

**National Committee for Sub-National Democratic Development
Secretariat (NCDDS)
Terms of Reference (ToR)
Local Participatory Consultant
Sustainable Climate-Resilient Accelerated Local Economic Development
(SCALED) Project**

Title : Local Participatory Consultant
Duty Station : NCDD Secretariat, Phnom Penh, Cambodia
Contract Duration : 60 working days, over the period from November 2026 to February 2027
Market Approach : National (Short-Term Individual Consultancy)
Expected Start Date : November 2026
Contract Type : Lump-sum contract
Grant Number : E748-KH

1. Background

The 10-Year National Programs on Sub-National Democratic Development, Phase 2 (NP2, 2021-2030), was designed to implement key decentralization and deconcentration policies, specifically the Law on the Management of the Capital, Provincial, Municipal, District and Khan Administrations (2008), Law on the Management of the Commune/Sangkat Administrations (2001). The NP2 aims at enhancing the delivery of public services and local development with mainstreaming of gender equality, social equity and inclusiveness and climate change adaptation through establishing the structures and governance systems of sub-national administrations to be modern, autonomous, efficient, transparent, and accountable in providing public services and local development. NP2 is implemented under leadership and management of the National Committee for Sub-National Democratic Development (NCDD) with assistance of NCDD Secretariat (NCDDS) for day-to-day management and implementation of the program.

The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC), through NCDDS, is preparing the Sustainable Climate-Resilient Accelerated Local Economic Development (SCALED) Project to support implementation of the 10-Year National Program for Sub-National Democratic Development Phase 2 (NP2, 2021-2030). The project is expected to be implemented over a five-year period (2027-2031) with an indicative budget of US\$80-100 million, primarily financed by the World Bank (WB) and other anticipated development partners.

The proposed Project Development Objective (PDO) focuses on three interrelated dimensions:

1. Strengthening subnational administrations' resilience systems and capacities;
2. Delivery of local economic and climate-resilient infrastructure; and
3. Promoting citizen participation, social accountability, and inclusive service delivery.

The project consists of four components:

- Component 1: Local Resilience Systems Strengthening;
- Component 2: Local Resilience and Economic Investments;
- Component 3: Innovation and Learning; and
- Component 4: Coordination, Policy and Implementation Support.

Promoting citizen participation, social accountability, and inclusive service delivery is a core dimension of the SCALED Project Development Objective. In response to declining participation rates in subnational planning and monitoring processes, NCDDDS is recruiting a qualified Local Participatory Consultant to diagnose current barriers to robust and effective public participation in local planning mechanisms in Cambodia at CS and DM levels, including an assessment of use of digital participation tools from the users' perspective, and to develop effective citizen engagement options for SCALED that address the key barriers to participation. . As part of early preparation, the World Bank together with the RGC undertook a detailed knowledge stocktake, from which a summary of findings relevant to this assignment is annexed below. The stocktake identified important gaps in the *rate* and *quality* of citizen participation in decision-making at the local level (.e. Commune/Sangkat level) in Cambodia, as well as several drivers of the low level of participation.

Given that SCALED will focus predominantly on Districts/Municipalities (DM), which are somewhat removed from citizens by several factors, including greater physical distance and indirect elections, it is equally important to consider options for citizen participation in decision-making at DM level, including through digital tools.

2. Objective of the Assignment

The objective of this consultancy is to deliver focused technical inputs to inform the design of SCALED, building on the findings of the SCALED Knowledge Stocktake regarding public participation. These inputs will contribute to other consultancies, including the revision of local planning guidelines (conducted by a separate Senior Local Planning and Governance Consultant), the preparation of the Project Document and Implementation Manual (delivered by a Senior Project Management Consultant), etc. The objectives of this consultancy are to:

- (i) Based on the analysis of the barriers to meaningful participation at the local (i.e. Commune/Sangkat) level, particularly for women and marginalized groups, the consultant will develop specific recommendations for SCALED's citizen engagement design, which may include a series of complementary channels that can enable the effective participation of a wide range of citizen groups, including digital channels and options that maintain user anonymity; and
- (ii) Assess challenges and barriers for citizens' and Commune/Sangkat councilors' participation in decision-making at DM level, and propose concrete options/channels for enabling effective participation in DM level decision-making, including digital channels.

3. Scope of Work

3.1. Inception and Analytical Framework

- Review the SCALED Knowledge Stocktake on local participation and related diagnostic material prepared for this assignment.
- Prepare the inception report with a description of consultant's assignment, methodology, work plan, consultation arrangements, approach to reviewing the existing Stocktake report, and proposed structure of the diagnostic note.

