H.E Dr. Ing Kantha Phavi chairing the annual reflection meeting held on May 3rd 2022 at Hotel Cambodiana on the cooperation of delegate lawyers from the Bar Association of the Kingdom of Cambodia and Judicial Police Agents/Officers, both members of Gender-Based Violence Working Groups.
"I would like to thank ACCESS for supporting the Cambodian Government to initiate this meeting to address issues in collaborations between various partners so that GBV legal case management is strengthened benefiting women affected by GBV. And Judicial Police Agents (JPAs) and Judicial Police Officers (JPOs), many of whom are among the GBV Working Group (WGs), have important roles to play.”
H.E Dr. Ing Kantha Phavi, Minister for Women’s Affairs, May 3rd 2022.

Introduction

Rates of gender-based violence (GBV) remain high in Cambodia. According to the 2014 Cambodian Demographic and Health Survey, one in five women reported experiencing violence in the last 12 months. About 40% of women who experienced GBV sought assistance to stop the violence; 90% of women victims reported serious injury requiring health treatments, but only 53% received it. The Australia-Cambodia Cooperation for Equitable Sustainable Services (ACCESS) aims to improve access to and quality of GBV service provision. Funded by the Government of Australia, ACCESS is a bilateral program working closely with the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) to support the implementation of the National Action Plan for the Prevention of Violence Against Women (NAPVAW III). The program works in six target provinces: Kampong Speu; Kampong Cham; Siem Reap; Tboung Khmum; Ratanakiri; and Preah Sihanouk. ACCESS aims to trial and establish systems for GBV service provision which can be replicated in other parts of Cambodia.

What was the state of GBV services before the ACCESS program began?

Before ACCESS began, Committees for Women and Children at a Provincial, District, and Commune level had responsibility for managing violence against women. However RGC officials reported that these committees have so many issues to discuss that they often ran out of time for GBV case management and that committee members were not trained in GBV case management. Furthermore, the committee membership does not reflect the multi-sectoral approach to GBV services required, such as engagement with health, legal and counselling and shelter services. A GBV specific working group had been established in three of the ACCESS target provinces, however the working groups were meeting infrequently and their members were not trained on GBV case management. No working groups had been established at the District level.

How has ACCESS improved GBV service coordination and provision?

“Thanks to ACCESS and partners for helping to improve the effectiveness of district GBV WGs in the six districts. These groups are essential to ensure services are provided to GBV survivors, i.e., coordinating between health services, legal and psychosocial support. I also expect and encourage ACCESS to consider supporting GBV Working Groups in the other 6 districts in the province”. Ms. Krang Si Thavy, Director, Provincial Department of Women’s Affairs, Siem Reap

“We appreciate the support of ACCESS to establish a way to monitor the effectiveness of the working groups. With this method, we know what has improved and what is lacking.” Ms. Sean Chanthorn, official of the Provincial Department of Women’s Affairs, Kampong Cham.

1 “Before we relied on the Women and Children’s committee at all these levels to raise and discuss GBV cases. But as you can imagine, this committee had so many agenda items, they could not find enough time to raise and really discuss GBV cases” Ms. Bun Kuntha, Deputy District Governor of Steung Trang, formerly Chief of Women’s Affairs of Chamkaleu]
Since 2019, ACCESS has been working in partnership with the national- and provincial- level institutions of Women’s Affairs to establish and strengthen GBV working groups at a Provincial and District level. ACCESS has:

1. **Standardised the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the GBV WGs, based on best practice.** The Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MoWA), with technical support from ACCESS, undertook a study tour to inform the development of a standard working group ToR. The ToR clarified the responsibilities of the working groups and their members, the frequency of working group meetings and the budget implications of the working groups.

2. **Assisted to establish new Provincial and District level WG.** Working with its civil-society organisation (CSO) partners, ACCESS has supported the establishment of GBV-WGs in the three remaining target provinces and 33 GBV-WGs at a District level across the six provinces.

3. **Provided training and orientation for GBV-WG members.** ACCESS partners provided logistic and advisory support for the GBV-WG meetings, working closely with the relevant Provincial Department of Women’s Affairs (PDoWA) and District Office of Women’s Affairs (DoWA).

4. **Built the capacity of GBV-WG members.** ACCESS and its partners provided training in the essential GBV service guidelines to support their role in GBV case management. As of April 2022 a total of 1,280 GBV-WG members in the six target provinces have been trained in essential GBV service guidelines.

5. **Developed and applied a process to monitor the effectiveness of the GBV-WGs.** In collaboration with MoWA and partners, a self-assessment monitoring tool was developed to annually assess the effectiveness of the working group. To date, four rounds of assessment have been conducted between 2019 and 2022, involving working group members meeting, discussing and agreeing on ratings against six criteria.

**How has the effectiveness of the GBV- WGs changed?**

*There are quite lots of changes over the years. In 2019 our working group was hardly functional, and our members knew very little about GBV and available services. Thanks to the training over the years by partners such as Legal Aid Cambodia and Cambodian Women’s Crisis Centre, our GBV-WGs have now been trained and been able to resolve GBV cases more effectively.* – **Ms. Hak Sovan Chandavy, Director, PDoWA, Kampong Speu.**

The annual assessment of working group effectiveness has demonstrated an increase in the effectiveness of the working groups. The average effectiveness score of the Provincial working groups has increased from a baseline of 50% in 2019 to 88% in 2022. All the GBV-WGs have now been officially established and they are recognized by the provincial administrations with official circulars. All members have been orientated as to their roles and duties and they have been holding regular meetings. The start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 led to some disruption, with many working group meetings cancelled. However in 2021, all the working groups were trained to use social media apps such as Zoom and Facebook allowing the meetings to continue online.
The 21 District working groups newly established under the program have demonstrated an increase in effectiveness, with a rise in the average effectiveness score from 26% in 2019 to 72% in 2022. The assessment found that all working group members have been orientated as to their roles and duties. However, to further improve their effectiveness, the working groups need to develop a workplan with a budget in time to match the government’s planning and budgeting cycle and therefore be eligible for funding. There was also a need to improve the quality of meeting discussions to resolve GBV cases in compliance with the principles of GBV case management. The pandemic severely disrupted meetings in 2020. However, by 2021, many WGs had learned to use online meeting applications to meet virtually instead.

