EVALUATING GOOD GOVERNANCE IN CAMBODIA: THE LAAR EXPERIENCE

Australasian Evaluation Society Conference

Wellington, New Zealand

30 August to 3 September, 2010

Presentation Overview

1. Background on Pact

2. Background on the LAAR program

3. Criticisms of development

4. Background on evaluation in USAID programs

5. Evaluations methods used for LAAR

6. Lessons learned from LAAR

7. Implications for evaluation theory and practice

Pact Globally

Pact Cambodia
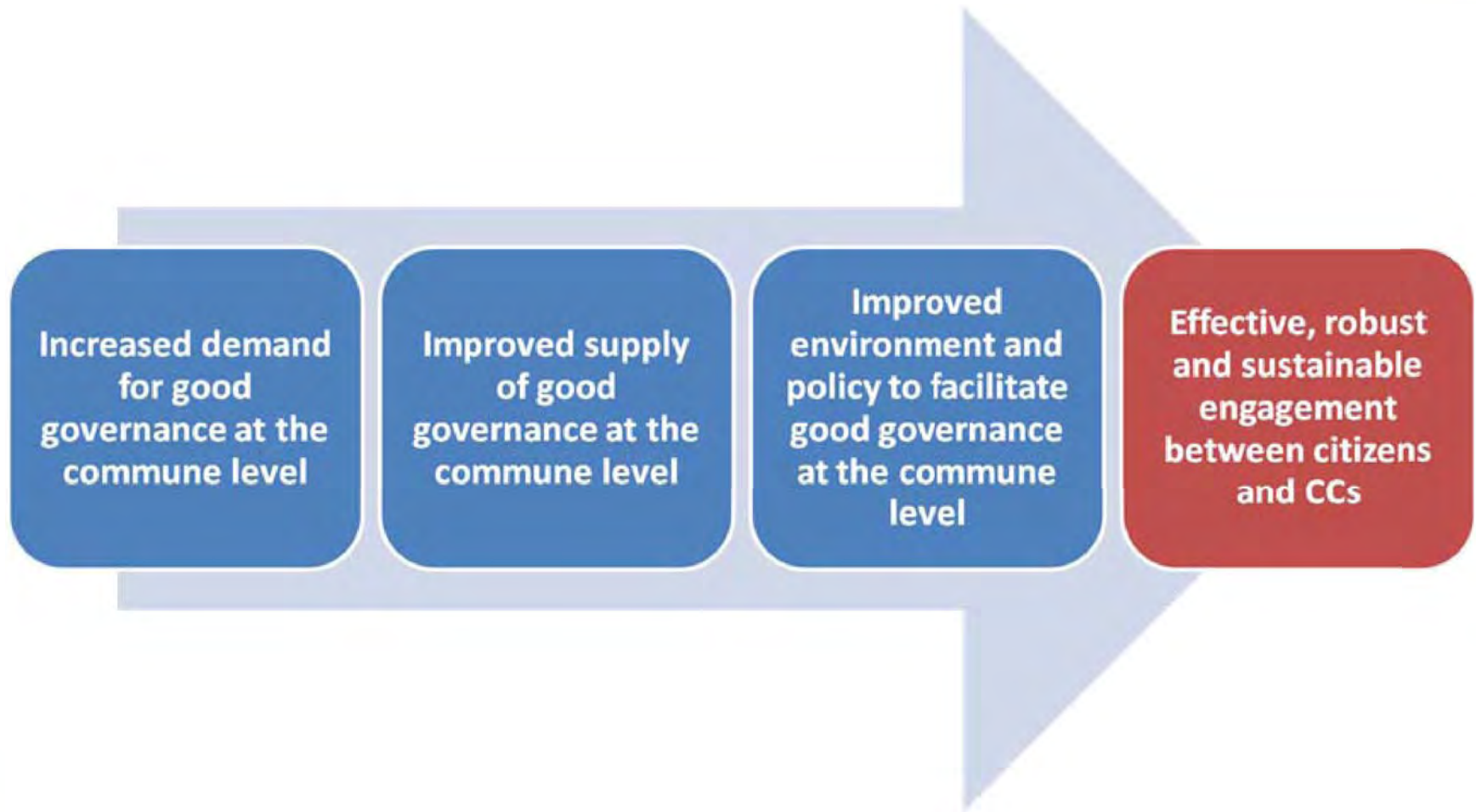
The Local Administration and Reform Program