3.2. Assessment of Barriers to Effective Participation at Commune/Sangkat and District/Municipal Levels

- Review and synthesize the findings of the Stockade on public participation at Commune/Sangkat (CS) level, and identify any potential unanswered questions about the causes/drivers of low and ineffective participation that could be answered with limited field data collection (e.g. focus groups discussions).
- Review how public participation is reflected and implemented in decision-making at District/Municipal (DM) level, including challenges and obstacles for citizens and CS Councils to participate.
- Review of existing capacities at both CS and DM levels for facilitating participation that enable or constrain effective participation;
- Conduct targeted civil society and stakeholder consultations (maximum 2-3 focus groups) to investigate any relevant unanswered questions about drivers/causes of low participation and existing capacities for facilitating participation, and seek feedback on the proposed options for increased and effective public participation in decision-making at CS and DM levels, to be coordinated with NCDDS team and the Senior Project Management Consultant, to avoid duplication;

3.3. Assessment of Digital Tools, and Participatory Climate Risk and Resilience Tools

- Assess 2-3 digital participation tools (e.g., SMS/mobile feedback platforms, e-consultation portals, GIS-based citizen reporting) for their feasibility, cost, and appropriateness in the Cambodian local governance context, as options for the SCALED project. The analysis should consider connectivity and digital-literacy constraints at commune/Sangkat level. This task should be coordinated with the Senior Digital Consultant undertaking; the consultant assigned this task will focus on the user experience (UX) and accessibility of the digital tools;
- Assess 2-3 participatory climate risk and resilience tools for their feasibility and appropriateness at subnational level, as options for the SCALED project. This task should be coordinated with the Climate Change Consultant.

3.4. Development of Options for Wide and Effective Participation at CS and DM Levels, and Toolkit for Facilitating Public Participation, including Results Monitoring indicators

- Based on the review and assessment mentioned in 3.2 and 3.3 above, the consultant will make recommendations for broad, inclusive and effective public participation in planning processes, at both CS and DM levels, as inputs in the revisions of planning guidelines, including priority digital tools and participatory climate tools.
- Regarding digital tools, the consultant will also: i) outline functional requirements for the digital tools (target users, data flow, integration with existing CDP/CIP databases, offline

fallback); and ii) ensure alignment of the proposed tools with national data privacy standards and security protocols for citizen-generated data.

- In coordination with the Senior Local Planning and Governance Consultant to draft a practical toolkit for facilitating public participation and citizen engagement in local decision making, and planning processes, and performance monitoring, comprising a facilitation guide for public forums, a participation checklist for local committees, and standard consultation templates that address gender, social inclusion, and climate-risk considerations;
- Propose a simple set of indicators to monitor effective participation that sub-national administrations can track and report against, with methodology to monitor indicators (e.g., sources and methods for data collection);
- In coordination with NCDDS, the consultant will pilot-test the draft Facilitation Toolkit in 1-2 selected Communes/Sangkats and revise the tools based on feedback before finalization;
- In coordination with the Senior Capacity Development Consultant, recommend a capacity building or training plan for NCDDS and subnational staff on the implementation of the facilitation toolkit; and
- Contribute to the development of user-friendly training materials on the facilitation toolkit and provide orientation to NCDDS and relevant subnational staff.

3.6. Diagnostic and Recommendations

- Develop a single diagnostic note (10-15 pages), including: (i) key findings of the review and assessment conducted under activities 3.2 and 3.3 above and their implications for SCALED project design, ; ii) the concrete recommendations for promoting effective participation in local decision making, and planning processes (which will be inputs to the revisions to planning guidelines, under task A-4) as well as for SCALED project design; (iii) key findings of the assessments of existing capacities for facilitating public participation, with concrete recommendations for a training plan; and (iv) proposed indicators to monitor effective participation; and
- The facilitation toolkit, and inputs to training materials.

4. Expected Deliverables

No.	Deliverable	Indicative Timeline	Payment Schedule
1	Inception report confirming methodology, data sources, consultation plan, and proposed structure of the diagnostic note	Within 1 week of contract signing	20% upon acceptance of the inception report
2	Draft and finalize of diagnostic note (include finding implication, capacity and recommendation)	By December 2026	45% upon acceptance of the draft participatory toolkit in line 3
3	Draft participatory toolkit (facilitation guide, checklist, consultation templates, participation indicators), pilot-tested in 1-2 communes/Sangkats	By January 2027	
4	• Final revised diagnostic note (10-15 pages) reflecting comments/recommendations, for presentation at the Consolidated Technical Workshop. • Revised facilitation toolkit.	By February 2027	20% upon acceptance of the final revised diagnostic note and revised facilitation toolkit

No.	Deliverable	Indicative Timeline	Payment Schedule
5	Inputs to Capacity development plan, training material and orientation to NCDDDS team on the implementation of the facilitation toolkits.	By February 2027	15% upon acceptance of the capacity development plan and materials.

5. Duration of the Assignment

The assignment is expected to be conducted over a period of approximately up to 60 working days between November 2026 to February 2027, with level of effort determined by NCDDDS.

The Consultant will be required to travel to selected districts/municipalities and Communes/Sangkats to conduct focus group discussions, coordinated with other Component A field activities.

