



An institute to serve facilitators of development

Local Administration and Reform Programme

-VBNK's experience-

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Acronyms

ARLP- Action-Reflection-Learning-Planning

CBOs- Community Based Organisations

CC- Commune Councils

LAAR- Local Administration and Reform Programme

NGO- Non-governmental organisation

PNGO – Provincial Non-Governmental Organisation

RGC- Royal Government of Cambodia

1. Introduction

Between 2005 and 2007 VBNK provided a capacity building service for a USAID-funded Local Administration and Reform (LAAR) programme led by the non-governmental organisation (NGO) PactCambodia (Pact). VBNK worked in partnership with Pact to design and run a programme led by the needs of provincial NGOs (PNGOs), Commune Councils (CCs), community based organisations (CBOs), local NGOs, and national and sub-national government officials. The approach capitalised on the knowledge and experiences of all partners in order to create a community of shared learning.

The overarching objective of the programme was to promote good governance, specifically through strengthening engagement between CCs and PNGOs. VBNK's mandate was to provide a capacity building service to increase PNGO staff's knowledge, broaden understanding and strengthen their skills and confidence to build communities' knowledge of local good governance. All activities were based on the four core principles of accountability, transparency, participation and partnership.

As this report will explore, throughout the LAAR programme VBNK used a three-pronged approach to learning which comprised of training, coaching and reflection. This was the first comprehensive exploration of this methodology for VBNK and therefore produced a significant amount of new learning about how this approach works in practice. For staff this way of working has had a profound effect on their work, strengthening their capabilities, skills and confidence and so adding to VBNK's capacity to provide quality, relevant training and facilitation. For participants there have been many positive impacts of this methodology, but also many lessons about creating sufficient time and space to allow for this long-term learning to prosper.

VBNK also gained from the opportunity to work in partnership with other organisations during the design stage of the programme and learnt significantly from the delivery of the programme. LAAR enriched VBNK's experience, providing direct experience of social development work through supporting the CCs and their citizens through tools to increase engagement such as the outreach activities. Staff also produced much personal and professional learning through LAAR, which comprises the final section of this report.

The full impact of VBNK's capacity-building work within LAAR is as yet not fully developed and the LAAR programme is still ongoing. A recent report by CDRI¹ indicates that civil society as yet lacks sufficient capacity and organisation to demand accountability from CCs, and CCs although willing to respond to the needs of civil society and citizens are still limited by insufficient authority and resources to sometimes fully respond to citizens needs. However, there are several quantifiable results that can be seen amongst PNGOs, CCs and citizens on the programme's themes of participation, partnership, accountability and transparency.

