

EMPOWERING A NEW CIVIL SOCIETY

Pact's Cambodia Community Outreach Project



By Michael Barton
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	4
Interviews	5
Abbreviations	6
Setting the Stage: a Society In Transformation	7
Introduction	12
Pact arrives at pivotal turning point	12
Nurturing the Growth Of NGOs: Incubation To Maturity	14
Promoting civil society institutions - 1991 to 1994	14
Personal Journeys – Cambodian NGO Leaders.....	15
Rebuilding civil society	17
Coping with different rates of maturity - 1995 to 1996.....	19
Maintaining momentum in an unstable atmosphere - 1997 to 1998.....	21
Consolidating civil society gains - 1999 to 2000.....	24
Shared Experiences and Lessons Learned	27
Early models of civil society.....	27
Developing a program vision.....	27
Implementation Challenges	30
Resource development Initiatives	31
Development in the cultural context.....	33
Achieving impact.....	36
A possible wild card: the proposed NGO law	41
Foundations For the Future	43
CCOP Sub-Grantees	45

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When I arrived in Phnom Penh in February 1997, Pact's Cambodia Community Outreach Project (CCOP) was already a mature program, having supported the work of over forty US and Cambodian organizations in a broad range of activities and services benefiting Cambodia's poor and vulnerable people. The program was also in transition. The original U.S.-based organizations had localized as Cambodian NGOs and Pact was fostering the next generation of NGOs -- support organizations that could offer capacity-building services to local NGOs such as Pact was currently providing. Cambodia appeared to be on a path to sustainable development.

Political events later in the year would place all of this into question and demonstrate the need for a vibrant and effective civil society. Pact appreciates the support and understanding of USAID/Cambodia that allowed the program to continue at such a critical time. Sincere appreciation is also extended to various USAID staff who, throughout the life of CCOP, understood the need for the program to respond to changing circumstances in the NGO sector and supported adjustments allowing the program to be more responsive to the needs of Cambodian civil society. The achievements of CCOP would not have been possible without the close partnership and financial support from USAID.

Credit is also due to Sarah Newhall, Pact's first Country Representative, and now President and CEO of Pact, who launched the program, provided the vision and still maintains a special place in her heart for Cambodia and Cambodians. She has ensured a supportive atmosphere and remains a constant source of inspiration of pushing the envelope on NGO sector development opportunities. Here, we also acknowledge the support of headquarters staff, Sarina Prabasi, Cambodia Program Officer, and Traer Sunley, Director of Communications, for their invaluable support to CCOP and this document, in particular.

Pact staff have grown in their roles and effectiveness as builders of civil society. While Pact's first Cambodian employee still works for the organization, former Pact staff can be found in leadership positions in both local and international NGOs.

Finally, we recognize the NGO grantees, for this is their story, too, and especially the directors and staff of the NGOs who contributed their personal experiences and impressions for this report.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADHOC	Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
BFD	Buddhism for Development
CANDO	Cambodian American National Development Organization
CHED	Cambodian Health Education Development
CCOP	Cambodia Community Outreach Project
CNGO	Cambodian Non-Governmental Organization
CNSN	Cambodian NGO Support Network
CPAT	Community Participation Assessment Tool
CPP	Cambodian People's Party
FHU	Family Health Unit
FUNCUPEC	Front d'Union National pour un Cambodge Independent, Neutre et Cooperatif
KBS	Khmer Buddhist Society
KRDA	Khmer Rural Development Association
KWWA	Kratie Women's Welfare Association
MAT	Management Assessment Tool
MOD	Management Organizational Development
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
OCA	Organizational Capacity Assessment
PACT	Private Agencies Collaborating Together
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
SAG	Strategic Assistance Grant (CCOP)
SSC	Social Services of Cambodia
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNTAC	United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

SETTING THE STAGE: A SOCIETY IN TRANSFORMATION

The unique challenge of rebuilding civil society through nongovernmental organizations is revealed when the chronology of events of more than a decade is taken into account. Pact initiated the CCOP at the beginning of a decade that witnessed fundamental change at all levels of Cambodian society. This would serve both as a catalyst and constraint to the establishment and development of Cambodian NGOs.

The Vietnamese army drove the Khmer Rouge into the jungles along the Thai and Laos borders in 1979, and occupied the country for the next ten years. The Vietnamese government supported the fledgling communist-orientated government of the People's Republic of Kampuchea and the presence of the Vietnamese army continued to isolate the country and its people from the international community. With Cold War animosities preventing any concerted effort to help bring the Cambodian people out of destitution, the country remained bereft of social or physical infrastructure. The former Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc countries were virtually the sole source of bilateral aid until the departure of the Vietnamese army in 1989.

The United Nations aid program during this period was confined to providing emergency relief through its own agencies: UNICEF, the World Food Program, and the Food and Agricultural Organization. Aid was also delivered through the International Committee of the Red Cross. The little bilateral aid that came into Cambodia in the 1980s was funneled through the few international NGOs active in the country, which numbered 40 by 1989. Even while the Cambodian government was under UN sanctions, the presence of these international NGOs had an influence on the Cambodian government's policies and actions. They also provided valuable information to their own governments on the precarious situation of the country's population.

Only with the withdrawal of the Vietnamese troops in 1989 did the opportunity for a broad-based international response become possible. However, the security conditions in the country remained unstable. Ten years of occupation by the Vietnamese had failed to destroy the Khmer Rouge as a military force. They would remain active from their jungle bases for years, engaging the country in a protracted civil war that would last for most of the next decade.

1989 signaled the country's first steps toward peace, security and political and economic stability, even though the steps were sporadic, erratic and inconsistent. Within two years the Peace Accords were signed, enabling, for the first time, for the resources of the international community to be mobilized in a combined endeavor to right some of the past wrongs done to the people of this small nation. The chronology of events that follows provides an outline of the slow and complicated process of lifting a nation out the mire of war and civil conflict and provides an insight into the gradual transformation of Cambodian society.

1991

- The four Cambodian political factions, as well as 18 countries, and the Secretary General of the UN sign the **Paris Peace Accords** in October. The accords are intended to integrate the Khmer Rouge soldiers into the Cambodian Armed Forces and to allow the Khmer

Rouge to participate in the national general elections planned to take place in less than two years.

- The **Cooperation Committee for Cambodia (CCC)** is founded to serve as a source of information for international NGOs coming into Cambodia in the early 1990s. CCC has since evolved to provide NGO input on policy issues involving both donors and the government of Cambodia.
- The **first Cambodian NGO**, Khemara, is registered with the government. A human rights NGO, ADHOC, is also formed.

1992-1993

- The **United Nations Transition Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC)** is deployed. With 20,000 peacekeepers from thirty-four countries, UNTAC is the largest peacekeeping mission ever deployed by the United Nations in terms of size or the scope of its mandate. At the same time, the UN repatriates 350,000 Cambodians from the Thai border camps.

1993

- The first **general elections** in twenty years take place between May 23rd and May 28th with an estimated turnout of 90% of the registered voters. Hun Sen's refusal to step down after suffering defeat is complicated by the fact that his political party, the Cambodian People's Party, has its own army, police force, radio and television stations, as does the winning royalist FUNCINPEC party. A compromise is reached in which Hun Sen agrees to share the leadership of the country as second prime minister, with his rival Prince Norodom Ranariddh as first prime minister.
- A new **Constitution** is introduced that reinstates Norodom Sihanouk as king and establishes Cambodia as a constitutional monarchy. Provisions within the new constitution allow for the growth of civil society organizations and enshrine rights for its citizens never before guaranteed by Cambodian government.
- In November **MEDICAM** becomes a formal membership organization of NGOs working in the health sector in Cambodia. NGOs operating in Cambodia's health sector established MEDICAM in 1988 and held regular meetings to share information. The Ministry of Health formally recognized MEDICAM in January 1991 and invited MEDICAM representatives to participate in the Ministry of Health Coordinating Committee.

1994

- The **government alleges a coup attempt** forcing Prince Ranariddh's half-brother, Prince Chakrapong, into exile. A crackdown of government critics ensues and one newspaper editor is murdered. The finance minister is removed from office and the foreign minister resigns in solidarity.

- The **NGO Forum** establishes an office in Cambodia after operating in Europe since the 1980s. The organization lobbies on behalf of the country for representation at the UN, an end to international isolation, and the repatriation of its citizens.

1995

- By 1995 approximately **180 Cambodian NGOs** exist and 200 international NGOs. From 1993 to 1995 it is estimated that local NGOs disbursed US\$6.5 million in programs.

1996

- A **draft NGO Law** is made public by the government in July after extensive consultation with NGOs. This is the first instance of civil society participation in the legislative process.
- A major **defection of Khmer Rouge forces**, headed by Ieng Sary (former foreign minister during the reign of the Khmer Rouge from 1975-1979) is orchestrated by the Cambodian government. This defection serves a decisive blow to the rebel movement, which falls prey to internal divisions.
- The **first free trade union** in Cambodia is declared by union organizers at a rally outside a Phnom Penh garment factory in December. Also in December, debate is initiated in Cambodia's National Assembly on a new labor law intended to bring Cambodian labor laws up to international standards. Over the next two years a number of trade unions emerge and several union federations are formed representing workers in a broad range of industries.

1997

- The **first NGO Fair** is held in Phnom Penh in January.
- The years of political tension between the rival governing factions since the 1993 elections results in skirmishes between opposing forces, and security throughout the country continues to deteriorate. In the first week of July **fighting breaks out** in Phnom Penh and the first prime minister flees the country. Over the course of three days, the FUNCINPEC forces of Prince Norodom Ranariddh are routed. However, Hun Sen retains his position as second prime minister and convinces a FUNCINPEC Member of Parliament to assume the title of first prime minister. Most observers recognize this title as one in name only, as real power remains with Hun Sen.
- After the fighting in July and the ouster of Prince Ranariddh as first prime minister, the U.S. government cuts all direct assistance to the Royal Government of Cambodia. Humanitarian assistance is channeled through NGOs.

1998

- On April 17th **Pol Pot's death** in a jungle border camp is confirmed. Later, two former Khmer Rouge leaders, Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea, negotiate with the Cambodian government to surrender their forces to the Cambodian army, reducing the Khmer Rouge to a handful of rebels.
- In July the **second general election** is held successfully and international observers deem it to be free and fair, although with some reservations. Hun Sen's party wins the majority of seats but does not have the two-thirds majority to form a government as required by the country's constitution. Disputes over the fairness of the elections lead students to organize several days of **demonstrations** over the first week of September 1998 that occasionally result in violent confrontations. **Student groups** take the name "Students for Democracy," and protests continue for two more weeks. An appeal by Prince Norodom Ranariddh finally restores some semblance of calm.



Pact Cambodia staff display inked index fingers as evidence that they have voted in the July 1998 general election.

The process to establish a coalition government requires intense diplomatic negotiations before the new government is finally established with the royalist FUNCINPEC party as a coalition partner with Hun Sen's CPP. Prince Ranariddh becomes president of the National Assembly and a Senate is also established for the first time.

- Before the end of 1998 the last hold out of the Khmer Rouge leadership, **General Ta Mok, is captured** near the Thai border. The Khmer Rouge, as either a rebel force or political entity, ends.