There are emerging signs of sustainability of the GBV-WG model. In 2021, Siem Reap used its own budget to establish working groups in six districts not targeted by ACCESS to ensure province-wide coverage. Furthermore, Kampong Cham funded an additional district working group, Kampong Speu allocated budget for the provincial working group, and Ratanakiri is providing funding for four district GBV-WGs. Steung Treng and Preah Vihear, while not ACCESS-supported provinces, used their own budget to support provincial GBV working groups and have been running these since 2020 with the support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Both Provinces have one district working group established and as of April 2022 were in the process of establishing another district working group. MoWA reported that the other two provinces (Battambang and Odor Meanchey) and Phnom Penh municipality are also preparing to establish their respective GBV working groups. These examples of the replication of the GBV-WG model demonstrate that the model is seen as effective by the government officials involved and is strongly supported by MoWA.

2 The criteria pertain to 1- formal establishment of WG, 2- Orientation on rules and duty of members, 3- WG’s plan for meet- ing endorsed and integrated in respective administration workplan, 4- budget for meeting endorsed and integrated, 5- meeting held at frequency as planned and adequate participation of members, 6- meeting held effectively to resolve GBV cases. For each criteria it is scored on a three-point scale (with score 1, 3 or 5, where 1 is the lowest and 5 the highest and each score has a descriptive marker of situation pertaining to the criteria).

3 The principles are: no blaming, no judgement, respect for client’s rights, confidentiality of the client’s identity, supporting client’s safety.
“Seeing the need for effective coordination of GBV services and the available technical support of ACCESS, we have had the provincial working group established and running since the middle of 2021. The working group has been useful for speeding up GBV service delivery. We have also held routine meetings and been able to plan and budget meetings with the government’s funds. Even more, we have managed to have two district working groups established”. – Mr. Ros Mithona, official of PDoWA, Preah Vihear.

“Steung Treng now has a provincial and two district working groups established. It has been very helpful that we have them running. The mechanism has helped lots with coordination and GBV service provision as we have all relevant authorities in the working group and they are informed about cases and help to ensure services are provided in a timely manner.” – Ms. Ung Sopheak, official of PDoWA, Steung Treng.

Improvements in GBV service provision

The primary purpose of the GBV-WGs is to ensure GBV cases are effectively managed and that survivors receive the services they need. Over the period September 2019 to June 2022, with ACCESS support, a total of 4,603 service sessions were provided to 2,467 women. GBV-WGs were central in coordinating and ensuring services for GBV clients. Most of the social and legal services were provided by ACCESS partner Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), while healthcare, injury treatment and forensic examinations were provided by public health providers.
What would have happened if ACCESS did not support the GBV-WGs?

ACCESS has provided critical financial and capacity building support to the establishment of the working groups. While MoWA was already committed to the working group model, ACCESS support and the support of the program’s partners have helped to determine how to ensure these groups function effectively. It is likely that fewer working groups would have been established without this support. Coordinating stakeholders from many different sectors to establish the working groups and build working group members’ capacity is complex and time- and resource-intensive. It requires analytical capabilities, technical know-how and human, financial and material resources. It is therefore unlikely that without ACCESS, MoWA would have had the necessary resources and means to support the establishment and functioning of sub-national groups.

GBV WGs at provincial and district levels are an essential part in the implementation of NAPVAW at sub national levels - H.E Hou Samith in Technical Working Group on Gender-Gender Based Violence (TWG-GGBV) meeting on February 19 2021 to develop of annual operational plans for NAPVAW III
a. 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 strong. The data and information for this story were collected systematically via facilitated discussions and interviews with Working Group members. While perceived biases are unavoidable in scoring the criteria of working group functioning, rigorous attempts were made to seek evidence supporting scoring. In many cases, evidence was provided, for example, a designation letters from authorities, reports of meetings, actual plans or budgets formulated and/or endorsed.

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<th>Significance of the change</th>
<th>Level of ACCESS contribution</th>
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<td>The significance of the change is considered to be highly significant, reflecting that the reported change will most likely outlast ACCESS. Evidence for this is that RGC counterparts have demonstrated greater ownership of the GBV WGs, a commitment to scale up working groups nationwide and have invested their own budget into running the working group meetings and dedicated time and resources to this mechanism.</td>
<td>The level of ACCESS contribution to the change is assessed as very significant. Those interviewed believe that without ACCESS, the reported change would probably not have happened. While there were some contextual factors which increased RGC involvement and engagement with the GBV-WG establishment and operation, and there were existing relationships amongst partners in the GBV sector, ACCESS’ work was agreed to be indispensable for the process of establishing and improving GBV WGs.</td>
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b. Data Sources

ACCESS Six Monthly report June - December 2020
ACCESS Six Monthly report June - December 2021

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4 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.