

## The project “Empowerment of civil society advocating for the rights of urban poor in Siem Reap project” (CISUP) closed by end of July 2016, how did it end? Time for a debriefing.

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The CISUP project started in May 2014 initially for 2 years with a co-financing of the EU for Human Rights. For this project, ADDA made a partnership with the local organization Legal Aid of Cambodia (LAC). The project was extended by 3 months and definitively closed by July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2016.

The objective of the project was that Civil society is built to advocate for the land rights of vulnerable urban and peri-urban poor in Siem Reap improving their land tenure situations and livelihood.

Land issues are often at the same time a cause and a consequence of poverty. The price of lands in Siem Reap is high and lands accessible to the poorest are those that are not “authorized” and cheaper- e.g many new comers in Siem Reap, settle on “unused” public lands (dams and roads) with the risk to be evicted when public development projects start, or in restricted area such as the Angkor Archeological Park where lands transfers and constructions are strictly regulated or even forbidden. In this area, even long term “legal” residents have fragile land tenure because they do not often make the official request for a land certificate, as they don’t know how to do. Moreover, poor villagers affected by land disputes are afraid of intending action against well-off or powerful people or companies, because they don’t know their rights or do not trust local authorities.

When they are not sure about their future in a place, people are reluctant to invest time and money to improve their living environment and housing, they are not seen as positive forces for local development and are rather considered as a burden by local authorities and do not benefit from public services.



*CISUP project Closing Ceremoni with participation of ADDA’s Project Coordinator in Cambodia, Kjeld Vodder Nielsen.*

### **What did we do?**

ADDA and LAC worked with the SHGs members and villagers in 7 communes affected by various land issues to improve their land tenure and encourage communities' engagement in local development processes.

Our support took the form of trainings, coaching, advisory and facilitation services with 3 mottos, for the people to become the engine of change: "know your (land) rights", "gain greater capacity of leadership and management", "engage in advocacy and build partnerships".



*Coalition committees monthly exchange meeting, Nokor Thom, May 2016.*

### **What is achieved?**

A large number of villagers better understand their land tenure status, and how they can legally improve their situation in the short and mid-term. More than 1000 villagers- a majority of members of existing SHGs- voluntarily gathered in community coalitions (6) registered at commune levels to join forces, define and implement community development plans and land strategic plans.

In terms of land, the coalition members made joint official requests for land certification in the archeological park, obtain the effective intervention of higher ranking officials to solve land disputes, and plan and work with local authorities for the application of a circular ensuring fair re-location processes for informal settlers. Negotiations and procedures have been initiated during the project and a positive dialog developed between the authorities and the communities, however due to the nature of the processes tangible results will materialize later.

In terms of community and local development both the SHGs and the coalitions achieved a lot: 4 new SHGs were established at the demand of the villagers, the capital raised by the groups to provide loans to their members for productive and emergency purposes increased from USD 44,000 to more than USD

80,000 in 2 years, SHGs and coalitions participation to local planning processes, the efforts engaged in soft advocacy during public forum and monthly commune meetings and partnerships built with other NGOs and projects as well as commune authorities resulted in the completion of 27 community development projects and 57 being under progress out of the 114 projects prioritized by the coalitions.

**What will happen now?**

The project officially ended with a closing workshop mid-July 2016, honored by the presence of ADDA Country Coordinator Kjeld Vodder Nielsen, EU project manager and Municipality authorities.

Activities are continuing...without ADDA and without EU funding.

The SHGs now operate on their own: they conduct their meetings and manage saving/ loaning and they contribute to the administrative costs of the coalitions. The coalitions continue to represent the interest of their members at commune and provincial levels, provide technical supports to the SHGs committees as required and follow the implementation of their plans with new partners. The 6 coalitions committees are regularly meeting to exchange experiences, observe progresses and learn from each other. Changes are on track!