1999

- The student groups that had organized anti-government demonstrations in protest of the 1998 general elections now begin to come together in formal organizations, known as **Student Movements**. Besides specific grievances, such as border encroachment, the students focus on such general issues as promoting democratic principles and advocating fundamental human rights.
- After a two-year delay **Cambodia is admitted into ASEAN** (The Association of South East Asian Nations) as the 10th member of this regional body on April 30th. Cambodia's admittance into ASEAN completes the membership of all the nations in the region. Cambodia's admittance to ASEAN also signifies the end of the country's decades of international isolation.

2000

- An estimated **400 NGOs** exist, counting registered and non-registered organizations, as well as local and international organizations.
- The first Provincial NGO Fair is held in Battambang province in May, with Pact sub-grantees Buddhism for Development (BFD) and Cambodian Health Education Development (CHED) serving on the organizing committee. Over 50 NGOs operating in Battambang participate.
- The government announces that nationwide commune elections will be held in February 2002.

INTRODUCTION

Pact arrives at pivotal turning point

After twelve years of fighting, the four opposing political factions in Cambodia declared a cease-fire in June 1991. Intense negotiations followed, culminating in the signing of the Paris Peace Accords in October. In November, a Pact project team arrived in Phnom Penh to begin implementing the Cambodia Community Outreach Project (CCOP) with funding from USAID. Pact was the first USAID-funded program in Cambodia and among first international organizations to be established in the country after the Peace Accords were signed.

The unique circumstances within Cambodia under which Pact launched The Cambodia Community Outreach Project (CCOP) cannot be over-emphasized. The country had been decimated by more than two decades of war and would endure ongoing civil war for years to come. The thorough devastation experienced by Cambodia has no parallel in modern times. What incessant bombing in the late 1960s and early 1970s did not destroy, the victorious Khmer Rouge rebels who marched into Phnom Penh on April 17th, 1975, proceeded to methodically dismantle or entirely restructure. During the rule of the Khmer Rouge, religious practices and beliefs were replaced by new political doctrines; temples, churches and mosques were converted to other purposes, abandoned or destroyed. The education system was dissolved and educators, intellectuals, and professionals were viewed as threats to the new order. The central bank was blown apart and money was abolished. Purveyors of culture, whether they were classical dancers, singers, or actors, were arrested and many disappeared. The completeness of the restructuring of the old society and the construction of a new society, one without a history, permeated down to the most fundamental element of any social structure -- the community and the family.

In the aftermath of decades of war and destruction, the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Cambodia's social, political, economic and cultural institutions was daunting. In industrial and non-industrial societies alike, establishing, maintaining and institutionalizing integral social relationships such as trust, security, cooperation and mutual respect, can be elusive endeavors. In Cambodia, the country's history had a traumatizing effect on the psychology and sociology of the entire population. After emergency relief aid, it was most important that the country's cultural heritage be reestablished and social and communal bonds mended. Only with this foundation in place could functional and representative social, political, and economic institutions hope to flourish and a new civil society emerge.

Pact Cambodia initiated the CCOP at a pivotal point in the country's transition from a war-ravaged society to one based on peace and security. The hurdles were formidable. There was little or no experience among the population to draw upon. Every aspect of the program would require intensive training and counseling in order that concepts, skills and techniques could be understood and practiced with some proficiency.

CCOP's ten-year history produced a broad range of experiences, both rewarding and challenging. These experiences are documented to provide a historical chronicle of the role Pact Cambodia played in rebuilding Cambodian civil society and how the CCOP program evolved over time to meet these needs. Endeavors to build vital civil society institutions where virtually none existed involved establishing a strong foundation from which vibrant and influential indigenous organizations have since evolved. In the process, numerous

challenges, stemming from internal and external constraints, were encountered and overcome.

Much of this report is based on interviews conducted with twelve NGO directors who are either current partners (seven NGOs) of Pact, or former partners (five NGOs). In selecting the twelve NGOs, a concerted effort was made to present a balance of perceptions from as diverse a selection of CCOP partners as possible. Of the twelve, five were urban-based and seven were rural-based; six worked in community development, four were NGO support organizations, one a human rights organization, and one a social service-based organization. Four of the partner NGOs surveyed were headed by women. Seven were of Cambodian origin and five had origins as U.S. NGOs that have since localized.

The experience of these representative NGOs provides the heart and soul of the history of Pact's CCOP program. Their stories reveal the struggles in the initial stages to formulate objectives, draw up proposals and gain support to carry out their programs. They also reflect the difficulties people (directors, staff, officials and the general public) had in coming to an understanding of the novel concept of an NGO and other cultural elements that affected the very wellsprings of their work. In addition, the NGO informants were asked to look at the appropriateness of different Pact interventions as well as the impact that these had on their own program successes.

NURTURING THE GROWTH OF NGOS: INCUBATION TO MATURITY

Promoting civil society institutions - 1991 to 1994

Initially CCOP targeted some of the most needy groups within the Cambodian population, the poor, women and war victims, to ensure the immediate provision of basic commodities and services such as food, health care, and income-generating activities to help the vulnerable population to become self-sufficient. The Pact approach provided organizational and community development training and strategic assistance grants (SAGs) to enhance NGOs' ability to provide humanitarian assistance to vulnerable populations at community levels. The CCOP would implement a program of strengthening and promoting effective and sustainable organizations that would assist these groups and encourage broad-based participation in development of the country.

Initiating a program of this nature had its own unique start-up problems. Only two indigenous NGOs existed in 1991, Khemara, a development organization focused on women, and

Cultivating Cambodian Connections

Among the first group of Cambodian-American sub-grantees supported under the CCOP program was the Khmer Buddhist Society (KBS). KBS was an established organization in the United States that had built a Buddhist temple in Seattle, Washington. It was one of the few Cambodian-American NGOs that had the legal status to secure a grant from the Pact/USAID program and was actively encouraged by the Pact head office to initiate a program in Cambodia. "The Pact head office assisted to the point of helping to prepare KBS's initial proposal," affirmed the organization's transition advisor, Ellen Minotti. Ms. Minotti also noted that Pact Cambodia provided office space for KBS in Phnom Penh.

KBS's program provided training to village leaders in eleven provinces as well as social service training to the staff of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Labor, Vocational Training and Youth Rehabilitation. The training, which concentrated on counseling methods and community development initiatives, resulted in a variety of community activities tailored to the needs and desires of the community members. A 44-year-old graduate of a five-month training program commented, "I feel like a bird who has been living in a cage, waiting for my master to feed me. Since the training, I feel like I have been released from the cage, and now I have learned how to find my own food."

ADHOC, a human rights organization. Lacking a pool of local NGOs to draw upon and to serve as a foundation from which to build civil society, one of Pact's initial strategies was to focus on soliciting proposals from U.S.-based organizations that had links to the Cambodian community. These efforts resulted in an initial group of seven U.S and Cambodian-American organizations receiving the first sub-grants.

The Cambodian-American organizations had their genesis in Cambodian communities across the United States, including Seattle, Long Beach,

Boston and Washington D.C. Of the seven NGOs in this first group, six established bases in different Cambodian provinces, while one promoted a national program from Phnom Penh. Together they represented diverse interests ranging from psychosocial counseling to rural enterprise development, community leadership, women's social and economic improvement, and village maternal and child health. Two years later, four additional American NGOs became Pact partners in Phase II of the CCOP. Of the initial seven American NGOs, all either localized as Cambodian NGOs or obtained funding from other sources by the time Phase I ended in September 1996. Only four NGOs (now Cambodian NGOs) of the initial eleven still receive some form of support from the CCOP program.

Personal Journeys – Cambodian NGO Leaders

After establishing Pact in an office in Phnom Penh, attention then turned to developing strategies to incubate local NGOs. Sarah Newhall, Pact Cambodia's first country representative, sought out local people representing a variety of backgrounds. They were identified as having leadership potential for building Cambodia's civil society organizations. Rather than focusing on a specific sector, opportunities were sought that would provide good models for those to follow. Who were these prospective NGO leaders? They came from a variety of backgrounds and experiences but two examples typify the context and motivation for becoming involved. They illustrate the environment, circumstances and demand for a program like CCOP and the emerging civil society that had developed since the fall of the Khmer Rouge.



Pact Representative meeting with the CANDO Director

the Vietnamese invasion also spurred a mass exodus of frail and starving Cambodians fearful of an uncertain and seemingly threatening future. In the midst of political disarray, huge numbers of destitute Cambodians took advantage of this window of freedom to escape to the Thai border in the hope of being able to start a new life. The future in the refugee camp may not have embodied more certainty, but at a minimum there was a sense of security and relief in the form of food and other basic necessities.

The young man was Heng Monychenda and soon after settling into the Site II Refugee Camp he made the decision to become a Buddhist monk, a decision that was to have a dramatic influence on the course of events in his life over the years to come. In 1982 he founded the Khmer Buddhist Association in the Site II camp to promote Cambodian Buddhism. From these roots, the Khmer Buddhist Research Center was established with Heng Monychenda as its director. Monychenda then began a newsletter entitled "Buddhism in Khmer Society," which outlined what had happened in Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge regime. It incorporated the teachings of the Buddha as a reference point in an effort to explain the psychological aspects of how Cambodians coped during this period.

By 1990 rumors were circulating that the refugees would be returned to Cambodia. In this atmosphere of hope for a new start back in their country, Monychenda asked himself, "What can we do for the people when they return?" He wanted to focus on community development initiatives that would develop self-help skills. With a foundation based on Buddhist philosophy and some ideas for community development, Buddhism For Development (BFD)

In 1980 a young Cambodian man fled the political turmoil that was engulfing his country to the safety of the Site II Refugee Camp across the border in Thailand. Having survived the horrors of nearly four years under the Khmer Rouge regime, he was now fleeing the occupation of his country by a foreign power. The invasion of Vietnamese troops into Cambodia and their capture of Phnom Penh in January 1979 effectively put an end to the reign of the Khmer Rouge. However,

was established in May 1990 at the Rithysen monastery in Site II Camp. The organization conducted workshops on Buddhism and community development as they applied to Cambodian society, with half the participants comprising Buddhist monks and half lay-people. Follow-up activities to the workshops included an assessment of the needs of the people in the community and study tours of rural communities in Thailand to learn more about the concept of community development.

After returning to Cambodia in 1992, Monychenda moved BFD along with him and reestablished the organization at Wat Anlongvil in Sanker District, Battambang province. Ironically, the buildings in which BFD established its offices had been used as a training center for the Khmer Rouge to conduct political indoctrination. However, the dark past embodied in these buildings was soon transformed with BFD's various programs. BFD took a unique approach to formulating its program activities by integrating Buddhism with community development and stressing the need to rebuild both the spiritual and material aspects of Cambodian society. At the time no other organization in Cambodia incorporated Buddhism in its community development programs. Heng Monychenda acquired a variety of skills and strategies during the time he was outside Cambodia that became important tools to bring about improved standards of living for the most vulnerable rural populations in the country.

While Monychenda was expanding his knowledge and philosophy of community development from outside the country, other Cambodians were attempting to gain insights into new approaches to Cambodia's development from within the country. In the capital of Phnom Penh in 1980, a civil servant had returned to work in the Ministry of Education where he had served as a schoolteacher before the Khmer Rouge closed all the schools and evacuated the city in April 1975. He was now working under the People's Republic of Kampuchea (1979-1989), the governing regime that was put in place by the Vietnamese after the fall of the Khmer Rouge. The civil servant was Mr. Phoung Sith and he was a writer of physics textbooks for which the government paid him 15 kilograms of rice per month. He soon encountered the heavy-handedness of the new regime, when he attempted to incorporate some of the ideas from textbooks published in France and the United States and by UNICEF. The Vietnamese advisor to the ministry refused to permit such ideas into Cambodia's curriculum.

