

LEARNING FROM IMPACT STUDIES

WORLD CITIZENS PANEL IN
CAMBODIA

OXFAM NOVIB CASE APRIL 2015



OXFAM
Novib

SUMMARY

MEASURING THE IMPACT OF OUR WORK IN CAMBODIA

Only by understanding the impact of our work can we see how we can improve its effectiveness. In Cambodia, where we have been working to strengthen civil society for 35 years, we assessed our impact using the World Citizens Panel methodology – a survey of programme beneficiaries and a control group, followed by in-depth “stories of change” to shed light on how change occurs. The lessons learned will inform our transition towards taking more of a back seat in our support of Cambodian partners.

CASE DESCRIPTION

AIM OF THE PROJECT

The World Citizens Panel (WCP) is an impact measurement method developed by Oxfam Novib. It combines quantitative research, in the form of impact surveys, with qualitative research, through asking people to tell their “stories of change”. We devised the WCP to give participants in our programmes a voice, to learn how our programmes can be improved, and to contribute to the public debate on aid effectiveness.

The WCP aims to make changes in people’s lives visible in an empowering, inclusive and rigorous way. In impact surveys, mobile phones are used to collect data which allows us to measure and compare changes between participants in our programmes and a control group. This provides useful information about the extent to which impact has been achieved. We complement this with “stories of change”, to provide in-depth insight into how change comes about, so that we can test our theories of change and improve our approach.

The World Citizens Panel started in 2012 and has conducted impact measurements in six countries so far: Somalia, Pakistan, Uganda, Mali, Nigeria and Cambodia. It was implemented in Cambodia from April to November 2014, to measure the impact of programmes on land rights, resilience and youth and urban migration. In 2015, we will measure impact in Mozambique, Niger, Sudan, Tunisia, Myanmar, Vietnam and the Great Lakes region.

CONTEXT

Cambodia has made remarkable progress in rebuilding after its civil war, but despite its economic growth, poverty and inequality remain widespread: it ranks only 136th out of 187 countries on the United Nations Human Development Index, and an estimated 83% of the population are vulnerable to being plunged into poverty by even small shocks.

Culturally, Cambodia remains a highly patriarchal and hierarchical society. Voices of dissent are not accepted, and people find it difficult to exercise their rights as free citizens. The situation for women is particularly difficult, with low levels of knowledge on gender equality – Cambodia ranked 105 out of 149 countries in the UNDP’s Gender Inequality Index for 2013. Cultural norms often prevent women from participating in many aspects of daily life, including leadership positions, and there is a high level of discrimination and violence against women in both the domestic and public spheres.

Cambodia has the youngest population in Southeast Asia, with 45% aged under 18 and 70% under 30, but the concerns of young people are generally not represented in national and sub-national development priorities or budgets. Many are migrating to urban areas to try to find livelihoods. However, the country's export-oriented growth in the garment, tourism, agricultural and construction sectors has not been enough to absorb the estimated 250,000 new entrants to the labour market every year. There is a need to help guide public and private sector policy and investment in education, training, health services and information, and to support youth in exercising freedom of expression.

Economic growth has had environmental and social costs, including deforestation and land grabbing, with poor people being evicted from land to benefit investors and the emerging elite. Natural resources are being over-exploited at an accelerating rate: the impact of illegal forestry, illegal fisheries and land grabs has been compounded by the government granting in recent years – with minimal control or accountability – 300 economic land concessions, 259 mining licenses, 29 oil and gas related licenses, 30 special economic zone developments and 72 hydropower projects, according to the Open Development Cambodia website. The rapid depletion of natural capital is likely to undermine future socio-economic development, and may induce social unrest and instability. It is essential to move to truly sustainable management and shared prosperity.

As a developing country Cambodia remains heavily reliant on foreign assistance, which however started to be withdrawn by western countries in 2015. New donors, China in particular, have emerged but with a focus on business and political opportunity rather than human rights. Engaging this new eastern investment in the interest of the poor and vulnerable will require new strategies.

Cambodia is one of the ten members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which is pursuing closer integration. In 2015 all ASEAN countries will be connected through a single market, while blueprints are being drafted to promote socio-economic development. There are strong prospects for Oxfam to increase its engagement with ASEAN and to have more influence through regional programming.

