

# communication matters!

Communication between  
persons with disabilities  
and local authorities  
in Cambodia





# communication matters!





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# Introduction

Persons with disabilities often don't have access to information and public services, but also don't know or are not able to communicate that they want access. On the other side, the local authorities often do not know how to provide persons with disabilities with information and services, and because they don't hear from persons with disabilities they might also not be aware of the need to do so. This is a vicious cycle.

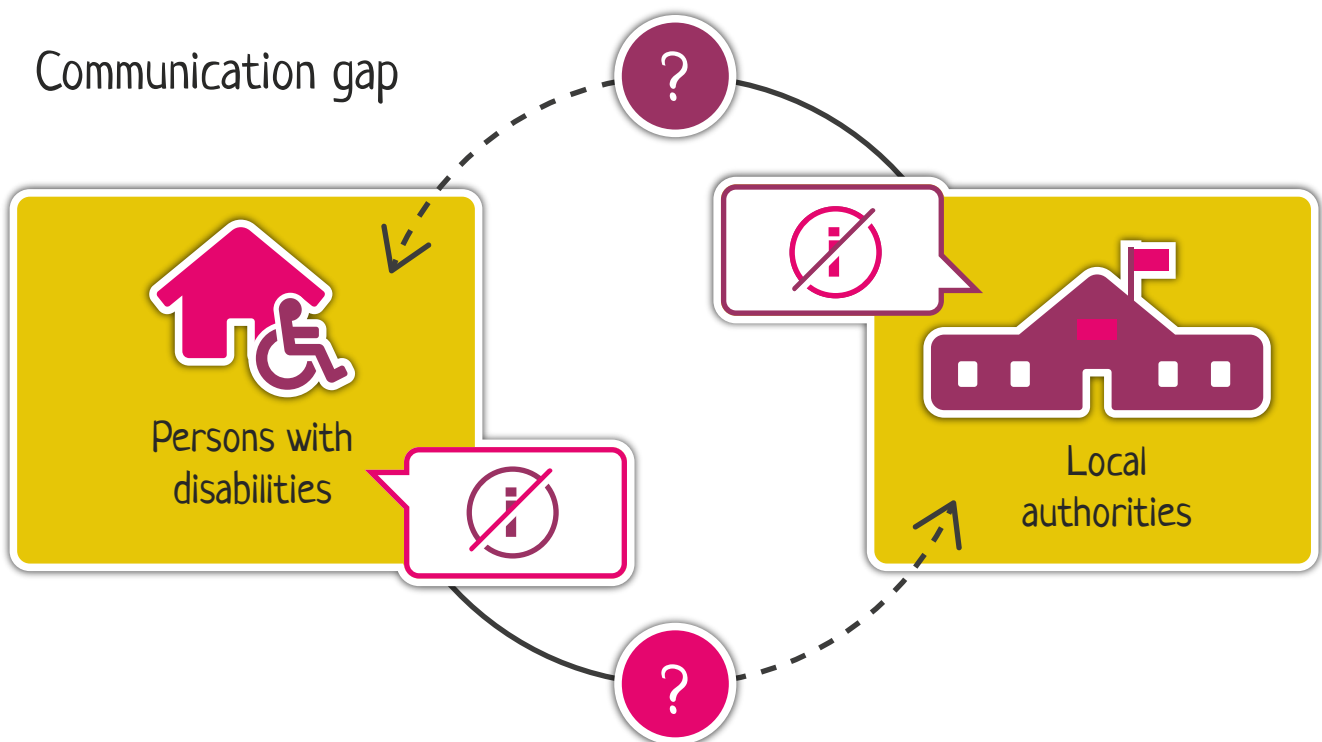
This communication gap can hinder well intended actions and can prevent those most in need of support from receiving it.

## How should communication happen?

Effective communication is a two way process between people.



For example, the local authorities share information with citizens through posters or radio messages, and citizens share their opinion with the local authorities through voting or participating in community meetings.



