

# PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE NATIONAL LEAGUE OF LOCAL COUNCILS AND THE ASSOCIATION OF URBAN MUNICIPALITIES OF ALBERTA

## ADVANCING THE ROLE AND CAPACITIES OF CAMBODIAN LOCAL COUNCILS FOR MORE SUSTAINABLE AND EQUITABLE LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

### 1. Overview of the project

#### 1.1. Summary

##### *National League of Local Councils of the Kingdom of Cambodia (NLC)*

The National League of Local Councils was created in 2006. It represents 1,633 commune-sangkat councils and 197 district/municipality/khan councils. One of the key strategic objectives of NLC is to support the capacity of its members to take a lead in the promotion of more equitable and environmentally sustainable development.

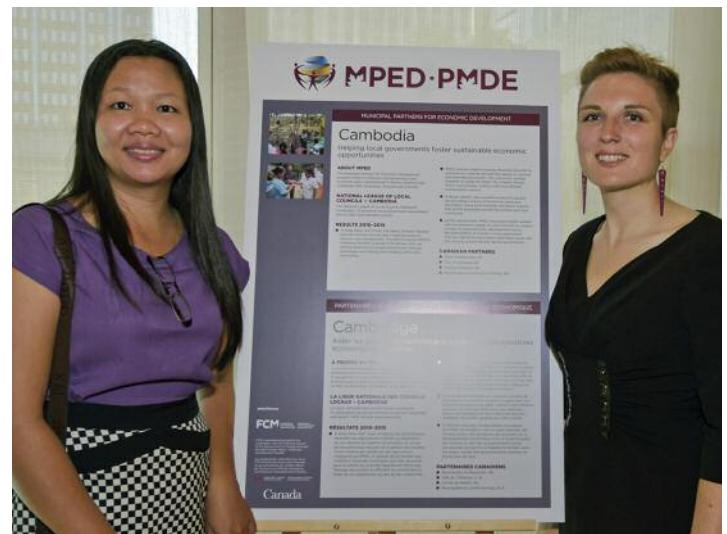
The partnership between NLC and FCM was initiated in 2009 when FCM provided technical support to the League's Public Relations Committee (PRC). FCM helped the League create its website, quarterly newsletter and information book, which has made the League well-known and understood. The Municipal Partners for Economic Development (MPED) program built on this initial small partnership, expanding it to a formal co-management partnership in the delivery of the Cambodian projects. Through MPED (2011-15), FCM and NLC committed to develop a joint workplan with three sub-components: 1) implementation of demonstration projects in district and in municipalities of three provinces in Cambodia focused on the development of local economic development (LED) strategic planning processes and delivery of small LED initiatives, 2) the institutional capacity building plan of NLC itself and 3) the development and implementation of regional knowledge-sharing activities jointly with other associations and partners in South-East Asia. This document focuses primarily on the second component of this program, the association capacity building (ACB) of NLC.

In this context, the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) and NLC formed a partnership in 2011 to build the capacity of NLC to be a more effective agent of change in advancing the role and capacities of Cambodian local governments regarding sustainable and equitable LED.

Decentralization is still in its early stages in Cambodia and weaknesses are impeding local councils to play their catalytic and supportive role in LED effectively. Moreover, in 2011 when MPED was introduced in Cambodia, the

concept of LED was new to most local councils, as well as for the NLC team itself. As partners, AUMA and NLC developed a "Local Government Association Capacity Building Project" to guide their work on strategies and actions to increase LED knowledge-sharing and advocacy, increase the number of women who run for local office, improve training and development processes, and develop a media and communication plan.

Five years later, there have been significant achievements. Although there is still room for further dissemination, the concept of LED is now widely understood, discussed and prioritized in Cambodia, within the districts and municipalities directly involved in the project, but also all across the country. NLC has reached out to its whole membership through its annual congress, various dissemination workshops, publications and media coverage. The documentation produced within the scope of the program drew the attention of key line ministries at central and provincial levels. LED issues are being discussed and planned in different forums, projects and policy dialogues. The percentage of women elected as local officials is in constant progression. Although this is attributed to a combination of various national efforts, it is positively regarded by NLC, which calls for even better results in the future. For example, since the creation of local councils, three election terms have passed. At the sangkat and commune level, the



number of elected women has more than doubled between the first and third terms.