While the political system in Cambodia can be described as democratic, the ruling party has traditionally exerted strong control and been intolerant of public dissent, with growing corruption and lack of transparency and accountability. However, the past two years have brought surprising shifts, including a strongly contested and controversial national election that saw the mobilization of youth through social media. The election resulted in a year-long political deadlock, compounded by alleged fraud, before an agreement was reached on more equal sharing of power in the National Assembly and reform of the electoral system. Despite this agreement, political feuding continues to be a barrier to inclusive growth and development for all.

WHY DID OXFAM NOVIB GET INVOLVED?

Oxfam has been contributing to the development of Cambodia, and strengthening Cambodian civil society, for 35 years. Our ultimate goal is to see a functioning compact between citizens and state: a government that is committed to fulfill its responsibilities, and people – including the poor and vulnerable – who are able to hold the government accountable. Oxfam has been increasing the involvement of national civil society organisations in setting our priorities, and we are now establishing a new group to govern our future work. The Country Governance Group will include Oxfam staff and representatives of Cambodian civil society.

As national civil society strengthens, Oxfam will increasingly support from behind, through fundraising, contributing expertise, convening, facilitating and supporting, generating knowledge, and being a global networker and influencing agent. This fits with Oxfam's global decision to increasingly foster Southern and independent affiliates. Support will be concentrated around three themes: voices for change, natural resource governance, and resilience. Gender justice and active citizenship, particularly engaging youth, will be at the basis of all Oxfam's interventions. We used the World Citizens Panel to measure our impact in these areas so far, to inform future work.

THE INTERVENTION

The World Citizens Panel implementation in Cambodia in 2014 measured impact on the five rights which are part of Oxfam Novib's mission – the rights to sustainable livelihoods, essential services, life and security, social and political participation, and gender justice. Additional questions were formulated to measure impact achieved by programmes in Cambodia on land rights, resilience, the right to be heard, migration, and perceptions on civil society organisations' influencing role with regard to space for civil society, gender based violence, female leadership and land rights.

At a workshop in April 2014, Oxfam and 11 partner organisations decided on the questions to be asked. In May and June 2014 partners collected data, interviewing about 3,650 people – participants in Oxfam's programme, and a control group. In July, we reflected on the results, discussing what can be learned and what could be done differently to engender more impact. For issues that were not easy to interpret, it was agreed to conduct more in-depth qualitative research collecting "stories of change". The report on the survey was published and shared with all stakeholders in December 2014.

After training in August 2014, 10 partner organisations collected 'stories of change' from about 95 project participants. The stories focused on four areas, chosen on the outcomes of the survey: gender based violence, income and food security, land rights and access to information. A workshop was organised for Oxfam staff and partner organisations to analyse and learn from the stories together, based on which all organisations formulated recommendations for themselves to increase the impact of their work.

Alongside the WCP, Oxfam engaged an external consultant in July 2014 to conduct impact research into the influencing role of civil society organisations in Cambodia and Oxfam's contribution. The consultant's report was complemented by survey data on citizens' perception of how civil society organisations have influenced policies and practice. It showed that Oxfam Novib's long-term support to a number of civil society organisations has been crucial in their survival and the influencing work they could do: "While it appears today that many of the Oxfam Novib partners are more established NGOs with significant sector experience, it is notable that Oxfam Novib also provided crucial early support to emerging organizations such as the human rights organization ADHOC, which have since developed to be leaders in their sector. A criticism of the Oxfam Novib approach to partnership in the past is that while support was provided to experienced organizations, there was less attention paid to bringing partners together to work collectively on common issues. However, in more recent years Oxfam Novib has strategically selected partners such as NGO Forum and CCC with the intention to support civil society strengthening by encouraging networking and joint advocacy."¹

¹ Ruth Bottomley, 2014: The Role of Civil Society in Influencing Policy and Practice in Cambodia

RESULTS

A report with all the findings of the survey and stories of change can be found on the [World Citizens Panel website](#). Its highlights were:

Sustainable livelihoods

- Significant differences were found between women in the target group and control group with respect to increased income and value of assets, but not on food security. There were no significant differences between men in the target group and control group.
- Four main areas for improvement were identified: providing better agricultural extension services; strengthening savings groups; increasing link with markets; and improving mainstreaming of gender issues in livelihood projects.
- There is increased awareness of how to file complaints about land concessions being granted to external investors, but there has been little compensation or other follow-up action from the government. More emphasis should be put on facilitating networking among communities and organisations to increase the chance of people realising their rights.