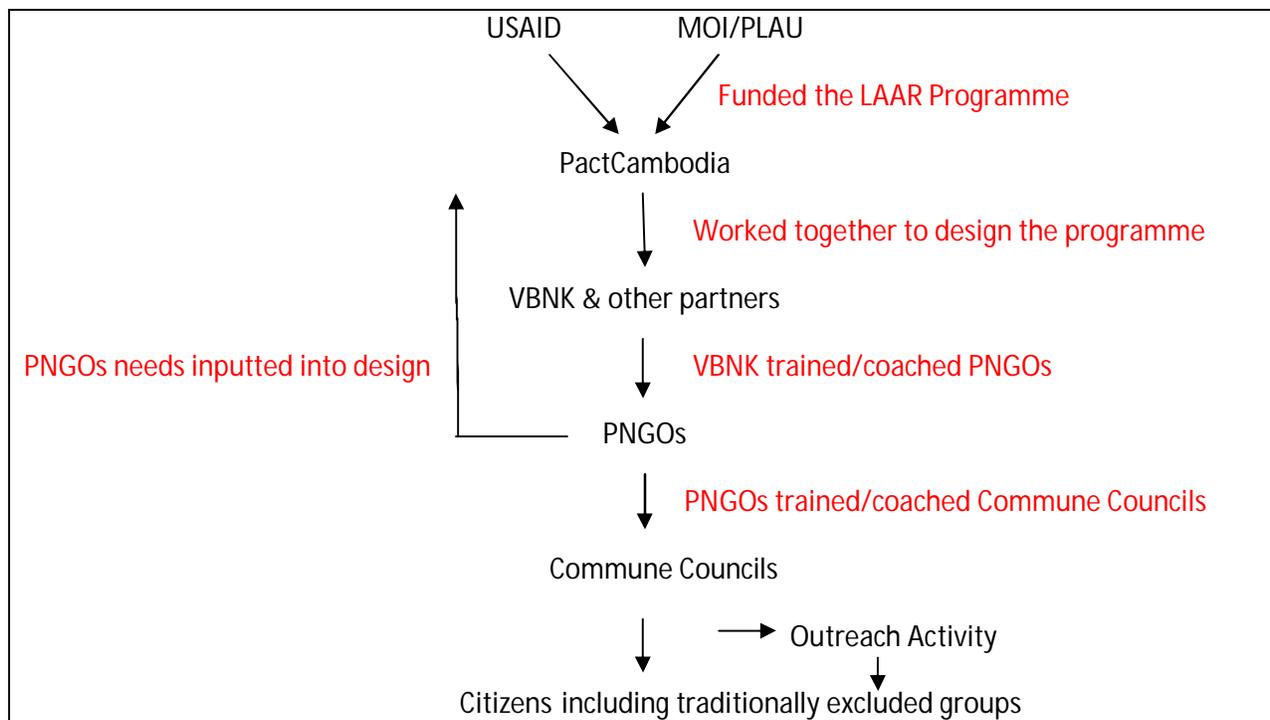
The primary purpose of this report is to provide an account of VBNK's role and experience of the LAAR programme for capacity-building. Drawing from interviews with staff members and documentation, it

¹ CDRI Policy Brief 'Where Decentralisation Meets Democracy: Civil Society, Local Government and Accountability in Cambodia', November 2007, Issue 7.

looks at the process a year after VBNK's role in the LAAR programme came to an end and examines what learning VBNK can draw from this.

2. History and Context

VBNK worked with Pact to design a programme to enable the necessary skills to be developed amongst the PNGOs for them to support CCs. From the start of the LAAR programme the aim was that the skills developed amongst the PNGOs would be long-term and would be applied in their interactions with commune councillors, and other CBOs, to develop deeper levels of engagement with citizens.



The context for this body of work was the Cambodian decentralisation process which began in 2001 when some political power and responsibility was conferred from central government to the provinces through commune councils. In 2002, elections for the CCs were conducted in 1,621 communes resulting in 11,261 new councilors taking office and assuming responsibilities for local governance and development within their province.

The Royal Government Cambodia's (RGC) stated aim of decentralisation in Cambodia is to strengthen local democracy, promote participatory democracy and reduce poverty. Donors and NGOs also saw decentralisation as an opportunity to reduce poverty. For example, a World Bank publication² promoted decentralisation as a way to shorten the 'route of accountability and bring government closer to the people'.

² World Bank. 2004. *Cambodia at the Crossroads: Strengthening Accountability to Reduce Poverty*. World Bank: Phnom Penh.

However, it is recognised by the government and donors that the decentralisation process needs to be properly managed if it is to have an impact on enhancing local democracy. Capacity amongst citizens and CBOs needs to be improved if they are to act as an effective check on local government. Councillors also need to be encouraged to develop effective relationships with citizens and in particular to reach out to those traditionally marginalised in the political process, including women, the poor and ethnic minorities.

The LAAR programme, which began in 2005 and will run until 2010, was designed to address these concerns. It aimed to enhance the capacity of PNGOs to support commune councils in the long-term through this process.

3. Designing the Capacity-Building Programme

3.1 Methodology

The LAAR programme provided a unique opportunity to apply VBNK's approach to learning; which recognises the cultural and power barriers which inhibit our ability as individuals to learn and apply new information. Several barriers are specific to Cambodia and others are connected to the way new information is traditionally taught, all of these factors however must be overcome for effective learning for transformation to take place. VBNK's involvement in the design and teaching parts of the LAAR programme was shaped by this learning methodology.

