

Anti-Corruption Activities: Case of Cambodia

(Working with Reform Willing Government)

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I. Introduction to CSD

The Center for Social Development, or CSD, is a non-governmental organization that specializes in democracy and transparency research and technical assistance. We have a wide range of ongoing projects, including:

- Regular open debates on major national issues
- Education and legislation to improve all areas of Cambodia's electoral process
- Technical assistance to build the capacity of NGOs and government institutions
- A new initiative to observe and report on the proceedings and activities of the National Assembly and Senate

However, another main focus of CSD is to research, publicize and tackle the problem of corruption in Cambodia. To this end, the Center:

- Publishes a monthly research bulletin that focuses on transparency and accountability
- Has organized two major international conferences on corruption issues
- Has led delegations to study the situation in other countries.

II. Promoting the Passage of the Anti-Corruption Legislation

For many years, has advocated the passage of effective Anti-Corruption laws. More than 3 years ago, CSD drafted model Anti-Corruption legislation for Cambodia, in close co-operation with the government and National Assembly. The three-part Act sought to:

- outlaw all corrupt practices
- require official registration of assets and liabilities
- establish a Commission to investigate and prosecute abuses of the law.

With support and commitment from both Prime Ministers, CSD submitted the draft law to the Jurist Council of the Council of Ministers for examination and review in May 1996. Unfortunately, at that time the political situation started to seriously deteriorate, leading to the political and military coup of July 1997. The ensuing political tensions meant that the problem of corruption was not at the top of the national agenda, and our work on the Anti-Corruption laws was temporarily set aside.

CSD was pleased to see that the political program of the new Cambodian Government, presented by Prime Minister Hun Sen to the National Assembly on the 30th of November 1998, gives a high priority to the fight against corruption. This commitment conforms closely to CSD's goals and activities.

As soon as the National Assembly and new Senate were formed, CSD started to press again for the passage of the Anti-Corruption laws, which had lain dormant since 1996. For this second mandate, the coalition government called itself the "Government of the National Economy". For this end and with the pressures from the international communities and monetary institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank, the Government tries its utmost to tackle the anti-corruption issues.

This opportunity allows CSD to work closely with the Ministry of Parliamentary Relations and Inspection on the draft laws, and organized meetings of Cambodian civil society representatives and international transparency (including UN legal advisors, TI Malaysia, Germany, and Australia ICAC) experts to provide recommendations. The ideas that arose centered on improving the clarity of the law, and the importance of a truly independent Anti-Corruption Commission.

We recently had a meeting at the Jurist Council of the Council of Ministers. For the first time ever in the Cambodian contemporary, the Jurist Council invited the civil society to give inputs in the drafted legislation. The Jurist Council was pleased with the NGO (more than thirty)s' input and the draft is now at the Ministry of Parliamentary Relations and Inspection for revision, based on the NGOs' recommendations.

The National Assembly also currently has its own draft law concerning the creation of the Anti-Corruption Commission. CSD is therefore playing a mediating/facilitating role between the National Assembly and the Ministry of Parliamentary Relations and Inspection, to coordinate the process and develop a coherent law that represents the best aspects of each draft.

III. Co-operation with regional and international groups

CSD has recently been approached by the World Bank in Cambodia with a view to conduct a "household survey" to obtain the view of household, on the adequacy and effectiveness of public institutions in Cambodia. Also, following the visit in June of a Transparency International delegation from Germany and Malaysia, CSD expects that it will shortly become the Transparency International Chapter for Cambodia.

In September 1999, in cooperation with the Ministry of Relations with the National Assembly, Senate, and Inspection has organized (September 1999) a five-day National Workshop to Draft a National Anti-Corruption Action Plan. This workshop was supported by AusAID through the Centre for Democratic Institutions (Australia) and the International Development Law Institute (Philippines).

The issues included Government policy, Legislative Requirement and Monitoring, Internal and External Audit, Education, a Code of Ethics, Declarations of Assets, and Making Existing Machinery Work Better.

IV. CSD's Corruption Research

In 1997, CSD was forced to suspend its efforts to pass Anti-Corruption laws following the political coup and collapse of the coalition government. We took this opportunity, however, to try and find out more about the way Cambodian people perceived corruption. After CSD got the authorization from the Ministry of Interior, CSD conducted the first ever National Survey on Public Attitudes Towards Corruption, between January and May 1998, asking adults from 22 different occupations, ranging from Members of Parliament and the Council of Ministers to farmers and fishermen, what they thought about corruption and how it might be stopped.