6. Payments

The payment will be made on the basis of lump sums to be determined based on qualifications, deliverable outputs, and contract negotiation.

7. Reporting and Supervision

The Consultant will report directly to the Project Director and/or designated Project Manager of SCALED project preparation, in coordination with the World Bank Task Team's governance and social development focal points. For technical implementation, the consultant will closely collaborate and maintain regular coordination with:

- Relevant technical departments of NCDDDS;
- The Senior Local Planning and Governance Consultant and the Gender and Inclusion Consultant, to ensure alignment of findings and consistency of the toolkit with the revised SNA planning guidelines;
- Other consultants engaged in SCALED project preparation, including but not limited to the Senior Digital Consultant (on digital participation tools); the Senior Project Management Consultant (for all inputs on citizen engagement aspects of SCALED design); the Senior Local Planning and Governance Consultant (for inputs to the revision of planning guidelines); the Climate Change Consultant (on the assessment of participatory climate resilience tools); the Gender and Inclusion Consultant (on barriers to participation of women and vulnerable groups), etc.
- World Bank technical teams.

The Consultant shall coordinate the planning and scheduling of consultations with DM/CS councils and subnational staff with the Senior Project Management Consultant and other consultants engaged in SCALED preparation to combine or sequence consultation activities where possible and avoid duplicative engagement or consultation fatigue among subnational stakeholders. NCDDDS will support this coordination, including through a shared consultation calendar where feasible.

All deliverables shall be submitted in English. Khmer summaries may be requested where necessary.

The consultant is expected to:

- Participate in regular preparation meetings with the NCDDS project team and the World Bank Task Team, are required.
- Provide brief written progress updates to NCDDS upon request.
- Respond in a timely manner to review comments and requests for revisions from NCDDS and the World Bank Task Team.

8. Required Qualifications and Experience

Education

- Advanced university degree (master's degree or higher preferred) in Social Development, Development Studies, Public Policy, Political Science, or a related field.

Professional Experience

- Minimum 8 years of relevant professional experience in participatory planning, social accountability, or citizen engagement in local governance contexts;
- Extensive, relevant professional experiences in the areas of social accountability, local governance, policy analysis and / or advocacy;
- Proven knowledge and understanding of Decentralisation and Deconcentration reforms and local development in Cambodia;
- Demonstrated experience assessing and specifying digital participation tools or e-governance platforms is highly desirable;
- Experience conducting focus group discussions and community-level consultations;
- Experience supporting donor-funded projects, preferably financed by the World Bank or other multilateral development partners;
- Familiarity with Cambodia's commune council and CDP/CIP planning processes; and
- Demonstrated experience developing practical tools, checklists, facilitation guides, or manuals for adoption by government systems or donor-funded programs.

Skills and Competencies

- Strong facilitation and community engagement skills;
- Excellent analytical and report-writing skills;
- Ability to assess technical digital tools and translate them into practical design recommendations;
- Possession of strong verbal and written communication with internal and external stakeholders in both Khmer and English; and
- Fluency in English and Khmer (written and spoken) are required.

9. Selection Method

The Consultant will be selected in accordance with the applicable procurement and consultant selection procedures of the World Bank and the Royal Government of Cambodia.

10. Ethical Considerations and Confidentiality

The Consultant shall:

- Maintain confidentiality of all project information and documents;
- Comply with applicable government and donor policies;
- Avoid conflicts of interest during the assignment; and
- Ensure that all outputs are original and of professional quality.

11. Administrative Support

NCDDS will:

- Facilitate access to relevant documents and stakeholders;
- Coordinate focus group logistics with relevant subnational administrations and civil society organizations;
- Provide available project information and background materials;
- Review and provide feedback on deliverables in a timely manner; and
- Provide the Consultant with access to the SCALED Knowledge Stocktake, its underlying source documents, relevant government legal and policy instruments, and other available project preparation materials, subject to document availability and applicable confidentiality requirements.

Stocktake Summary: Local Community Participation in Cambodia

Key findings on Community Participation in Local Decision-Making in Cambodia

1. Awareness vs. Actual Participation

A persistent gap exists between citizens' awareness of their right to participate and their actual engagement. The 2018 Transparency International Cambodia (TIC) survey found that 85.1% of citizens are aware of their right to participate in Commune/Sangkat meetings on development plans, investment programs, and budgets. Yet only 28.6% have ever attended such meetings, and even fewer have viewed budget plans (11.6%), participated in council meetings (6.2%), or reviewed written fund records (1.9%).

The 2025 Governance Survey (NP-II baseline) quantifies this further, with a Civic Engagement sub-index score of 0.58 (Somewhat Weak), noting that only 23% of citizens participate in community-based organizations (CBOs). Councillors and officials also showed a weak understanding of the purpose and benefits of citizen participation.