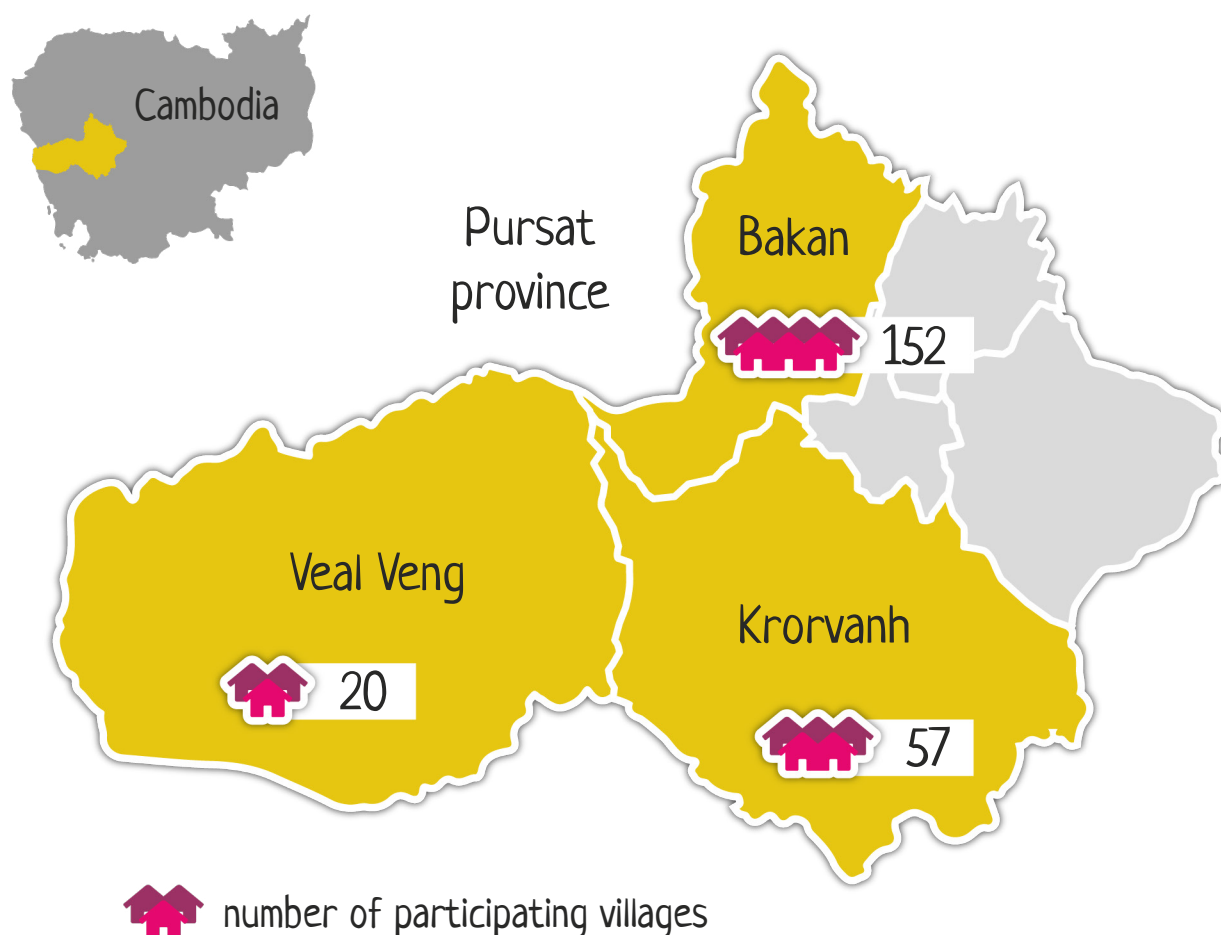
# Why and how did the study take place?

There are many mechanisms for citizens to tell the local authorities what they need, and for the local authorities to speak to citizens. But we heard many persons with disabilities in our work say that they felt as if they had no voice, were not listened to, and were not included enough in local meetings. The local authorities, however, said that persons with disabilities are welcome, but are not coming. Or that they don't know how to work with persons with disabilities. We wanted to know what was behind these statements.

Therefore we did this study to see if persons with disabilities are able to tell the local authorities what they need. And to look at what the local authorities would need in order to hear and respond to persons with disabilities.

The study took place in the province of Pursat in 2017. Pursat is a poor province in the northwestern part of Cambodia. The province has 6 districts, 49 communes and 505 villages.

The study took place in 229 villages in three districts in Pursat: most in Bakan because more people live there, and less in Veal Veng because it is very remote and hard to reach.

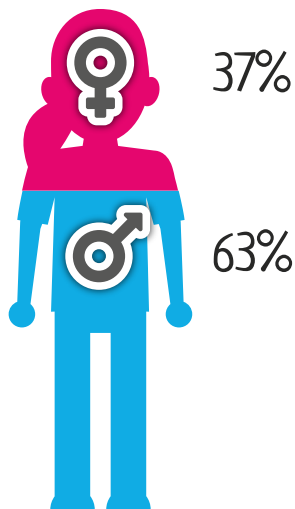


## Number of persons with disabilities interviewed



We aimed to reach out to as many persons with disabilities in the villages as we could.

