BEST PRACTICES FOR
Cambodian Citizen Journalism Projects

CONTENTS

INTRODUCT

WHAT IS CITIZEN JOURNALISM?

Citizen journalism is based on the theory that the public can provide valuable inputs to the development and maintenance of a democratic and informed society through direct participation in the gathering, investigating, reporting and disseminating of news, and that the act of providing the public with a platform to do so builds their ability to claim their right to freedom of expression, while also bolstering freedom and plurality of the press more generally.

Citizen journalism goes by many names, including "participatory journalism," "open-source reporting," "guerilla journalism," "grassroots journalism," and "street journalism." Moreover, citizen journalists' (CJs) methods of operation are as diverse as the names they go by. Depending on their skill level and access to resources — including, critically, information communications technology (ICT) resources — CJs may operate their own alternative news outlets, may run a news blog or social media site, or may submit full reports or news tips to professional media outlets, but all forms of citizen journalism involve members of the public providing first-hand accounts of news events that affect themselves and their communities

The phenomenon of citizen journalism has spread worldwide, enabled by the rapidly growing influence of the internet, with its ability to turn users into publishers with a global audience, and by increases in the affordability and availability of user-friendly, all-in-one reporting tools, such as smartphones, which give average citizens the ability to report breaking news more quickly and efficiently than traditional journalists. Though its reach is truly global, citizen journalism is most needed — and stands to have the most profound impact — in areas of the world where the mainstream media is prone to government controls or censorship, or where media ownership is highly concentrated. It is in these places, where citizens' access to information is debilitatingly limited, that CJs have the potential to enact lasting change, by holding governments to account and shedding a spotlight on critical issues such as human rights abuses, which would normally go unreported in their countries' mainstream media.

This "Best Practices Guide for Citizen Journalism Projects" outlines how citizen reporters are achieving just this in Cambodia, gradually opening up the country's repressive media environment. This guide aims to document the challenges, lessons learned and achievements of the Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM) in the development and maintenance of a nationwide network of more than 200 CJs, in hopes of inspiring other news organizations and civil society groups in Cambodia, Southeast Asia and across the world to incorporate citizen journalism as a tool in the advancement of their work in the areas of press freedom and democratic governance.

CHALLENGES
SOLUTIONSTOCOMMONPROBLEMS

CJs face a number of job-related challenges that, if not addressed, can impact on their ability to effectively cover the news and file reports. Challenges can include such things as poor access to the internet, proximity to news sources and ensuring CJs remain motivated.

Below is a list of common challenges faced by CJs and some suggested solutions on how to overcome them.

CHALLENGE#1

Newly recruited citizen journalists lack technical knowledge of ICT like smartphones and computers, considerably slowing down the learning process.

Consider recruiting CJs with existing, basic ICT knowledge.

Give a basic introduction, then provide regular review of these lessons in subsequent trainings.

Introduce tools such as social media, which are fun to learn and can be used in everyday life, maximizing knowledge retention.

Pay particular attention to CJs struggling with technical skills.

CHALLENGE#2

Citizen journalists lack the commitment or resources to fully participate by traveling to cover news and filing regular reports.

Clearly outline your expectations for CJs in a signed agreement at the beginning of the project.

Encourage CJs to set specific and achievable goals for themselves.

Consider providing financial support to CJs through payments for stories, reimbursements for travel expenses, provision of phone credit or data plans. Try to minimize expenses for your CJs.

Set up a feedback mechanism CJs can use to voice their concerns or difficulties with your staff.

CHALLENGE #3

Citizen journalists' reports are under-utilized.

Consider disseminating CJ reports to other news outlets.

Provide CJs with networking opportunities (such as Bridging Forums) to establish relationships with other media outlets and NGOs that may be interested in using their reports.

CHALLENGE #4

Low Internet penetration limits CJs' ability to file reports.

For CJs covering news from remote areas, consider alternatives, such as satellite Internet.

Accept CJ breaking news tips and reports by phone or SMS.

