



Talkback Programming

Cambodia Communication
Assistance Project
Promise Tracking – Case Studies

2017



International Development
Australian Broadcasting Corporation



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Background

The Cambodia Communication Assistance Project (CCAP) enables citizens to publicly express issues through media, and decision makers to respond to those issues raised, improving government accountability and transparency. CCAP provides two-way dialogue platforms for citizens to question sub-national authorities (elected and non-elected provincial, district, commune and village officials) and then follow up on responses. Working with media outlets in four provinces on talkback programming, content focusses on local government services and ending violence against women – two areas that affect the daily well-being and prosperity of many Cambodians.

This is achieved through integrated media dialogue platforms, which comprise:

- **Radio: 20 one-hour live to air talkback shows on governance issues plus six one-hour ending violence against women shows every week. All programs are rebroadcast, totalling 52 hours over six days per week.**
- **ICT and social media: 60,000 visitors per month, 387,500 website hits per month, 60,000 Facebook followers and more than 51,000 Facebook page likes.**
- **Community listening clubs: four lead community listening clubs and 52 small listening groups that meet, listen, discuss, and call into radio programs.**

Facilitating on-air promises

A promise tracking tool was developed to enable effective promise tracking by local broadcasters. These broadcasters record and track promises made by sub-national authorities on air and have a follow up interview process to discuss the response after consulting with the community members on the latest developments.

So far, 65 per cent of promises (agreed action and clear timeframe) made on air have been fully met and a further 35 per cent of promises have started but are not yet complete. The promise tracking tool aims to increase trust in authorities, and improve government transparency and accountability on service delivery and community development projects.

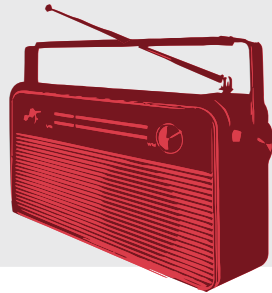
The following stories highlight the impact of the talkback programming in improving the responsiveness of local authorities to deliver promises made to the community.

Talkback programs

October 2015 – May 2017

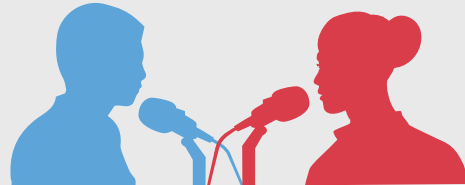
Number of talkback programs

1545



Talkback guest speakers

1960



Talkback callers

7997



Male 68%

Female 32%

Promises made by guest speaker

131

Promises completed by guest speaker

85

Promises that are underway

46



Case Studies

Road Construction in Sleng Village Offers Path to Education



Going to school in Sleng Village, Siem Reap Province is not as easy as it seems. To access the main road leading to the school, nearly 50 children must walk one kilometre down a muddy, narrow road. Many families have feared for their children's safety as they walk down the uneven busy street. The 25-minute trip to school forces the children to walk with their bicycles for almost 20 minutes before they can ride the rest of the way to school.

In mid-2015, Nokorphnom radio station hosted a talkback program discussing the road issue. Citizens complained to the Commune Chief, Chea Hoeun, and asked him to pave the road using the municipal budget.

Following the program's broadcast, the Chief called for a public meeting with villagers to discuss the problem and agree on a solution.

In early-2016, talkback staff followed up on the Commune Chief's promise. They invited Chea Hoeun back on-air, where he reported that

“the commune authorities have paved four kilometres of road including the one in Sleng Village after we heard about the issues on this program.”

Since the road improvement, life has become better for children and their families, thanks to talkback for raising the issue to the local authorities.

A grandmother told the program “my children had to drop out of school because crossing the muddy road was dangerous. My grandchildren are lucky with the road construction, they will continue with their education.”

Access to Education is Maintained, Thanks to Talkback Programming



A controversial riverside development has been stopped after residents of Bay Domram in Battambang province raised concerns it could deny children access to their school.

The Commune Chief, Mr Ngouy Chhangly reversed the decision after he faced public pressure while a guest on the Battambang Provincial Department of Information radio station.

When Mr Ngouy Chhangly appeared on the talkback program many of the callers complained about the development of a new grocery marketplace on the riverbank.

Both Mr Ngouy Chhangly and the Banorn District governor had approved the construction. However, there had been no environmental risk assessment or public consultation before they granted the business a construction licence.