VBNK's overall understanding of capacity-development is not as a simple transfer of knowledge, but instead as an endogenous process that can be stimulated, but not transferred, from the outside. Education and training can enable this learning process, but unless other factors such as organisational or institutional constraints, that stand in the way of realising that potential are dealt with, then capacity development will be constrained.

Specific obstacles related to Cambodian culture, and encountered through LAAR, include a reluctance to openly disagree with other people and an internalised method of receiving new information in a passive, non-participatory manner. Encouraging debate and contributions from participants therefore formed an essential part of the LAAR programme.

Other potential obstacles to learning, which are not culturally specific, are the potential impact that training alone can provide in affecting social change. As explored in the publication *Learning for Transformation*³, using traditional training sessions as a tool for changing behaviour is limited by the difficulty of applying information learnt in one context into another, by often the uncertainty about how to use a specific skill and through insufficient confidence about drawing from the training. During LAAR VBNK therefore provided coaching sessions after the training to follow-up and develop those skills that

³ O'Leary, Moira and Nee, Meas. 2001. *Learning for Transformation*. VBNK: Phnom Penh.

participants had learnt, and to coach them through any difficulties they encountered in applying new ideas.

Part of the VBNK approach in any project is to recognise our own learning as facilitators of development. LAAR was therefore designed to incorporate sufficient time for VBNK and for PactCambodia's own reflection on issues and this report fits within this methodology by exploring the ways VBNK staff have learnt and developed through their work.

"Through LAAR I have dared to speak to a crowd of people and learnt not to be afraid of being thought right or wrong."

VBNK trainer, Lean

3.2 Structure

The structure of the LAAR programme reflected this methodology. LAAR was conducted in three distinct yet interrelated stages; training, coaching and reflection. By providing both training and coaching the aim was for participants to not just complete set learning objectives, but to learn and apply skills that were relevant to their workplace and the reflective element of the programme supported this learning.

The first stage was to develop and deliver the training element of the programme. The course was designed so that the needs of participants and their organisation formed the curriculum of the course. Through consulting with participants and all partners the content for this element of the programme was established, with the consultative process also serving to lay the basis for developing a positive relationship between facilitators, participants and all partners to enable common understandings about the content of the course and the expectation of each other in the course to develop. Training was then specifically conducted to increase understanding and develop new skills, with the explicit aim of establishing new and changing existing behaviours.

The second stage was the coaching element of the course, and this comprised of on-the-job support from VBNK trainers. During this stage VBNK staff watched PNGO representatives at work with CCs and CBOs and then worked with PNGOs to identify ways to improve their performance. What was covered in the coaching session was led by the coachee - with their needs, questions, interests and challenges directing the content of each coaching session. In this way the PNGOs were supported in the application of their learning from training.

The third stage was concerned with reflection, and provided space for participants to examine their own learning, and assess what areas they could improve upon. This stage was conducted using Action-Reflection-Learning-Planning (ARLP) techniques. See below for more details:

Action Learning is a method for learning new behaviour that consciously mirrors the more natural way that human beings learn from experience, from doing, from living. It is about learning from our experience, learning from our actions and then applying these learnings back into our next experience

or our next action. Action Learning is a continuous cycle - the end of each learning cycle becomes the beginning of the next cycle.

1 Action: Doing/experiencing and recalling the experience. To become more conscious of our “experience” while acting can impact on the next step quite dramatically.

2 Reflection: Re-examining and thinking about the event or action means to make it more conscious, to analyse it, to evaluate it, to understand it better or on a deeper level. The problem is that we do not do this normally.

3 Learning: Reflection is no guarantee that learning has taken place! Very often people “reflect” on practice and repeat the same mistake over and over again. Therefore the distinction between **reflection** and **learning** in the AL Cycle is important; learning here is the process of distilling or drawing out the **core generalised lessons**; moving from “what actually happened” to “what tends to happen”.