Consider taking Internet coverage areas into account when selecting CJs for your project.

CHALLENGE #5

Citizen journalists have limited English knowledge, restricting their interactions with ICT tools' English-language interfaces.

Instructors should always teach in the CJs' native language.

Some operating systems offer English alternatives. Android operating systems offer maximum language flexibility and offer Khmer, Thai, Vietnamese and many others. However, some technical terms do not translate well, meaning that some English terms may need to be taught. Local developers may have even more language options available.

CHALLENGE #6

Citizen journalists lack reporting skills or struggle to identify news-worthy stories or angles from which to approach a news story.

In addition to training on basic reporting skills, consider offering field mentoring sessions with professional reporters to build hands-on reporting experience.

ETHICS
FOR CITIZEN JOURNALISTS

Even though CJs are not held to such a high standard as their professional counterparts, they still need to abide by an ethical code of conduct in order to avoid problems for themselves and society, and in order to show demonstrate the trustworthiness of the information they provide. To achieve that, CJs should guarantee that their reporting and behavior meets a six-part ethical test:

1. TRUTH

CJs must report the truth — a real news event, not rumors, and not something that has been made up or invented. Truth is based on the observable facts of the event or issue.

2. ACCURACY

Accuracy is the state of being exactly as it is. In news media, common areas to watch for accuracy include spelling names of sources correctly, reporting numbers and figures exactly according to the facts, or, if official numbers are not available, with the best estimate possible. However, as CJs are not professional reporters, their editors hold some responsibility for editing and verifying their reports for accuracy prior to publication.

3. BALANCE

To the extent possible, all parties involved in a story should be given an equal opportunity to respond. If CJs are unable to cover all sides of a story, it is the responsibility of their editor or news organization to edit the report for balance prior to publication.

4. TRANSPARENCY

Honesty is also a top requirement for CJs. This includes being honest with their news organization, with their community, and with their sources of information by identifying themselves as CJs. In addition, and this is particularly true in countries with low ethical standards, CJs must not engage in blackmail or accept any kind of payment for publication (or non-publication) of a story. However, in dangerous situations where honesty with sources is not possible, CJs may consider keeping their identity confidential and obtaining information by hidden means, for example, by taking photos, filming, or recording with hidden camera and recorders, according to applicable local law.

5 PROTECTION OF SOURCES

CJs must treat their sources of information with respect. They must follow the same rules in relation to off-record and on-record as expected of professional journalists. This means protecting the privacy of sources who request to remain anonymous. Additionally, victims of crimes should not be misrepresented. Photos of sources should respect their privacy and dignity.

6. FACT v. OPINION

CJs should focus on reporting facts. Opinion should never be represented as fact. Any articles that contain the opinions of the CJs should be clearly marked as "opinion" or "editorial."

TECHNOLOGY
EQUIPMENTFORCITIZENJOURNALISTS

Today's world is dominated by technology and ICTs are transforming the face of modern journalism. These new tools have the potential to facilitate fast, cost-effective and targeted journalism and it's critical that CJs not only have access to the right technologies but are also trained in how to properly exploit them.

CJs require only a few simple pieces of equipment in order to start report¬ing. In developing countries where the cost of this equipment can be prohibitive, organizations or news outlets hoping to work with CJs might consider supplying them with the ICT they need to report, which includes: a smartphone, access to the internet, a laptop computer and a portable power bank.
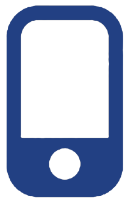
SMARTPHONE

At the minimum, all CJs should have a smartphone. Today's smartphones are the ultimate reporting tool, capable of taking photos, capturing video, recording voices or submitting breaking news tips via call or SMS.

Internet

An Internet connection (whether via a 3G or 4G sim card used with a smartphone or USB modem, or even a satellite Internet connection) helps CJs to submit photos, video and audio reports in real-time. In terms of speed: The faster, the better.