## Division by sex

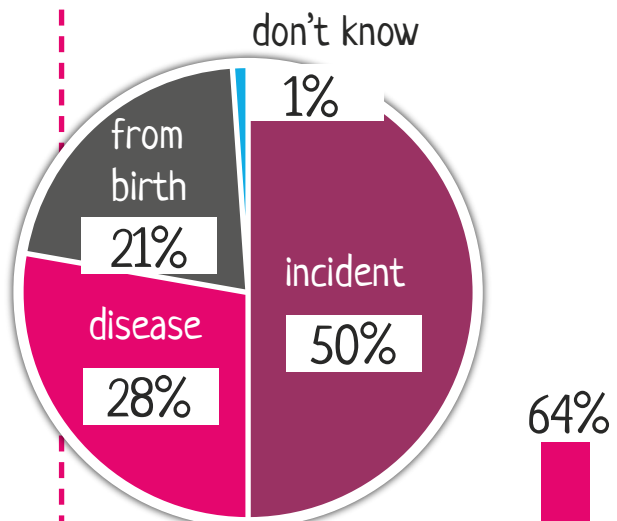


## Cause of impairment

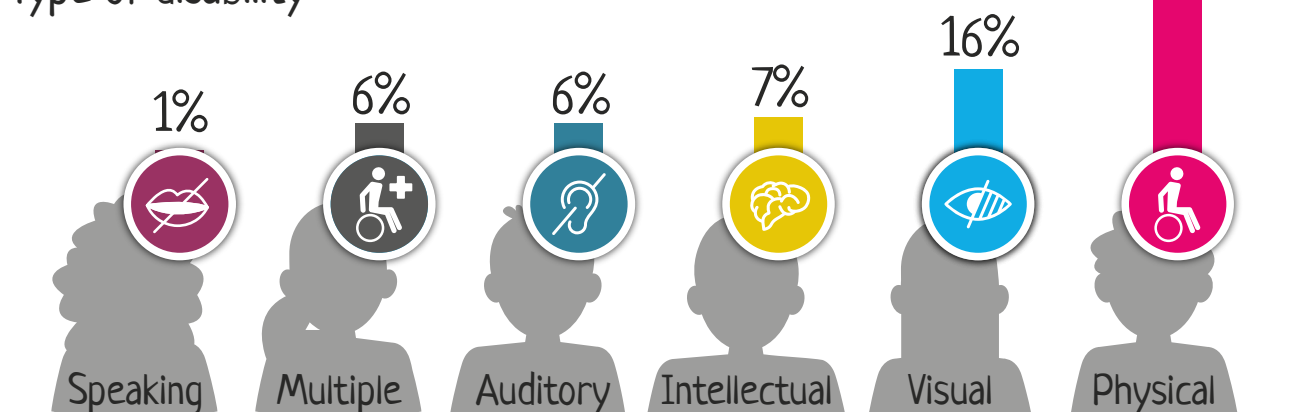
Pursat is a heavily landmine affected area, and the internal conflict has involved many of the men.

This might explain why we found so many more men with disabilities as compared to women, as well as so many persons with physical disabilities.

Half of the respondents indicated that they had attained their disability through an incident - mostly because of landmines or fighting.



## Type of disability<sup>1</sup>



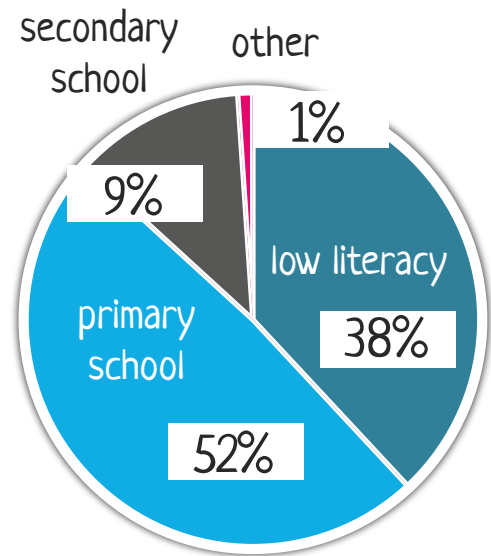
<sup>1</sup> Respondents were asked to tell what type of disability they had - which gave us many descriptions of the impairments that the respondents had. The research team then had to go back to the data and divide the respondents into the categories of types of disability. In the future, it would be better to identify respondents based on functional limitations rather than self-identification.

## How did we find all these persons with disabilities?

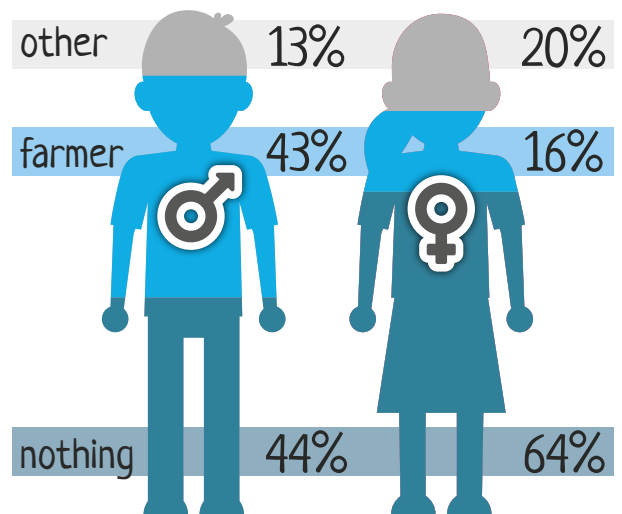
That was actually quite hard! We didn't know where the persons with disabilities were in the villages, so we asked the local authorities in each area. But the commune councils often didn't have enough information, or only knew persons with physical impairments. This could also explain why most of the persons interviewed in our study were persons with physical impairments.

This was quite a challenge – but it did help the commune councils realize they lacked this specific information. So different communes were trained to identify persons with disabilities in their area. Now in some communes, there are lists of persons with disabilities which are being used by the local authorities.

