Communication between persons with disabilities and local authorities in Cambodia

Light for the World and DDSP, 2018
communication matters!
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Introduction

Persons with disabilities often don’t have access to information and public services, but also don’t know or are not able to communicate that they want access. On the other side, the local authorities often do not know how to provide persons with disabilities with information and services, and because they don’t hear from persons with disabilities they might also not be aware of the need to do so. This is a vicious cycle.

This communication gap can hinder well intended actions and can prevent those most in need of support from receiving it.

How should communication happen?

Effective communication is a two way process between people.

For example, the local authorities share information with citizens through posters or radio messages, and citizens share their opinion with the local authorities through voting or participating in community meetings.

Communication gap

Persons with disabilities

Local authorities
Why and how did the study take place?

There are many mechanisms for citizens to tell the local authorities what they need, and for the local authorities to speak to citizens. But we heard many persons with disabilities in our work say that they felt as if they had no voice, were not listened to, and were not included enough in local meetings. The local authorities, however, said that persons with disabilities are welcome, but are not coming. Or that they don’t know how to work with persons with disabilities. We wanted to know what was behind these statements.

Therefore we did this study to see if persons with disabilities are able to tell the local authorities what they need. And to look at what the local authorities would need in order to hear and respond to persons with disabilities.

The study took place in the province of Pursat in 2017. Pursat is a poor province in the northwestern part of Cambodia. The province has 6 districts, 49 communes and 505 villages.

The study took place in 229 villages in three districts in Pursat: most in Bakan because more people live there, and less in Veal Veng because it is very remote and hard to reach.
We aimed to reach out to as many persons with disabilities in the villages as we could.

We found so many more men with disabilities as compared to women, as well as so many persons with physical disabilities.

Half of the respondents indicated that they had attained their disability through an incident - mostly because of landmines or fighting.

Respondents were asked to tell what type of disability they had - which gave us many descriptions of the impairments that the respondents had. The research team then had to go back to the data and divide the respondents into the categories of types of disability. In the future, it would be better to identify respondents based on functional limitations rather than self-identification.
How did we find all these persons with disabilities?

That was actually quite hard! We didn’t know where the persons with disabilities were in the villages, so we asked the local authorities in each area. But the commune councils often didn’t have enough information, or only knew persons with physical impairments. This could also explain why most of the persons interviewed in our study were persons with physical impairments.

This was quite a challenge – but it did help the commune councils realize they lacked this specific information. So different communes were trained to identify persons with disabilities in their area. Now in some communes, there are lists of persons with disabilities which are being used by the local authorities.

Age range

- >70: 10%
- 61-70: 16%
- 51-60: 29%
- 41-50: 15%
- 31-40: 10%
- 21-30: 13%
- >21: 7%

Highest level of education

- primary school: 52%
- secondary school: 38%
- low literacy: 9%
- other: 1%

Occupation

- farmer: 43%
- nothing: 44%
- other: 13%
- 20%

Commune councils

In addition we held 22 Focus Group Discussions with Commune Councils. These involved commune council members, village chiefs, and in some cases also commune clerks and members of the Commune Committee for Women and Children.
Access to Information

How do communes share information with citizens?

Commune councils said that the most common way that information is shared in their community is through village or commune meetings. Persons with disabilities, as seen on the right, however, do not mention meetings as a place where they get information. Also, as can be seen on page 14, most persons with disabilities also said they did not attend meetings or other community consultations.

How do persons with disabilities get information about what is happening in their community?

1. family member
2. local authority
3. television
4. community member
5. mobile phone

Why do persons with disabilities say it is not easy to get information?

Often because the person with disability does not receive the information

- they felt that only persons without disabilities were asked or able to join the meeting
- the information is too general or simple
- it was difficult to access the information because of their impairment
- information came too late
- information was too quick and therefore unclear

Is the existing way of getting information easy for you?

No 94%

And sometimes because the content of the message was not good

- the information they did receive was not relevant to them
- did not solve the problems of persons with disabilities

This section looks at whether persons with disabilities are able to access important information that is shared in their community.
Do commune councilors think the way they share information reaches persons with disabilities?

Most commune councils agreed that with the current way of sharing information, it is not easy for persons with disabilities to access the information. In the communes where the councilors said that the information methodologies were okay, the persons with disabilities said they did not find the information methods easy to use.

According to the councils, persons with disabilities were not able to access information because they...

- could not communicate
- could not travel to the meeting
- did not receive the invitation
- live too far away
- are too ill to receive the information
- have migrated to other places

How can access to information be improved according to persons with disabilities?

- Promote the participation of persons with disabilities
- Ask organisations for support
- Communicate differently to persons with disabilities
- Communicate directly to persons with disabilities or through their families
- Do not discriminate persons with disabilities
- Focus on building relationships with persons with disabilities
- Encourage persons with disabilities to participate
- Provide specific items or help, such as food or treatments
- Provide persons with disabilities with relevant and detailed information
- Provide information on time
- Use sign language or body language to communicate
Accessing public services

Almost all persons with disabilities indicated that they had challenges accessing public services and information.

They said that they had difficulty because it was hard to get important news, and they felt they did not get enough information.

Some said this was because they were poor, or lived in a remote village far away from public services.

Many respondents felt that they were not able to access services because the public services were not interested in persons with disabilities, and did not give them attention.

Many also said they were excluded because persons with disabilities are not able to meet criteria or requirements set up by services, such as loan providers.

Most said they had difficulties accessing public services or receiving information about public services because of their disability. So in their own opinion, their impairment was the barrier.

Examples

I am not able to go to the services because I cannot walk.

I don't have transport available.