- Cooperative agreement with USAID

- USD 14 million over 5 years (2005-2010)

- 13 provincially-based partner NGOs (164 staff)

- 356 commune in 8 provinces with a population of 3,167,357 people (51% female)

- 3,164 CC members (422 female)

- 4,442 CMC members (2,014 female)

- 654 social development projects (SDP) funded with 39% cost share

- 356 outreach grants for 356 CCs
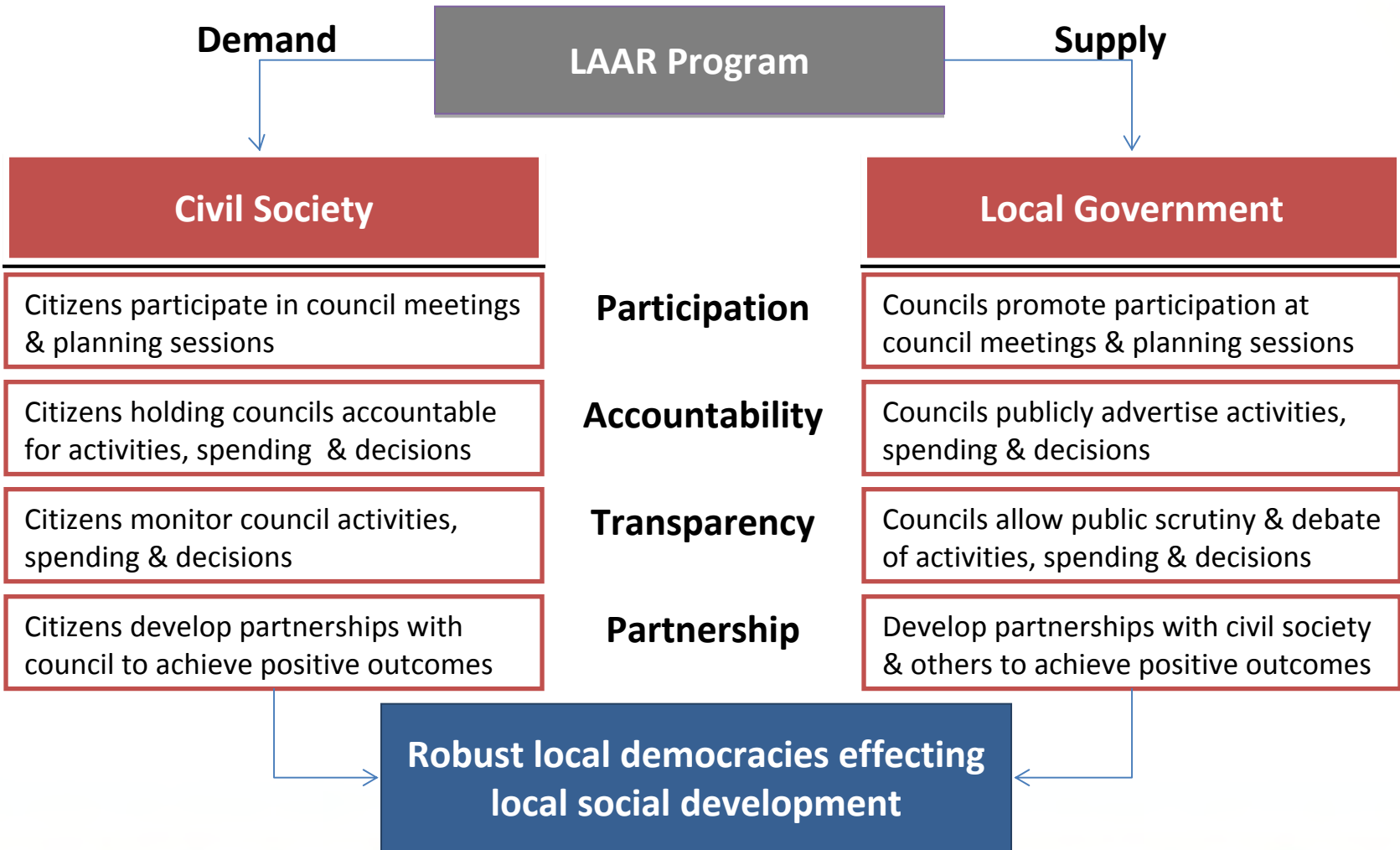
LAAR Goal and Objectives