2. Formal Participation Mechanisms

Cambodia has established several formal structures for community participation, most notably:

- Commune Development Plans (CDP) and Commune Investment Programs (CIP): These involve focus group discussions at the commune level. In Kratie Province, commune representatives reported approximately 40–50% of the population engaged in the CIP process, and one Kampot commune mobilized participation even among the elderly. However, there is wide variation across communes, and citizens often feel their priorities — particularly non-infrastructure needs — are not reflected in final plans.
- Social Accountability Framework (ISAF): ISAF is the flagship tool, using Community Scorecards (CSC) and Joint Accountability Action Plans (JAAP). The 2023 API report on ISAF Phase II found that 27,768 participants (62% female) contributed to scorecards from 2021–2023. Around 60–64% of proposed community actions were included in JAAPs, but the response rate from service providers — meaning those actions actually addressed — averaged only 14% in 2022, which is critically low.
- One Window Service Offices (OWSO): The 2025 GIZ ISD Evaluation found that OWSO expansion improved access, particularly through mobile services for disadvantaged groups, with citizens noting improvements in hospitality, efficiency, and accountability.

3. Quality and Depth of Participation

Multiple studies point to participation being largely shallow or formal rather than substantive. The 2024 CDRI report on local governance found that while 84% of council members reported holding a public meeting about the CIP, more than half stated that citizens did not raise concerns, and only 11% reported that the final decision was made by villagers at a public meeting.

The 2015 CDRI social accountability study found that in healthcare, responsiveness to community feedback occurred, but it was driven by the state's willingness to deliver core functions — not by genuine accountability to citizens. In the urban water and sanitation case, community scorecards were developed but produced no meaningful change; the most effective route for poor citizens remained reliance on patronage networks.

In education, the 2015 SCI study found that School Support Committees (SSCs) — intended as a vehicle for community oversight — functioned largely as rubber stamps, with limited financial management knowledge and low sense of ownership over school budgets, which parents viewed as "government money" rather than community funds.

4. Barriers to Participation

The documents consistently identify the following barriers:

- Lack of time (cited by 42.6% of non-participants, TIC 2018) and not being invited or encouraged (32.8%).

- Fear of reprisal: The 2015 CDRI study found that villagers consciously adapted their behavior to avoid conflict with authorities, including not using complaint boxes in health centers due to fear of identification and retaliation.
- Political culture and hierarchy: A 2014 voter survey found 60% described the state-citizen relationship as that between a father and a child, reflecting deeply ingrained deference. Challenging leaders in public is not culturally normalized.
- Patronage dynamics: Village chiefs, CPP supporters, and powerful individuals are overwhelmingly seen as the most influential actors in local decisions. The TIC 2018 survey found 98% of CPP council members viewed CPP party supporters as highly influential, while ethnic minorities and women were seen as least influential.
- Limited information access: The 2025 Governance Survey found citizens have limited knowledge of SNA (sub-national administration) structures, roles, and complaint mechanisms, with the Accountability sub-index scoring 0.54 (Somewhat Weak).

5. Role of Intermediaries

Village chiefs and Community Accountability Facilitators (CAFs) play a critical intermediary role. The 2024 CDRI study found that 94% of informal leaders reported passing on citizens' concerns to the commune chief or council. However, the 2021 CDRI civil society study found that youth organizations relying on local authorities for recruitment tended to be co-opted into existing political structures, limiting genuine citizen voice.

CBOs (community forestry groups, farmers' water user committees, etc.) are increasingly recognized as important entry points, particularly in the 2024 World Bank climate accountability study, but their engagement tends to be narrowly focused on specific sectors rather than broader governance or climate issues.

6. Structural and Institutional Challenges

- Financial constraints: Commune budgets are often inadequate, with over 50% allocated to administrative costs, leaving little for responsive service delivery or climate resilience measures (2024 WB report).
- Capacity gaps: The 2025 MoI SNA Planning Evaluation found that SNAs struggle with situation analysis, data management, and technical planning, and face frequent staff turnover.
- Top-down policy making: Despite decentralization rhetoric, the 2015 SCI study noted that policy-making remains largely top-down, with limited incorporation of feedback from local implementers or communities.
- Centralized decision-making: The 2015 CDRI study found that decisions on major urban services (e.g., piped water) are made at the national executive level with no input from local authorities or communities.

7. Where Participation Has Worked

Despite the challenges, some positive outcomes are documented:

- The 2019 EBA/Seila evaluation found that long-term participatory local infrastructure programming significantly reduced poverty and stimulated local economic development in communities where it was implemented.
- The 2025 Governance Survey found the Responsiveness sub-index at 0.74 (Strong), with a high correlation between citizen priorities and SNA plans, and strong citizen confidence that local administrations understand their needs.
- ISAF, where well-implemented, has led to more positive citizen-service provider interactions, and provincial authorities in at least one case requested it be scaled up.
- The 2024 WB climate accountability study noted that ISAF-driven coordination between district and commune levels through JAAPs has improved inter-level communication.

