

# NEW TOOLS NEW HOPE

YOUTH VOICE THROUGH  
CAMPAIGN TOOLS

OXFAM NOVIB CASE MAY 2015



**OXFAM**  
Novib

# SUMMARY

## USING TECHNOLOGY TO ENGAGE CAMBODIAN YOUTH IN POLITICS

Traditionally, politics in Cambodia is seen as the preserve of the older generation. However, young people are increasingly using the internet to discuss issues that affect them. How can youth's growing desire for engagement be harnessed into participation in the political system? This project is developing two online platforms – one for young people to raise issues and seek support, and one for them to ask questions directly to members of parliament.

# CASE DESCRIPTION

## AIM OF THE PROJECT

The first part of this project, “Ask your MP”, followed a scoping study by One World UK at the beginning of 2013. Building on the increasing use of SMS, Facebook and the internet, the aim is to give young people the means to raise questions to elected Members of Parliament (MPs) to increase their political participation and make elected politicians more accountable to this constituency.

The aim of the second part of the project, the Urban Youth as Change Agents online campaign platform, is to provide young people with a platform to express their opinion and campaign on their priority issues, both online and offline. The idea was inspired by the success of Change.org in Thailand.

COMFREL was selected as local partner for both initiatives, as the leading organisation on election monitoring and reform and a long-standing Oxfam partner. COMFREL had already been using IT in election monitoring since 2012, with the involvement of some 5,000 young election monitoring volunteers.

Oxfam Novib also invited and facilitated One World UK to identify opportunities to use technology to increase the participation of youth in politics, drawing on their experiences in election monitoring in West Africa. Oxfam Novib engaged Dutch alliance partner Butterfly Works to assist in co-creating the campaign platform for Youth as Change Agents. Butterfly Works had earlier assisted COMFREL to increase the use of information technology in election monitoring.

## CONTEXT

People aged up to 30 account for around 70% of the Cambodian population. However, the young are traditionally discouraged from taking part in any political or public affairs – they are told that politics is dangerous and the work of older people only, and they should care only about their studies, employment and entertainment.

As a result, young people are under-represented in the processes that formulate policies, laws and practices that negatively affect them – including low quality of education, rampant corruption, unemployment and poor work conditions.

Meanwhile the emergence and widespread use of social media such as Facebook and YouTube, smartphones and the internet in Cambodia during the last few years has provided an outlet for information about social injustice, violence and corruption that is hardly covered via traditional media channels. The voices of victims are being heard for the first time.

Young people are more exposed to new technology than the older generation, and are starting to voice opinions, raise concerns, demand solutions, criticise the government and talk about politics via social media. The 2013 national election saw large-scale participation of young people in politics for the first time, during the campaign and subsequent political deadlock.

## WHY DID OXFAM NOVIB GET INVOLVED?

Young people increasingly want to use information and communications technology (ICT) to exercise their rights to take part in politics, participate in public affairs, express their opinions and hold the government accountable. However, they lack a specific platform to mobilise support and directly address politicians or government officials. Most advocacy through Facebook is short-lived and quickly forgotten.

Identifying this gap, Oxfam Novib designed these two platforms. Oxfam Novib works with strategic partners COMFREL, which is experienced in election monitoring and reform, and One World, with its experience in Africa of using ICT for social change. Butterfly Works contributes additional technical and co-creation skills in developing the platform. Youth and youth organisations are directly involved in the development, and at the end of the period the platform will either be independent or be handed over to a youth organisation. The programme is part of Oxfam's new "Voices for Change" programme in Cambodia, strengthening the voice of youth, women, workers and civil society and their capacity for social and political participation.

## THE INTERVENTION

The project aims to provide both online and offline platforms where young people can express their opinion and mobilise support to hold elected officials accountable. Two main strategies have been implemented: platform development and platform promotion and use.

### 1. Platform development

A scoping study was conducted by One World UK in early 2013 to identify opportunities for young Cambodians to become more politically involved through the use of ICT. Oxfam Novib initiated and facilitated the scoping study.

As a result, the "Ask Your MP" platform was developed in 2013 by One World UK and COMFREL to allow young people to communicate and ask questions to elected MPs through SMS, Facebook or email. A network coordinator checks the questions and answers without changing the content. Privacy is guaranteed for both the person asking the questions and the MP responding.

The "Online Campaign" platform is being developed in 2015, as a website-based campaigning and petition tool to allow users to express issues and concerns and mobilise others to support them through petitions and sharing via social media such as Facebook. The platform will accommodate written words, picture, voice and video.

A co-creation workshop for the development of the platform was organised in January 2015 by Butterfly Works with the participation of COMFREL, youth, youth organisations, Oxfam Cambodia staff and advisors from Oxfam's headquarters in The Hague. The workshop specifically focused on the kind of issues youth would want to raise.

Young people are involved from the beginning to the end of developing the tools, including the layout, design, and function of the platforms. The project was used as a case in Cambodia during the Asia Youth and Urban programme development workshop in Dhaka, attended by Oxfam and COMFREL staff.