## 1.2. Project methodology

### 1.2.1. First component: Provision of LED-related services to members

NLC intended to develop quality LED-related services for members, including training, knowledge sharing and progress monitoring. The first step was to gain an understanding of the current situation with regards to LED and to assess the needs of members through a large LED survey. The second step was the creation of a pool of LED trainers to ensure a wide reach of LED capacity building across the country. The third step was the development of an LED policy paper and advocacy strategy with the objective to influence policy development and implementation. Parallel to the implementation of this ACB plan were demonstration projects directly involving nine local governments; these projects contributed to the overall strengthening of capacity related to LED of both NLC staff and board members, as well as local councils and their partners. The experience of demonstration projects fed the development of training material and documentation developed by NLC throughout the ACB project.

#### STEP 1: Development of LED Survey

The LED survey was inspired by the work of the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM). Representatives from UBCM had presented the results and use of this work in different MPED forums organized by FCM. They worked with the Association of Cities of Vietnam to undertake a similar process. In 2013, the experiences of both UBCM and ACVN were analyzed by NLC and AUMA, and adapted to the Cambodian context.

Overall, the survey aimed to raise awareness and understanding of LED among NLC members, and broaden recognition that LED is about more than just infrastructure development.

While the survey questionnaires in B.C. and in Vietnam had been mailed to members, the same process would not allow NLC members to respond in an informed and relevant manner due to lower levels of familiarity with the basic concept of LED. It was therefore decided to organize three large workshops in different regions of the country. The first part of the workshop would offer basic LED training, while the second would allow participants to complete the survey on-site.

NLC adapted the questionnaire from the Vietnam and B.C. versions with the technical support of AUMA and a Canadian consultant. A Canadian volunteer from the City of Amherst, NS, developed the training component of the workshop. He delivered the first session jointly with a local consultant and the NLC team, who then delivered

the subsequent sessions. Results from the survey were compiled by that same local consultant, and then analyzed by a Canadian consultant. Recommendations were formulated by NLC based on the analysis of the survey.

In total, 401 participants (108 female) from NLC members (commune-sangkat councils, district/municipality/khan councils) in five regions of Cambodia participated in the training and responded to the survey. The report from this survey called “Local Economic Development: Thriving for Local Prosperity”, printed in Khmer and English, was distributed to all members and relevant line ministries.

#### STEP 2: Creation of a pool of LED trainers

A pool of LED trainers was established in 2014 to assist the NLC in LED capacity development, training and knowledge sharing. The team consists of 19 members, chaired by a former Kampong Cham municipal governor who is knowledgeable and experienced in FCM and LED projects. Some trainers had experience in LED demonstration projects, while others come from provincial associations of municipality, district, commune and sangkat councils from the LED target provinces – Kandal, Kampong Cham and Battambang.

The LED team was provided with two days of training in facilitation skills to strengthen their capacity in sharing knowledge and experiences of LED projects with other local governments in the country. Following the session, the trainees reported being more confident. They have since shared their LED knowledge and experiences during workshops organized by NLC and supported by FCM.

#### STEP 4: Development of LED policy paper and related advocacy strategy

A policy paper developed in 2015 examined the important role of local governments in Cambodia in promoting LED. The purpose of the paper was to identify the policy directions needed to enable the local councils to perform their economic development role effectively to better serve their citizens.

This policy paper builds on MPED-supported work done by UCLG to develop an LED policy paper for adoption by its members; this paper sought to draw attention of local



governments, national governments and donors around the role of local governments in supporting economic growth and poverty reduction. With the support of a Canadian consultant, and based on the survey results and experience of the demonstration project, NLC developed its own LED policy paper. It formulates recommendations for local governments, for central government and for the international donor community.