Bay Domram residents were concerned the river would be narrowed by the construction project that had begun filling in the river bank with sand.

The construction site is next to a bridge that connected the village to the local school. Many villagers believed that, because of the narrowing of the river, flooding would destroy their only bridge.

Without the bridge, families would have to pay extra to travel across the river by boat. For poor families, this could mean the difference between their children attending school and missing out.

Going to school by boat in the old days has already prevented many from accessing education. One of the Bay Domram villagers said he feared the education of his two grandsons would no longer be an option with the grocery marketplace construction.

He said,

“we could not afford our children’s education when they were young because we had to spend so much money on crossing the river by boat. I was scared that if the 11-year-old bridge is damaged, the fate of my two grandchildren’s education could end like their parents, uncles and aunties had.”

The bridge has also been an important part of the village’s economy. Since it was built in 2006, farmers have been able to sell their produce to communities on the other side of the river.

After hearing the concerns of the villagers, Mr Chhangly promised that the business licence holder be reviewed by the Department of Water Resources. The review would assess the likelihood of river flooding and other associated risks with the project.

Over the next few months radio staff followed up on the development and reported updates to their audience.

In August 2017, the Deputy Provincial Governor, with advice from the Water Resources Department, issued a letter banning the construction.

Not only was the private sector firm ordered to stop the construction, it was also ordered to reverse all the work filling-up the riverbank. They had found the development was in violation of a new decree that banned constructions within 50 meters of the bank river.

An official of Provincial Department of Water Resources and Meteorology, Hout Chandarith, told the talkback program “this is the first time ever the Department issued a sub decree to stop construction by the river bank.”

After overturning the building licence, Mr Chhangly appeared on-air to make a public apology for granting the construction license without conducting an environmental assessment or consulting the villagers on the proposed construction.

In the village the residents celebrated their victory. The elder villager said he was overwhelmingly happy that his two grandsons could use the bridge to continue their studies across the river.

By holding local officials to account, residents could appeal against a construction project that would have endangered their community.

This bridge, which connects farmers to markets and students to schools, was successfully protected by talkback programming keeping authorities accountable to citizens.

At Ampil Commune, Talkback Brings Safety and Security



High rates of muggings, threatening citizens and fighting between rival gangs has left residents of Ampil Commune fearful for their safety. The high rates of crime in the villages had left some unwilling to leave their homes at night or attend public celebrations or community events. Criminals armed with knives and sticks had taken away the sense of safety for many law-abiding residents of Kampong Cham province.

A lack of effective policing and the rise of criminal organisations forced residents to contact the local Phnombros Phnomsrey radio station (Kampong Cham Provincial Department of Information). In November 2016, villagers called into the talkback program to voice their fears to the Ampil Commune Chief, Roith Kimhai.

The Ampil Commune Chief discussed details of the problem with citizens on the talkback program. Listeners consulted with Mr Kimhai and suggested measures to increase village safety, including neighbourhood patrols at night, strengthening police reporting processes and allowing community members to report to police suspected members of criminal groups.

After listening to their concerns, Mr Kimhai told listeners “I promise to prioritise combating criminal activities as part of the commune safety plan.”

Over the next three months, talkback program staff followed up on the story and by January 2017 the program could confirm that all the agreed action points had been put in place.

Residents of Ampil Commune said they felt safer because of the changes made by their Commune Chief.

One 50-year-old farmer from Ampil said “the village safety group formed after the talkback program and is doing a great job with patrolling the village and social gatherings. People are no longer living in fear of criminal activities.”

The benefits of community consultation have been acknowledged by Commune Chief Kimhai. He said,

“I began to appreciate the talkback program after the discussion I had with villagers over safety issues. I can see the benefits of the program, not only for villagers but also the local authorities.”

Since it began broadcasting in 2012, Phnombros Phnomsrey radio has focused on issues of good governance. From 2016 to 2017, the station has used the promise tracker system to hold local authorities to account on 11 promises made on-air. This public-consultation and accountability measure has improved the delivery of essential services to communities like Ampil.

Prey Thnang Commune Receives Toilets After Years of Waiting



For generations the population of Prey Thnang Commune of Kampot Province have had a lack of public sanitation services. Of the 2000 families in the Commune, 30 per cent do not have access to toilets at home due to extreme poverty. Because of this, open defecation is common practice in the farming community. It is not only a major health hazard, but it also creates an unsafe environment for women.