I am blind and therefore find it hard to get information.

I have difficulty communicating due to my deafness.

I am unable to speak clearly.

Many persons with disabilities said they would like to ask authorities for support and services, but felt unable to do so because:

- they had difficulty in putting their case forward
- they do not know who to contact
- they have difficulty communicating
- they don’t feel confident
Can persons with disabilities access public locations?

Commune councils were asked whether they thought persons with disabilities were able to access public facilities in their commune.

They said that most public locations are not accessible for persons with disabilities in their communes. This makes it difficult for persons with disabilities to attend and make use of public services.

What official documents do respondents have?

Official documents, such as birth certificates or ID cards, are issued by the local authorities, and are needed in order for citizens to participate in public life.
Participation in the Community

In which community events did persons with disabilities take part in the past year?

- 57% social event
- 42% meeting
- 28% community consultation
- 10% training

Why did persons with disabilities not participate?

Many respondents indicated that their disability prevented them from participating in community events: because they weren’t invited, did not get the information, or simply because of the belief that persons with disabilities cannot or shouldn’t go anywhere.

- 25% I was not invited
- 22% I was not informed
- 9% Disabled people cannot go anywhere
- 16% Because of my disability
The rights of persons with disabilities

Do persons with disabilities think that they have rights?
We asked persons with disabilities...

Most said they don't know.

Do you have rights as a person with a disability?

How have persons with disabilities heard about these rights?

Which rights do persons with disabilities say they have?

- Right to Development
- Not to be discriminated
- Equal Rights
- Right to be consulted
- Right to Survival
- Right to join in social events
- Right to movement
- Right to talk
- Right of Expression
- Right to Education
- Right to get a job
- Right to vote
- Right to join in meetings
- Right to travel anywhere
- Right to get information and news

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<th>Source of Information</th>
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<tr>
<td>Advertising on tv/radio</td>
<td>82%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Government/local authority</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An organisation</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7%</td>
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Are commune councils aware of the rights of persons with disabilities?

Half of the commune councils are aware of the rights of persons with disabilities.

- 50% not clear
- 50% yes

Have persons with disabilities and commune councils heard about the main laws regarding persons with disabilities?

The UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the Cambodian Law on Disabilities are international and national documents which say that persons with disabilities have the same rights as persons without disabilities.

- 100% UNCRPD
- 100% Cambodian Law

But when we asked persons with disabilities in the village, hardly any had ever heard of these documents! This was the same for the commune councils.

- 99% UNCRPD
- 77% Cambodian Law

Never heard of it!
Information on disability in commune councils

What has been done in the commune to support and promote persons with disabilities?

Some ways that persons with disabilities have been supported and promoted in communes with external support are:

- Improving access to public buildings
- Advertising health service
- Improving access to health service
- Developing work opportunities
- Informing about rights of persons with disabilities

Reasons why communes say they have challenges in supporting persons with disabilities:

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<th>Lack of finances</th>
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<td>Discussion has not yet been put into action</td>
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<td>Lack of skills</td>
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Involvement in meetings

Most communes say that when persons with disabilities are involved in commune meetings, it is especially when meetings are about community development, community security, hygiene and health, social security and persons with disability.

The reasons persons with disabilities are not involved in meetings, according to communes:

"They have no transportation or are not able to travel."

"The involvement of persons with disabilities is not seen as important."

"Because of their disability."

The skills that commune councils felt they are currently lacking to successfully include persons with disabilities are:

- Communication
- Disability
- Resource mobilization
Data

Slightly over half of the communes says they have data on persons with disabilities in their commune.

Most communes said that disability was integrated into the Commune Investment Plans.

However, even where communes said they had mentioned disability in the CIP, there was often no budget allocated to disability specifically!

Communes who say they have mentioned disability in their CIP

Communes with budget allocated for disability

Ways in which disability was integrated into the Commune Investment Plans

- Work opportunities
- Providing specialized equipment
- Improving facilities for persons with disabilities
- Requiring the involvement of persons with disabilities
- Vocational training
- Health training
- Providing capital
- Providing clean water
Types of things persons with disabilities requested

- Public accessibility (e.g. ramp)
- Capital
- Food
- Government pension
- Land
- Scholarship
- Toilets
- Study materials/vocational training
- Well
- Wheelchair/Prosthetics

Commune councilors respond to these requests by ...

If request or issues need to be passed on to a higher level for a decision, then the process is for councilors to follow the Commune Investment Plan process, and address issues during meetings and workshops at commune or district level.

When persons with disabilities make requests, commune councilors say they respond to these requests by...

- Passing request on to head officer
- Making a proposal
- Through commune/district meetings
- Taking up contact with other organisations (e.g. NGOs)

However, none of the communes said they felt confident in their ability to communicate with higher authorities about issues concerning disability.

Reasons for not communicating requests with higher authorities

- We aren't required to support persons with disabilities
- I don't have communication skills
- I don't have the ability to make proposals
- I don't know the decision of the head officer
- There is no plan
- There is no transportation
Conclusion

In Cambodia, there are ways for citizens to give input to the local authorities, for example through village and commune meetings. We tried to study whether persons with disabilities were able to voice their concerns to the local authorities.

With this research, we see confirmed that persons with disabilities are often not able to, and often don’t know how to, use public services and inform the local authorities of their needs. At the same time, the local authorities are often not able to, and do not know how to reach out to, inform, and involve persons with disabilities.

This research was carried out as part of the Advocacy and Communication for Change programme by Disability Development Services Program and Light for the World.

Research is being carried out in two phases – each covering half of the province of Pursat. This document represents results from phase I. Results from phase II are expected in 2019.
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