

SUPPORT TO THE PARLIAMENTARY CENTER OF ASIA – PHASE I



Student participant in the #Girl2Leader Cambodia campaign hosted by the Cambodian Women Parliamentarians Caucus and supported by PCAsia.

Photo@PCAsai

BACKGROUND

This regional project forms an integral part of the Swiss Cooperation Programme in the Mekong Region 2022-25. It targets parliamentary services of ASEAN member states (with specific focus on Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar). Within ASEAN, the political systems and the levels of maturity of the members' parliaments vary substantially. Especially the three focus countries Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar (CLM) currently face specific challenges with regard to becoming fully democratic systems. In addition to political challenges, the parliaments generally lack the capacities and capabilities to fulfil their mandate. By default, parliamentarians usually strongly rely on professional parliamentary services as they are seldom specialists in the areas on which they must legislate. Therefore, parliamentarians will be better equipped to fulfil their duties and perform their roles if parliamentary staff is competent.

In the past, the former Parliamentary Institute of Cambodia (PIC) addressed the capacity building needs of parliaments in Cambodia and other ASEAN-member countries. Due to the political setback in Cambodia in 2018, PIC shifted its focus to the regional level and concentrated its support to the technical assistance of parliamentary services. The evolution from PIC to the Parliamentary Center of Asia (PCAsia) and therewith the new regional focus responds to a lack of capacity building opportunities relating to parliamentary activity throughout South-East Asia.

OBJECTIVES

The project aims to contribute to the improved performance of the target parliaments by strengthening the capacity of parliamentary staff and increasing the intensity of technical exchanges and experience sharing among their regional peers.

Outcome 1: Parliamentary staff has increased capacity to provide support to parliamentarians to make a draft legislation.

Outcome 2: Parliamentary staff has improved capacity to provide support to parliamentarians to implement their representation function.

Outcome 3: Parliamentary staff has improved capacity to provide support to parliamentarians to fulfil their oversight role, in particular at local level.

Outcome 4: The ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA) Secretariat uses PCAsia's services and engages in peer learning and exchanges.

Outcome 5: PCAsia is recognised as a valued partner in the form of a capacity strengthening institute in legislative and democratic development support in the region and internationally.

PROJECT AT A GLANCE:

Duration

Phase I: 01 May 2021- 31 Dec 2024

Budget

Total budget:

USD 9,050,000

Swiss contribution:

CHF 3,900,000

Implementing Agency

Parliamentary Center of Asia (PCAsia)

Other partners

- Sweden (Sida)

- Swiss Parliamentary Services

- ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA)

- Parliaments in the ASEAN region

Imprint

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March 2022

EXPECTED RESULTS

PCAsia's training programme is designed for parliamentary staff but also includes 'champions' from targeted parliaments. PCAsia strives for gender balance, mainstreaming it within all of its activities, including research, training, and outreach, as well as bringing gender experts to develop its gender programme.

Key results are amongst others the following:

1. Parliamentary staff has increased analytical capacity to support the oversight role of the parliament on the state budget, the legislative agenda through research products, and conduct public consultations on issues related to research products.
2. Women's caucuses and women parliamentarians of AIPA are supported in their activities through technical and implementation assistance.
3. Staff of the AIPA Secretariat utilise PCAsia's training offer according to their capacity development needs.

APPROACH

Due to the complex and instable political environment of the targeted CLM parliaments, PCAsia adopts an impartial, demand-oriented, and strictly technical approach; responding to the direct requests of secretariats, parliamentarians, and commissions. The intervention for each target country will be fine-tuned every year through the annual-work-plan.

The capacity development activities apply a learning by doing approach. PCAsia builds its capacity development interventions on the current priorities of the parliaments and uses mentorship and on-the-job training as mode of work. For the trainings and mentorship, PCAsia uses its own resource persons as well as external consultants and parliamentary staff of various European countries (e.g. Switzerland and France). In addition, it facilitates the exchange and mutual support among European and Asian parliamentary services through exposure visits and online forums. To maintain cost-effectiveness and to overcome the constraints imposed by COVID-19, an emphasis is put on e-learning and the training of trainers as it will later enable parliamentary staff to be trained in their own languages and will thus become self-sustaining. Due to the military coup in Myanmar in February 2021, the current focus countries are Cambodia and Laos only.

KEY RESULTS AND INSIGHTS FROM SUPIC PHASE II

This project builds on SDC's previous support to PIC and the following key results: PIC's technical training activities had 1,205 (464 women) parliamentary staff as direct participants. PIC facilitated the elaboration of 299 research products by parliamentary staff, and developed a regional information exchange platform as well as an online library comprising a total of 2,912 bibliographical records. Furthermore, a second Atlas on Parliamentary Diplomacy in the ASEAN context was published, and 183 outreach activities of the Cambodian parliament were supported. As outcome, the trained parliamentary staff were more empowered to fulfil their roles. According to PIC's survey, 89% of respondents indicated that PIC's research, knowledge and skills are beneficial to their careers as parliamentary support staff, while 62% indicated that they always apply their skills to their jobs. In 2021, PIC successfully handed over the parliamentary research intern programme, fiscal analysis capacity training, and the Cambodia legal database to the Cambodian Senate.

TARGET GROUP AND PROJECT LOCATION

The direct target beneficiaries of PCAsia's activities fall under three groups:

1. Staff of the parliamentary services of ASEAN member states (with specific focus on Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar) obtain trainings and mentoring but also join as resources in a wide range of relevant topics;
2. Staff of the AIPA Secretariat obtain tailor-made trainings, exposure visits and mentoring in order to strengthen the AIPA general secretariat's own capacities;
3. Future parliamentary staff receive training from PCAsia's pre-entry training facility on their roles and duties, especially in consideration of the need for ethical and professionalism requirements.

The training programmes are open to all 3,300 parliamentary staff of CLM parliaments. Their activities usually reach around 500 parliamentary staff as direct beneficiaries. The project's indirect beneficiaries include members of parliaments in the ASEAN region, and all citizens across South-East Asia.