- **Goal:**

    Effective, robust and sustainable engagement between citizens and their elected commune representatives

- **Objectives:**

    ➢ Build sustainable horizontal and vertical links between citizens, local government and national government (increase demand)

    ➢ Increase and institutionalize participatory development processes and democratic practices within sub-national government (improve supply)

    ➢ Increase public participation in the Commune Investment Planning and decentralization and de-concentration reform processes (improve policy)

LAAR Model of Change

Increased demand for good governance at the commune level → Improved supply of good governance at the commune level → Improved environment and policy to facilitate good governance at the commune level → Effective, robust and sustainable engagement between citizens and CCs

Good Governance Model

Demand

LAAR Program

Supply

Civil Society		Local Government
Citizens participate in council meetings & planning sessions	**Participation**	Councils promote participation at council meetings & planning sessions
Citizens holding councils accountable for activities, spending & decisions	**Accountability**	Councils publicly advertise activities, spending & decisions
Citizens monitor council activities, spending & decisions	**Transparency**	Councils allow public scrutiny & debate of activities, spending & decisions
Citizens develop partnerships with council to achieve positive outcomes	**Partnership**	Develop partnerships with civil society & others to achieve positive outcomes

Robust local democracies effecting local social development

Criticisms of Development

"The idea of development stands like a ruin in the intellectual landscape. Delusion and disappointment, failures and crime have been the steady companions of development and they tell a common story: it did not work. Moreover, the historical conditions which catapulted the idea into prominence have vanished: development has become outdated." (Sachs, 1999)

USAID D&G Programs

- *"The best way to advance America's interests worldwide is to enlarge the community of democracies and free markets throughout the world."* President William J. Clinton, July 21, 1994

- *"I would define the objectives of transformational diplomacy this way: To work with our many partners around the world to build and sustain democratic, well governed states that will respond to the needs of their people..."* Condoleeza Rice, January 18, 2006

USAID D&G program evaluation

- 1998 – published the 'Handbook of Democracy and Governance Indicators' and required programs to develop 'Performance Management Plans'

- 2006 and 2007 – released studies exploring the impact of D&G support at the macro-level

- 2008 – released the NAS study 'Improving Democracy Assistance: Building Knowledge Through Evaluations and Research'

LAAR Monitoring and Evaluation

- A Performance Management Plan

- A series of semi-independent evaluation by decentralization experts

- Dedicated MERL unit, plan and system

- Capacity building of staff, partners and beneficaries in M&E

- Two large surveys (over 2,500 respondents each)

- Focus group studies

- Most Significant Change stories

- A self-assessment process for commune councils

- A stakeholder evaluation workshop

- An independent mid-term evaluation

NAS Recommendations for USAID

1. Undertake a pilot program of impact evaluations

2. Develop more transparent, objective and widely accepted indicators of change

3. Use more diverse and theoretically structured clusters of case studies

4. Rebuild USAID's mechanisms to share and disseminate evaluations and research

LAAR Impact Evaluation

- 1st Citizen Satisfaction Survey (2008) sample:
  - 2,340 citizens (residents of voting age)
  - 390 commune councilors
  - Target and non-target communes
  - Ethnic Minorities
- 2nd Citizen Satisfaction Survey (2010) sample:
  - 2,341 citizens (residents of voting age)
  - 390 commune councilors
  - Target and non-target communes