Summary Assessment

Across all documents, community participation at the local level in Cambodia is characterized by strong formal frameworks but weak implementation. Citizens are aware of their rights and express a strong desire for meaningful

engagement — the TIC 2018 survey found 91.1% believe participation would improve service quality — but structural barriers (fear, patronage, capacity, resources, information gaps) prevent this from translating into genuine influence over decisions. **The most effective participation tends to occur where trusted intermediaries (NGOs, CBOs, CAFs) facilitate dialogue, but sustainability beyond project cycles remains a key concern.**

Drivers and Reasons for Low Community Participation in Local Decision-Making in Cambodia

1. Fear of Authority and Reprisal

This is the most consistently documented and deeply rooted barrier across multiple documents and time periods. The 2015 CDRI social accountability study provides some of the most direct evidence. Citizens — particularly the poor — are explicitly reluctant to participate due to fear of disrupting patronage relationships with officials on whom they depend for assistance. One female project participant is quoted directly: *"I learned a lot from the project but I can only use about 30 percent because I am still scared of authority to the point of life and death."* Another reflects: *"I had better stop complaining now that I have no support from an NGO. My and other villagers' efforts are likely to be fruitless because our initiative lacks backing by a powerful actor."*

The same study documents a case where a student was told she could not re-enroll, with the suspected real reason being her public participation in a school accountability meeting. Students reported feeling "uncomfortable after expressing concerns at public meetings" after school officials signaled that open criticism was not acceptable. The 2024 World Bank climate accountability report confirms this dynamic persists, noting that citizens "prefer informal mechanisms of raising voice to avoid government reprisals," and that "the relationship between citizens and commune councilors is characterized as distant and formal due to national-level political dynamics."

2. Low Perceived Benefit — Costs Outweigh Returns

The 2015 CDRI study is particularly clear on this: *"The main constraint on citizen participation is not lack of interest in the issues or collective action, but the fact that the costs of involvement are greater than the perceived benefits."* Three specific sub-reasons are given:

- Citizens are not clear what they will get from participating.
- They are not convinced the process will change anything, because there is no concrete course of action available to them.
- Information provided to them is not specific enough to motivate action.

The 2024 WB report adds a further structural dimension: when citizens participate in planning processes (e.g., the Commune Investment Program/CIP) but see their priority needs consistently not funded — with communes defaulting instead to road rehabilitation — they become frustrated and stop engaging. As the report states, *"the misalignment with the stated needs of a significant portion of the population and the actual CIP investments contributes to disincentivizing citizen participation."*

Similarly, where the JAAP (Joint Accountability Action Plan) is not visibly integrated into the CIP, citizens conclude their participation is pointless: *"Citizens feel that there is no point to their participation."*

3. Limited and Inaccessible Information

The 2015 CDRI study found that information disseminated through social accountability projects was *"primarily for government officials as evidence of the gaps and local needs, but is presented in a manner that is not accessible to villagers and does not propose collective actions."* Villagers who did access information could not interpret general statements as evidence of government failure.

The 2025 NP-II Governance Survey quantifies knowledge gaps: only **24% of citizens** know how the Commune/Sangkat Council is elected, and only **21%** know how the District/Municipality/Khan Council is elected. Awareness of budget-related rights drops further: only **50.6%** know they have the right to view a written record of commune funds, and in practice only **1.9%** have ever done so (TIC 2018).

The 2024 WB report also found that in some communes, collection and dissemination of information was not prioritized — often due to frequent turnover of commune and district staff — leaving citizens without the basic inputs needed to engage.

4. Time Constraints and Competing Priorities

The TIC 2018 survey found **42.6% of non-participants** cited lack of time as the main reason for not engaging in commune budget processes. The 2024 WB climate report echoes this: *"People are busy due to their busy lives, limited understanding of the CIP process, migration, and family health care."* Seasonal migration, in particular, affects many rural communities.

5. Deep-rooted Political Culture and Patronage

Multiple documents point to a political culture that structurally discourages autonomous citizen voice. The 2015 CDRI study notes that local authorities are themselves products of a patronage system rooted in the post-Khmer Rouge state-building era, where "the power of local authorities and patrons comes from outside the village, from powerful patrons more than from popular support and legitimacy." A 2014 voter survey cited by CDRI found **60% of respondents described the state-citizen relationship as between a parent and a child** — reflecting ingrained deference to authority.

This culture has concrete effects on participation: citizens self-censor, avoid being seen as troublemakers, and adapt their behavior to avoid conflict with figures they depend on. The 2015 CDRI study notes that "villagers were acutely aware of fear and resentment from government officials if they acted or said things not endorsed by authority." The TIC 2018 survey shows who actually holds influence: **98% of CPP council members** rated CPP party supporters as highly influential in local decisions, while ethnic minorities and women were consistently rated as least influential.

