

TI IPP STRONGG IN CAMBODIA

Ready to Engage Project

Transparency International Cambodia (TI Cambodia) is part of the Transparency International global coalition against corruption that brings together chapters operating in more than 100 countries worldwide with an international Secretariat based in Berlin, working towards a shared vision: a world free of corruption.

BACKGROUND

In Cambodia, corruption remains a critical issue. Over the last five years, Cambodia scored very low in Transparency International's [Corruption Perceptions Index \(CPI\)](#), ranging between 20 in 2018 to 22 points in 2023, placing the country at the rank 158th (out of 180). However, results from Transparency International's [Global Corruption Barometer – Asia 2020 \(GCB\)](#) indicate some positive developments regarding anti-corruption. More than half of Cambodians think that corruption levels have decreased in the 12 months prior to the survey, and 7 out of 10 people believe that they can make a difference in the fight against corruption. Nevertheless, the bribery rate remains a concern, with 37% surveyed people saying that they had to pay a bribe to access a public service over the same period.

PROJECT APPROACH

With support from the *TI Indo-Pacific Partnership for Strong, Transparent, Responsive & Open Networks for Good Governance (TI IPP STRONGG) 2020 – 2023*, TI Cambodia has worked towards increasing awareness of anti-corruption among diverse groups across the country, enhancing social demand for accountable governance by citizens, and improving the national anti-corruption legal framework. Building on existing networks that reached approximately 25,000 citizens, the *Ready to Engage Project (REP)* has further expanded its outreach and engage various anti-corruption actors and citizens, particularly women and youth, to increase awareness and empower their participation in anti-corruption. The project was implemented over a period of 3 years and 7 months, from June 2020 to December 2023.



A youth distributed leaflets on One Window Service (local public service) in Reul commune, Puok district, Siem Reap province. / Picture @ TI Cambodia



A community forum on One Window Service (local public service) in Reul commune, Puok district, Siem Reap province. / Picture @ TI Cambodia

TI CAMBODIA'S ACHIEVEMENTS

Advancing Legislations through Civil Society Action

Despite a lack of government willingness, TI Cambodia has worked in partnership with relevant CSO actors in Cambodia to gain a sizable amount of political commitment and influence on several legislative bills, including those related to access to information, public procurement, anti-corruption, whistleblower protection, asset declaration, and digital rights.

TI Cambodia has mobilised key actors to form the CSO Anti-Corruption Working Group. With the support from this project, the group has established a well-functioning system with a clear advocacy strategy, currently focusing on the absent legislation on the protection of whistleblowers, witnesses, and victims. Advocacy initiatives, including high-level workshops and public campaigns on social media platforms, have been conducted with the aim of raising public awareness, stimulating discussions and debates, and increasing demands for the urgent enactment of the law. As a result, the working group has succeeded in engaging various opposition parties and obtaining their commitment to push for the adoption of the law.

To date, the Law on Access to Information has yet to be passed, despite many years of CSO efforts to push for immediate adoption. With support from the project, however, the CSO Access to Information Working Group, of which TI Cambodia is part, has managed to have the government renew its commitment to address this long-pending bill. TI Cambodia and the CSO working group have actively engaged with the ministry in charge of drafting to provide recommendations and inputs to the government to ensure at least minimum international standards for the draft bill.

TI Cambodia and the CSO working group have also initiated a series of awareness-raising and advocacy activities such as national multistakeholder forums, social media campaigns, media coverage, and policy dialogues, gaining a lot of attention from stakeholders from all spectrums, including the government, civil society, development agencies, media, youth, as well as the wider public. As a result, the former prime minister has publicly made a pledge to have the draft law adopted by 2025. In the meantime, TI Cambodia and the CSO working group will continue to monitor the government commitment, increase public demand, and advocate for the passing of the law.

TI Cambodia has also contributed to the improvement of the draft public procurement bill. A CSO Budget Working Group composed of subject-matter expert NGOs, including TI Cambodia, has engaged closely with the Ministry of Economy and Finance, which is responsible for the drafting process. This engagement has led to the ministry accepting three out of thirteen recommendations after an analysis of the legislation jointly led by TI Cambodia and the Advocacy and Policy Institute (API). Furthermore, three other inputs are under consideration, while the ministry has justified the remaining recommendations. TI Cambodia and the CSO working group will continue engaging with the ministry to provide further input to the draft law as needed.