Lessons Learned from 1ˢᵗ Survey

- Stronger focus on LAAR program objectives, activities and model of governance – dropped questions that were interesting but not directly relevant to LAAR

- Avoid using technical words, acronyms and jargon in the questionnaire

- Focus more on behaviors and knowledge rather than opinions where possible

- Stronger focus on data analysis and report writing

- More comprehensive Scope of Work for contractor

Improvements in 2ⁿᵈ Survey

- Improved sampling of non-target communes based on more socio-economic traits

- More time spent developing the questionnaire

- Independent back translation of questionnaire

- More focused questions

- Field work conducted at a better time of year

- More qualified report writer

- More spot checks of field work

- Better data cleaning system

- Blind review, analysis and report

- Follow up focus groups

Positives of using a Survey

- Commune easily lend themselves to random selection

- Sufficient data was available to draw a solid comparison group

- The survey was large enough to make general inferences

- Results accepted by the Government

- People listen to surveys

Survey Issues/Limitations

- Positive bias

- Poor understanding of topics

- Survey not able to match the experimental nature of the program

- Perceptions are not always the reality

- Interviewer bias

- Translation bias

- Not always clear why a trend happened

- Does not reveal unexpected outcomes

- Project spill over

- Attribution

- Timing

Implications for Evaluation Practice

- 'Impact Evaluations' are counter to democratic philosophies being promoted:

  – Reinforce top-down power structures

  – Outsiders define what is good or bad about a specific democracy (they may miss an important break-through)

  – Are not designed to be accessible or transparent for local citizens – they can not question or call the authors to account

  – Can reinforce neo-colonial suspicions

  – Randomized treatments can be costly and inefficient (not an efficient use of public money)

  – Randomized treatments under-assume the importance of local political will and knowledge as a key factor in success (who can act as a local role model for others)

Factors affecting D&G evaluations

- Democracy and governance are contested and political – they do not move forward in a linear progression

- Local Government tends to develop like 'spot fires' - with good practices popping up in one area then spreading

- Local Government is especially prone to personality politics which makes changes erratic and inconsistent over time

- Elections mean that the key players change which can set everything back to square one (especially when the project has a limited mandate with no follow on assistance)

- Local governance sits in a political system that rely on other players (not just the local council) that affect the outcomes

Conclusions

- Measuring change in democracy and governance programs is less science and more art

- Evaluations of democracy and governance programs need to balance accountability to the people in the country being evaluated and the donor country

- Logical Frame works are not well adapted for democracy and governance programs – they are not flexible enough

- The parameters and the methods used must involve stakeholders – promoting democratic values and stimulating local debate

- Impact Evaluation Surveys can be produced with participants – but to do so would require large amounts of time and money

- Alternative measures of impact – such as most significant change – must be explored

"*Before, I had a difficult time speaking up…Now, when I speak, people listen. I have a face. I have a voice. I have respect from the people.*"

Ms. Phat Lvor

Commune Councilor – Takream Commune

References

- Axworthy, T. (ed.) (2008) 'Creating Democratic Value: Evaluating Efforts to Promote Democracy Abroad', Centre for the Study of Democracy, Kingston, Ontario

- Centre for Democracy and Governance (1998) 'Handbook of Democracy and Governance Program Indicators', Technical Publication Series, United States Agency for International Development, Washington DC

- Crawford, G. 'Promoting Democracy from Without – Learning from Within (Part 1)', Democratization, 10:1, 77-98

- Easterly, W. (2006) 'The White Mans Burden', Oxford University Press, Oxford

- Finkel, S., Perez-Linan, A., Seligson, M., Tate, N. (2008) 'Deepening Our Understanding of the Effects of US Foreign Assistance on Democracy Building Final Report', United States Agency for International Development, Washington DC

- National Research Council of the National Academies (2008) 'Improving Democracy Assistance: Building Knowledge Through Evaluations and Research', The National Academies Press, Washington DC

- Sachs, W. (ed.) (1992) 'The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power', Zed Books, London

- Van Crevald, M. (1999) 'The Rise and Decline of the State' University of Cambridge Press, Cambridge