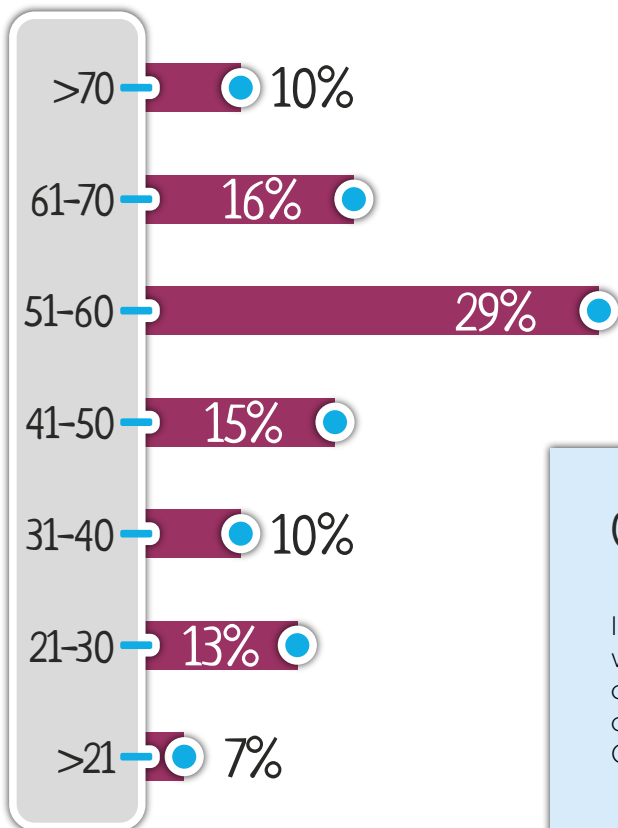
## Highest level of education



## Occupation

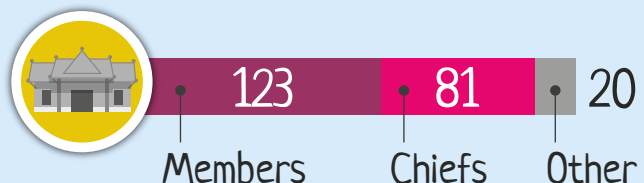


## Age range



## Commune councils

In addition we held 22 Focus Group Discussions with Commune Councils. These involved commune council members, village chiefs, and in some cases also commune clerks and members of the Commune Committee for Women and Children.



# Access to Information →

This section looks at whether persons with disabilities are able to access important information that is shared in their community.

## How do communes share information with citizens?

Commune councils said that the most common way that information is shared in their community is through village or commune meetings. Persons with disabilities, as seen on the right, however, do not mention meetings as a place where they get information. Also, as can be seen on page 14, most persons with disabilities also said they did not attend meetings or other community consultations.



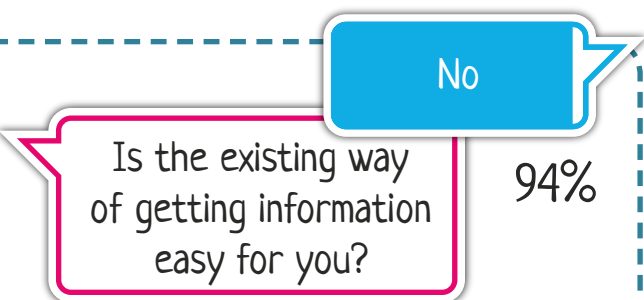
## How do persons with disabilities get information about what is happening in their community?



### Why do persons with disabilities say it is not easy to get information?

Often because the person with disability does not receive the information

- they felt that only persons without disabilities were asked or able to join the meeting
- the information is too general or simple
- it was difficult to access the information because of their impairment
- information came too late
- information was too quick and therefore unclear



And sometimes because the content of the message was not good

- the information they did receive was not relevant to them
- did not solve the problems of persons with disabilities

## Do commune councilors think the way they share information reaches persons with disabilities?

Most commune councils agreed that with the current way of sharing information, it is not easy for persons with disabilities to access the information. In the communes where the councilors said that the information methodologies were okay, the persons with disabilities said they did not find the information methods easy to use.

According to the councils, persons with disabilities were not able to access information because they..



could not communicate



could not travel to the meeting



did not receive the invitation



live too far away



are too ill to receive the information



have migrated to other places

## How can access to information be improved according to persons with disabilities?

Promote the participation of persons with disabilities

Ask organisations for support

Communicate differently to persons with disabilities

Communicate directly to persons with disabilities or through their families

Do not discriminate persons with disabilities

Focus on building relationships with persons with disabilities

Encourage persons with disabilities to participate

Provide specific items or help, such as food or treatments

Provide persons with disabilities with relevant and detailed information

Provide information on time

Use sign language or body language to communicate

# Accessing public services

This section focuses on whether persons with disabilities are able to access public services in their community.

Almost *all* persons with disabilities indicated that they had challenges accessing public services and information.

They said that they had difficulty because it was hard to get important news, and they felt they **did not get enough information**



Most said they had difficulties accessing public services or receiving information about public services because of their disability. So in their own opinion, **their impairment was the barrier.**



Some said this was because they were poor, or lived in a remote village **far away from public services**



Many respondents felt that they were not able to access services because the public services were not interested in persons with disabilities, and **did not give them attention**



Many also said they were excluded because persons with disabilities are **not able to meet criteria** or requirements set up by services, such as loan providers.



## Examples

I am not able to go to the services because I cannot walk.

I don't have transport available.

I am blind and therefore find it hard to get information.

I have difficulty communicating due to my deafness.

I am unable to speak clearly.