4 Planning: The core “insights” from the previous step must now be translated into decisions that will ensure improved practice and these decisions then need to become part of the plan.

If a central purpose of a developmental practice is to help people to become more independent, to stand on their own feet, then Action Learning becomes a central process of helping people to become independent learners, learning more from their own experience and becoming less dependent on experts for knowledge or guidance. Helping people to become more conscious, confident and skilled “action learners” should be a central purpose to almost any developmental process.

Through LAAR VBNK developed further skills in designing a long-term capacity-building programme from ground level. Initially designed as only a five day training session with follow-up coaching sessions, LAAR was significantly extended during the second year through further training and coaching sessions spread out across one year. The number of PNGOs and CCs also grew significantly during the second year.

3.3 Challenges and Outcomes

Extending the programme across a second year provided a significant opportunity for all partners to learn from the first year and work to improve a programme of capacity-building. It also provided VBNK with the potential to work with PNGOs in a deeper, more substantive way in order to affect change. However, the design aspect of the programme also produced some challenges for staff and emphasised the importance of building positive relationships between each organisation, so as to generate common understanding of terms and mutual ownership by all parties.

Working with Pact meant common understandings across a range of issues had to be developed in order to maintain a continuity to approach. Coordination meetings became a place where differences in approach were ironed out between both organisations, but this took time and added another layer of work for VBNK.

At times there were tensions between VBNK’s approach to learning which incorporates time for reflection, and is therefore more gradual and Pact, who set deadlines to achieve learning outcomes.

These differences of pace and priority were particularly pronounced during the planning of the outreach activity, with VBNK providing PNGOs with guidelines on how to plan the outreach activity which focused on explaining the importance and reasoning between increasing participation, whereas Pact advised the PNGOs that they should instead focus on the logistics of this outreach activity. Balancing sufficient time for reflection alongside deadlines was a consistent area of conversation and necessitated building compromises between learning outcomes and reflective time.

Designing the capacity-building element of the LAAR programme from scratch and building up relationships for the first time VBNK staff describe as being both challenging and rewarding. VBNK staff felt that they learnt how better to work with people from different organisational backgrounds and priorities, but that they also had to compromise over some of the reflective areas of work in order to facilitate these relationships.

4. Delivering the Programme

4.1 Structure

As explored above, LAAR was conducted through two components; training of work-related content and on-the-job coaching. The training was conducted to increase understanding and develop new skills with the explicit aim of establishing new behaviours, or changing existing behaviours. The objective for coaching was to ensure that training activities had a noticeable effect on participants.

The training sessions conducted learning in a way which was new to participants and trainers. Both had to learn how to learn in a way which was outside of the traditional pattern of the Cambodian education system; that was more participatory, drew strongly on participants own inputs into the sessions and where the trainer facilitated learning instead of teaching new information. This way of learning forms the bedrock to the VBNK approach; producing learning that can be transferred to the workplace and sustained over time and therefore produces behaviour change in people.

LAAR re-conceptualised the role of the trainer for staff. The LAAR process encouraged and supported the development of participants' own knowledge, with the trainer helping to draw this information out. VBNK staff therefore no longer needed to provide answers but to instead pose questions. Staff were encouraged to prepare themselves through thinking about what it would be good to achieve from the session and how best to facilitate this process.

LAAR was the first long-term coaching programme that VBNK worked on, it acted therefore as a pilot of the dual behaviour change methodology of training and coaching. It also allowed VBNK to see and assess how effectively information learnt from the training sessions was passed onto the commune councillors through the PNGOs.

4.2 Challenges and Outcomes

VBNK

Applying this methodology was a learning process for everyone involved in the course and took time for both VBNK staff and participants to accept, and work with.

For participants, many had previously worked as either teachers or lecturers and were used to learning being conducted in a top-down, non-participatory style. This meant they attended training sessions but remained quiet, reluctant to voice their own opinions and looked to the trainer to provide all the answers. This also shaped the way they expected to work with commune councils, with PNGOs initially providing commune councils with all the answers to any questions they may have instead of allowing them to think themselves about what the answer might be. VBNK found that it was only through taking time to build up a positive relationship with PNGOS that this allowed them to participate in the training sessions; this constituted the key success factor in enabling learning amongst participants.