LAPTOP

CJs who are expected to submit full-length reports, instead of just news tips and photos, will need a computer in order to type out their reports. A laptop is preferable, as it can be taken to the field where the news is happening.
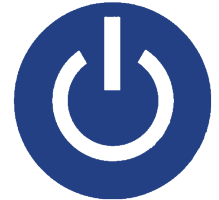
POWERBANK

For CJs who live in or report from areas without reliable electricity, a source of power for is critical to ensure they can capture the news without fear of their devices dying. A small and portable power bank is an ideal solution.

COMMUNICATION TOOLS

In order to smoothly perform their jobs, CJs will need to gain an operational knowledge of email and social media platforms, which can be helpful in communicating with news outlets and editors, but also in engaging in direct dissemination of information to the public:

SECURE EMAIL

Email is an ideal way for CJs to submit multimedia reports. However, CJs are recommended to use a secure or encrypted email platform, such as Gmail, Hushmail, or ProtonMail. At a minimum, the email platform should employ HTTPS-secured encryption. If possible, CJs should opt for the strongest security settings possible, such as Gmail's 2-step verification.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social networks like Facebook and Twitter are good tools for instant delivery of text, photo, audio and even video. Social media can and has been used widely by human rights advocates to build networks, organize and advocate. However, it is also a potentially rich source of information for those opposed to the activities of rights advocates or journalists. Therefore, knowledge of account and privacy settings available is extremely important.

TECHNICAL CAPACITY BUILDING

Each CJ will have different capacities in terms of technical skills, and the training curriculum should be adjusted to meet their needs. However, any citizen journalism course should at minimum ensure that CJs have a solid understanding of the following concepts related to day-to-day operations and maintenance of their ICT devices, and information security:

ANTI-VIRUS SOFTWARE

Examples of good software include Avira, AVG and Avast. CJs should be careful never to install more than one antivirus or Internet security suite on the same device, as they can interfere with each other's effectiveness. CJs should frequently check for and install anti-virus software updates.

PRIVACY ON SOCIAL MEDIA

CJs must assume that everything posted to online social networks is public. Online social networks like Facebook and Twitter are intended for sharing information with broad audiences. Though these sites have advanced security options, their security policies can change without notice, and security breaches are relatively common. CJs should avoid posting their personal information on these online services as much as possible and make sure to adjust their profile's security or privacy settings. All social media users should be careful to accept friend requests only from individuals they know and trust. But even if users trust everyone in their networks, they should still avoid putting too much information into their status updates, as it is easy for someone to copy information posted online.

PASSWORD PROTECTION

CJs should understand how to protect their computer or smartphone with a password, so that the device locks after no more than 5 minutes of system inactivity. Passwords should be strong and complex, consisting of at least 10 characters and incorporating numbers and symbols. Passwords should never consist of only a name or sequential series of numbers or letters (like "abcde" or "12345"). Passwords should never be shared with others or written down.

SETUP & INSTALLATION

Smartphones have many settings which control the security of the device. It is important for CJs to pay attention to how their smartphone is set up. The usual way to install new software on a smartphone is to use Google Play store or Apple store, log in with user credentials, and download and install a desired application. CJs must be careful to only download and use apps from trusted developers. All apps and the operating system should be kept up-to-date.

DATA BACKUP

There are many different backup options available. Some software can backup to online services such as Google Drive or Dropbox, though these are not always so secure. Alternatively, CJs can perform an offline backup to external storage such as memory card, external hard disk.

MOTIVATION
KEEPINGCITIZENJOURNALISTSACTIVE

By definition, CJs are working outside of a formal office environment, usually without the benefit of a profefssional network and contributing reports and information on their own time, and often at their own expense. It's easy to see why CJs can lose motivation. In CCIM's experience, the following steps help to increase CJ participation and contributions:

STIPENDS

Providing CJs with reimbursements or pre-paid credit bundles for mobile phone or mobile data expenses related to their reporting can help decrease any financial obstacles that might prevent CJs from filing their reports in a timely manner. Likewise, reimbursements for travel expenses incurred while reporting, including transportation, accommodation and meals, also help to ease the financial burden on CJs.