A sub-decree on the Internet Gateway was issued by the Ministry of Telecommunication and Posts with the aim of establishing one single gateway for all internet traffic. Experts from the private sector, development partners, and CSOs view the sub-decree as a move that would further jeopardize personal privacy and internet freedom. Through joint advocacy efforts of CSO Digital Rights Working Group – a network of local and international organizations, including TI Cambodia, working to protect the digital space and internet freedom in the country – the implementation of the sub-decree on Internet Gateway has been put on hold.

Empowering Youth: Taking Action Against Corruption

Youth is a very indispensable partner to the project. TI Cambodia has worked with 19 local youth groups in different provinces, supporting them to address governance issues and increase demand for accountability. Through collaboration with these active youth groups, thousands of people have been reached and educated on public service and budget, corruption, and its impacts on their lives, in addition to other social and environmental issues in their communities.



Youth led Initiative on One Window Service Mechanism / Picture @ TI Cambodia

With a low level of accountability in the country, even lower in remote communities where resource allocation and information sharing are limited, TI Cambodia has empowered hundreds of youths and people in communities in five provinces – Battambang, Siem Reap, Kampot, Prey Veng, and Rattanakiri. A total of 3,700 people (55% of whom are female) have benefited from the project through their participation in capacity-building trainings, public forums, and youth-led projects supported by TI Cambodia. The project has also supported actions taken by youth and citizens. As such, the project has brought about 237 instances of people taking action to address accountability and governance issues in their communities across the five provinces. A total of 19 joint initiatives implemented by these people range from workshops between rights holders and duty bearers, capacity-building trainings for peer youth, and the distribution of public service-related leaflets to communities. With increased self-confidence enabled by the project, youth have also voiced out community issues and demanded responses from their local councils. For example, one young agent of change succeeded in having their local council incorporate a fisherman community's concerns into their commune development plan. Another instance involves a female youth who demanded a fine receipt from the traffic police, who were initially not willing to issue one for her.

Empowering Youth for Community Change

In the Battambang province, a fisherman community's request has been addressed by their council. This would not have been possible without the active intervention of a young man, Thea Rin, who is one of TI Cambodia's youth beneficiaries. He attended capacity-building sessions on good governance, accountability, and participatory decision-making processes. Following the training, Thea Rin developed an interest in his commune's affairs and regularly attended meetings with his council to learn about ongoing community issues. In one of these meetings, he raised the issue of a fishery community lacking a budget for flooded forest patrolling. Upon hearing the issue, the council discussed and agreed to provide a small budget for the community. At the time of reporting, Rin plans to help the community once again by requesting an increase in the allocated budget to expand the patrol and prevent illegal fishing of protected fish.

Building Strong National and Regional Partnerships for Good Governance and Accountability

TI Cambodia fostered close relationships with national CSO coalitions on digital rights and access to information. Working closely with these coalitions, civil society made its voice stronger, louder, and heard by the government. As a result, various government commitments and actions have taken place, ranging from a declaration by the former prime minister to have the Access to Information draft bill passed by 2025 to relevant ministries incorporating CSO recommendations in drafting key laws on access to information and public procurement. Through collective advocacy with the CSO working group on digital rights, the

government has held off the implementation of a sub-decree that is found to be violating privacy rights by the CSO coalition. TI Cambodia also collaborated with leading local CSOs in building a CSO anti-corruption working group. The coalition has been carrying out advocacy initiatives aimed at increasing public awareness of the anti-corruption legal framework, particularly the importance of and the need for a whistleblower protection act.

TI Cambodia has also strengthened its networks at the regional level. The chapter is a member of the Southeast Asian Network for Transparent and Accountable Governance (SEANTAG), which leverages the collective strength of Southeast Asian civil society organisations, think tanks, and research institutions, to advocate for holistic transparency and accountability initiatives which foster knowledge sharing and encourage dialogue between policymakers and civil society to promote good governance across the region. TI Cambodia has also recently joined another newly established regional network on anti-corruption, "Southeast Asian Anti-Corruption Network for Civil Society", which aims to facilitate the sharing of experiences and lessons in advocating for reforms and greater transparency and accountability. It also seeks to support diverse voices in policy and decision making, identify commonalities in regional challenges, and work together to address them.

Covid Impact and Project Resilience

Corruption thrives in times of crisis. As COVID-19 quickly spread across the country, TI Cambodia's role became even more relevant. To ensure access by most vulnerable groups to Cambodian government's cash assistance program, TI Cambodia supported youth capacity building and initiatives aimed at raising awareness of the cash assistance scheme among the wider public.