6. Perceived Bias and Lack of Trust

The 2024 WB report found that some citizens do not participate because they perceive commune processes as biased or captured: *"Communities felt that those who had money often won the case."* Others cited factional allegiances of communes that made them feel excluded. There is also evidence of informal fee extraction: *"Villagers had to pay extra fees (beyond those mandated) for basic commune services,"* further eroding trust.

7. Gender-Specific Barriers

The 2024 WB report documents a specific gender dynamic: while women sometimes attend meetings in higher numbers (because men are away for work), this attendance is driven by **social obligation rather than empowerment**. Women *"feel obligated to attend due to social pressures but do not feel empowered to play an active role in decision-making."* Commune-level decision-making is perceived as the purview of men, meaning women's physical presence does not translate into voice.

8. Design Failures of Participation Mechanisms

Several documents point to how badly designed interventions suppress rather than enable participation:

- **Top-down project design:** The 2024 WB report notes that top-down projects "frequently result in lack of buy-in or contribute to conflict dynamics within communities."
- **Narrow scope:** The 2019 WB health report critiques social accountability tools for focusing "on a narrow range of services implemented by communes rather than issues self-selected by the community," limiting relevance and engagement.
- **Market-driven accountability framing:** The same report notes that the "market-driven framework underpinning social accountability limits its ability to mobilize collective action, as these mechanisms are individualistic."
- **No follow-through post-project:** The 2015 CDRI study found that once the NGO left, organised community committees ceased to exist, and participants had "no idea what they should do further," generating a sense of hopelessness that would deter future participation.

9. Hostility Toward NGO-Facilitated Engagement

The 2015 CDRI study documented that local authorities were "suspicious and uncooperative" with NGOs facilitating participation projects, viewing them as potential threats to public order. The 2024 WB report found that in Kratie Province, some government officials explicitly "accused NGOs of inciting people against the commune"

when they facilitated budget awareness sessions. This hostility constrains the space for third-party facilitation, which is often the only route to meaningful engagement.

Summary

The evidence across these documents points to a self-reinforcing cycle: **citizens do not participate because they fear reprisal, see little benefit, and lack information; meanwhile, the processes themselves are poorly designed to receive their input or act on it, which validates their reluctance.** This is not primarily a knowledge or awareness problem — people are broadly aware of their rights — but a structural and political one rooted in Cambodia's governance culture, patronage dynamics, and the institutional design of local participation mechanisms.

Evidence on Participation Rates and Quality: Implications for SCALED Design

1. Participation in Commune-Level Planning (CDP/CIP) — The Core Planning Mechanism

SCALED places the Commune Investment Program (CIP) at the center of participatory local planning, including integrating climate risk tools into it. The evidence on the quality of CIP-related participation is sobering. The 2024 CDRI local governance study found that while **84% of council members reported holding a public meeting about the CIP**, more than half reported that **citizens did not raise any concerns** at those meetings. Only **11% of councillors** said the final CIP decision was made by villagers at a public meeting, and only **1%** said citizens play the biggest role in deciding how funds are spent. The 2025 NP-II Governance Survey confirmed this, finding that less than half of informal leaders were consulted by the Commune/Sangkat council on the budget, CDP, or CIP. The 2024 WB climate accountability report adds a critical design implication: when CIP investments consistently fail to reflect citizen-stated priorities — defaulting to roads and infrastructure while non-infrastructure needs go unfunded — it actively **erodes future participation**. The report states directly that this "misalignment contributes to disincentivizing citizen participation." For SCALED's single investment window design, ensuring some degree of citizen-visible alignment between stated priorities and actual investments will be essential to sustain engagement. **Implication for SCALED:** High meeting attendance or formal CIP consultation cannot be taken as evidence of meaningful participation. SCALED's M&E framework should track whether citizen-raised concerns are actually incorporated into investment decisions, not just whether meetings were held.

2. ISAF Institutionalization — Rates, Quality, and Structural Weaknesses

SCALED's Component 1 prioritizes institutionalizing ISAF within local planning. The evidence on ISAF's current performance reveals both potential and serious structural problems that design must address.

Reach: The 2023 API ISAF Phase II report documented **27,768 participants** across community scorecards from 2021–2023, with 62% female. However, the average number of community participants per scorecard was only **12 persons**, and in the lowest-scoring scorecards fewer than 10 people participated. This is a very thin base for a governance accountability mechanism.

Inclusion in JAAP: Around **60–66%** of issues raised in community scorecards were included in JAAPs across sectors (commune administration, health centers, primary schools) in 2021–2022. This indicates reasonable uptake at the planning stage.

Government response — the critical failure point: The response rate to JAAP actions collapsed dramatically between 2021 and 2022. Government response to commune administration actions fell from **78% to 6%**; for health centers from **74% to 14%**; for primary schools from **73% to 23%**. Even accounting for the fact that 2022 responses may have been recorded in 2023, this drop signals a **fundamental accountability gap** between what is committed in JAAPs and what is actually delivered — the precise gap SCALED aims to close.