The Corruption Survey produced one important and irrefutable result: although 84% of the 1,513 people agree that corruption is the norm in Cambodia, the great majority of 91% believe that it is harming the nation, and 98% would like it to be stopped as soon as possible.

The survey also revealed some worrying demographic trends, the most striking involving two key groups: young people, and civil servants. In general, the younger generation showed a significant lack of concern for, and knowledge about, corruption. Teenagers give less priority to fighting high level corruption and have less conviction that corruption hurts the national economy or reduces people's confidence in government. Civil servants, by contrast, tend to have a better understanding of corruption's consequences but are much more accepting of everyday corruption. Government employees, for example, are much more likely to think that corruption "greases the wheel" and that most businesses pay bribes. They are more accepting of gift giving to civil servants, workers taking home office supplies and vote buying.

This, and other research, has led CSD to take a holistic approach to anti-corruption efforts: not just ensuring the passage of effective laws, and developing networks of cooperation between anti-corruption activists, but also developing education programs that target the most influential - and most misguided - demographic groups.

V. Anti-Corruption Education in Cambodia

At present, there are no organizations providing direct anti-corruption education in Cambodia, although several bring elements of it into other programs. The Khmer Institute for Democracy (KID), for example, wants to instill and strengthen Buddhist values in society that are similar to democratic and secular values. It takes this message to the grassroots, conducting educational seminars on morals and ethical behavior at District and Commune levels, as well as producing television series and

promoting publications on ethical behavior. While it may not deal directly with corruption, there is no doubt that KID's work is influential in increasing the honesty and transparency of its target groups.

The Cambodian Institute of Human Rights (CIHR) also includes elements of anti-corruption education within its five-day Good Governance training seminars, which are mainly targeted at district level chiefs and police officials, although it is not an independent module. And the seminars and workshops run by the Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO) also inevitably involve a degree of anti-corruption training.

But the idea of "anti-corruption education" is itself an alien one in Cambodia. Corruption has always been something that was "swept under the carpet" - a recognized part of the system, but not one to be discussed openly. To even think about creating formal education or training that raises awareness of corruption, increases knowledge about its effects and encourages people to avoid it, is a radical step. It is, however, a necessary one.

VI. The Transparency Task Force

With the cooperation of Ministry of Education Youth and Sport, CSD has formed a working group that we call the *Transparency Task Force*. This group of educational professionals and anti-corruption experts is currently developing a wide-ranging counter-corruption curriculum, for integration into the formal instruction program of the Ministry. The style is based upon the traditional moral and ethical values put forward in Cambodian folk tales and Buddhist preaching.

The Transparency Task Force began its research meetings on June 29 of this year, after being approved by His Excellency the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education Youth and Sport. Discussions have already confirmed the key anti-corruption messages that need to be conveyed, and the work is now focusing on how to include these ideas into the teaching program. To this end, two seminars were held in August and September entitled "The Integration of Transparency and Accountability into the Curriculum", and attended by a wide range of education officials and teacher trainers.

Once the plans for integration are complete, CSD will conduct a series of pilot training courses, to test the efficacy of the anti-corruption curriculum component, and then hold a second seminar to discuss the outcome. By the end of the year 2000, CSD hopes that all primary and secondary teachers will be disseminating these messages to their students. Once this task is completed, the Transparency Task Force will turn its attention to integrating similar messages into training programs for civil servants, and students at high school level.

VII. Other Corruption Education Efforts

Of course, training programs and school classes are not the only means of corruption education. Awareness raising among the general public is also crucial. To this end, CSD develops a poster campaign to raise public awareness and understanding of corruption, in particular by demonstrating the harm that even the lowest-level corruption can do to national development. These posters will soon be seen in government departments, educational institutions and commercial businesses around the country.

We also continue to cover transparency and accountability issues in our monthly research bulletin, and raise the media profile of anti-corruption efforts through coverage of CSD seminars, surveys and public forums. And we support the efforts of organizations such as the World Bank, whose policy of prevent funds being used corruptly both has a direct effect on the attitude of the government, and also demonstrates clearly to people the ultimate price of corruption.

VIII. Conclusion

All of these mentioned activities can be made possible thanks to the political willingness of the Cambodian leaders, the international trends against corruption, and the international communities pressures to reduce and halt the corruption activities and practices in Cambodia.

With deep and entrenched roots of corruption, the fight against it is a very slow process with progresses and setbacks. We still have a very long and rough way to go, but, nonetheless, the political will of the leader is a MUST.