The 1980s were a time when human rights, rule of law, and open and free debate did not exist for the Cambodian people. It was also a time when officials in the Cambodian government owed their appointments to the Vietnamese. Phoung Sith knew too well that government surveillance was pervasive and just talking about issues such as human rights might result in interrogation.

In 1991, the same year the Paris Peace Accords were signed, a friend gave Phoung Sith a copy of the United Nations document *The Declaration of Human Rights*. Sith saw in the document a tool for bringing about fundamental changes in Cambodian society. Since his student days in the late '60s he had dreamed of the time when his country would become more democratic. When the old regime was replaced with the Lon Nol republican government, the young idealist discovered that the new regime was not much different and probably even more corrupt than the old one. As one oppressive regime followed another Phoung Sith only became more committed in his determination to fight for human rights. "These regimes," as he says in understatement, "made life difficult for the Khmer people."

Eventually a small group met secretly with a UN official on the top floor of a downtown hotel to discuss *The Declaration of Human Rights* document. They ran a great risk of being arrested and had to exercise caution to make certain they were not being watched. After this meeting, word spread and a core group of similarly minded individuals formed. Made up of intellectuals, professors, engineers, and lawyers, the group met every two weeks at different locations, with the place often changing right up to the time they were to meet. Their activities remained clandestine until the arrival of the United Nations Transition Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) mission in 1992. The human rights activists contacted UNTAC officials, as well as then Prince Sihanouk, to present their proposal for forming a human rights organization, which they named Human Rights Vigilance. Upon gaining support to form the organization, they applied to the Supreme National Council to be officially recognized. Their application was approved by the SNC in March 1992.

Over the years of its existence, Vigilance has encouraged people to participate in national elections, has promoted free and fair elections, and has trained police with respect to their role in a democratic society that has resulted in improvements in how the police conduct themselves. Additionally, by keeping human rights issues on the government's agenda, Vigilance has been able to observe that the human rights policies of the government have also improved.

The background experiences of these two individuals demonstrates the circuitous route taken by average Cambodians who made significant contributions to building civil society institutions where previously none existed. While one individual initially worked from outside Cambodia in order to build a strong civil society when he returned, the other worked from within the country. By the time Pact Cambodia opened its office in Phnom Penh in 1991 both had undertaken to work for similar objectives.

Rebuilding civil society



An elder monk demonstrates how to graft a fruit tree in BFD's tree planting program.

1992 witnessed Pact's first SAG to Buddhism for Development, in Battambang province, representing USAID's first funding support to a local NGO. A grant was made to Vigilance the following year. This modest start would ultimately result in 49 program grants to 25 Cambodian NGOs in the first four years of the CCOP (8 SAGs to Cambodian NGOs in 1993, 20 SAGs in 1994, and 18 SAGs in 1995). This first group of Cambodian NGOs represented a range of program areas of which twelve were rural community development NGOs working in thirteen provinces and four were urban community development NGOs. There were three human rights

and three student/youth organizations, as well as one professional association, an NGO devoted to HIV/AIDS issues, and one NGO coalition.

Besides strengthening individual organizations, Pact early on recognized and encouraged the development of coalitions to incubate new approaches and share lessons learned. This

encouragement resulted in establishment of Ponleu Khmer in June 1993. With high hopes of strengthening local NGOs' influence in Cambodian society and creating an effective NGO network to provide support services to its member NGOs, Ponleu Khmer attracted almost 100 local NGOs to join the coalition. However, the difficulties of establishing such a coalition, which Pact's current country representative, Steven Sharp, described as "trust and turf" issues, soon came to dominate and would destabilize the organization over the next few years.

From CCOP's inception, initiatives targeting women's issues and gender development were an important focal point. Gender-specific data was collected by subgrantees that provided an indication of the impact that specific programs were having on women. Indicators were also developed to measure the level that women's skills were upgraded and/or the provision of services to women and children. On the basis of these findings, CCOP set a goal that 25% of the SAGs would be managed by women. In addition, approximately half of the participants in training programs were to be women. The gradual upgrading of women's skills resulted in a high level of involvement of women in the management of the partner NGOs.

Specific programs targeting women included the establishment of the Family Health Unit (FHU) in 1994. The FHU focused on public education on child spacing and HIV/AIDS. Staff of the Ministry of Health and the Secretariat of Women's Affairs, as well as NGOs implementing village health programs, were targeted for training. Pact also collaborated with CARE to support the National Midwives Association in their efforts to improve maternal and child health services. In addition, CCOP provided grants to four local NGOs that focused on building the confidence, awareness, self-reliance and leadership skills of Cambodian women. These were the Battambang Women's AIDS Project, the Cambodian Women's Development Association, the Kratie Women's Welfare Association, and Mother's Love.

Noteworthy developments in CCOP's evolution in 1994 focused on training, sustainability, self-assessment techniques, and general efforts to increase the strength and effectiveness of the NGO sector in Cambodia. In January, a majority of Pact sub-grantees participated in the USAID-sponsored Sustainability Workshop. The workshop, which proved to be seminal, encouraged sub-grantees to secure matching funds for their CCOP grants. Its success can be measured by the fact that even at this "young" stage of development, the NGOs were able to secure between 15% and 25% in matching funds. Training developments also centered around a concerted effort by the training director, Sue Leonard, to train a cadre of Cambodian trainers who could lead capacity building workshops in the Khmer language.

Local partner organizations were also encouraged to undertake self-assessments of their activities to strengthen management systems and ultimately the sustainability of their organizations. To achieve this, a workshop was conducted to design an organizational assessment tool that would be sensitive to the characteristics of the individual sub-grantees. The Management Assessment Tool (MAT) developed was applied six sub-grantees. The lessons learned were incorporated into a revised MAT, which was subsequently implemented with them to develop action plans for organizational development. To further strengthen and sustain the burgeoning NGO sector, regularly scheduled meetings with Pact subgrantees were also instituted. These meetings, which were conducted in Khmer and held three times a month under the auspices of the Cooperation Committee for Cambodia (CCC), served as a significant opportunity for local NGOs to network and effectively work together.



Squatter community residents tending home gardens along Bassac River in Phnom Penh under a program run by the Urban Sector Group (USG)

A series of monthly visits between subgrantees emerged as another effective strategy in knitting the NGO sector together. These site visits provided opportunities for Pact subgrantees to learn from each other and to analyze the successful and constraining factors affecting each project. An added benefit developed as the subgrantees became resources to one another. After one such visit, Kasekor Thmei began a chicken-raising project modeled on UCC's project in

Kampot. Similarly, international agencies began to pool their resources, loaning or contracting their staff as advisors in credit, technical areas, and family health. These strategies helped fill in some of the gaps in the human resource capacity of the country in the early stages of the program.

Given the inexperience of the Cambodian NGOs at this stage, many organizations were still having great difficulty in defining their roles and forming a clear vision of their objectives. However, progress could be identified on several fronts. The increased capacity of Pact's local staff reached a level whereby they could take on more individual responsibilities and act with a certain level of independence. Case managers were able to discuss basic program management issues more articulately and they could effectively coordinate site visits without supervision. In addition, training of trainers (TOT) skills was spreading among subgrantee staff, allowing them to conduct training within their own projects, as well as develop skills to assess the training needs of local NGOs. Yet another milestone for the year was the organization of the country's first NGO Fair in Phnom Penh. The fair provided local and international NGOs with a venue to give donors, government officials, and the general public a better idea of the scope of their activities.

Coping with different rates of maturity - 1995 to 1996

By 1995 Cambodia had 180 local NGOs, 120 of these were officially registered with the government, and another 200 international NGOs. At this time the CCOP program faced a strategic juncture as some subgrantees were progressing in organizational management and financial capacity at a faster rate than others. Less mature NGOs were still struggling to gain a stable footing and reach respectable levels of capacity, and still others were just arriving on the scene as newly established organizations. It became evident that a reorganization of Pact's training unit was in order. From the time that the Pact Cambodia office opened, the CCOP program unit was referred to as the "training unit." The reorganization served to enhance the effectiveness of the CCOP program through a program unit that provided individualized services to each NGO rather than generalized training.

With the Cambodian NGOs maturing at different rates, the training programs needed to become less generic and more specialized. This provided an opportunity to upgrade the management and technical skills of the Pact Cambodian staff. It became the rule to include

staff in every aspect of decision-making, including management planning sessions, and an emphasis was placed on critical analysis and communication skills. More general training for Pact staff included English language classes, computer classes, and instruction in problem solving, project monitoring and evaluation, and technical skills in sectors such as credit, health and agriculture.

The increasing capacity of the Pact Cambodian program officers meant that Pact's program staff were now organizing logistics and coordination of workshops. In addition, by this time in the program's life, the SAG portfolios were being managed entirely by Cambodian program officers. The completion of the translation of a Khmer language *Training of Trainers Manual*, as well as a *Management and Planning Training Manual*, contributed to these achievements.

Increasingly, the Cambodian-American NGOs funded under the first phase of the CCOP were considering becoming local NGOs. Localizing meant replacing the expatriate staff with Cambodians and registering as a Cambodian NGO with the government. The move to localize the international NGOs developed at an opportune time, when donor agencies had begun to focus funding and institutional support on local NGOs. The Cambodian Humanitarian Foundation's (CHF) program in the province of Takeo and the International Medical Corps' (IMC) program in Svay Rieng were the first of Pact's original subgrantees to officially register as Cambodian NGOs in 1994. The CHF program evolved into the NGO Rachana (*Fine Art*) and the IMC program became the NGO Samakee (*Solidarity*). Of the eleven international NGOs funded under the CCOP, six had localized by 1997 and the other five had obtained funding from other sources.

During 1995 Pact continued to play an integral role in building support networks that would serve to encourage the growth and maintain the strength of Cambodia's NGO sector. In September, Pact collaborated with Oxfam, CIDSE and the Canada Fund to develop an informal network of donor, capacity-building training, and technical assistance agencies that supported Cambodian NGOs. The Cambodian NGO Support Network (CNSN) was formed and regular meetings were held to discuss Cambodian NGO needs and how to coordinate efforts to benefit the NGO sector. A series of four partnership workshops were organized by CNSN to examine partnership experiences and discuss accountability and transparency issues, as well as other issues affecting the local NGO sector. The CNSN also funded the publication of the Cambodian NGO Resource Directory in order to provide local NGOs with information regarding donors, services, volunteers and networks.

Another pioneering initiative taken by Pact at this time focused on developing support networks for Cambodian NGOs, including an in-kind grant to the "CNGO Meeting" and a SAG to Medicam. The in-kind grant to the CNGO Meeting supported monthly meetings that it had begun in mid-1996 in an effort to provide a regularly scheduled forum for Cambodian NGOs in all sectors to share information and experiences on an informal basis. Medicam, on the other hand, was a support organization for NGOs working in the health sector in Cambodia. The SAG was intended to facilitate the participation of local health-related NGOs in Medicam's activities. In Battambang, Pact provided support to CMDC to coordinate a monthly meeting of local NGOs and to provide advice on fund-raising strategies.

Having reached a crucial phase of the program, a mid-term evaluation covering the first four years of Pact's CCOP was completed in April 1996. The evaluation outlined the strengths and weaknesses of the program, revealed lessons learned, and set forth recommendations for

the future direction of the program. The report noted that the local NGOs were at a critical stage of their development and as they reached maturity, it was important that support continue in order to maintain what has been gained and avoid jeopardizing their continued growth and existence (see box).