The League will present this LED policy paper to the National Committee for Sub-national Democratic Development (NCDD) and advocate for its adoption by the government with the recommendation that local councils put it into practice. The League will do the advocacy work by cooperating with other partners involved in LED projects such GIZ (German Aid Agency).

### ***1.2.2. Increase women's participation in local government***

This component sought to help increase the number of women running for municipal office, with a particular focus on young educated women. Young women are underemployed and underrepresented, but often don't think of getting involved in local politics. Instead, they are focused on elected positions at the national level.

The main strategy of NLC as part of its ACB plan was to carry out two surveys to better understand the obstacles blocking women from involvement in local politics and to identify opportunities on which to capitalize. The first survey was called "Women in Local Politics in Cambodia". The purpose was to update the challenges faced by elected commune-sangkat female councillors, their experiences and their suggestions put forward since becoming councillors. In total, 204 women commune-sangkat councillors responded to the survey. This represents 10 per cent of the total number of commune-sangkat women councillors elected in 2012; they represent five different political parties.

The second survey, "Attracting Young Women to Local Government in Cambodia", sought to (1) raise awareness and create an understanding for potential future candidates in local government roles, (2) learn how young women perceive local government careers in terms of rewards, barriers and challenges, (3) inform 200 young educated women about career opportunities in local governments and (4) demonstrate that NLC is committed to attracting young women to local government positions, especially for the 2017 commune-sangkat elections. The survey was conducted at two universities: Battambang University and the Royal University of Phnom Penh, with 181 female students filling out the questionnaire.

This research helped NLC to better understand the needs and challenges of involving young, educated women in local politics. Many young women often overlook local politics and focus their political careers

on elected positions at the national level. As a result, women's interests continue to be underrepresented at the local level and many young, educated women remain underemployed and without a voice. This research helped confirm the need to continue to build the capacity of local government associations to reach out more to women and find positive ways to include them in decision making.

The reports from these surveys have been printed in Khmer and English and are being used as evidence-based documents for advocacy work with the national government and relevant stakeholders.

### ***1.2.3. Dissemination and communication strategy***

MPED has supported, through various training sessions, two main committees of NLC: Public Relations (PRC), and Women and Children Affairs (CWCA). The training mainly focused on communication, representation and writing skills for newsletters and case studies. Communication training was also provided to NLC staff and Board members.

In 2014, three LED case studies were developed and a video documentary was produced showcasing the impact of MPED'S demonstration projects on the community. This was the result of the PRC'S and the Partnership and Advocacy Committee (PAC)'s hard work. They collected information, conducted interviews and compiled the case studies. The development of these products was part of the knowledge-sharing component of the project, but also built the capacity of the PRC and PAC. The video on LED demonstration projects implemented by the nine target districts/municipalities was produced in Khmer, English and French. The video has been widely disseminated and promoted to NLC's members during council and executive meetings and events organized by the League; in regional events organized by UCLG-ASPAC; through NLC and FCM websites; through MPED's newsletter; and by all Canadian municipalities involved in the program.



### **1.3. Partners and stakeholders**

The project was coordinated by the NLC Secretariat, which played an important role in organizing activities and logistics. A full-time capacity building advisor (National Program Coordinator) was hired to help the NLC Secretariat achieve its goals. The NLC Board was also actively involved in project leadership, as well as with advocacy with relevant government ministries.

The CWCA and PRC also had key roles in implementing the project and assuring its success. The CWCA was actively involved in validating questionnaires for both the LED survey and the survey on women in local politics in Cambodia. The PRC was highly involved in communication training and LED case study development.

Community members from the nine target LED districts/municipalities also played a key role as they were actively involved in LED survey dissemination and workshops involving participants from various districts/municipalities from across the country. In the workshops, they shared their practical experiences in implementing LED demonstration projects.

The pool of LED trainers played a very important role in disseminating information on LED and in raising awareness of local councils on their role in LED. They have been instrumental in NLC's advocacy strategy to engage in dialogue with different levels of elected officials and line ministries.