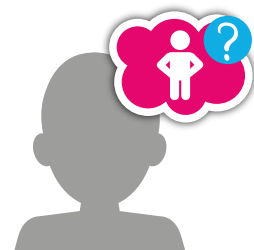
Many persons with disabilities said they would like to ask authorities for support and services, but felt unable to do so because:

they had difficulty in putting their **case forward**

they do not know who to **contact**

they have difficulty **communicating**

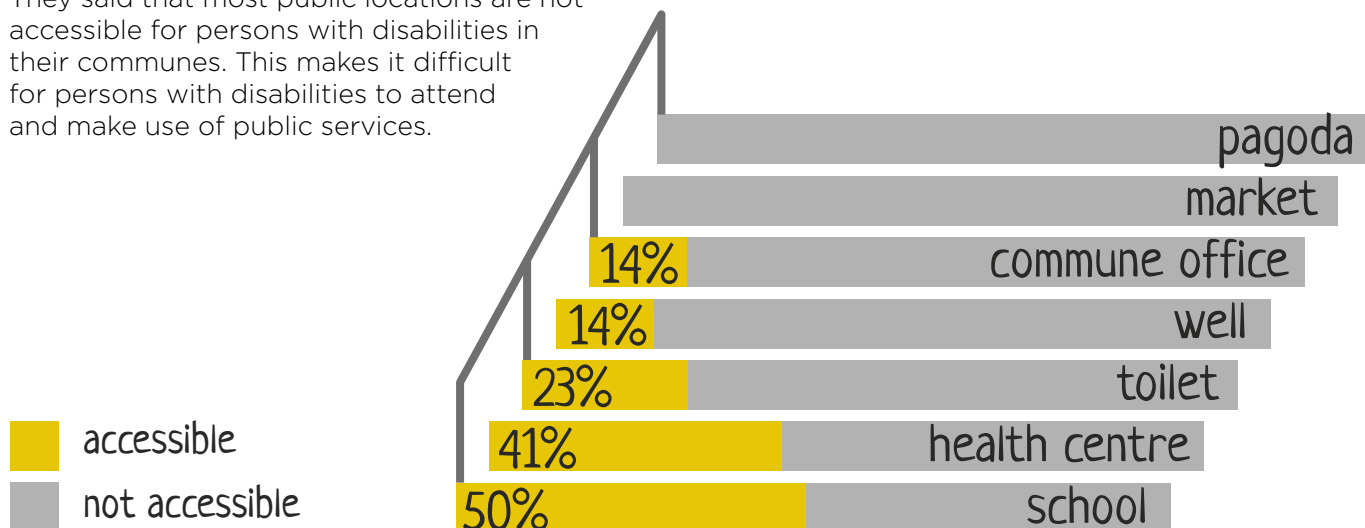
they don't feel **confident**



## Can persons with disabilities access public locations?

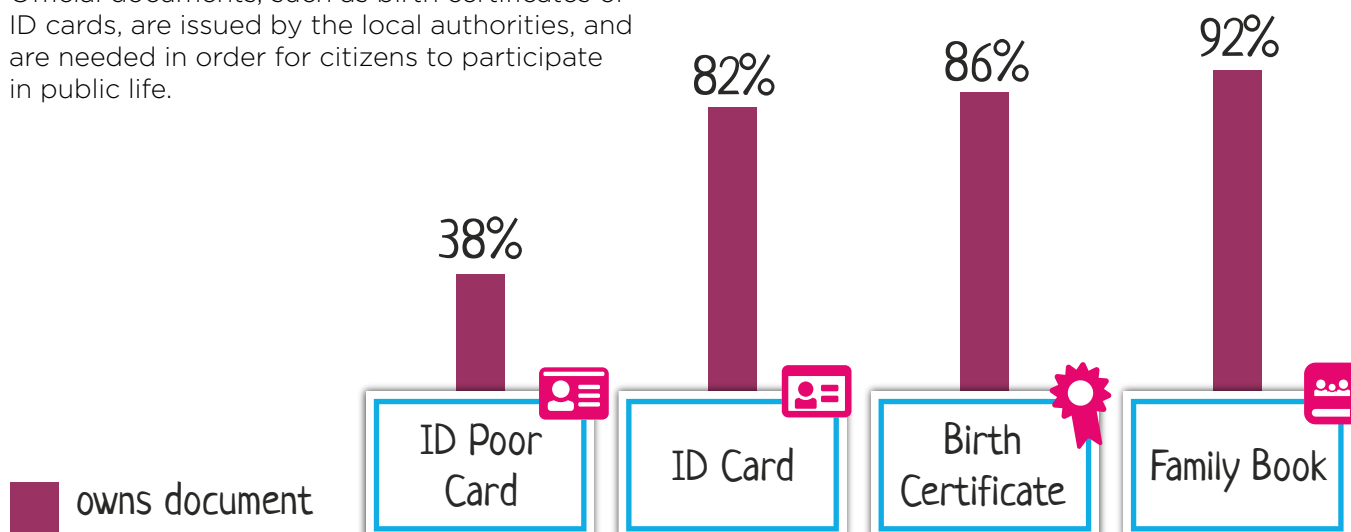
Commune councils were asked whether they thought persons with disabilities were able to access public facilities in their commune.

They said that most public locations are not accessible for persons with disabilities in their communes. This makes it difficult for persons with disabilities to attend and make use of public services.