Lessons learned at midterm

The 1996 evaluation described the strengths of the CCOP in terms of the increased capacity of Cambodian NGOs to deliver grassroots development initiatives that had the added effect of developing Cambodian civil society as a whole. CCOP was also valued for its ability to influence government policies and demonstrate how NGOs and government can work together. Other successful aspects of the CCOP included creating organizations capable of providing training opportunities and learning experiences for Cambodians, whether they worked within the NGOs or they were villagers and government officials working in collaboration with NGOs.

Weaknesses of the CCOP described the need to develop more effective management tools, as well as community organization and participation techniques. Other weaknesses cited the lack of inherent technical abilities related to strategic planning and budgeting. The report also noted that the Cambodian NGOs would need to demonstrate more transparency and effectiveness in meeting objectives if they hoped to continue to secure donor funding.

General recommendations coming out of this evaluation focused on giving support to maturing Cambodian NGOs rather than to new ones, and on setting specific priorities for continued support. It was recommended that priority be given to Cambodian NGOs that concentrated on training or support roles, those that demonstrated potential to effectively manage funds and staff and the capacity to implement sustainable programs. The report also stressed that Pact should concentrate on supporting activities that encourage networking, coordination and the sharing of ideas between local NGOs. Initiatives that focused on developing strategic plans, staff training, and the creation of monitoring systems were recommended as a focus of support. Recommendations on specific program areas centered on staff development support, financial management, advisory boards, advocacy, and the promotion of fund raising and income generation.

Maintaining momentum in an unstable atmosphere - 1997 to 1998

This period was a watershed in many respects for the CCOP program and its partner NGOs, not to mention for the Cambodian governmental system and Cambodian society as a whole. The defining event was the factional fighting in July 1997 between the armed forces of the two major political parties that resulted in the ouster of the first prime minister and the consolidation of power in the hands of the political forces of the then second prime minister Hun Sen. Phase II of CCOP had just ended in March and an extension of funding for the program had been secured for another year. Nevertheless the altered political environment had a direct effect on Pact's program in Cambodia. The U.S. government declared that aid would now be restricted to humanitarian programs implemented by NGOs. No aid funds were allowed to directly assist the government of Cambodia and funding would now to be directed entirely through NGOs. While the CCOP program had not directly funded any government program initiatives at any point prior to these developments, a number of Pact partner NGOs had assisted government ministries and departments with respect to staff training. This was now specifically prohibited.

Political instability combined with a build-up in political tension in the lead up to national elections planned for 1998 created an atmosphere that made the NGO sector susceptible to

adverse influences. Even before the outbreak of armed conflict, the combination of the above-noted factors had led, in part, to the demise of the Cambodian NGO federation Ponleu Khmer. Issues of political neutrality and the use of NGO funds caused the staff to resign *en masse*. However, the demise of Ponleu Khmer spawned a new Cambodian NGO in August 1997, Star Kampuchea, founded by fourteen of the sixteen staff members of Ponleu Khmer. The new organization sought to continue to build networks of cooperation and coordination among Cambodian NGOs. The staff of Star Kampuchea wanted to start afresh and learn from their experience at Ponleu Khmer to avoid the pitfalls that had brought down that organization. Pact provided funding to Star to enable the group organization to implement its program objectives and build a track record upon which to obtain additional funding.

A RISING STAR

Following upon his disappointing but eye-opening experience at Ponleu Khmer, the director of the NGO Star Kampuchea, Mr. Nhek Sarin, foresaw an opportunity for a renewed effort to create an organization based on strong attributes. Nhek Sarin envisioned building the new NGO on a foundation of transparency and accountability in which the management and staff would abide by a formal code of ethics. The mission of Star Kampuchea was outlined in terms of fostering good governance within local NGOs to create a proper understanding of the role of NGOs in strengthening civil society. Star Kampuchea also aimed to promote multiparty democracy and respect for human.

In charting this new course, Nhek Sarin is proud of what has risen from the ashes of Ponleu Khmer. He states that Star Kampuchea developed definitive roles for its staff, a specific policy for its executive committee, formal internal regulations, and a clearly defined strategy that together has helped the organization achieve its objectives. In pursuing these internal initiatives, he says that a high level of trust and cooperation has now been established with donor agencies.

In light of the destabilizing events of July 1997, efforts were made to ensure that the Cambodian NGO subgrantees had strategies in place to deal with possible political intimidation. Pact staff monitored the situation on an ongoing basis and helped subgrantees to be aware of potential problems. Several incidents had already occurred in which political parties had targeted Cambodian NGOs in efforts to gain their favor. These incidents continued to prove worrisome for fear that Cambodian NGOs might be diverted to supporting political parties. Contributing to this precarious balance was the lack of adequate sources of funds for sector, which made offers of funding from political parties very tempting. Furthermore, management and organizational structures within a vast majority of Cambodian NGOs continued to be sufficiently weak to make them vulnerable to political influence. To counter such influences, a workshop on political neutrality was sponsored by

CNSN with Pact funding in March 1998, which was attended by the Pact NGO partners.

Despite the persisting political uncertainty, progress was made on other fronts in the CCOP program with the establishment of two important local training institutes as CCOP subgrantees began to specialize in designated areas of capacity-building expertise. An institute to train NGO managers evolved out of the work done in the previous years by the Management Organizational Development (MOD) Working Group and began operation as VBNK. Pact was instrumental in supporting MOD and also provided bridge funding to VBNK for its first three months of operation. At the same time, Silaka became a localized Cambodian NGO, which emerged from the Cambodian-American NGO, CANDO, and provided general management training to NGO staff.

The destabilizing political events did not prevent a range of activities concentrating on specific program areas from continuing. Activities throughout 1997 and 1998 focused on the

ongoing mentoring of Cambodian program officers in efforts for them to assume increased levels of responsibility for managing Cambodian NGO subgrantee portfolios, and planning and facilitating workshops. A new staffing structure was also put in place in order to concentrate support to local program officers and CCOP subgrantees. In addition, monthly “team days” were organized to discuss specific issues pertaining to new development and organizational management and funding policies related to the NGO sector. Two major issues concerning CCOP subgrantees dominated Pact’s agenda at this time. One issue revolved around the development of governance structures within Cambodian NGOs to strengthen their organizational stability as well as to conform to the anticipated requirements of a pending NGO Law. A second issue centered on having local communities take more control of their own development activities and building community organization skills.

Throughout this period, assistance also focused on developing critical self-assessment skills to redesign program strategies, define long-term visions, and examine the impact of programs on target populations in order to develop realistic plans and appropriate interventions. Extensions of existing grants were approved pending the development of new program proposals by subgrantees and the demonstrated ability of subgrantees' projects to achieve targeted outputs. Subgrantees were also encouraged to make progressive moves from direct service delivery to increased community management of activities. Pact’s assistance focussed on the introduction of a community participation assessment tool (CPAT) that could be utilized by subgrantees.

Pact-sponsored workshops during this period addressed such topics as community development concepts, PRA techniques, program planning, and project monitoring and evaluation. Other workshops examined accountability and transparency and identified models for by-laws and governing bodies for Cambodian NGOs appropriate to the Cambodian context. While Pact sponsored some of these workshops and funded the attendance of NGO partner’s staff, others were conducted by collaborating agencies such as credit training by Catholic Relief Services and a conflict resolution workshop conducted by the Cambodian Development Resource Institute. Some were funded by Pact’s NGO partners themselves. A workshop on boards of directors and by-laws was held by Star Kampuchea and a community development and organization training by Vaddhanak.

A particularly significant workshop sponsored by Pact in September 1998 was intended to safeguard the legacy of CCOP achievements, as plans began for the time that the program would wind down. The workshop brought together representatives of the local and international NGO sectors and key stakeholders from donor agencies and the Cambodian government to share experiences and discuss challenges as well as envision future possibilities for Cambodian NGOs. The workshop concluded that Cambodian NGOs had reached a stage where leaders were now confronted with managing more complex organizations, creating new demands for the leadership and the staff. Simultaneously, Cambodian NGOs and society had developed to the point where Cambodian NGOs needed to play a more instrumental role in engaging decision-makers and representing constituent issues in shaping civil society. Conclusions drawn from the discussions indicated that issues of capacity building, sustainability, networking, and government/NGO relations would continue to dominate the agenda of efforts of the Cambodian NGOs in order to maintain what they had gained over the years.

At the same time, it was recognized that Pact needed to continue providing ongoing logistical and financial support for a number of the subgrantees. While some progress had been made in

improving Cambodia's infrastructure, there remained large gaps in communication and technological areas that still required Pact's assistance. In more remote regions of the country, Pact NGO partners still relied on Pact's support to maintain levels of effectiveness in day-to-day operations. The Pact office in Phnom Penh continued to serve as a base from which subgrantees could send and receive mail and faxes, utilize the office's telephone as a contact number, make photocopies, use the computers and get information on the travel and security situation in the country.

Consolidating civil society gains - 1999 to 2000

The final phase of CCOP unfolded at a time when political developments were beginning to provide stability and the possibility of the genuine growth of civil society in the country. The Khmer Rouge collapsed as a military and political force, Prince Ranariddh's FUNCINPEC party and the Cambodian People's Party formed a coalition government with Hun Sen as prime minister, and Cambodia was accepted into the ASEAN regional forum.

Under the CCOP program, Pact continued to emphasize strengthening management capacity and project design to enhance institutional sustainability and impact on the target communities being served. Additionally, Pact now prioritized tailoring technical assistance and organizational development support to the individual needs of its subgrantees. A number of different workshops and forums were organized to address issues such as understanding assessment tools, promoting advocacy techniques, and building the sustainability and governance of Cambodian NGOs.

Revisions to the MAT continued to make it more appropriate to the Cambodian context. A representative from Pact and a representative from a support organization subgrantee attended Pact's worldwide training in organizational capacity assessment (OCA) in the Philippines. Two OCA design workshops were subsequently conducted with Cambodian community development subgrantees and NGO support organizations. The OCA tool that resulted, which enabled NGOs to identify strengths and weaknesses and develop corresponding action plans, was then pilot tested for each group.

The process allowed NGOs who were to use OCA to develop the tool. "It was for them to use, not us," clarifies Pact country representative Steven Sharp. He also notes that in the second year of using the OCA tool, comparisons were made with the first year assessment scores. Remarkably, explains Sharp, "The scores for individual NGOs went down, indicating that NGO management and staff were being more objective" in their assessments. The introduction of this self-assessment tool allowed NGO staff to address other internal issues that may otherwise have been left to fester. A sure sign of the increasing maturity of an NGO is when NGO staff bring issues concerning internal conflicts to the forefront. According to Steven Sharp, this evolutionary process has meant that, "Now the staff [of Cambodian NGOs] more readily challenge autocratic management styles."

Pact also began to focus on NGO advocacy skills to promote NGO interests and strengthen Cambodian civil society. A concept paper produced by Pact and the NGO Forum, drew on the ideas generated by Pact's subgrantees at a workshop entitled, "The Role of Advocacy in the Work of NGOs". Pact helped clarify the different skills for local issues verses national policy advocacy, which were eventually incorporated into the training curriculum.