Awareness and confusion: The 2024 CDRI governance study found substantial institutional confusion around ISAF. While ISAF had been implemented in 69% of surveyed communes, **36% of non-CPP council members did not know if their council had a CAF**, and **32%** did not know if their council had prepared a JAAP. A quarter of council members did not believe villagers were aware of the JAAP. The 2015 CDRI study documents a recurring pattern where ISAF tools are adopted formally but remain "on paper" due to lack of enthusiasm from citizens or authorities.

CAF performance: Community Accountability Facilitators are the operational backbone of ISAF. The evidence shows their role skews heavily toward information-giving rather than problem-solving. The 2023 API report found

CAFs are least active in resolving issues, securing community financial contributions, or resolving conflicts — **44% of CAFs report they never or rarely resolve disagreements between villagers**. The 2024 CDRI study also found CAFs are "pessimistic about the link between CS poor performance and accountability," seeing ISAF's value primarily in service improvement rather than as a political accountability mechanism.

Implication for SCALED: Institutionalizing ISAF cannot mean simply scaling up existing modalities. Design should address the government response gap (the JAAP implementation stage), strengthen the CAF role beyond information provision, and create upstream institutional mechanisms that make JAAP commitments binding on service providers and SNAs. The 2025 GIZ ISD evaluation's experience with OWSO — which tied citizen feedback to service standards — may offer a model.

3. Inclusive Participation — Women, Youth, and Vulnerable Groups

SCALED emphasizes women's leadership and inclusive engagement. The evidence reveals that formal inclusion does not equate to substantive voice.

Women: The 2024 WB climate accountability report found that women often attend meetings in higher numbers when men are away for work, but this is driven by **social obligation, not empowerment**. Women do not feel empowered to play an active role in decision-making, and commune-level decision-making is perceived as men's domain. In ISAF scorecards, women represent 62% of participants (API 2023) — a positive figure — but whether this translates into women's issues shaping JAAP commitments is not established.

Youth: The 2021 CDRI civil society study found that youth engagement in local governance is significantly shaped by patronage: youth organizations that depend on local authorities for recruitment tend to be co-opted rather than independently engaged. Only **24.7%** of respondents in the TIC 2018 survey reported youth participated in commune budget processes.

Marginalized groups: The TIC 2018 survey found participation is heavily skewed toward powerful community members — **53.8%** of respondents said "big, powerful, or important people" participated in commune budget processes, compared to **28.3%** for poor households, **14.3%** for disabled people, and **3.4%** for children. The 2024 CDRI study confirms that ethnic and religious minority villagers are far less likely to be perceived as influential by council members.

Implication for SCALED: Generic "inclusive participation" targets will not be sufficient. SCALED's design for Component 1 and Component 3 (innovation pilots on nutrition, childcare, income generation) should build in disaggregated tracking of whose voice shapes decisions, not just who attends. The evidence suggests targeted investment in women's and youth capacity to exercise voice — beyond attendance — is needed.

4. Budget Transparency and Citizen Knowledge

SCALED involves commune-level investment flows and accountability for those investments. Citizen budget literacy is a precondition for meaningful engagement.

The TIC 2018 survey found **99.9% of citizens had never seen an official budget document** and **96.5% had never tried to obtain budget information**. Only **1.9%** had ever viewed a full written record of commune funds. The 2025 Governance Survey found only **24%** of citizens know how the Commune/Sangkat Council is elected, and **50.6%** know they have the right to view commune fund records. The TIC 2018 survey also found that **over 60%** of respondents could not distinguish between state budget funds and political party funds used for development projects — a confusion that actively undermines accountability.

Implication for SCALED: Budget transparency and citizen literacy around financial flows cannot be assumed as a baseline. SCALED's social accountability component will need to invest in accessible information dissemination about the single investment window and CIP — not just in the mechanics of scorecards — before participatory mechanisms can be meaningfully exercised.

5. The Information-Action Gap

Several documents converge on a finding that is directly relevant to SCALED's theory of change: **information provision alone does not produce accountability**. The 2015 CDRI study states plainly that "information alone does not motivate collective action or put pressure on state actors to respond," and documents cases where information about misuse of public money and poor services was already in the public domain — yet no accountability followed. Participation is constrained not by lack of awareness but by the power asymmetry between citizens and the state.

The 2024 WB climate report reinforces this, noting that citizens prefer informal, patron-based channels over formal participation mechanisms precisely because they yield more predictable results. The 2019 WB health report flags that social accountability tools based on a "market-driven framework" are inherently individualistic and cannot mobilize collective action.

Implication for SCALED: If SCALED's social accountability design rests primarily on information disclosure and scorecard tools without addressing the structural incentives that make officials respond (or not), the evidence suggests it will have limited impact. The project should consider what sanctions or positive incentives exist — linked to SCALED's own performance financing — to make JAAP commitments binding and visible.