A 45-year-old farmer and regular talkback listener said “the open defecation area is located behind my house. My family has been exposed to risk of diseases for the last 16 years since we settled here. It is unsafe for women too. Sexual harassment cases do happen at open defecation spaces in isolated areas.”

The community had rarely voiced its frustration to the provincial authorities until it became a topic of discussion on the local radio station, Kampot Provincial Department of Information. During a talkback program, callers revealed the magnitude of the problem and the urgent need for action from public service providers.

The radio talkback program was discussing the issue with its guest, Manager of the Health Care Office of the Rural Development Department, Chun Rung. Mr Rung listened to dozens of calls from Prey Thnang residents who demanded public sanitation services.

Some listeners called for toilet seat distribution, while others requested the construction of toilets near their homes.

Mr Rung stated the construction of toilets were already in his Department’s plans, but he would make it a priority after hearing the Commune’s complaints.

For two months the program followed up on the Rural Development Department’s promise. The radio team followed the story and connected with citizens in the Commune to check if any progress had been made.

By July, 250 toilet seats had been provided to the residents of Prey Thnang Commune. The Rural Development Department had delivered on their promise and provided toilets to the villagers most in need.

Mr Rung said, “the program helped me understand the problem further and connect with citizens to find solutions without traveling to the field.”

The talkback program, according to the local farmers, has improved the responsiveness of local authorities and led to the distribution and construction of toilets to those most in need.

One 27-year old farmer said,

“I did get a toilet seat at home within a few weeks after I called the talkback program. I am glad that my request has been considered by the authorities. I believe calling the program and voicing issues on-air made the authorities take quick action. Now the community is cleaner and safer.”

Preah Dak Talkback Helps Villagers with Affordable Electricity Access



More than 16,000 people in the Preah Dak Commune in Siem Reap Province were denied access to affordable electricity services. Outside the main town of Preah Dak, electricity was expensive and unreliable.

A private company bought electricity from the Electricite Du Cambodge (EDC), a state-run entity, at a cost of 800 riels per kilowatt hour (kwh) to run grids to villages around Preah Dak commune business area and charged users at the rate of 5,000 riels per kwh. This is six times more expensive than EDC.

This higher rate of charge left less well-off villagers with no access to electricity. In early December 2015, the villagers broke their silence and reported their concerns to the talkback program on Siem Reap Provincial Department of Information (PDI) radio station.

The talkback program invited the Commune Chief, Touch Chhorn, to listen to the concerns of the villagers in Preah Dak.

One radio caller told the program that “access to electricity means safety in our remote Commune.”

Callers suggested the Commune Chief negotiate the prices with the private company and for EDC to build more power infrastructure for the region.

In response to citizens’ concerns, Mr Chhorn said “I will negotiate electricity charges. Electricity should be affordable for everyone.”

During the first half of 2016, the talkback radio producers followed up three times on the issue.

In early 2017, the PDI radio station hosted a follow-up program discussing the issue. Mr Chhorn updated listeners on the continued negotiation efforts. He also announced efforts to lobby Provincial Authorities to intervene in price reduction, stating “I talked about this problem at every district and provincial meeting. The Provincial EDC is accountable for providing the public with affordable services.”

A few months later, the Commune Chief went on the talkback program to report the good news that the Provincial EDC agreed to install additional power poles and grids in the area, so villagers would have 24-hour direct access to electricity supplied by EDC at its official rate.

Mr Chhorn praised the talkback program’s role in providing a platform for discussions with citizens on access to public services, stating

“Talkback is a forum for accountability and I am happy to respond to public concerns. I wanted to tell the people living in my commune that I worked on this issue for almost three years. Talkback helped me exchange ideas for a solution with residents of the Preah Dak Commune.”

Radio talkback staff visited the commune a few months later to check on the progress made. One farmer in the Preah Dak Commune said, “I feel safe now because I can turn on the lights all night in some places including in my cowshed.”

Another farmer commented “when there are topics about development issues in my Commune, I often listen. I like the program because it helped my Commune with providing access to affordable electricity.”

Talkback radio program is aired by partner Nokor Phnom provincial radio station and is a prime source of information on local governance issues.