AUMA worked closely with the NLC Secretariat to identify strategic priorities and develop the project plan, implementation plan and monitoring framework. They provided guidance and technical support, especially in the development of the two surveys related to participation of women in politics. AUMA hosted a study tour in Edmonton where NLC staff experienced how it is addressing issues of gender in local politics and advocacy work around economic development and public affairs.

Influenced by previous work by the UBCM in Vietnam, Canadian consultants, a local consultant and one volunteer from the City of Amherst teamed up with NLC to design the LED survey questionnaire, build and deliver training workshops on LED and analyze the survey results. This support from external experts was instrumental to the development of high quality tools adapted to the local context.

## **2. Project results**

### **2.1. Expected versus actual results**

#### ***The main expected results of the ACB project:***

1. The NLC has supported local councils in successfully promoting environmentally friendly local economic development initiatives with the purpose of job creation and, hence, poverty reduction.

2. The national government begins to develop a LED strategy.
3. NLC becomes a centre for information on women in local politics.
4. NLC training provides knowledge of information related to LED and advocacy initiatives.
5. Greater visibility of NLC and understanding of its role and information related to LED work is shared effectively.

#### ***RESULT 1: The NLC has supported local councils in successfully promoting environmentally friendly local economic development initiatives with the purpose of job creation and, hence, poverty reduction.***

This expected result refers to the capacity of NLC to manage implementation of the demonstration projects in the nine local councils as part of the first pillar of MPED in Cambodia. The achievement of this result is largely discussed in the three case studies on the demonstration projects.

#### ***RESULT 2: The national government begins to develop a LED strategy.***

The LED survey done by NLC was instrumental in attracting the attention of high-level government officials, especially from the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Planning and Ministry of Economics and Finance. H.E Hou Taing Eng., the Secretary of State at Ministry of Planning said, "*the survey and research results are meaningful and essential for local governments in Cambodia to understand their people's economic situations and make their living conditions much better*". This was a major achievement for the project and helped advocate with the national government the need for the development of an LED strategy.

As a result of the project, NLC is a more effective agent of change in advancing the role and capacity of local governments in Cambodia in relation to sustainable and equitable LED. Thanks to this work, there is obvious advancement on developing a national LED strategy, although nothing has been formalized yet.

The development of the LED policy paper confirmed that local councils, which are democratically elected bodies, play an indispensable role in the process of economic development in Cambodia. The NLC is now better able to advocate to the national government that local councils are crucial to providing a safe, secure and stable environment in which economic activities can flourish. They are responsible for creating and maintaining physical infrastructure such as roads, irrigation system, water supply and waste management, which are necessary prerequisites to economic activity. Through its research, NLC has demonstrated the need for a national policy that defines clear roles and responsibilities to local governments in promoting economic development.

Advocacy has been focused on the National Committee for Sub-national Democratic Development (NCDD), which is the government's inter-ministry body, since it plays a central role in developing such a policy.

### **RESULT 3: NLC becomes a centre for information on women in local politics.**

NLC is the first local organization in Cambodia to have conducted research and analysis on women in local politics. Its two surveys had extensive uptake and allowed NLC to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of elected women in local politics. The surveys documented the challenges faced by elected female councillors, their experiences and their suggestions. The findings provided insight to NLC about how to support women councillors to help them perform their roles and responsibilities and engage in local governance more effectively. NLC has raised awareness and encouraged young, educated Cambodian women to run for elected positions at the local level, especially for the 2017 commune-sangkat elections. There is still a lot of work to be done to help women overcome the challenges, but as a result of the dialogue created by the NLC study more opportunities are being considered.

The CWCA has also built capacity through its involvement in validating and testing questionnaire surveys with women in local politics in Cambodia and the survey on attracting young women to local government in Cambodia. The committee will play an important role in sharing the findings of the two surveys and their practical experiences with female university students and women who may wish to join local governments; however, given its limited budget, the committee has not been so active.

### **RESULT 4: NLC training provides knowledge of information related to LED and advocacy initiatives.**

A team of 19 trainers successfully conducted workshops organized by NLC to help build capacity of local government on LED and advocacy initiatives being pursued by the League. These trainers are using all available opportunities to promote LED in their respective communities.