To provide CCOP subgrantees with tools to pursue financial sustainability among CCOP subgrantees, Pact funded a subgrantee, Ponlok, to update the 1996 “NGO Resource Directory”. This provided a comprehensive database of potential donors and commissioned a survey of its subgrantees, which resulted in a report entitled *What Does The Future Hold?*. In addition, Pact organized a Local Fundraising and Collaboration Workshop in



Facilitating an OCA workshop

conjunction with Ponlok that examined twelve Cambodian NGO case studies representing different fundraising options, including fees-for-service, self-financing, Wat committees, in-kind contributions and corporate fundraising.

Pact continued to conduct “team days” for its program officers to provide an opportunity to discuss general community development concepts and methodologies and to undertake some comparative analysis of Pact’s current community development NGO partners. Other team days covered governance, financial management, and the introduction of the OCA tool. In April 2000, Pact hosted the NGO Support Organization meeting to encourage the development of a peer-learning network for Cambodian staff employed by NGO support organizations. The quarterly Director’s Forum served as a support mechanism for NGO directors to discuss issues of organizational change among their peers.

SUSTAINING THE GAINS

What Does The Future Hold? identified areas of progress in organizational development of the CCOP subgrantees that contributed to a degree of sustainability. Only three partner NGOs had ceased operation since 1991. The report described four types of governance structures present among CCOP subgrantees that were external to the organization: boards of directors, advisory boards, steering committees, and general assemblies. Twelve of the thirty-two NGOs surveyed had boards of directors, but only five were deemed as being active. The survey findings revealed that local NGOs understood the importance of establishing a board of directors. The primary incentive initially in establishing a board was to gain legitimacy in the NGO’s dealings with donor agencies. Nine of the NGOs surveyed had advisory boards that were viewed as transitional governing mechanisms for NGOs. Three NGOs surveyed had steering committees, while six had no formal governance structures in place and continued to be governed by the director only. One NGO combined a common organizational structure with what can be described as a more traditional Cambodian approach to associations by forming a general assembly.

The report concluded that governance structures remained entities that were “unfamiliar and daunting to most local NGOs.” It is clear that the trend is towards eventually establishing independent governance structures, but in order to do so they will need additional assistance from support agencies. Although initially doubtful about the usefulness of the structure, the idea of a board is becoming more appealing to them as a mechanism to ensure the continuity of their vision.

The variety of initiatives undertaken by the CCOP program bore fruitful results during this period. Pact received more concise proposals revealing clearer programmatic objectives. Pact's support to Oxfam/Great Britain to develop a Landlessness and Development Information Tool (LADIT) allowed NGOs to assess the extent and consequences of landlessness on their respective target populations. In doing so, the NGOs were able to enhance the design and implementation of community oriented programs and services.

By CCOP's tenth year, the program had moved through a challenging and vigorous evolutionary process. While the CCOP program had a modest start, it eventually helped to encourage an explosion of civil society organizations. The result is a community of NGOs that have sufficient capacity to use community development concepts to formulate effective and participatory initiatives in all sectors of activity. In addition, support organizations have been established that provide ongoing training previously provided by international NGOs such as Pact to an ever-widening array of recipients. The CCOP also encouraged other training programs to emerge that address increasingly sophisticated needs of the NGO community in Cambodia. The support networks that have been established disseminate information pertinent to NGOs and provide opportunities for NGOs to share experiences including successes and failures, as well as new initiatives and program techniques. The CCOP process has allowed for the greater empowerment of local communities, both urban and rural, throughout the country. A number of CCOP partner initiatives have established community funds and many initiatives have been localized so that local people plan, initiate and manage their own projects.

The Cambodian NGOs that participated in the CCOP program gained respect and recognition from their target populations as well as local governing authorities that have been encouraged to collaborate in their initiatives. This demonstrates that NGOs and governing authorities can work together at all levels of government. With enhanced capacity for planning, organization, and management the NGO partners that have been part of the CCOP process can feel assured of a higher likelihood of sustainability. Additionally, they can take a great deal of satisfaction from what they have achieved and the positive impact they have had at all levels of Cambodian society.

SHARED EXPERIENCES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Early models of civil society

While the concept of nongovernmental organizations was unfamiliar in Cambodia in the post-1979 period, such organizations have had a limited presence in Cambodian society in the past. The extent of their strength and impact on Cambodian civil society before the Khmer Rouge period is not certain, but they were present in one form or another. Most often NGOs were membership organizations representing professional associations, or, alternatively, organizations of students, ethnic minorities, business interests, or other groups. Although NGOs that have focused on community development initiatives did not figure prominently in Cambodian society in the past, there is evidence of some such organizations dating back to the early years of the regime of the young King Sihanouk and even before. Cambodia's first Boy Scout troop was founded in 1934 as the Khmer Scout Association under the patronage of Prince Monireth. The National Mutual Help Association dates back to 1949 and was founded to provide food, clothing and money to the needy. The Cambodian Red Cross was founded in 1951, the Women's Mutual Health Association established in 1953, and ethnic groups, such as the Association of Vietnamese in Cambodia, date to the 1950's. There is a notable absence of trade unions during this period and only one trade union existed during the Peoples Republic of Kampuchea regime (1979-1989). By and large the prominence of community development NGOs in Cambodia was not to emerge until the 1990s.

While not a formal organization in the sense of an NGO, a Wat (a Buddhist temple) committee is found in almost every Cambodian community. Even though these cultural institutions were decimated during the Khmer Rouge regime, people have rebuilt them over the last two and-a-half decades so they once again serve as the mainstay of Cambodian culture. Especially in rural communities, they serve as the source of moral and ethical teachings as well as a source of popular education and social cohesion. The committees also mobilize community resources to erect Watts, build local infrastructure and provide funds for funerals of poor villagers. The importance of this community-based organizational structure has been recognized by NGOs, and they have utilized these structures in carrying out their community initiatives.

Developing a program vision

The people who became the predominant actors in the Cambodian NGO sector shared the common trait that they all were neophytes. The NGO leaders that emerged in Cambodia in the early 1990s had only vague notions of what a nongovernmental organization was and the potential role it could serve for developing Cambodian society. Despite this, they formulated ideas and thought through action plans that would form the foundations of organizations devoted to community-based development and providing support to the NGO sector. They set daunting tasks for themselves, whether or not the person was fully aware of the challenging process that he or she was about to embark upon.

Some of the first generation of NGO leaders already had exposure to international NGOs in the refugee camps, which often provided formal and nonformal training in community development concepts and organizational skills, or else had worked for the United Nations when the UNTAC mission was established in 1992. For people like Heng Monychenda, the refugee camps also served to bring them closer to their cultural roots. Other NGO leaders who remained in the country, like Phoung Sith, had no previous experience with international NGOs. These NGO leaders had at least two things in common: the experience of struggling

through the horrors of the Khmer Rouge regime and the fact that they were inspired to renew Cambodian society.

Each of the Cambodians had to overcome considerable hurdles in order to get their ideas off the ground. The vast majority had no previous experience in proposal writing, nor had they the skills required to articulate ideas and concepts. Compounding this situation for some was the fact that they had to make long journeys to Phnom Penh to present their plans. A few of these Cambodians had never even been to Phnom Penh before, nor approached donor agencies to ask for funding. Many arrived in the capital with only a slip of paper with the names of one or two donor organizations.

VENTURING INTO UNCHARTED WATERS

Mr. Sok Sokhon had been a refugee in the Site II Camp in Thailand for 12 years before returning to Cambodia and establishing Chivit Thmei (New Life in Khmer), a rural development NGO based in Battambang province. During the time he spent in the camp, he was fortunate enough to study in a teacher-training school, which gave him the opportunity to be a teacher and eventually to become the principal of a school in the camp. He also received training in rural development skills in agriculture and village fund-management from a Thai NGO called Rural Friends. In 1991 he was one of several individuals who formed the Khmer Rural Development Association (KRDA) at the refugee camp. He served as deputy of KRDA before returning to Cambodia in 1992 to work for UNTAC.

While at UNTAC, he visited Svay Por district in Battambang several times and talked to monks and local villagers about rural development. He asked the monks and villagers to spread information about development activities and to discuss it further among them. The result of these early efforts was the establishment of Chivit Thmei in August 1993. One of Chivit Thmei's first initiatives was to plant trees and to increase food security by encouraging the growth of dry season rice.

Sok Sokhon admitted that he was venturing into completely new territory, both literally and figuratively, when he ventured out to seek donors for Chivit Thmei's programs. He had never been to Phnom Penh and had to get a map of the city when he arrived so he could approach potential donors with his proposal. With the donor agency located in a big office in a big house, even approaching the guard at the gate was intimidating. He approached the task cautiously and with a strategy to build up his confidence.

"On the first day, I just talked to the guard, then I returned the next day and talked to the receptionist, then I returned on the third day and spoke to the receptionist again." It took a few days to gain the confidence to talk to the representative of the donor organization. However, after meeting the donor his fears and lack of confidence abated. "I found it easier to speak to the foreigner than to Cambodians in the city who look down on us because we are from the countryside."

The director of the Kratie Women's Welfare Association (KWWA), Yous Thy, learned of Pact Cambodia from the women's NGO Khemara. Neither Thy nor her associates had ever been to Phnom Penh and when they arrived, the people at Khemara gave them a place to stay, provided some training in organizational development, and took them on site visits to Khemara projects. "We didn't have a clear idea of KWWA's objectives at the start," admits Yous Thy, "and exposure to concepts and project sites was invaluable." Still, communicating with potential donors was very difficult. KWWA was located in a remote province, where they had no telephone and getting to Phnom Penh required a day and a half of travel. Added to this was the lack of English language skills of the KWWA management. The combination of these factors contributed to long delays in getting responses to their proposal. It was one year before KWWA became a partner of Pact in the CCOP program.

As the future Cambodian NGO leaders overcame challenges in their efforts to interest donors in their programs, they obtained funding to start programs. They could then concentrate on building their capacity in a variety of areas. The Pact NGO development partners see the enhancement of their management capacity as the most valuable contribution Pact made to the growth of their organizations. Skills training included financial and administrative management, planning (both long-term and strategic), proposal writing, and general leadership strengthening. BFD's Heng Monychenda eloquently expressed it: "The organization was a precious stone, but it needed something to polish it to bring out the value." For NGO support organizations, Pact provided specialized training in course analysis and marketing strategies. Pact also provided consultants and program specialists to address specific technical needs in specialized programs. An example is the CHED program. Pact found sponsors that gave internships to CHED's staff in printing educational material.

Pact was one of the few donor agencies that provided funds for operating costs. In the early 1990s, there was a serious lack of funds for projects, with funding for core costs virtually nonexistent. Heng Monychenda of BFD requested funds for the salary of one project coordinator, but in reality the funds were shared among five staff. Similarly, for KRDA, Pouk Chamroeun noted that when they started they did not have money to pay the staff, and people volunteered to collect information on the problems and needs of the villagers. Other NGO leaders, such as Thida Khus of Silaka, appreciated that Pact allowed room for the organization to develop its structure and program. Pact also funded development programs of organizations that had religious connections at a time when many donors had a policy not to fund such organizations. Nhek Sarin from Star Kampuchea commented, "Pact can provide a view of what is good and what is bad—other donors are more neutral." Lim Phai, the director of USG explained, "Pact is more hands-on when working with its partner NGOs, while other donors are outside the country and may only visit two or three times a year." Lim Phai thought this was an important factor that ensured, "a close relationship and helped us keep track of our objectives and identify problems."

