Story of Significant Change: Improving Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Sector Planning and Coordination

“The coordination approach that ACCESS has taken is leading the right way to engage and influence relevant ministries and actors, especially Ministry of Interior (MOI) and, National Committee for Sub-National Democratic Development (NCDD), which is a good step [toward] improved sub-national level collaboration and implementation.” (ACCESS implementing partner staff member).
Coordination in the GBV Sector before Access Started

GBV stakeholders interviewed noted that while they did some joint planning and had some existing relationships before ACCESS started in late 2018, it was small scale and didn’t involve many partners or Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) representatives. Most partners worked separately to plan their own activities. Consequently, the Ministry of Women Affairs (MoWA) did not have a clear picture of the sector and Line Ministries with power over resource allocations such as the Ministry of Economic and Finance (MEF) and MoI were not involved.

While GBV Response Working Groups (WG) had been introduced and piloted in some provinces and districts, they were not fully functioning in all of the provinces and districts, without consistent and adequate budget allocations. The national Technical Working Group for Gender-based Violence (TWG-GBV) budget was still being provided by Development Partners. The provincial WG meetings did not happen regularly, and the quality of the discussion varied across provinces. At a district level, there was a lack of resources, coordination, and role clarity in relation to planning for GBV service delivery.

The change in 2019 in GBV sector planning and coordination:

“This approach [joint planning] was very helpful so we know who does what, where, and that way we could coordinate resources and activities accordingly”.

Provincial Department of Women Affair (PDOWA) Official, Kg Cham.

“With joint planning and coordination, we were able to spread our efforts to more districts...[and] ACCESS contributed to gather the inputs of [partners in the] GBV sector and [agree on an approach to] establishing and training of the GBV workgroups, without overlaps or waste of resources.”

ACCESS GBV Partner Program Manager.
Joint planning started with consultations between ACCESS implementing partners and MoWA at a national and provincial level. MoWA led the process, gaining an understanding of the partners and their work. Because of the joint planning process, MoWA counterparts and ACCESS implementing partners developed a mutual understanding in terms of approaches, plans and resources needed from MoWA such as planning and, travel allowances. Furthermore, MoWA have managed and provided guidance to ACCESS implementing partners as to which interventions to prioritise in order to implement the National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women III (NAPVAWIII). The agreement of partnership and coordination principles through the joint planning process has helped ensure smoother implementation as it is clearer how MoWA will support the process. Through aligning the GBV partners’ workplans with NAPVAW, MoWA was able to understand the resources and time needed to implement NAPVAW III, which enabled MoWA to reasonably allocate more resources to the coordination of GBV work, including:

- Money to cover daily subsistence allowances (DSAs) for MoWA staff attending meetings
- Some budget for TWG-GBV meetings, and
- Additional needs for government human resources for coordination of GBV works

MoI, MEF and Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (MoSVY) joined the planning process, engaging with the GBV sector for the first time. As these agencies have a critical role in decisions around budget allocations and resourcing for NAPVAWIII, this was an important opportunity to increase the level of resourcing available. One representative from the MoI and one from the MEF joined the first GBV Workstream meeting on 28 January 2020. Through leading the planning and coordination process and selecting the implementing partners who received ACCESS grants, RGC staff have greater engagement with and accountability for activities across the GBV sector. Sub-national engagement by PDoWA has also increased their understanding about the program, activities and their roles. RGC have demonstrated their ownership of the process by chairing key ACCESS meetings, and agreeing to cover the DSA payments for government official travel during the ACCESS Inception and Provincial Dissemination Workshops. This is a positive sign of sustainable systems change. RGC noted that the engagement of a broader range of RGC entities was valuable. For example PDoWA’s inputs helped to ensure the feasibility of the proposed activities at a provincial level.

ACCESS partners stated that the joint planning process is modelling how to engage effectively with RGC to those involved. It has improved coordination between the different ACCESS implementing partners, improved consistency in the support provided, reduced overlaps in resource allocation, allowing for a more even geographic spread of activities and targeting effort at what matters most. For example, overlapping activities in establishing and training district GBV working groups in Kampong Speu (between UN Women and Cambodian Women’s Crisis Center (CWCC)) and among implementing partners in Siem Reap (Legal Aide of Cambodia (LAC), CWCC, and the Asia Foundation (TAF)) were avoided through the planning process. This has allowed scarce resources to be allocated where they are most needed. An example of greater consistency is a proposal to create a standard terms of reference (ToR) for the provincial GBV working groups. The ToR has been identified as critical to strengthening coordination, because they clarify working group member roles, frequency of meetings, and budget implications. In the ACCESS Partnership Survey, partners reported good information sharing and collaboration, with high levels of existing rapport.
How ACCESS Supported this Change

The ACCESS team worked closely with MoWA to undertake the joint planning process to create a single workplan for all the ACCESS IP’s work in the GBV sector, convening stakeholders at a national and provincial level. It began with a workshop in May 2019 to agree GBV sector priorities and provide an opportunity for GBV and disability sectors to present their priorities to each other. ACCESS managed a competitive process where implementing partners submitted workplans that were then jointly reviewed by ACCESS and MoWA for strategic coherence and to identify any overlap in activities. ACCESS then consolidated all implementing partner activities into a single joint workplan. This was presented in a second workshop in July and refined by all partners, including those in both the GBV and disability workstreams. After further consultation and coordination, a joint plan of activities for GBV was finalised in early August and presented in a workshop. Provincial dissemination workshops were then held in the three priority provinces in November and December 2019 to seek provincial partners’ feedback and promote their leadership of the work in their provinces.