The implementation of MPED demonstration projects in the nine districts and sangkats over five years, which included numerous knowledge exchanges, contributed to raise the awareness of local governments about LED. All leaders involved in MPED demonstration projects confirmed that LED initiatives are now incorporated into their five-year development plans and into their three-year rolling investment plans.

Three LED case studies produced in Khmer and English detailed the experiences of target districts of Kandal's Koh Thom and Kampong Cham's Kang Meas in increasing living standards and income levels for local farmers through better access to knowledge and information about agricultural production. Another LED case study

is about the experience of Kampong Cham municipality of Kampong Cham province in promoting tourism development and increasing the number of tourists visiting Kampong Cham, with the ultimate goal of improving the livelihood of local people. The League's Public Relations Committee and Partnership and Advocacy Committee played a central role in producing the case studies after they were trained on case study documentation skills.

A video on LED demonstration projects implemented by the nine target districts/municipalities was produced in Khmer with subtitles in English. The video has been shown to NLC's members in its council and executive meetings and at events organized by the League. This video serves as a communication tool for NLC, contributes to raise interest of other local governments in LED activities and projects, and demonstrates NLC's capacity to deliver quality development projects that contribute to economic growth in Cambodia.

The case study development and LED video documentary helped establish NLC as a centre for information on LED that can share best practices and lessons learned for other local governments to use as models.

### **RESULT 5. Greater visibility of NLC and understanding of its role and information related to LED work is shared effectively.**

As a result of the League's work with FCM, the NLC has achieved greater visibility and understanding of its role. The PRC along with the League's Partnership and Advocacy Committee (PAC) had training on news reporting and writing, advocacy skills and case study documentation skills. The development of three LED case studies by the PRC and PAC, the report of the three surveys and the LED policy papers were all key in obtaining greater visibility. NLC has committed to institutionalize MPED's results by integrating its objectives into its five-year strategic plan. NLC became an institution capable of being a meaningful partner of the national government. It will mobilize partners to further support LED. NLC can provide high-quality training services and is prepared to play this role.

Through the project, NLC leaders have had the chance to share and learn knowledge and experiences on LED in regional and annual workshops organized by FCM. These kinds of activities have provided NLC Board members with new knowledge and experiences to be used and shared with local governments in Cambodia.

## **2.2. Compatibility with program crosscutting goals**

Women's participation in the project has been highly promoted in the ACB project activities. The Committee for Women and Children Affairs (CWCA) is one of the main targets of the ACB project. Women have been actively

involved in surveys, workshops, meetings and trainings. For instance, 205 elected female councillors participated in the survey on women in local politics in Cambodia. Women also represented 25% of all participants in dissemination workshops, LED surveys and LED trainings, and have become strong promoters of women's participation in local politics and LED initiatives.

### **2.3. Success factors**

The success and results of the project are based on the following key factors:

**NLC's existing working relationships with the Public Relations Committee and Committee for Women and Children Affairs:** The two committees, which support the NLC Board, have played an important role in executing the ACB project activities.

**NLC's existing positive reputation:** NLC has a strong foundation as it has members in all provinces (1,633 commune/sangkat councils and 197 district/municipality/khan councils). Thus NLC finds it easy to mobilize local councils to participate in filling survey questionnaires and taking training and workshops.

**NLC has strong support from core line government ministries (Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Planning and Ministry of Economics and Finance):** High-level representatives from the ministries had actively participated in all LED survey dissemination workshops. The Secretary of State for Ministry of Planning praised the quality of the LED survey, saying the results are acceptable and useful.

**Improved LED expertise:** The MPED's ACB work has been an important factor in the capacity of the NLC team to deliver the program efficiently and in turn build the capacity of its membership. Through a sound capacity building plan developed and delivered with the support of AUMA, NLC now understands better how to play its role as a representative of LGs. NLC knows how important LED knowledge and initiatives are and how they should be shared with its members.

### **2.4. Sustainability of results**

NLC ensures the results of this project will be sustainable in different ways. The first step is the incorporation of these priorities into the League's five-year strategic plan with clear priorities and an action plan. NLC is also committed to continue advocating for a stronger LED enabling legal and policy environment in Cambodia.