Many NGOs had problems in articulating clear objectives that would provide a distinct vision for their respective organizations. Ellen Minotti of SSC felt that, "Pact's influence was significant in giving direction to forming the vision of SSC's project." She explained, "In the beginning we weren't thinking of sustainability or community development, we thought we would only be here for eighteen months." Similarly, Thida Khus from Silaka said, "everything was new and there was no prior experience with concepts of advocacy, developing NGOs, and fundraising. But undoubtedly, the resulting development of civil society in Cambodia helped to establish the NGOs that followed." Over time, the partner NGOs gained a clearer vision of their overall purpose and mission and were better able to define objectives and activities to support their mission.

Some NGO partners observed that the maturing process worked both ways and that Pact itself had to overcome some growing pains. Thida Khus noted that as the Pact program matured there was a noticeable change in the staff that "resulted in Pact being more responsive and being present at all stages of the program process." Pact's own staff needed to develop skills, which were not available in Cambodia. The director of SSC also remarked that in the early stages, "the Pact program advisor didn't have any more knowledge than the people working in the NGOs."

Implementation Challenges

A major psychological barrier centered on just how one referred to NGOs. The word for organization in the Khmer language is “angkah,” which is the same word that the Khmer Rouge used to refer to their governing regime. The assistant director of KRDA confided that it was difficult to organize NGO activities in the beginning because, “local villagers still had many bad memories from the Khmer Rouge time that they related to anything referring to ‘organization.’ He went on to say that, “The generation that survived the Pol Pot regime had difficulty in believing that there could be sincerity in an NGO claiming to exist for the benefit of the people.”

In the initial stages, the NGO leaders themselves were often unable to form a clear conception of what an NGO was. Yet, they had to provide some explanations to the people in the communities with whom they were working. Dr. Oum Samoen, the director of Rachana in Takeo province, explained to the local villagers that an NGO was a neutral entity. Suspicions abounded, including government-appointed local authorities. Dr. Oum said, “For the first year of Rachana’s operation the local authorities followed my activities closely, but after a year or so they stopped.” However, even after two years of operation, Rachana still had to inform local authorities of any planned meetings due to continued suspicions about what it was doing.

The management of KRDA in Battambang province had similar experiences. The suspicions of the local authorities in Battambang were based largely on fears that the KRDA activities were a front for starting a political party. But in the early days of initiating NGO programs, it was not only the local authorities that saw NGOs as a threat. Members of local communities who had vested interests also harbored animosity toward the new organizations. Pouk Chamroeun of KRDA comments that some people tried to make a bad name for KRDA by spreading rumors among members of the Village Development Committees. He explained, “Some business people who lend money attempted to discourage villagers from participating in KRDA’s credit program by telling them that it wasn’t any good.” Siv Sophy, the director of Vaddhanak in Kampong Chhnang province, had similar experiences when people from both inside and outside the community advised villagers not to participate in Vaddhanak activities, causing some villagers to drop out of the program. Sophy reflects, “It took time for the villagers to have faith in Vaddhanak’s programs, but over time Vaddhanak was able to prove that their techniques worked.” After gaining the confidence of the villagers, Siv Sophy stated that people then began to take ownership of the different activities instead of identifying them only as Vaddhanak projects.

NGOs also began to face another reality: that progress would be slow and arduous and measured in small increments. “Things didn’t change as fast as one thought they would,” declared Thida Khus of Silaka. The protracted periods of war and large-scale destruction of the social and economic institutions of the country stripped Cambodians of the social bonds and cultural traditions that had long held Cambodian society together. Yous Thy of KWWA in Kratie province feels communities will not be able to solve their problems soon and that “KWWA cannot solve the problems by itself, it will need a partner.”

The reality reflected in these observations has not obstructed the contributions that CCOP has made to strengthen Cambodian NGOs. Many NGO leaders credit the assessment of their strengths and weaknesses and the training they received as assisting their organizations to mature. The skills they acquired also contributed to establishing better relationships with community members, government authorities and donor agencies. Perhaps Dr. Oum Samoen

of Rachana best summed up the significance of CCOP's program when he said, "Rachana's programs are still in existence today because of the training received from Pact." More significantly, he added, "Today these programs are also sustained by the community."

For some NGO leaders, having reached mature status and a degree of sustainability brought the added satisfaction of proving the skeptics wrong. "When Silaka started, they thought that we were too ambitious and we wouldn't survive for more than three months," asserts Thida Khus. With many Cambodian NGOs now reaching their first decade of operation, they have gained a sense of confidence and cautious optimism about the future, although concerns about political stability in the country, maintaining capacity levels, and securing sustainable funding or revenue will remain for foreseeable future.

Resource development Initiatives

Coping with financial limitations required creativity and persistence in efforts to diversify the funding bases of Cambodian NGOs. As Pact phases out its programs, NGOs will have to expend even more time and effort soliciting funding support from a number of donor agencies. Many Cambodian NGOs are caught in a paradox when attempting to secure a funding base: while donors like to see long-term plans, and Pact has encouraged strategic planning, they are not willing or able to commit to long-term funding. Many NGOs that devoted much time and effort in developing three-year plans are able to attract only one-year funding commitments. NGOs value the training in proposal writing they received from Pact, yet NGO leaders such as Poa Sarben, the assistant director of CHED in Battambang, declared that fundraising remains a problem because they still don't know how to contact donors in other countries. In such cases, there remains an expectation that Pact would find new donors for them.

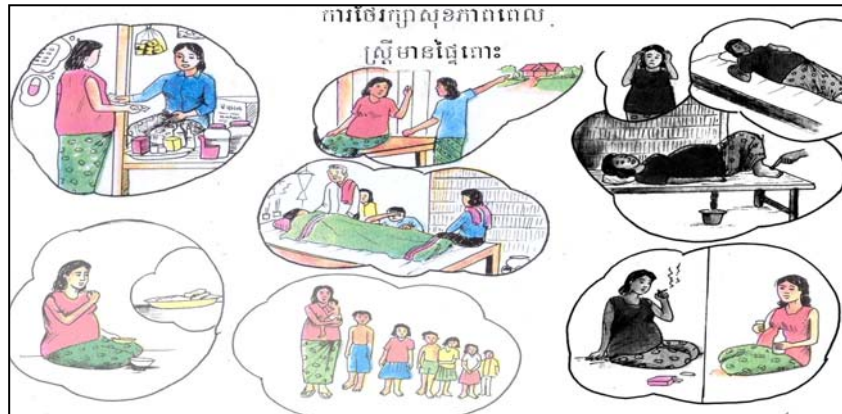
NGOs focusing on community development initiatives that have implemented successful savings and credit schemes have been able to tap another source of funds. The success of Chivit Thmei's credit program has allowed it to build a capital base that provides a degree of financial stability. Other community development NGOs that currently do not have savings and credit programs are seeking to initiate similar income generating programs.

Support organizations such as Vaddhanak, CHED, and Silaka are able to augment their revenue from fees-for-service from training activities. For Vaddhanak, this source of income is not sufficient in itself as it only covers 20% of the organization's budget requirements. Furthermore, Vaddhanak experienced acute financial problems in 1998 and 1999 because of the drop in demand for staff training as donor programs retrenched after the factional fighting in 1997. Scenarios such as this make it particularly important, notes Thida Khus of Silaka, to keep abreast of the current political and economic situation in the country, as well as be able to read current trends in the market. Silaka derives 80% of its income from fees-for-service; however, the director stressed, it has become more difficult to rely on this source of income since 1998. Additionally, Khus commented, training needs have changed over time, which has adversely affected the potential income that can be generated from this source.

For more technical operations such as CHED's development of health education material, keeping up with technological advancements has been particularly challenging with the establishment of many more printing facilities in Cambodia. The newer printing facilities have more current technology and CHED finds it difficult to compete with the new operations. CHED's income has suffered as a result. This problem is compounded by the fact that training in this industry such as design and printing programs, if it is available, is very

expensive. Pact worked with CHED to focus on its comparative advantage in the development of health education materials.

The Pact partner NGOs have achieved tremendous strides in building the capacity of their respective staff and management teams. NGO staff are now more independent, enabling them to take on more responsibilities and undertake more initiatives on their own. Lok Vichet, the director of CHED,



Maternity health awareness poster developed by CHED

claimed that the increased capacity of his staff has helped in the creation of new ideas that have allowed the organization to expand its program. The extensive investment in time to train staff, however, comes with a hidden cost. Often no sooner has an organization built an experienced staff than the staff leave to work elsewhere. Many of Pact’s partner NGOs complained that they are helpless to curb the human resource drain because they cannot compete with the salaries and benefits offered by international NGOs. Lok Vichet from CHED used the analogy of growing a mango tree to maintaining the human resource capacity of an organization: “After you plant the tree, you try to protect it and care for it by building a fence around it, but as it grows, it gets bigger and the fence can no longer contain it. Then, anyone can have access to it, and when it begins to bear fruit it is easy for people to pick.”

For organizations operating in rural areas the staffing problem is compounded by their remoteness. A common difficulty, explained the director of Vaddhanak, is to persuade people with training and skills from economic centers like Phnom Penh to go to work in remote rural communities. Dr. Oum from Rachana observed, “There is no one in the rural communities with the skills and understanding of basic community development concepts, and local people have difficulty absorbing such concepts because of their generally low education levels. The problem is difficult to solve since bringing someone from the distant urban centers is more costly than recruiting staff locally.”

NGO Chivit Thmei has instituted a unique solution to counter the human resource drain. It has implemented a volunteer program and currently has six young people from Battambang town and other communities working with them in order to gain work experience. Some volunteers stay for a year and others for between three and nine months. Chivit Thmei hopes the volunteers’ work experience and skills will serve to provide a reserve of people for future staff requirements.

While attempting to solve staffing problems for rural-based NGOs by recruiting skilled people from urban centers, the director of Rachana asserts that there are advantages to having staff from the local communities. “They are familiar with the community and the community is familiar with them, and they know how to communicate with the locals.” Nonetheless, a majority of NGO leaders directors acknowledged that deficiencies in staff capacity would remain an ongoing concern. “The organization will need more staff with specific skills in different areas,” emphasized the director of Vaddhanak.

Development in the cultural context

The slow progress made in implementing NGO programs was ascribed by some to how the Cambodians view their world and their community after years of war and conflict. Thida Khus observed that a certain psychology has developed among Cambodians whereby “they think only of short term gains, which results in a trade-off between proper ethics and ways of survival - people don’t know any other way.” The result of this cultural and psychological perspective, she concludes, is that “the snowball effect hasn’t occurred.”

The Pact partner most experienced in coping with the psychological dynamics of prolonged civil strife is Social Services of Cambodia (SSC). Considering the extent of the trauma experienced by average Cambodians over two decades, it is not surprising that Ellen Minotti confirms that the reaction of Cambodians to this experience is comparable to that of people in other societies that have experienced traumatic situations. A significant difference, however, is the influence of Cambodian culture, which generally leads Cambodians to consider that the misfortune they experience is a result of fate. Ellen Minotti stresses that Cambodians need help to deal with this, as the majority had to do unpleasant “things” in order to survive during the Khmer Rouge period. Pouk Chamroeun of KRDA believes that the affect of the war made it difficult for community solidarity to materialize. However, changes have occurred in communities and these changes have involved his organization. Now numerous ceremonies that community members celebrate together include KRDA staff.