## What official documents do respondents have?

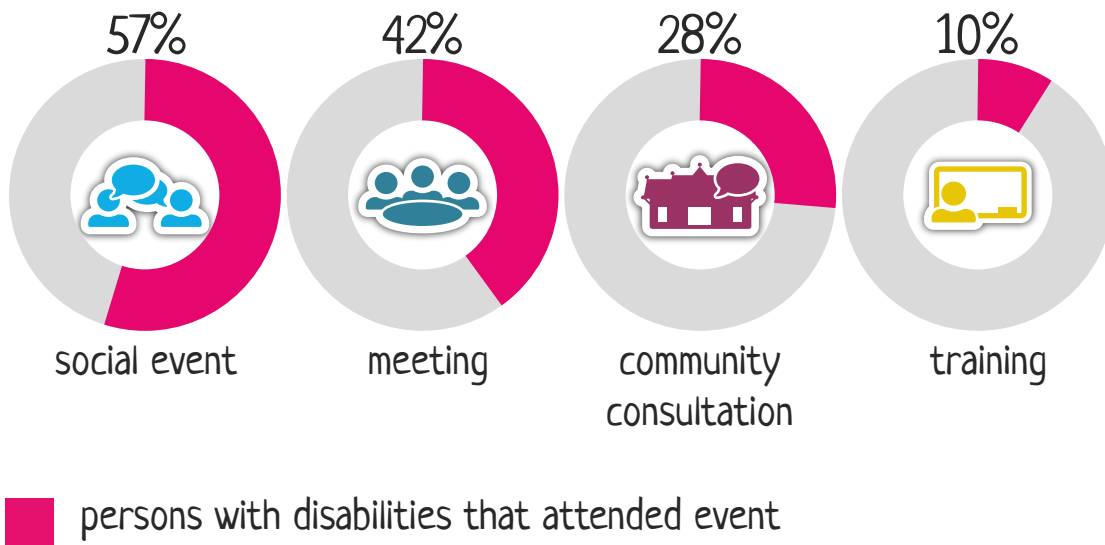
Official documents, such as birth certificates or ID cards, are issued by the local authorities, and are needed in order for citizens to participate in public life.



# Participation in the Community

This section is about whether persons with disabilities are involved in activities and social life in their communities.

In which community events did persons with disabilities take part in the past year?



## Why did persons with disabilities not participate?

Many respondents indicated that their disability prevented them from participating in community events: because they weren't invited, did not get the information, or simply because of the belief that persons with disabilities cannot or shouldn't go anywhere.

9%

Disabled people cannot go anywhere

I was not invited

25%

22%

I was not informed

Because of my disability

16%

# The rights of persons with disabilities

This section is about whether citizens and local authorities know about the rights of persons with disabilities.

Do persons with disabilities think that they have rights?

We asked persons with disabilities...

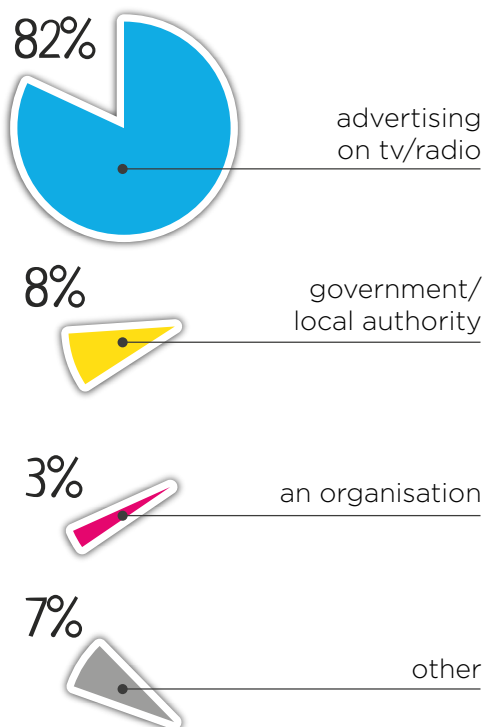
Most said they don't know.

Do you have rights as a person with a disability?

77% I don't know

23% yes

How have persons with disabilities heard about these rights?

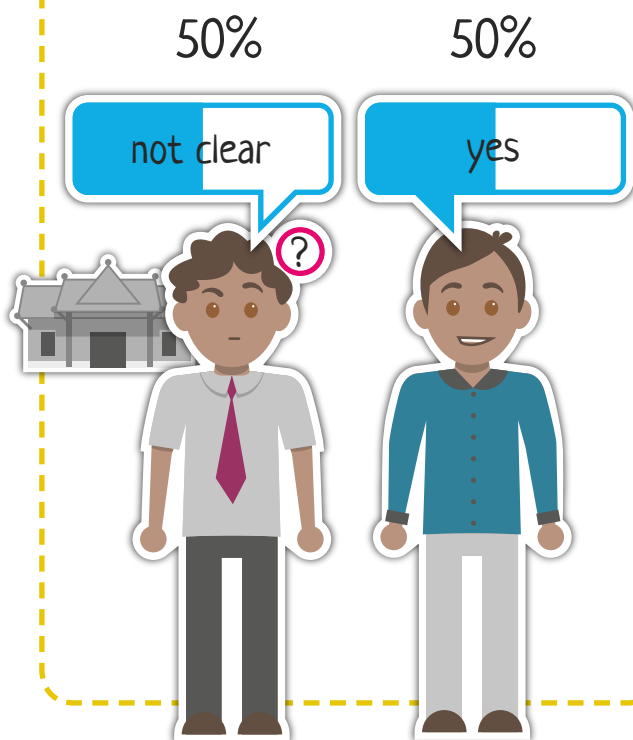


Which rights do persons with disabilities say they have?