The Public Relations Committee will also play a central role in disseminating information about LED concepts and initiatives to NLC members across the country. To fund this activity, NLC could implement its planned increase in membership fees.

NLC will mobilize resources from national and international NGOs, as well as development partners, to build on achievements from MPED. For example, the Committee for Women and Children Affairs could share results from the two surveys with young educated women to encourage them to participate in local government.

Lastly, a pool of LED trainers, with experience in MPED-LED projects, was established by the NLC. They play an important role in sharing knowledge and experiences with other local governments across the country.

## **3. Sharing the experience: What did stakeholders learn from the experience that could be adapted by other municipalities?**

### **3.1. Lessons**

At the end of five years of collaboration in implementing the ACB project, some important lessons were learned.

#### **Experience developing and using knowledge management tools:**

Learning about knowledge management tools is the most important lesson. NLC has implemented many projects with development partners, but MPED focused on the importance of producing success stories, cases studies and videos on LED projects. These knowledge products have largely built NLC's capacity to communicate the processes and results of its interventions on LED, and contributed to raising the organization's profile to draw the attention of numerous local governments and ministry representatives.

#### **Importance of public relations and communication:**

With financial support from FCM since 2009, the Public Relations Committee played an important role to increase the visibility of the League, which is now well aware of the importance of communicating more effectively with stakeholders and members

### **3.2. Good Practices**

**Knowledge management tools:** MPED has facilitated the production of success stories, case studies and video on LED as important documents that could be shared widely and effectively.

**Surveys:** The two surveys on women in politics and LED are important resources for the League to use as training documents and evidence-based advocacy. The member surveys allow the organization to understand the current situation related to a specific issue, identify relevant priorities and support the development of relevant and timely services that respond to the needs expressed by stakeholders.

**Regional and annual workshops:** NLC Board members have been able to share knowledge and learn from experiences on LED presented in workshops organized by FCM. These kinds of activities have provided NLC Board members with new knowledge and experiences and can be used and shared with local governments in Cambodia.

### 3.3. Success stories

#### *LED project enhances capacity of NLC Board members to be dynamic leaders*

Mr. Kong Chheng has been chairman of the League's Public Relations Committee since 2008. With technical support from FCM in 2009, he was involved in the development of the League's communication plan that has helped promote the visibility of the League through the creation of a website, a quarterly newsletter and an information book. Mr. Kong Chheng and PRC members have also learned the concepts and the importance of public relations.

In 2012, through MPED, members of PRC and the League's Partnership and Advocacy Committee (PAC) took part in several training sessions that built their capacity. These included training on public relations and spokesperson skills, advocacy skills, news writing and reporting, and case study writing and documentation.

The above training has built the capacity of the PRC and PAC. Mr. Kong Chheng has become more confident and knowledgeable on information dissemination and LED projects. He has represented the League in various events and as a guest speaker on radio talk shows.

Mr. Kong Chheng, who is president of Kandal Provincial Association of Municipality, District, Commune and Sangkat Councils, said he now understands well the concept of LED for local governments and how the target districts and municipalities in his province can benefit from it. "This is a good lesson that I learned from the FCM project," he said, adding he would use the

experience to strengthen the association and share with others.

Similarly, Mr. Keang Sengky, PAC chairman and president of Kampong Thom Provincial Association of Municipality, District, Commune and Sangkat Councils, said FCM's LED project enabled him to learn more about the LED service that his association will deliver to its members. Mr. Sengky has been disseminating LED concepts and experiences to his members and encouraging them to come up with LED initiatives.

Both Mr. Kong Chheng and Mr. Keang Sengky are members of the League's LED Trainers. They are committed to sharing LED concepts and experiences with local governments in the country.

With the enhanced capacity supported by FCM, Mr. Kong Chheng and Mr. Keang Sengky were, in July 2014, voted to be two of the League's vice presidents. The League is headed by a president and eight vice presidents. It has 1,633 commune/sangkat councils and 197 district/municipality/khan councils as its members.

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