## 2. Platform promotion

After the development of the Ask Your MP platform, various promotion strategies were conducted by COMFREL, including the production and distribution of 500 t-shirts, 100 posters, 500 brochures and 5,000 stickers to youth forums and NGOs partners. A radio spot was broadcast twice daily on three radio stations. 53 forums were conducted with around 15 participants each in 22 out of the country's 24 provinces to introduce the new platform.

The campaign platform is still being developed and will be promoted via various initiatives developed by youth themselves, and through radio talk shows, public forums and Facebook.

## RESULTS

The "Ask Your MP" platform has so far received and forwarded 205 questions to MPs of which 181 have been answered.

MP Keo Phirum said: "I receive many questions from this project and I also send many answers. The difficulty is that I cannot send my answers by SMS as it is difficult for me to explain in limited space available. This project is good for me and others MPs to have direct communication with citizens".

Viracheay, a community member, said: "The platform allows the people in my community and I to communicate with our representative and raise our concerns to MPs. I participate in the platform via Facebook and ask my MPs about the flood in the community".

About the online campaign platform, which is under development, 27 year old Ms. Eng Chandy said: "This is a good opportunity for youth to raise their voice, build capacity as public speakers and network".

## LESSONS LEARNED

The uptake of "Ask Your MP" was slow for the following reasons:

- Originally, plan was to use the platform as "Ask the Candidate" in preparation for the national elections in 2013. The platform was used to disseminate voter information, but time was too short for it to be an effective Q&A platform. Hence the emphasis on the second phase, "Ask Your MP".
- Very few MPs of the CPP ruling party agreed to answer questions. The CNRP opposition party was more forthcoming.
- The platform experienced technical problems, mostly as MPs found it difficult to answer in the same language and method used by the youth asking questions. SMS is most popular, and has restrictions on space.
- It is hoped that "Ask Your MP" will receive a boost as one of the tools under the campaign platform being developed.

General lessons learnt from both projects:

- Essential for the success of this kind of project is the active involvement (“co-creation”) of youth, as target group and users, from the design stage to implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

## HUMAN INTEREST

### “ASK YOUR MP” CASE STUDIES

**Sotheara:** *“I have doubt for long time related to the rumour of building of the airport in my community but nothing happens. I want to know this information but I don’t know how to get this. I don’t know how to ask my MP.”*

*“After participating in the “Ask Your MP” platform, I know how to communicate with my MPs. I have raised two issues via SMS to the MPs but so far I haven’t got any response yet.”*

*“After the response I will share “Ask Your MP” with my community through public forums.”*

**Vong Sokhary:** *“I am Vong Sokhary, university student living in Phnom Penh. I voted last year and I want my MP to help my community on such issues as flooded road, drainage systems, land conflict and insecurity. However, I don’t know any means to communicate to them.”*

*“One day I participated in the promotion of “Ask Your MPs” platform by COMFREL. During the event I got to know the means to communicate with my MPs through sending SMS.”*

*“After that event, I raised the issue of flooded road to the MPs, I got a response from the MPs promising to address the issue. Even if the issue is not immediately solved, the people in the community and my friends have tried to use this platform.”*

*“I think that if everyone uses the platform, they can communicate with the MPs with spending less time and more result to report to the MPs about our concerns.”*

### “CAMPAIGN PLATFORM” CASE STUDY

**Sam Silkin** is a 25 year old male university student in the capital, Phnom Penh. He was not aware of any tool to bring community issues to the public and duty bearers until he joined the “Campaign Platform” project.

*“I never knew that there are online tools to advocate for such issues” Sam says. “Taking part in this project since the beginning makes me aware that I have the right and tools to do this.”*

*“The project is very important providing the tools and material for campaign development. If youth seek solutions and start to take action, we need to build a network with other youth for voicing and demanding support. Success cannot happen without public awareness”.*

Sam already decided what issues should be raised in the platform. *“I will bring the issues of traffic jams and waste to campaign via the upcoming platform and Facebook”.*

© Oxfam Novib May 2015

This document was written by Pitour Sok.

For more information, or to comment on this publication, please email [info@oxfamnovib.nl](mailto:info@oxfamnovib.nl)

This publication is copyright but the text may be used free of charge for the purposes of advocacy, campaigning, education, and research, provided that the source is acknowledged in full. The copyright holder requests that all such use be registered with them for impact assessment purposes. For copying in any other circumstances, or for re-use in other publications, or for translation or adaptation, permission must be secured and a fee may be charged. E-mail [info@oxfamnovib.nl](mailto:info@oxfamnovib.nl)

The information in this publication is correct at the time of going to press.

Published by Oxfam Novib in May 2015.

Oxfam Novib  
P.O. Box 30919  
2500 GX The Hague  
The Netherlands

T +31 (0) 70 3421621  
[info@oxfamnovib.nl](mailto:info@oxfamnovib.nl)  
[www.oxfamnovib.nl](http://www.oxfamnovib.nl)