Positive relationships also allowed VBNK staff to feel fully comfortable in their role as trainers. Prior to LAAR some staff were still grappling with adapting their understanding of what it means to be a trainer, shifting from being a teacher with all the expertise towards facilitating the sessions and encouraging participants to answer questions. Initially this was difficult to change, staff felt like they might be thought stupid or might be laughed at for not knowing all the answers. Gradually through building up good relationships with the PNGOs this method began to work for both parties. PNGOs learnt to value their own knowledge and the VBNK staff were respected for their approach. One VBNK trainer, Thavy, even became known affectionately as 'the questioning trainer' because of his method of answering questions with another question.

The way staff conceptualised their role began to fundamentally change from teacher to facilitator. In the process staff all developed better communication skills through facilitating learning between people of different levels of education and ability.

"The communities cook, but they wouldn't know how to write recipes whereas the donors write recipes but never cook, VBNK's role was the bridge these groups to produce a cookery book of local knowledge and facilitate mutual learning through the process."

Thoeun, VBNK trainer

All of the VBNK staff confirmed that their understanding of what it means to be a trainer progressed during LAAR; instead of answering the participant's questions they learnt to ask questions and moved towards becoming facilitators instead of teachers imparting 'wisdom' they learnt to listen and encourage participant's to answer their own questions.

Provincial non-governmental organisations

A continual theme throughout the LAAR programme was creating sufficient space to teach behavioural change techniques. PNGOs ability to participate in the programme was at times limited by needing to complete work with the councillors and for the donors. This problem links to the structural position of the PNGOs between both communities and the international donors they are funded by which is to

some extent contradictory, with PNGOs owing their existence to international donors, yet representing the voice of the citizens⁴. These pressures of time and commitments meant that PNGOs were often keen to rush to answers or simply gain information, without stopping to fully reflect on the process, which forms an essential part of the coaching programme.

An additional logistic barrier to effective capacity-building sessions was some overcrowded training sessions. Some sessions that VBNK conducted with PNGOs simply had too many participants to make the training effective. In Kompong Cham and Kompong Thom provinces, for example, training was held with approximately 45 people at one time. Staff reported that there were significant difficulties in making sure that this number of people were fully engaged in the training.

The coaching sessions however, produced several individual stories of changes. One PNGO representative in the Pursat Province was initially reluctant to train commune councillors on her own, feeling intimidated by the male dominated CCs she had to work with, but during the process of training and coaching she learnt to have confidence in her own ability to facilitate. By the end of VBNK's involvement in LAAR she was facilitating training sessions and providing coaching independently, with the commune councillors commenting that they trusted in her ability as a trainer.

In Battambang province VBNK's work with the PNGO Buddhists for Development (BFD) also improved significantly during the programme. Initially BFD were very reluctant to even meet with VBNK, believing that this took up time that could be spent fulfilling their work commitments to Pact. It was only through showing BFD the relevance of the training and coaching VBNK was providing and how gaining skills in report writing could speed up and improve their reports for Pact that BFD started to engage fully in the sessions and made time to learn VBNK's approach more fully.

Overall many PNGOs commented on the effectiveness of using reflective techniques, which really helped them to report on their work and have more self-awareness about their role as a facilitator for CCs. However there is still concern by VBNK about whether these techniques have been fully internalised by PNGO staff and VBNK staff would like to see what happens in the future.

Commune Councillors

Through enhancing the capacity of PNGOs in the four key areas of the LAAR programme; accountability, transparency, partnership and participation, the intention was for these values to be passed on to the PNGOs work with CCs. The overall intended effect on councils was to establish relations between citizens and their elected councillors, and including marginalised groups into the democratic process. This meant, for example, replacing one-off meetings with invited elites with councillors instead visiting people in the community individually to ask their opinions, including previously excluded groups such as the poor or women.