POINT PERSON

CJs are more likely to stay engaged when they have a clear point of contact for submitting reports and communicating their challenges and ideas. It is recommended that each news outlet or organization working with CJs designate one person as CJ Coordinator.

MENTORING

Consider connecting CJs with a professional journalist who can serve as a mentor and tutor. At CCIM, CJs are paired with professional journalists from CCIM's VOD news outlet who visit the CJs in the field and work on stories together, providing the CJs with practical, hands-on reporting experience. CCIM has also offered internships in the VOD news room to interested CJs in order to further build their skills and interest in reporting. At a minimum, it is recommended that all CJ projects provide opportunities for CJs to network with professional journalists and rights workers that might benefit from their reports through an event such as a Bridging Forum (see below).

ARTICLEPAYMENTS

Treating CJs like freelancers, by providing them with a small payment for high-quality and newsworthy reports, helps incentivize CJ participation and motivate them to improve their skills. Prior to awarding article payments, a standard payment scale should be developed that takes into account the quality, length and newsworthiness of the submission. The payment should be less than that of a professional freelance journalist, but still enough to make the CJs' work worthwhile.

STAYINGCONNECTED:BRIDGINGFORUMS

Bridging Forums are an example of a motivation strategy that promotes CJ engagement with professional journalists, media professionals and civil society by giving actors from all of these sectors the opportunity to gather and build networks to create opportunities for professional exchange and mutual learning.

Bridging Forums are considered best practices for citizen journalism at CCIM and are incorporated into all CJ projects due to their tremendous added benefits, which include: Providing news outlets with access to information and sources for

PROMOTING CITIZEN JOURNALISM IN MEDIA

One of the keys to ensuring the success of citizen journalism projects is in the dissemination of CJ reports and news tips to both mainstream and alternative media. While Internet dissemination alone has proven sufficient for many Western CJs, who run successful blogs or social media accounts, CJs operating in developing countries where Internet penetration is still relatively low will need to work over multiple mediums in order to expand the reach and impact of their reporting to the segments of the public who are most in need of the information from their reports.

CCIM has largely accomplished this by disseminating its CJs' reports via its VOD news outlet, which includes radio and online (www.vodhotnews.com) outlets with a potential audience of more than 8.5 million. These dissemination methods are supplemented with alternative delivery methods such as SMS text alerts and IVR news hotlines, all aimed at getting news directly to citizens. CCIM's new, Citizen News Wire service, set to launch in 2015, will further promote the timely dissemination of CJs' news reports to media outlets across the country by establishing a secure, web-based platform for professional journalists and NGOs alike to access CJ contributions in real-time, for incorporation into their own reporting or advocacy efforts.

For organizations that do not run their own news

The Phnom Penh Post

Workers to file stories from the factory floor

"I used to carry a needle and now I carry a pen, notebook and smartphone."

- garment worker and CCIM citizen journalist

outlets, and even for those who do, relations with external news outlets are likewise critical in promoting and publicizing CJs' reports. As much as possible, CJ reports should be made immediately accessible to professional journalists, for instance via email alerts or press releases. When possible, CJs should be encouraged to build direct relationships with professional journalists and other media actors in order to further promote their stories. Bridging Forums (see below) are useful as networking events that help connect CJs with professional journalists interested in utilizing CJ reports.

reporting, giving CJs professional contacts for mentoring and learning, building networks for the distribution of CJ information, and providing civil society representatives with access to information and sources for advocacy.

Through these networks, CJs are able to learn first-hand from professional journalists and to gain skills and knowledge about media practice. In turn, professional journalists and media professionals benefit by establishing relationships with CJs, who can serve as a valuable source of information on a wide range of issues at the lo-

cal and regional levels, which may be difficult for national-level journalists to access.