The director of Rachana also echoed experiences such as these: “For five years the local authorities never participated in Rachana activities, but now they do.” The director emphasized that a concerted effort to have the local authorities take an active part in Rachana’s activities was achieved largely by holding meetings in the houses of these officials. “Now, these people have become very active and encourage others to get involved,” Dr. Oum stated with some pride. He concludes that this has been important in creating a foundation of legitimacy for Rachana that serves to expedite the process of sharing ideas and influencing others in the community.

Sok Sokhon of Chivit Thmei says that in the initial stages, even if Chivit Thmei’s staff explained the concepts and ideas of the organization, many in the community did not believe them. There were even people hired by the authorities to spy on the NGO, and there were instances when those who were active in organizations could end up in jail or worse if they were suspected of engaging in unauthorized activities. Political dynamics evolved into a more amicable state with Chivit Thmei over time, but



Working in twelve Provinces, Human Rights Vigilance promotes advocacy issues such as land security. Vigilance also represents landless families involved in legal action to gain rights to the land they live on

relations between governing authorities and NGOs were often hedged by cautious overtones. The Chivit Thmei director stated, "After the 1993 elections, politics wasn't as big a problem, as people began to realize that Chivit Thmei's focus was only on rural development." However, over the ensuing years, Chivit Thmei's popularity among people in the district caught the attention of politicians who wanted to use Chivit Thmei for political purposes. Even as late as 1999 a provincial report accused Chivit Thmei of possibly being involved or connected to a rebel political movement. Sokhon stated, "There seemed to be an underlying fear among the political authorities that people would become empowered more than they would like. However, the *NGO Fair* held in Battambang in May 2000 funded by Pact, helped significantly to improve the relationship and understanding between Cambodian NGOs and the local government." At present, he notes, "The provincial governor is more understanding and cooperates and collaborates with local NGOs."

The frequent references made by the NGO leaders to the specter of politics that often overshadows their work, underlines the influence of the political culture in Cambodia. The director of Chivit Thmei theorized that politics inevitably becomes an issue in development work in Cambodia because organizations' activities focus on the poorest in society. If an NGO happens to be concerned with human rights issues, politicians can make the working environment for the organization especially arduous and frustrating. Phoung Sith of Human Rights Vigilance said that in his experience, "politicians often believe that human rights activists protect thieves." Furthermore, he related that there were situations where government officials will not intervene in human rights cases if it has political overtones.

Turning Confrontation into Collaboration

The Urban Sector Group (USG) is a CCOP partner NGO that started in 1993 as a forum that concentrated on exchanging information, as well as providing a mechanism to coordinate advocacy initiatives for squatter communities in Phnom Penh. Over time, USG became involved in community organizing and development activities. Continual evictions within squatter communities led USG to concentrate on the issue of evictions and to make concerted efforts to influence government policy. USG was the first NGO (Cambodian or international) to focus its program initiatives on issues related to urban poverty. USG presently focuses its activities among 27 communities in 12 target zones within Phnom Penh. USG's current director, Mr. Lim Phai, joined USG in 1995.

The 300 squatter settlements in Phnom Penh are made up of approximately 200,000 people, or around 15% of the city's total population. Lim Phai noted that the overall land area occupied by squatter settlements has remained the same over the years even though the number of people living there has been growing. Previously the influx of squatters was more seasonal, tied to the agricultural cycle of farmers. But the trend in recent years has been for people to stay in the city year round, making the situation with the squatter settlements even more precarious.

The eviction of squatters in Phnom Penh is the most contentious issue with which USG is involved. "When authorities want to evict squatters, confrontation can develop," Lim Phai confirms. USG collaborates with human rights and legal NGOs in an effort to ensure that some level of justice and respect for the rights of the squatters is maintained. In addition to the collaboration with these NGOs, USG works with the UN Centre for Human Settlements. Mr. Lim admits that when a case of evicted squatters goes to court, they inevitably lose. "But on some occasions we are able to gain a compromise in terms of obtaining land for the squatters elsewhere. The improved relations with the authorities over the years has helped."

Similarly, if a human rights violation is perpetuated by a high ranking official in the government or military, it is difficult to pursue. On occasion, "Vigilance staff has received death threats from people connected to the Ministry of Defense," Phoung Sith stated. However, despite this, he takes solace in the fact that people have come to understand the concept of human rights and have come to understand this concept through their identification with Buddhist traditions and culture. But he affirms that the frame of mind of average Cambodians is formed from the culture within which they are immersed. Mr. Phoung adds that, "people are afraid of those with power and people in power are afraid of too much democracy, and that they will lose their position."

Sociologists and anthropologists who have studied Cambodian society and culture often refer to the *patron-client* relationship that pervades the mindset of Cambodians. People assume a subservient attitude to those with power and authority and look to the "good graces" of those in high positions to provide for their security and sustenance.

Aspects of this *patron-client* relationship were revealed in statements made by a number of NGO leaders who have participated in the CCOP program. Many identified Pact as a patron that, beyond offering financial assistance, had deeper obligations to those that the program nurtured. Pact is sometimes referred to in terms similar to a respected elder, with the NGO represented more in terms of an adolescent. These representations are made in comments such as:

"Pact has been a very good parent to KWWA"
"Rachana is a child of Pact"
"Pact is like a father that teaches his child."

How these perceptions will affect NGOs relationships with other donors after their relationship with Pact ends is open to conjecture. While most of the NGOs funded under CCOP have already made transition from the CCOP program, instances likely will remain where the management of NGOs will expect ongoing assistance.

Achieving impact

Reflecting upon what their organizations have accomplished, NGO leaders provided insights into the affect that their interventions have had on their target populations. NGO leaders also pondered where improvements could be made, both in terms of their own work and in terms of Pact's work.

For community development organizations, NGOs see increased incomes, improved water sanitation, a greater awareness of health issues, and exposure to new agricultural techniques. Pouk Chamroeun of KRDA notes: "KRDA has developed people's knowledge and awareness of issues that affect their everyday life." He explained that previously, "There was no knowledge in the community of how to grow different fruit trees or home gardens, since they didn't have the technical skills. But now they understand how they can improve their income by growing different vegetables and fruit." Savings and credit programs that have been implemented by several of Pact's NGO partners have also contributed to financial security and stability for many rural families. In KRDA's credit program, of the 5% interest paid on loans, KRDA pays 2% into a village fund from which people can borrow or the community can use in infrastructure projects. Yous Thy of KWWA asserts that the savings and credit program her organization established has provided new opportunities for poor women. Now that these women have the ability to save, she said, "They can send their children to school or generate a small business".

Technical training has improved business performance and business planning for both urban and rural people participating in savings and credit programs. In addition, the saving and credit programs have had the added effect of reducing the influence of moneylenders. Programs that have developed rice banks, animal banks, and home gardening were also cited as contributing to food and financial security.

Training and the dissemination of information in program areas such as health have made people more aware of health issues and has resulted in improved water sanitation, and better child and maternal health. Rachana has a vaccination program for children that targets six diseases, and the organization also has a birth-spacing program that has been given recognition by other people in the health sector. A health volunteer researcher who conducted a national survey for World Vision in 2000, singled-out Rachana's program for the impact it had, indicating that 45% of the mothers in the district where Rachana works practiced some form of birth spacing, more than double the national average of 21%.

Health education programs have also created a general awareness of the need to seek proper health care. The director of KWWA emphasizes that through the efforts of her organization, "People are more aware of the benefits of seeking hospital care rather than going to traditional healers." More generally she adds that KWWA's efforts have "created an atmosphere where people have a better idea of health care for their families." Pouk

Chamroeun estimates that as a result of KRDA's program approximately 70% of the local people now know about birth spacing, water sanitation and taking medicine. However, he qualifies, "poor people are afraid of the expense of going to a doctor when they are sick and they may likely go to a traditional healer instead. So in some cases KRDA staff take them to a doctor."

Overall, the NGO leaders found increased confidence among the local people and a greater awareness of issues. Sok Sokhon of Chivit Thmei states that some community leaders can now write proposals themselves, and recently, self-help groups have been formed in Chivit Thmei's target communities to encourage savings and to focus on women's issues.

The director of BFD also confirms that as a result of the increased capacity within local communities where BFD is active, his organization is now able to localize activities, encouraging local empowerment. Youk Thy of KWWA also asserts that people in local communities "now have the capacity to help themselves and now volunteer to join the program rather than having to be convinced to join." Pouk Chamroeun of KRDA describes how the activities of KRDA have allowed people to benefit from knowledge on health issues, credit programs, and food security. However, he laments, "Poverty is still a problem. Out of a family of ten people maybe only two have jobs."

For NGO support organization grantees, program impact was measured in terms of increased human resource capacity and networking, advocacy and awareness raising. Thida Khus of Silaka felt one of the most rewarding aspects of her work with Silaka was "broadening the experience of Cambodians in order to provide them with skills and technical expertise." Phoung Sith of Vigilance also valued the new skills Cambodians had in human rights, democracy and the law. He takes pride in the fact that in the most politically unstable years, police from three different political factions were trained in their role in democracy by Vigilance. Since the integration of the police force, Phoung Sith claims that the training they received has resulted in identifiable improvements in how police conduct themselves. He has also detected improvements in the human rights policies of the government, in which he feels his organization's efforts have played a role.

Siv Sophy of Vaddhanak states that an estimated 50% of the staff of both Cambodian and international NGOs in the province of Kampong Chhnang have received training from her organization. This training has resulted in a pronounced improvement in staff skills in communication, understanding concepts, encouraging people to participate in community development, as well as working more effectively with technical staff. Additionally, staff can formulate clearer plans, develop indicators, and facilitate meetings. Siv Sophy points out that training has allowed skills and knowledge to be transferred to community members, giving them a renewed sense of self-reliance. This greater understanding of the concept of community development has, in turn, resulted in strengthening community solidarity, as groups gain direct benefits from their activities, "villagers now have the ability to create activities on their own and to establish associations by themselves."

CHED's director, Lok Vichet, describes the impact of his organization's programs in training NGO and national and provincial government ministry health educators in water sanitation, reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, and general health. Additionally, the health education material produced by CHED is highly regarded and is used by most NGOs and government in the health sector.

Another of CCOP's grantees, Social Services of Cambodia offers very specialized training programs, and measures its accomplishments in terms of developing sound models for delivering social services, building a database of information on mental health patients, and designing training methods that work in the Cambodian context. Ellen Minotti explains that despite the fact that the Ministry of Social Affairs is one of the ministries with the lowest prestige, SSC's program has given staff a sense that their line of work is a profession and that it is possible to get satisfaction from it. Additionally Ellen Minotti points to the influence SSC has had in developing the social service system in Cambodia and keeping mental health an issue where social workers have a role. She concludes, "SSC has been able to do a lot with a little."

The leaders of these organizations also noted a number of accomplishments with regard to networking, collaboration, and advocacy. Nhek Sarin of Star Kampuchea admits that it has been a challenge to build strong NGO networks because weaknesses remain with regard to transparency, participation, and the understanding of the role of NGOs in civil society. Yet, his organization has made some significant achievements by establishing three types of civil society networks. A national network includes thirty-six cooperating organizations, an advocacy team follows government policy and conducts workshops, and a network of union federations organizes forums and conducts training in advocacy. Provincial networks have been established in Pursat, Kampong Cham, Svay Rieng, and Kampong Som.



