches belonging to the five Clusters are engaging themselves with their local community people and with local authorities, in order to make sure that the community development initiatives are meeting the needs and priorities of the community. This links very well to the ICC Strategic Focus II, which emphasises empowering new and existing Civil Society Organisations through capacity building, consultancy, mobilisation and engagement, in order to contribute to community development and to address civil challenges.

Once VIDP phases out, ICC is expecting to see that local churches, under the umbrella of the five Clusters, will continue to be strong in networking, knowledge-sharing and helping each other. ICC is also expecting to see that churches belonging to the five Clusters will continue to work closely with their Village Development Committees and local authorities, in order to continue developing their village and improve villagers' livelihood.

Date: April 2019