The effectiveness of the training with the commune councils was nuanced; some elements of the LAAR programme were adopted easily whilst the more substantive changes either took time or were never

⁴ CDRI Policy Brief. 2007. 'Where Decentralisation Meets Democracy: Civil Society, Local Government, and Accountability in Cambodia'. Issues 07.

fully accepted. Whilst LAAR introduced councillors to the way their councils could function, the reality of shifting the way CCs behave was limited and as the LAAR programme is still ongoing it remains in some ways difficult to establish the full impact of this work.

As noted, throughout LAAR there was also a continual tension between making time and space to learn, and to meet other demands. Commune councillors had to earn an income, work as a councillor and meet with their respective political party. Their time was especially pressured towards the end of VBNK involvement in LAAR due to the forthcoming election in May 2008.

However, the way that commune councils participated in the programme did change during LAAR. The CCs were initially very reluctant to share from their own experiences. When asked for the first time about what were the potential resources related to social development within their communities they initially had little to say. The reasons for this can be attributed both to the newness of the situation and the way participants were expected to actively contribute to the sessions, which in the learning process is generally not culturally practiced. Through continuing to ask questions, rather than provide answers and through establishing a positive relationship this did improve.

Substantial work was undertaken on building up good, trusting relationships with PNGOs. The idea was to create an atmosphere where councillors would know they would not be told off or shamed for their actions, and this was a substantial challenge for the PNGOs to overcome. In many places this was successfully established. However, with some groups building a trustful, respectful relationship was confused with just becoming friends and socialising, therefore building an appropriate relationship was a challenge.

The effectiveness of more substantial behaviour change was limited. The ARLP technique was adopted by councils, but was rarely used generate new thinking about the learning process. Whilst the CCs did use the ARLP technique when the PNGOs were there to monitor and support them, VBNK staff feel it is unlikely that they would use it on their own.

Several small capacity-building elements of the programme worked well with the commune councils; in particular how to write effective proposals for funding. Faced with limited resources, knowing how best to obtain more funding and support is crucial for communities and prior to LAAR communes were often simply asking for funding, but being unaware of the best way to do this. By the end of VBNK's involvement in LAAR CCs were submitting successful applications to PactCambodia and other donors for funding.

One of the particularly positive developments of LAAR process is that CCs started to write reports about their spending, to put information up on notice boards and other public places, to post their schedules and to invite community members to attend meetings. Whilst LAAR has not erased many of the corrupt practices that are part and parcel of local government's way of operating, LAAR has at least made CCs more open about admitting corrupt practices where these exist.

5 Outreach Activities

5.1 Structure

In line with the objectives for CCs in LAAR to reach out to citizens, to better understand their needs and to involve them in the planning and implementing commune projects, an outreach activity formed an integral part of the training. Defined as active effort to provide opportunities for citizens and under-represented groups to be informed and involved in commune activities and projects to address their specific needs, in practice it meant a series of measures to maximise public participation in the commune councils. For VBNK it was an opportunity to gain first hand experience of a social development project, through working with PNGOs to develop this aspect of the programme with councils.

Initially each CC created an outreach plan. This plan described the strategy for engaging civil society, citizens and reaching under-represented groups. The goal was to perform activities that would increase the participation of citizens and civil society, especially in CC affairs and to ensure that their voices were heard at every stage of the commune development projects.

General guidelines in this process included thinking about when the meetings were held, how better to publicise them and often personally inviting appropriate people to attend specific discussions. Specific activities included meeting separately with a group such as the Khmer Islamic community or with a group of women to discuss issues which concern them.

To further facilitate outreach Pact provided CCs with social development funds to support specific projects as chosen by the councils in consultation with the citizens, through several outreach activities. Acting as a preparatory step in strengthening the levels of citizen consultation, the social development fund was used to stimulate interaction between citizens and their councils, and also to build up social development projects. Once an inclusive community agreement had been reached about how to spend the money communities would be provided with funds.