Throughout this process, ACCESS prepared background documents for MOWA officials, provided all the logistical support for arranging the workshops, consulted and solicited inputs from the counterpart officials in setting the agenda and topics. ACCESS also provided technical advice to MOWA in relation to service provision, training and coordination and facilitated their leadership of the process, including engagement between the GBV and disability stakeholders, both different RGC Ministries and the different implementing partners.
Interviewed stakeholders reported several other factors enabling the improvement in GBV sector planning and coordination. First, ACCESS staff and IPs enjoyed existing working relationships. Second, the 2019 Voluntary National Review of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) for Cambodia may have bolstered RGC focus on NAPVAW and its implementation. Third, there has been a broader strengthening of RGC focus on monitoring donor programs, placing an onus on ministries to be involved in partnership programs, including by committing their own resources.

Without ACCESS, stakeholders interviewed judged that the change towards a unified approach to planning and implementation may have been slower or not have happened at all. It is likely that the pattern of working in silos and fragmented inputs would have persisted and there could have been a lack of coordination in GBV works and services.

ACCESS’ implementing partners noted that the ACCESS GBV lead had superior technical knowledge, a past history of working in the sector and good management and problem-solving skills which have added value to the joint planning process. They also reported that ACCESS’s prolonged lead time utilising the “co-creation model” was very useful and meant that program goals were aligned with the Implementing Partners’. Furthermore, they reported that ACCESS staff were very accessible and understood the program activities well, working to overcoming delays when they arise.
Lessons Learnt and Future Focus of ACCESS

Some implementing partners noted that the joint planning process was resource intensive due to the time required from the partners to develop their plans and coordinate through the three workshops. RGC counterpart participation has also been challenging. While there has been some increase in RGC resources allocated, more is needed as currently there is insufficient time and budget for RGC to participate in ACCESS coordination work. While the process increased understanding across the disability and GBV workstreams, more work is needed to build mutual understanding of roles and responsibilities within and between workstreams. ACCESS will continue to work to strengthen partnerships and improve relationships and collaboration across the workstreams. This will, include establishing clear focal points at a sub-national level for the disability workstream and improving communication through more regular meetings with RGC counterparts and ACCESS implementing partners.

Although partners agreed that the joint planning process is a positive step in the right direction for the future of the sector, it will take time and consistent efforts and investment to build the relationships and positively embed the new approaches to planning and collaboration. ACCESS will now focus on strengthening relationships and partnerships at both a national and subnational level and also documenting and sharing positive experiences related to coordination and collaboration.

Significance of the change

The significance of the change is considered to be significant, reflecting that the evidence suggests that the reported change may outlast ACCESS. Evidence for this is that RGC counterparts have demonstrated greater ownership of the joint planning process and have put their own budget into paying DSA for coordination meetings and dedicated time and resources to the process. The partnership survey also noted high levels of commitment to working in partnership through ACCESS amongst the partners.

Level of ACCESS contribution

The level of ACCESS contribution to the change is assessed as significant. Those interviewed believe that without ACCESS, the reported change may not have happened. While there were some contextual factors which had increased RGC involvement and engagement with the GBV planning process, and there were existing relationships amongst partners in the GBV sector, ACCESS’ work was agreed to have sped up the process of joint coordination and provided the support to allow this to happen.
The Strength of the Data Informing the Story of Significant Change

The overall strength of the evidence in support of the survey is judged to be moderate\(^1\). It reflects that the evidence includes information collected from interviews and public forums and discussions involving ACCESS staff and so could potentially contain bias. However, this has been cross-referenced with information from the Partnership Survey led by an independent consulting company, Real Time Evaluation, which provides more frank assessment of the working relationships across the stakeholders. However, the Partnership Survey has some limitations due to the sample size not being fully representative of the whole sector.

Data Sources

4. ACCESS Summary Report, Component Collaborative Plans Finalising Workshop to support the implementation of the National Action Plan to prevent Violence Against Women 2019-2023 and the National Disability Strategic Plan 2019-2023, 16-17 July 2019 at Phnom Penh Hotel
6. Group Interview on 28 January 2020 conducted by the ACCESS MEL team involving ACCESS Implementing Partners.
8. Second ACCESS Steering Committee Meeting Notes, 8 August 2019.

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\(^{1}\) This judgement is based on a three-point scale of low, moderate or high evidence strength. Moderate confidence is indicated in non-peer reviewed publications, a limited scope of respondents including potentially some associated with the project, and or difficulty to triangulate the evidence broadly, It substantiates clear and trustworthy conclusions, Further research may change the overall rating.
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