CCIM has conducted annual Bridging Forums since 2015, with very positive results. CJ participants said the forums are a great way to build close connections with professional journalists and civil society organizations and discuss the best ways to share information between the groups. The forums are also important tools in strengthening citizen journalism skills and the journalism code of ethics.

RISKS
PRIORITIZINGSAFETY&SECURITY

Violent and corrupt actors around the world understand how information shapes perceptions and how the work of journalists can threaten their activities. Cambodia generally ranks near the bottom of worldwide press freedom indices due to government control and influence over the media, and threats and violence against journalists. The result is a more hostile environment for the press, and prioritizing safety and security has never been more important.

To reduce the risks CJs face in the field, safety training on physical and information security should be conducted, and safety and security measures developed, communicated and implemented so that CJs are well equipped to respond to threats or dangerous situations while undertaking their work.

CJs should be instructed not to take unreasonable or unnecessary risks in order to cover a story.

RISKS AND THREATS

Risks and threats to CJs come in many forms and can be physical, technological or institutional in nature.

Depending on the location, situation and topic of story, CJs may experience hostility and be at risk of physical assault.

As technology and digital devices continue to be useful journalistic tools, CJs are at risk of identity theft, online harrassment and information theft.

Today, journalism, as an industry and a profession, is characterised by ever-increasing turbulence and change. As technology and social media brings citizens from around the world closer together, some governments and other public institutions are increasingly taking an "us versus them" approach to the media. This can create a hostile and dangerous environment.

PHYSICAL SAFETY

In order to protect their physical security, there are a number of steps CJs should follow before, during and after assignments. The most important thing for CJs is that they are prepared before undertaking any mission. Prior to any mission, potential risks should be evaluated and, if required, a meeting between the CJ and supervisor should be held to discuss mitigation strategies. A concrete plan and communication flow should be designed, which includes a safe place to go should the need arise.

CJs should carry the following materials with them at all times:

- First aid kit
- Identification card
- Raincoat and press jacket
- Camera and smart phone with fully charged batteries
- Power bank
- Sufficient food and drinking water.

INFORMATION & DIGITAL SECURITY

Technological advances are making it easier than ever for CJs to report news and contribute to creating a well-informed public. Smart phones, social media and other online tools foster citizen journalism, allowing citizens to feel increasingly connected to their communities and provide the opportunity for more balanced reporting.

But with this growth in technology also comes risks and CJs should be strongly urged to protect their communications and information from growing threats.

Top tips for strong digital security:

- Guard your device from access by strangers
- Use strong, complex passwords and pass-phrases
- Use good antivirus software
- Backup your data at least once a week.

With social media channels like Facebook and Twitter remaining as popular as ever, cyber criminals are able to access a wealth of personal information online. CJs must be careful what kind of details they post online and must be aware of how this information may be used against them.

Top tips for safe social media use:

- Do not reveal too much personal information and financial data, including date of birth and relationship status
- Do not reveal your current location
- Do not state that you are home alone
- Do not post photos of your children or your friend's children
- Do not post about your travel information or plans
- Do not post offensive jokes or complaints about your job
- Do not engage in gossips or personal attacks
- Do not post about your health or medical record
- Change Facebook settings to "Friends Only" for all posts

RISK MITIGATION

CCIM maintains a strong nationwide network of more than 200 CJs, and the safety and security of CJs is their top priority. In order to ensure that CJs are best prepared to undertake reporting assignments, CCIM conducts in-depth training on a variety of topics, including safety and security, and also ensures CJs have access to important resources that have been designed to mitigate threats and risks faced by CJs in the field.

CCIM ensures that all CJs are given a flow chart that outlines the reporting process in case of an emergency or incident, including a list of key contacts. They also encourage all CJs to share important security and safety information amongst themselves by creating and facilitating dedicated Facebook groups.

As a key way of mitigating safety and security risks, CCIM also provides all CJs with adequate equipment, such as a smart phone, phone credit and portable power bank.