The aim was for funds to go into community development as opposed to the traditional areas of funding for councils which centre on infrastructure such as roads or buildings. Roads which lead out of the area tend to benefit those with funds to be able to leave, whereas the emphasis of LAAR was on enhancing the community's ability to participate in their area and providing as much support as possible to enable this.

5.2 Challenges and Outcomes

Through the outreach activity the structure and level of democratic participation changed. The number of meetings between councillors and the community were increased; the location was also changed, moving from inside the council into more accessible community spaces. Citizens started to be specifically invited by councillors to attend if it was felt that a meeting would be relevant to them. The meetings also started to look different; moving away from the councillors sitting at the front with

everyone else in rows towards everyone sitting in a circle with participatory techniques used to ensure everyone's point of view was heard.

When VBNK first met with citizens many said they could not participate because they simply did not have time, having to focus instead of earning a living. Other citizens articulated the view that CCs had little to say about their lives. Through changing the way participation occurred; making it more accessible in terms of timing, location and the way issues were discussed many more people started to participate, and this included traditionally more marginalised groups such as women, the poor and ethnic minorities.

Whilst still not everyone in the community participated, VBNK hope that one of the strongest legacies of LAAR will specifically be more poor people and more women getting involved in their councils and this will impact on more pro-poor and improved policies for women. LAAR is still an ongoing project so the full effect of this area of work is still being felt, but for VBNK staff it provided some first hand experience of the challenges that people living in the provinces are facing. As is explored in the following section, examples taken from involvement in this aspect of work have been used to enrich subsequent VBNK training courses.

6 Learning for VBNK staff

Looking at the different areas of LAAR, the impact it had on staff and both their personal and professional development is perhaps the most tangible area of the project. VBNK staff have now finished their involvement with the programme and have had time to reflect on what changes they have undergone. The culture at VBNK, which provides regular time allotted to working on personal development, lends itself to reflecting and learning from projects and all staff identify a change in the way they view their own role as a trainer, alongside many personal reflections on the LAAR process.

All staff spoke at length about how their perception of the role of a trainer changed through LAAR. Overall they no longer felt the need to know everything about a topic area, for fear of being asked a question they could not answer; instead they felt more comfortable in a more facilitative role where the participants themselves are encouraged to provide the answers. To prepare themselves for a project staff now prepare behaviour, rather than the content, thinking about what behaviour is appropriate to a particular person rather than what information needs to be known. Everyone said that they would continue to work in this way.

Lean: I learnt from hearing first-hand the challenges that people working and living within Cambodia are facing. Through meeting and working with PNGOs, CCs and citizens I was able to identify several substantial blocks to learning. One example was the power of proverbs such as 'women cannot do anything aside from kitchen tasks' which I saw act to limit women's participation and 'many people spoil the cake' which warns against teamwork and mass participation. I also saw the hierarchy attached to old age resulting in the marginalisation of the youth and restricting the way older people participated through not making it easy for them to make mistakes.

As a result of this experience I became more committed to helping people identify how they are behaving and to look for ways of improving. I draw from Buddhist teachings which encourage new thinking and new ideas, to show people that change is also part of the Cambodian tradition.

I have also learnt about my own blocks to learning. Through LAAR I have dared to speak to a crowd of people and learnt not to be afraid of being thought right or wrong. I now use these experiences to inform my work with other people.

Saren: I have been able to explain the importance of building strong relationships between participants and the facilitator through using examples of this work with LAAR. Participants, such as the health organisation Family Health International (FHI), have reported finding these examples really helpful.

Bounna: Through being involved in designing the session plans I learnt new skills in designing. I also learnt to be flexible, if something did not work during the programme I would work out of hours if necessary to redesign that particular part of the programme so it would work for the next day.

LAAR provided me with the opportunity to think more creatively about learning. In particular, due to the need to communicate with people who were illiterate, I learnt to design visual aids for communication. Seeing the success of this tool has led me to use these regularly.