- Right to Development
- Not to be discriminated
- Equal Rights
- Right to be consulted
- Right to Survival
- Right to join in social events
- Right to movement
- Right to talk
- Right of Expression
- Right to Education
- Right to get a job
- Right to vote
- Right to join in meetings
- Right to travel anywhere
- Right to get information and news

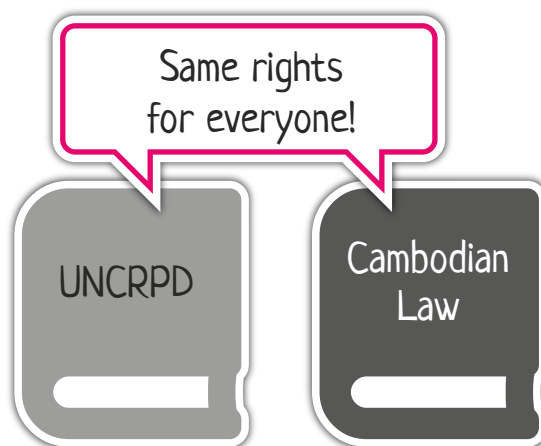
## Are commune councils aware of the rights of persons with disabilities?

Half of the commune councils are aware of the rights of persons with disabilities.

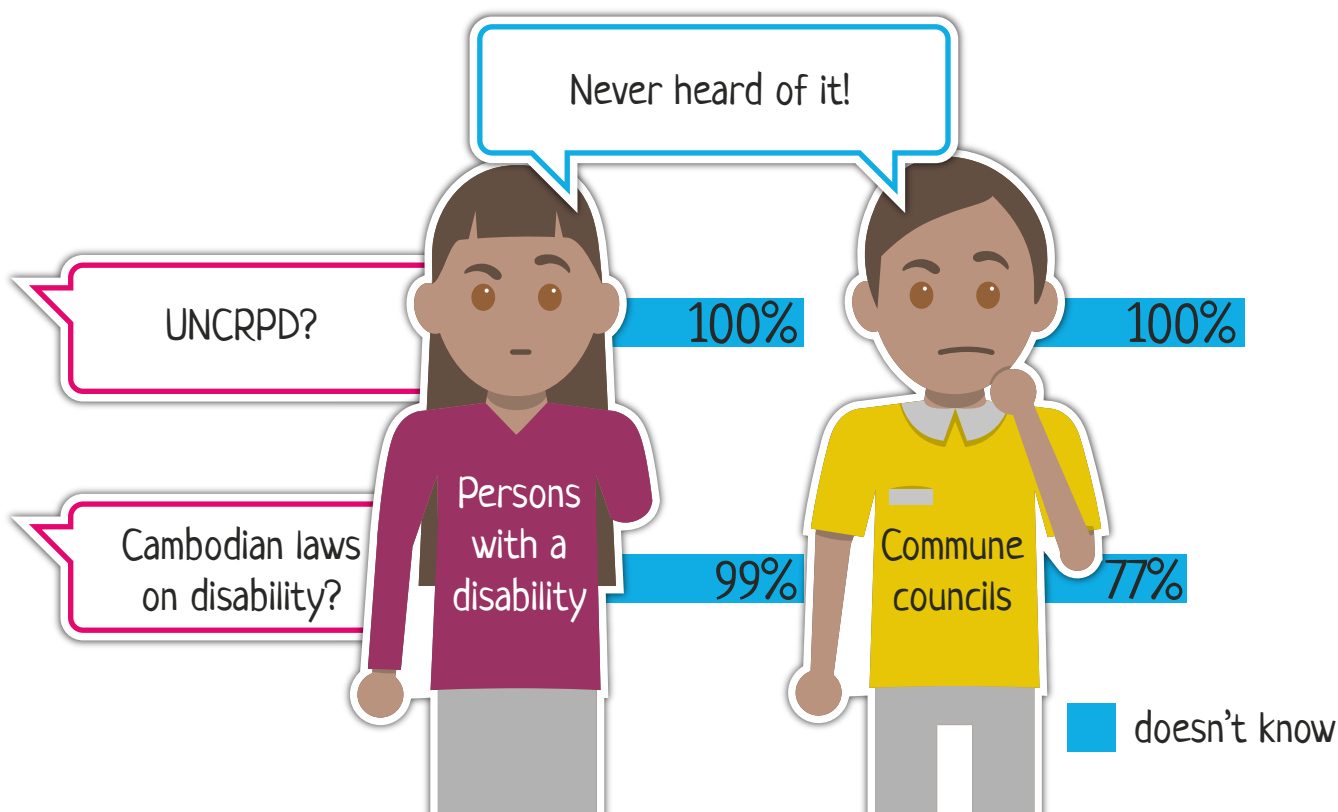


## Have persons with disabilities and commune councils heard about the main laws regarding persons with disabilities?

The UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the Cambodian Law on Disabilities are international and national documents which say that persons with disabilities have the same rights as persons without disabilities.



But when we asked persons with disabilities in the village, hardly any had ever heard of these documents! This was the same for the commune councils.



# Information → on disability in commune councils

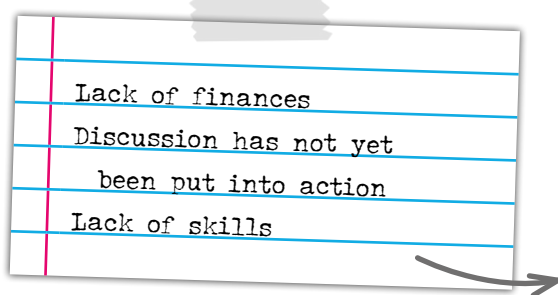
This section is about if and how communes have information about and able to involve persons with disabilities.