Life and security:

- Significant differences were found between the target group and control group with respect to damage to themselves and their belongings, disaster preparedness and capability to cope with future disasters.

Social and political participation

- Access to information is very limited in Cambodia. Radio, community-based organisations and verbal information from relatives and neighbours are the major sources of information. Young people have more access to the internet, email and social media.
- Partners' activities have had a big impact on people's participation in social organisations, collective action against injustice and their influence on decision making processes.
- There has been a positive trend during the last five years with regard to increased space for civil society, increased possibilities for female leadership and reduced gender based violence.
- The positive developments initiated by civil society organisations' influencing work are attributed to awareness raising and, to a lesser extent, advocacy work of civil society organisations, and also to increased space and possibilities created by the government.

Gender and empowerment

- Violence against women is a problem according to the majority of respondents, but most also think the problem is decreasing. Awareness seems to be higher among the target group, with a higher percentage reporting gender based violence as a problem in their community. In this area, the project should act as a catalyst for local change agents, involving local authorities and supporting role model families.
- There are generally good possibilities for women to become politically active and take a leadership role in society.

LESSONS LEARNED

Lessons learned from the survey and stories of change led to Oxfam and partners formulating recommendations for their own work. Reflections on survey outcomes were visualised in infographics such as the attached, on land rights, showing the bottlenecks

that were identified and recommendations for Oxfam to support communities that see their land rights violated.

READ ON

The impact report of the WCP team as well as the report on civil society by Ruth Bottomley can be downloaded from the World Citizens Panel website:
www.worldcitizenspanel.com

HUMAN INTEREST

Please find below one of the stories of change that have been collected. Please contact the WCP team if there is need for more stories or stories on different topics (land rights, livelihoods, access to information).

Toach Tonh, a man living in Svay Rieng Province, participates in a project from DPA and its partner CDA:

A new life after a positive change

“In the past, I did not get on well with my wife; especially, when I had not joined with CDA’s activities. We had quarrels once every two or three days; sometimes, it became violent. Indeed, then I went out drinking almost every day. When I came back, my wife blamed me and caused troubles, which was the root of rows. Sometimes, my wife also got drunk; we argued and fought, with both sides suffering injuries. We had some business in the family and farming (growing cassava and selling fish paste). We could not earn much as we did not put much attention into it; we were too busy with quarreling in the family.

It has been two years since my family took part in CDA’s activities, which include the prevention of domestic violence, farming, animal rearing techniques, and so on. Joining with CDA, I and my wife received both knowledge and materials (rice seeds and chicken breeds) as capital for further development. I and my wife were guided by a CDA worker, who was also our neighbour, on the negative impacts of domestic violence. These are the factors that make me change in terms of thinking and behaviours. I realize that I have wasted my time and money going out drinking too much, and when I came back I committed violence. All of these were bad and destructive. Consequently, I reduce my drinking habit and have more tolerance to avoid domestic violence. At the same time, I could observe that my wife became more patient and stopped drinking, too. We started to tolerate and understand each other more, which was something we had never had before. Then we corrected each other’s mistakes whenever we used any inappropriate words as a couple. It has been a year now since I and my wife stopped quarreling. Aside from farming, I help my wife with household chores such as feeding the cattle, cooking, and doing the washing up. Today, we have another business, lending money to other villagers, which helps uplift our living standard to another level.

Presently, we are living in a better condition compared to one year ago. I and my wife get on well and value each other. Before deciding to do anything, we always discuss with each other regardless business or farming. Doing this makes our income increase and leads to more profits and better living.

This change is most significant to me, because I think that in every family, drinking is the cause of domestic violence. With violence, the whole family cannot have happiness, and business cannot succeed because we lack consultation among ourselves. Therefore, avoiding and preventing domestic violence really leads to happiness.”

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