Thavy: Designing session plans from scratch improved my confidence levels. Previously within the team there was a tendency to just copy and paste from existing plans without being creative or thinking about how best to work with one particular group.

In a recent training session with MOI and World Vision Cambodia, I was able to use examples of working with commune councillors to apply this to teaching these participants about project planning. I found that having real experience to draw from improved my confidence as a facilitator.

Toeun: Through the LAAR programme I learnt to be more flexible and confident with this work. The positive feedback I had about this approach made me feel confident about using it again in the future.

My participatory work for training has changed and I now develop my process and set my own expectations for the session, instead of learning the content. Learning to coach enabled us all to approach our role as a facilitator in a different way. Instead of feeling that we had to be a specialist with all the answers, we instead learnt to work on unlocking other people's potential through asking questions.

The success of the LAAR programme is not only about the outcomes for the PNGOs, but through the process it was hoped by VBNK that staff members themselves would be able to grow and develop new skills. Staff felt that this part of the programme was successful.

7 Conclusion

The LAAR programme's underlying rationale is to reduce poverty. Through improving access to the democratic process for excluded groups including the poor it is presumed that this will result in a better quality of decision-making, with more pro-poor policies being made. Whether this underlying assumption is realised has to be assessed further on into the LAAR programme, effecting in turn how the capacity-building steps that began this programme are evaluated. However, for VBNK the function of LAAR was to provide an exploration of their learning methodology; fundamentally the premise that learning for behaviour change will occur through training, coaching and reflection. This report looks at this three pronged approach to capacity development to show many outcomes from this approach, one of the most significant being the impact it had on shifting VBNK staff approaches to their work.

Through work on LAAR VBNK staff experienced how to work in partnership with other organisations, specifically those from different organisational cultures. VBNK learnt about working with people who have different priorities and were mostly successful, in directing the LAAR programme in a way which accommodated VBNK's learning methodology. Part of the learning curve was also to design a programme from the beginning, working with the PNGOs to develop all the necessary skills for them to be able to work with CCs in a long-term and effective way. The second year of the programme responded to the areas of the first year that had not worked so well and also suited VBNK's approach through the extended time-period which allowed for more long-term coaching.

During the two stages of the programme, the training and coaching, the most significant impact was to evolve the way VBNK staff saw their role as facilitators; shifting their attitudes and behaviour from being an 'expert' teacher to a facilitator of learning. This is an ongoing process for trainers but one which has substantially changed the way VBNK trainers work.

For the PNGOs these elements of the programme produced some individual stories of change and overall led to representatives contributing to the sessions and talking more openly about their work. But the main message from each stage of the programme was the importance of investing time in building up supportive, trusting relationships between VBNK, the PNGOs and the CCs in order to allow more substantive behaviour change work to be accomplished. For CCs specifically VBNK staff feel that it will be smaller, more tangible elements of the programme such as report writing which will constitute the most discernible impact of this capacity-building work.

The third stage of VBNK's approach is reflective practice. Again the theme of finding sufficient time was apparent at every stage of LAAR; in designing the programme with Pact, to work with PNGOs and with

PNGOs using the technique with CCs. However VBNK staff felt that towards the end of the programme skills in reflective practice were being effectively utilised by PNGOs in their work.

Separate to VBNK's approach, the outreach activities were an aspect of the LAAR programme which staff feel may have been one of the most successful, in terms of getting more people to participate and developing a better quality of participation. This also informed staff's personal and professional learning from LAAR, enriching VBNK's understanding and ability as trainers within the social development sector.

Since LAAR VBNK has developed and taught a new training course entitled 'Facilitating Engagement in Decentralisation', which aims to reach governmental officials, NGOs and others working in the context of the decentralisation process in Cambodia. Whilst it provides a context to the decentralisation process in Cambodia, the aim of this course primarily is to teach this method of behaviour change. Through developing stronger methods of learning; through training and coaching it is hoped that this will lead to greater capacity to improve the democratic process in commune councils. The impact of LAAR will continue in this way to influence the quality and breadth of VBNK's work in the development sector.