

## PARTNERING TO MAKE BUDGETS WORK FOR THE PEOPLE

### The NGO Forum on Cambodia (NGO Forum) – Cambodia

The NGO Forum on Cambodia (NGO Forum) is a network of civil society organizations in Cambodia conducting policy analysis and advocacy on a wide variety of issues. The NGO Forum was founded in the early 1980s to campaign for an end to the aid embargo on Cambodia. The Phnom Penh-based organization has since expanded its network to include member organizations doing work on aid effectiveness, indigenous minority rights, environmental integrity, sustainable agriculture, land and housing reform, democratic development, and macroeconomic policy coordination. The NGO Forum seeks to “ensure that the rights of poor and vulnerable groups in Cambodia are recognized and supported by the policies and practices of Cambodia’s government and donors, and by the wider community.”

The NGO Forum divides its work into four broad thematic areas: 1) the Core Program provides general administrative and management support to all of the NGO Forum’s projects and coordinates with different civil society organizations in Cambodia to ensure effective cooperation on shared goals and initiatives; 2) the Environment Program focuses on the environmental and social impacts of development projects; 3) the Land and Livelihoods Program works with local communities to address issues of ownership rights, resettlement, and titling; and 4) the Development Issues Program examines the national development planning process, macroeconomic development policy, foreign aid effectiveness, and inefficiencies in social expenditures.

### NGO Forum’s Development Issues Program Advocates for Responsive Governance

The Development Issues Program (DIP) is one of the most important mechanisms in the NGO Forum’s push for a more transparent, accountable, and effective national government. Its projects on Economic and Social Development Policy address a wide range of issues, including debt, structural adjustments, trade policy, and inflation.

The DIP has also directed some of its capacity toward the monitoring of an emerging oil and gas industry. The growth of extractive industries in many developing countries has had a major impact on the lives of poor people, who often suffer the most from the resulting environmental degradation, land grabs, and misspent revenue. In 2008 the Economic Development Project of the DIP contributed to the establishment of the “Cambodians for Resource Revenue Transparency” Coalition. This coalition, which includes the Development Partnership in Action, the Youth Resource for Development Program, and the Advocacy and Policy Institute, is working to ensure that revenues from the development of Cambodia’s natural resources are distributed fairly and efficiently to improve social infrastructure and reduce poverty.



**Cambodia**  
**Open Budget Index 2010**  
Overall Score: 15  
Government provides scant information to the public on how it manages public resources.

Availability of budget documents critical for effective public input:	
Pre-Budget Statement	Yes
Executive’s Budget Proposal	No
Citizens Budget	No
Enacted Budget	Yes
In-Year Reports	Yes
Mid-Year Review	No
Year-End Report	Yes
Audit Report	No
<a href="http://www.openbudgetindex.org">www.openbudgetindex.org</a>	

Another influx of investment into Cambodia, in the form of foreign aid, has influenced the DIP to launch its Aid Effectiveness Project. Past development projects in Cambodia have suffered from inefficiencies caused by a lack of collaboration and communication between donors, lenders, aid recipients, and civil society institutions. The Aid Effectiveness Project creates a forum so that all these stakeholders can share information and contribute more effectively to various development initiatives. The project is significant in that it advocates for aid transparency while demanding accountability from both the government and donors. Resources from foreign aid are measured carefully by the impact they have on priority sectors, and the extent to which they can catalyze change for the poor.

One of the most exciting projects of the NGO Forum's DIP is the National Budget Project (NBP). Begun in late 2006, the NBP advocates for budget transparency at the national level by creating opportunities

for civil society and ordinary citizens to monitor public spending against results promised by the government in its National Strategic Development Plan. The primary component of the NBP is a website ([www.cambodianbudget.org](http://www.cambodianbudget.org)) created to gather, consolidate, and disseminate all publicly available budget information that formerly was scattered across different libraries, ministries, and websites of government institutions involved in the budgeting process. By facilitating easy access to this data, the website has become a useful resource for government officials, legislators, media professionals, academics and students, civil society institutions, and ordinary Cambodians. The DIP's National Budget Project is a nationally coordinated initiative to open up what was previously a closed process.

Though still falling short of best practices for budget transparency, Cambodia's Open Budget Index Score increased by 4 points from 2008 to 2010. This can

be attributed mostly to the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF) releasing key budget documents to the public. In response to pressure from the NBP, the MEF published the 2010 Mid-Year Review on its website, and a day after the release of the Open Budget Survey 2010 results, the NGO Forum was given access to the 2011 Draft Budget Law. To build on this progress, the NGO Forum is coordinating a media strategy to raise awareness about budgeting issues. The NBP organized several radio talk shows in 2010 to discuss agricultural financing and services. The fact that budget issues were even allowed to be discussed in this forum is progress in itself. The NGO Forum's Development Issues Program has put pressure on policymakers in Cambodia to open up their budgets, and it has led to increased transparency in the allocation of the country's public resources. Further progress will continue to create opportunities for stakeholders to become involved in an ongoing debate about how to reach better outcomes for Cambodia's poor.

## NGO Forum's Participation in the Partnership Initiative

The NGO Forum already works closely with the International Budget Partnership by providing data and conducting research for the biennial Open Budget Survey. In joining the IBP's Partnership Initiative, the NGO Forum hopes to continue and expand its cooperation on budget analysis and advocacy by scrutinizing the Cambodian public budget against the government's National Strategic Development Plan. The NGO Forum asserts that the budget does not adequately target the rural poor, who make up a very large proportion of the population. Measures of effective spending on social infrastructure and rural development often diverge greatly from what was allocated to these sectors in the official budget. The NGO Forum seeks to address underinvestment in social spending through an ongoing campaign to raise awareness about problems faced by the rural poor, and how these problems can be better addressed through more efficient targeting of critical sectors.

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### International Budget Partnership

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*The IBP's Partnership Initiative is a collaborative effort that seeks to enhance the impact of civil society budget work in selected countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The initiative strives to contribute to the development of sustainable institutions; to increase public access to timely, reliable, and useful information; to enhance the effective participation of civil society in policy and budget processes; and to establish a platform of good practices on which future generations of civil society can build.*