SNAPSHOT

Hotline and Mobile App Improve Access to Public Service

A commune council member in Srash Chik commune in Banteay Meachey demonstrates how to use the SEVAKHUM hotline in a training provided by the Advocacy and Policy Institute (API).

"To receive some commune services I used to go the commune hall several times as I do not know what documents I need. This hotline helps me know what I need in order to receive the services," said 55-year-old farmer Em Krem from Banteay Meanchey province.

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According to the corruption watchdog Transparency International, Cambodia recorded the lowest score among Southeast Asian countries on their 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), with 21 out of a possible 100 points. The index, which measures the perceived levels of public sector corruption, placed Cambodia at 150th worldwide in the study of 168 countries. Through its One Window Service Office (OWSO), the Royal Government of Cambodia has been working to address this issue by providing public services to the citizens and businesses with greater efficiency, transparency, accountability and quality. To ensure that public servants can operate more responsively and accountably, Cambodian NGO the Advocacy and Policy Institute (API) has created a tool called SEVAKHUM in partnership with Open Institute.

SEVAKHUM, which means commune service in Khmer, allows people to access information about key commune services remotely through an information hotline technology called Interactive Voice Response (IVR). To learn about the prices of public services like marriage certificates or identity cards, and find out what documents are required for these services, citizens can make phone calls to the hotline for simple information in their language or download the SEVAKHUM app from the Play Store.

"The current access to information mechanism at the sub-national level is limited at communes, and the information disclosure system is not properly functioning," said API executive director Mr. Neb Sinthay. "People reported facing difficulties trying to access information at the commune level. Commune officials are often absent and citizens are unable to have their questions answered when they try to access services. It is a continuous struggle for citizens to find consistent information on public services."

API is now introducing the SEVAKHUM hotline and app to select commune councils and commune police stations and has conducted outreach sessions for more than 440 citizens in remote parts of Cambodia, some of whom are trained to provide additional outreach sessions in other villages.

Upon learning about the hotline at a community forum, 55-year-old farmer Mr. Em Krem from Banteay Meanchey province, 350km from the Phnom Penh capital, said, "To receive some commune services I used to go the commune hall several times as I do not know what documents I need. This hotline helps me know what I need in order to receive the services."

Service providers also praise the tool. "The hotline is very important because it makes the services easier for the people. They usually come empty-handed and have no idea what the required documents are, so they have to go back and forth a few times. With this hotline, people will know clearly what they need to bring along for the service, so we can provide faster service. It also reduces my work in answering their questions [about the service]. The hotline will do the job," Mr. Meng Ly, Srash Chik commune chief in Banteay Meanchey province said with a smile.

After receiving training on the hotline and app, Srash Chik commune police chief Mr. Hok Chhunda downloaded the app to test on his Samsung phone. He explained how the app makes his work easier, "I cannot usually remember all the information for each service. This app lets me get the information whenever I need it."

SEVAKHUM is funded by USAID through Development Innovations, a project that helps civil society organizations and technology companies to design and use information and communication technology (ICT) solutions that address Cambodia's development challenges.