Priority Documents for Consultant Review

#	Document	Priority	Rationale
1	2024 CDRI — State of Local Governance in Cambodia: Accountability, Representation, and Responsiveness	Essential	Most recent and comprehensive survey-based evidence on how Commune/Sangkat Councils function in practice. Provides direct data on CIP decision-making, ISAF awareness gaps, CAF performance, and who actually influences local decisions. Indispensable for social accountability component design.
2	2023 API — Community Digital Scorecard and JAAP Analysis (ISAF Phase II)	Essential	Only document providing granular, quantified ISAF performance data — including the collapse of government JAAP response rates from 74–78% (2021) to 6–23% (2022). Most critical evidence for diagnosing why ISAF is not delivering accountability and what SCALED must fix.
3	2025 NP-II Governance Baseline Survey	Essential	Most recent nationwide quantitative baseline on citizen engagement, trust, and SNA performance. Provides sub-index scores (Civic Engagement: 0.58; Accountability: 0.54; Responsiveness: 0.74) that calibrate the starting point for SCALED and are a likely source for the project results framework.
4	2018 TIC — Accountability and Transparency in Budget Processes	Essential	Most detailed quantified source on citizen budget participation rates and barriers. Key statistics (only 28.6% of citizens have attended a commune meeting; 99.9% have never seen a budget document) define the depth of the participation deficit. Data on whose voice counts in commune decisions is essential for inclusive design.
5	2024 WB — Advancing Social Accountability in Climate Actions in Cambodia	Important	Directly addresses SCALED's climate-participation nexus — the most underexplored area in the literature. Documents why citizens disengage from climate planning, the role of CBOs, and the critical finding that CIP investment misalignment actively disincentivizes future participation.
6	2025 GIZ — End of Phase I Evaluation, Improved Service Delivery Programme	Important	Most recent operational evidence on what has worked at commune level to improve citizen-state interaction. Findings on OWSO, mobile services, and citizen satisfaction offer practical lessons for SCALED's service delivery dimension and help identify complementarity with GIZ programming.
7	2015 CDRI — Social Accountability in Service Delivery in Cambodia	Important	Analytically rigorous foundational text establishing that information alone does not produce accountability and that participation is constrained by power asymmetry and cost-benefit calculations. Core conceptual framing for SCALED's theory of change, despite being a decade old.
8	2018 UNDP — Inclusive Governance for Service Delivery and Social Accountability	Important	Documents UNDP's parallel engagement on ISAF and local governance, which overlaps significantly with SCALED's scope. Essential for understanding what has already been attempted, avoiding duplication, and identifying coordination opportunities.

9	2019 WB — How Social Accountability Strengthens Cross-Sector Initiatives to Deliver Quality Health Services	Important	Provides a critical conceptual challenge: its critique of the "market-driven framework" of social accountability — inherently individualistic and unable to mobilize collective action — is directly relevant to SCALED's cross-sectoral ambitions and theory of change.
10	2021 ASEAN Plus — Assessment of Public Service Delivery Systems	Supplementary	Useful for benchmarking Cambodia's service delivery performance regionally and identifying best practices from ASEAN peers. Too broad to offer depth on Cambodia's specific participation dynamics; most useful for communication and advocacy purposes.
11	2019 MoEYS — Challenges to Provincial Education Strategic Plan Preparation	Supplementary	Provides sector-specific evidence on decentralized planning failures in education, including tensions between central mandates and local capacity. Findings on participation are largely covered by the Essential documents; useful mainly for the education sector dimension.
12	2021 CDRI — Civil Society Organisations and Youth Civic Engagement	Supplementary	Valuable for understanding political constraints on civil society and the co-optation of youth organizations by patronage structures. Findings are consistent with and largely corroborated by the more recent 2024 CDRI and WB climate reports, making it supplementary.
13	2025 MoI — SNA Planning and Evaluation Report	Supplementary	Provides the government's own assessment of sub-national planning, useful for understanding institutional ownership and the official narrative. Less granular than independent survey-based sources on participation quality; important for political economy and alignment considerations.
14	2015 SCI — Program-Based Budgeting Reform and Community Participation in Primary Education	Supplementary	Sector-specific evidence on the limitations of School Support Committees as accountability mechanisms. Useful historical context on how community oversight bodies are captured or rendered ineffective, but largely superseded by more recent documents.
15	2019 EBA/Sweden — Long-Term Impacts of the Seila Programme	Supplementary	Demonstrates that sustained participatory local governance programming can produce measurable poverty reduction — useful for making the case for SCALED's approach. Primary focus is on infrastructure and economic outcomes rather than participation quality, limiting its relevance for participation design.
16	2003 ADB — Decentralization Reform and Commune-Level Service Delivery	Supplementary	Historically significant documentation of Cambodia's earliest post-war decentralization reforms. Most findings on commune council capacity and citizen awareness are reflected in more recent, quantified sources. Best used as background reading for team members new to Cambodia's decentralization trajectory.