In Svay Chek, Talkback Helps to Improve Public Health Services



When an emergency occurs during the night, residents of Svay Chek know there will be no doctors ready to help. For the 14,000 villagers in Siem Reap Province, it is common knowledge that physicians rarely attend the health centre at night. The closest healthcare facility to Svay Chek is 20 kilometres away in the province centre. Only those who can afford the transport expenses can travel to the hospital.

One Svay Chek resident said, “most of the time the health workers are not available at the health centre. For those who can afford extra expenses, they go to the provincial hospital for treatment but the poor ones, they do not have a choice.”

In March 2017, the talkback program hosted the newly appointed Deputy Director of Svay Chek health centre, Rith Theara. During the program, one listener called-in to complain about the discrepancies in service charges, health workers rudeness, and the relaxed attitude about the locals’ suffering. One listener asked, “why are the health workers not available during the night shift?” With another asking, “is it legal that physicians ask for extra money from patients?”

Some listeners reported that health workers would charge patients different rates from the officially listed ones.

One talkback listener commented that, “the health workers made it difficult for patients to access treatment. They often ask for additional identification documents such as the family book and if the patients don’t have it on them they ask them to obtain a new one to receive treatment.” After hearing the complaints from Svay Chek villagers, the Deputy Director promised to improve health services.

In July 2017, Theara provided the talkback audience with an update on improvements, reporting the re-structuring of shifts and health staff duties as well as the recruitment

of volunteers to communicate with villagers. He said, “I reinforced the role of the voluntary village-health support group who shared a list of service charges with villagers, collected their feedback to improve the health service responsiveness and accountability.”

The role of the program in highlighting the concerns of Svay Chek residents was acknowledged by Theara, who said,

“the commune authorities didn’t realize the problem was that big as we didn’t receive such significant information until the issue was discussed on-air. We have taken action regarding the comments received.”

Talkback staff followed up on Svay Chek two months after Theara’s announcement. One listener told talkback staff that, “there has been a major improvement in the health services and staff attitudes. Now villagers can access the health centre at any time and get treated without paying extra charges. Thanks to PDI talkback, I can see the result of my phone call to the program. The local authorities are more responsive to the public.”

Another listener who visited a healthcare centre said, “the health workers have clearly explained the medical examination charges to me when I visited with my child. They didn’t ask for extra money this time.”

Between 2016 and 2017 local officials in Seam Reap have delivered on 16 promises made on talkback radio. Because of the efforts of radio staff these officials are being held to account for their promises. The services they deliver have a profound impact on the health and wellbeing of people who live in communities like Svay Chek.

In Kampot, Identification Documents are Processed Free of Charge



Family record books are used in Cambodia to document vital family information such as date of birth, date of marriage, names of citizens and number of children. The Ministry of Interior used to charge 10,000 Riel (3.2 AUD) to produce the book. Local police would collect the money on behalf of the central administration. This is until the government waived the fee in January 2017.

The process should take 15 days according to government policy, but it has never been the case for a mother of two from Kampot's Dangton District. In April 2017, the mother told the talkback radio program "it has been two years since I applied for the family book production, what should I do now?".

The Provincial Department of Information partner radio station, 9 Makara, aired a talkback discussion about the irregularities associated with the production of identification documents. The Deputy Provincial Police Commissioner Sambath Sothearath told talkback listeners "the police implement the government policy of producing family record books at no cost. Those who violate this policy must be punished and I will follow up on this case".

Phally is a 70-years-old retired Commune Police Officer from Chhouk district. He told the Deputy Police Commissioner, "Please intervene as the Police Officers are still asking people for money when producing identification documents".

In June 2017, talkback radio producers followed up on the guest speaker's promise to address the issues raised. After

two years of waiting, the mother of two reported to the radio station, "Members of the commune police visited my house and told me about the missing documents in my application. This is something I was never told about by the police. I finally received the book, thanks to talkback".

Commenting on the case, Pang Seak, the Commune Police Chief in Dangton District told the talkback program, "No more cases left on my desk. I admit the police should have educated the public about the documents needed to issue the family book".

As for Phally, things have also changed in Chhouk District

"I am happy that the police officers stopped asking people for money when producing family record books. I believe the provincial police did follow up on the issues after they were raised on the talkback program".



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