## What has been done in the commune to support and promote persons with disabilities?

Some ways that persons with disabilities have been supported and promoted in communes with external support are:

- Improving access to public buildings
- Advertising health service
- Improving access to health service
- Developing work opportunities
- Informing about rights of persons with disabilities

Reasons why communes say they have challenges in supporting persons with disabilities:



## Involvement in meetings

Most communes say that when persons with disabilities are involved in commune meetings, it is especially when meetings are about community development, community security, hygiene and health, social security and persons with disability.

The reasons persons with disabilities are **not** involved in meetings, according to communes:

"They have no transportation or are not able to travel."

"The involvement of persons with disabilities is not seen as important."

"Because of their disability."

The skills that commune councils felt they are currently lacking to successfully include persons with disabilities are:



communication



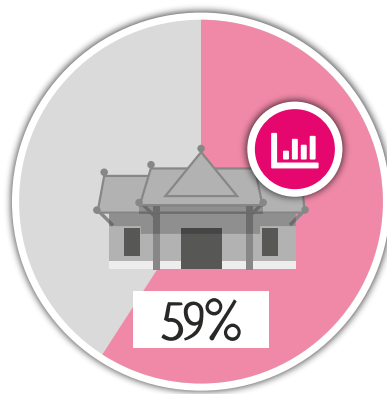
disability



resource mobilization

## Data

Slightly over half of the communes says they have data on persons with disabilities in their commune.



Most communes said that disability was integrated into the Commune Investment Plans.

However, even where communes said they had mentioned disability in the CIP, there was often no budget allocated to disability specifically!

Communes who say they have mentioned disability in their CIP



Communes with budget allocated for disability

## Ways in which disability was integrated into the Commune Investment Plans

- Work opportunities
- Providing specialized equipment
- Improving facilities for persons with disabilities
- Requiring the involvement of persons with disabilities
- Vocational training
- Health training
- Providing capital
- Providing clean water

## Types of things persons with disabilities requested

- ✓ Public accessibility (e.g. ramp)
- ✓ Capital
- ✓ Food
- ✓ Government pension
- ✓ Land
- ✓ Scholarship
- ✓ Toilets
- ✓ Study materials/vocational training
- ✓ Well
- ✓ Wheelchair/Prosthetics

## Commune councilors respond to these requests by ...

If request or issues need to be passed on to a higher level for a decision, then the process is for councilors to follow the Commune Investment Plan process, and address issues during meetings and workshops at commune or district level.

When persons with disabilities make requests, commune councilors say they respond to these requests by...

- ✓ Passing request on to head officer
- ✓ Making a proposal
- ✓ Through commune/district meetings
- ✓ Taking up contact with other organisations (e.g. NGOs)

However, **none** of the communes said they felt confident in their ability to communicate with higher authorities about issues concerning disability.



## Reasons for not communicating requests with higher authorities

We aren't required to support persons with disabilities

I don't have communication skills

I don't have the ability to make proposals

I don't know the decision of the head officer

There is no plan

There is no transportation

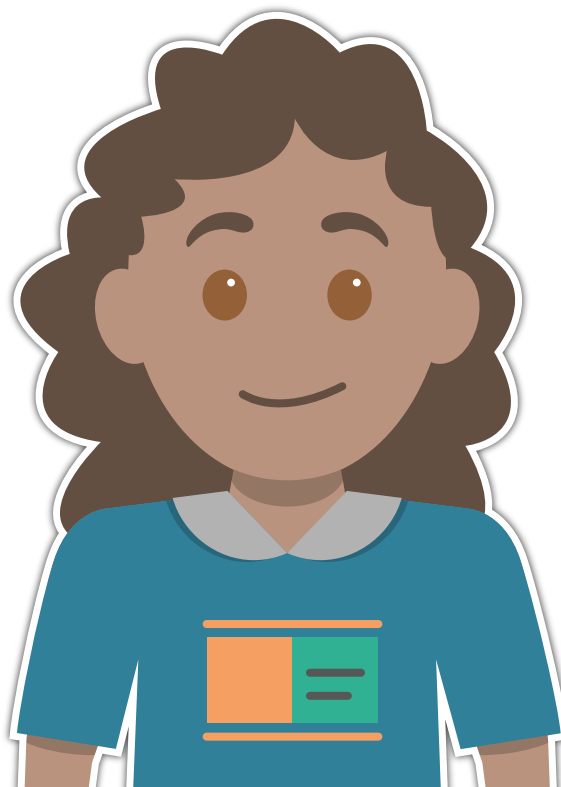
# Conclusion

In Cambodia, there are ways for citizens to give input to the local authorities, for example through village and commune meetings. We tried to study whether persons with disabilities were able to voice their concerns to the local authorities.

With this research, we see confirmed that persons with disabilities are often not able to, and often don't know how to, use public services and inform the local authorities of their needs. At the same time, the local authorities are often not able to, and do not know how to reach out to, inform, and involve persons with disabilities.

This research was carried out as part of the Advocacy and Communication for Change programme by Disability Development Services Program and Light for the World.

Research is being carried out in two phases – each covering half of the province of Pursat. This document represents results from phase I. Results from phase II are expected in 2019.



We would like to thank the following people for their hard work that led to this publication:

Pheng Samnang, Sam Sareth and the entire data collection and data entry team from Disability Development Service Program (DDSP); Virak Kheng, David Curtis and Judith Baart from Light for the World. We would also like to thank the Commune Disability Representatives, Village Disability Representatives, local authorities and of course the people of Pursat province who gave their time and knowledge in informing this work.





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