Animal Health Training conducted by KRDA in Battambang Province

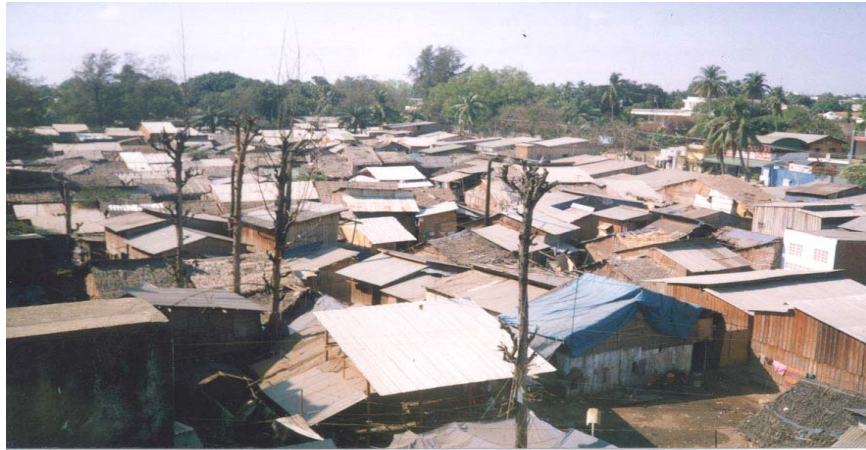
Similarly, Siv Sophy of Vaddhanak points to networking efforts of her organization in strengthening collaboration with other NGOs in Kampong Chhnang and other provinces. Vaddhanak is presently undertaking a collaborative process with five Cambodian NGOs to initiate a program called Cambodians for Decentralized Development. She confirms that collaboration efforts between NGOs, "has helped in sharing good and bad experiences and learning from and helping each other."

The NGO directors also noted that their collaboration efforts with various government departments and ministries at the national and provincial levels of government have resulted in cooperative working relations between the NGOs and the different levels of government. Lok Vichet of CHED cites the good relationship his organization established with Provincial Departments of Health, which has contributed to the impact of CHED's AIDS program. Vigilance has formed a coalition with two other Cambodian human rights organizations, ADHOC and LICADHO, and the Committee for Free and Fair Elections (COMFREL).

Most of the CCOP NGO partners found additional evidence of their accomplishments in the recognition their organizations have achieved and the corresponding good reputations they have built over time. This recognition has come from people within target communities and in government circles. For organizations such as SSC, which have been undertaking particularly unique initiatives, the increased recognition of the work of the organization has

resulted in people being more receptive to their program and in more requests for training in SSC's field of expertise. With USG's work among squatter communities, the recognition of the organization's efforts by local authorities has reduced the chances of confrontation when dealing with delicate issues of resettlement.

Being able to identify changes in the ways people think about their circumstances or how they see themselves is another achievement a number of the CCOP partner NGOs noted. The director of Silaka describes her organization as having played a major role in creating ideas among the population concerning advocacy. Heng Monychenda of BFD



One of the squatter communities in Phnom Penh where USG implements its programs.

talks about the changed morality noticed by the parents of children who received training in Cambodian social and ethical values. And the director of KWWA witnesses an increased solidarity and empowerment of women who come together to discuss their ideas and experiences.

NGO leaders also discussed aspects that they felt hindered the progress of their individual programs. Some of the factors that were noted in this regard referred to more general problems, while others were specifically targeted at Pact itself. General problems included the migration of people who leave the community to look for work, or farmers whose agricultural production is destroyed by floods or drought and who no longer can participate in savings and credit schemes, and rice banks and animal banks.

Other NGO directors referred to a lack of unity among Cambodian NGOs and the challenge of creating strong NGO networks. Still others noted that working with the poorest of the poor creates formidable difficulties that adversely affect the impact NGOs can have. Lack of education in poor communities results in low capacity levels. In addition, the poorest people are often too preoccupied with day-to-day sustenance to participate actively in an organization's programs. The director of USG explained that "efforts at community participation usually results in only a 40% to 50% participation levels at best, as it is difficult to gain broad-based participation unless the people can determine before hand that they will directly benefit."

The NGO partners identified issues with Pact as well. Several NGOs were concerned about the frequency of the turnover of Pact's program staff, particularly the number of times the country representative changed, four times over ten years. As the director of BFD noted, "By the time the country representative becomes familiar with the program of the NGOs, they leave." The BFD director went on to comment that the turnover of country representatives has given him the impression that Pact might not have a long-term strategy for its local NGO partners. The frequency in the turnover of Pact program officers raised concerns about program management, and the fact that when new program officers became involved, organizations would have to convince them anew that their programs had value.

In terms of the program itself, a number NGOs felt that CCOP emphasized certain program areas at the expense of others. In particular, it was felt that the CCOP concentrated on organizational elements and less on community organization and community development skills that would improve efforts to maintain secure and sustainable livelihoods for people.

More general concerns with the CCOP program focused on assessments and assessment tools. The director of Rachana observed that “[while] the Pact staff revealed mistakes made by the organization when they made site visits, they didn’t provide advice.” In addition, Rachana’s director claimed that Pact didn’t provide feedback after assessments of the organization’s program were conducted. He stressed that the assessment report was not discussed with him in terms of whether or not he accepted the recommendations, and he felt that the assessment caused Pact to terminate support to Rachana. With respect to the self-assessment tool, Nhek Sarin of Star Kampuchea claimed that the OCA tool was not clear and no recommendations were provided. “We need more specifics on what needs to be improved,” he declared.

Despite these critical comments, overall, the NGO directors acknowledged the contributions that Pact had made to their organizations outweighed the negative impacts. The capacity building in technical, organizational, and management skills has resulted in much stronger organizations. In turn, these NGOs are able to make valuable contributions to Cambodian society and to have a significant impact on the lives of the most vulnerable populations in the country.

A possible wild card: the proposed NGO law

A coalition of international and local NGOs, including Pact, came together in 1996 to form a working group to collaborate with the Cambodian government on development of a draft law governing NGOs and other associations. Weekly meetings were convened to make recommendations to the draft law and these recommendations were eventually submitted to the Ministry of Interior. After the Ministry of Interior made some revisions, the document was sent to the Council of Ministers for approval. Both international NGOs and Cambodian NGOs hoped that their interests would be protected with the passage of the new law. To prepare for this, the coalition of Cambodia NGOs, Ponleu Khmer, organized training sessions for Cambodian NGOs so they could learn about the requirements of the law.

The government made the draft NGO law public in July 1996, and from the discussions held among NGOs, a meeting was arranged with the Minister of Interior in order to go over aspects of the draft law. In reviewing the draft, the NGOs discovered that the Ministry of Interior had made revisions that reflected the minister’s priorities and desires more than the recommendations of the NGOs. However, in the end, the discussions were fruitful and resulted in the ministry agreeing to most of the changes suggested by the NGOs.

Unfortunately these efforts were for naught, as the political turmoil of 1997 put an effective end to passage of the NGO law. In October 1997 the Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) of then Second Prime Minister Hun Sen established a commission called the CPP NGO Monitoring Commission to monitor NGOs that the CPP felt “should be paid attention to from now till the 1998 elections,” according to an internal CPP memo (*Phnom Penh Post*, Jan.30-Feb. 13, 1998). The commission targeted human rights organizations and aid groups funded by USAID, as well as religious organizations, such as World Vision, to assess the extent to which such NGOs were allegedly involved in political activities.

In 1998 the government prepared a new draft NGO law that superceded all previous drafts. However, in the opinion of a legal consultant for the NGO Legal Aid of Cambodia, the Ministry of Interior's draft law was "about to eliminate the ability of just about every NGO in Cambodia to function." The new draft law was "a drastically changed version of a 1996 draft" and was described by many critics as "draconian." Funding restrictions were outlined for both foreign and local NGOs, and critics expressed concern about wording to the effect that foreign NGOs may not "cause any trouble to the politics of the Royal Government of Cambodia." NGO representatives feared "that a post-election CPP-dominated government could be controlling and restrictive" (*Phnom Penh Post*, July 17-23, 1998). There was a sense of betrayal among those NGO representatives who had taken part in the dialogue to this point in time, who felt that the process had not been transparent even though the Ministry of Interior assured all concerned parties that dialogue with the NGOs was important in order to get as much input as possible. To date, this new draft NGO law has yet to be passed by the government legislators.

FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The NGO leaders appear to be evenly split in opinions on the prospects for Cambodian NGOs. Most of their comments were qualified with statements that the continued growth and strength of Cambodian NGOs will depend on several factors. These factors include the presence of donor agencies, the prevailing political situation, government support and recognition, and the development of local communities and Cambodian society as a whole.

A number of the NGO directors felt that, with decreasing financial support from the donor community, it was inevitable that many NGO doors would close in the years to come. Smaller and weaker organizations would eventually succumb to, as one director stated, “the inability to develop ideas or a lack of funding.” At the Future Directions Workshop in September 1998 one participant commented, “The nature of the NGO sector is that it is nonprofit, and therefore, will never be self-sufficient on its own resources.”

Other NGO directors spoke to the importance of the ongoing political situation and the extent to which Cambodian NGOs can influence government policy and have a more significant impact on Cambodian society. The director of USG pointed out that very few Cambodian NGOs could currently do this. He stressed, “Now that the government is receiving support from the donor community, Cambodian NGOs can pressure donors to influence government (policy); otherwise the government won’t listen.” In this respect, another NGO leader noted, Cambodian NGOs need to recognize the role networks can play in providing a voice to the government.

One director emphasized this by stating that the Cambodian NGOs must be ever conscious of “the heavy hand of the government.” The proposed NGO Law will be significant in this regard. A majority of the NGO leaders were resigned to the fact that the NGO Law would be made up of both favorable and unfavorable elements. At best it was felt that the law would provide clear operating guidelines. At worst the law could be very restrictive with respect to the activities the NGOs would be able to undertake. The director of CHED thought the new law would be useful for NGOs since, “without such a law the government can do anything they want to Cambodian NGOs.” The director of Star Kampuchea thought that an NGO law would not be necessary if the NGOs were strong and abided by a code of ethics, but he qualified this by stressing that, “in a situation where the political environment is unstable, it would be good to have an NGO Law.”

Besides government showing a commitment to the NGOs, NGOs will also have to demonstrate their commitment to their respective target communities and Cambodian society as a whole. Pouk Chamroeun of KRDA expressed this idea succinctly when he stated, “If the local communities don’t progress, the NGOs will not progress.” The director of Silaka summed it up best when she said, “There is no turning back. The role of NGOs in civil society will continue to strengthen.” By putting a focus on the grassroots level and forging communications links and action plans that will help people decide what will happen in their communities, she foresees a development perspective that will be progressive rather than regressive. The initiative that Pact took back in 1991 has contributed to the establishment of a foundation of strong and competent organizations and the formation of vital networks in Cambodia. The paths taken to attain this have been as varied as they have been formidable. Cristina Mansfield, author of *What Does the Future Hold?*, concluded in her report that, “given the number of NGOs Pact has supported and the fact that the NGOs were new, and in many instances, Pact was the first donor, the failure rate has been exceptionally low; only

three NGOs out of 50 have failed.” She continues by stating, “Most startup NGOs have been able to continue implementing activities, develop their human resources, weather management crises, and find donors to support them.” Undoubtedly the Cambodia Community Outreach Program started a process in which, indeed, there is no turning back for the Cambodian NGO sector and for Cambodian civil society.



Children at an NGO supported pre-school

CCOP SUB-GRANTEES

U.S.-Based Sub-grantees

No.	Name	Abbreviation	Location	Grant Dates
1	Cambodian American National Development Organization	CANDO	Phnom Penh	Jun. 94 – Dec. 96
2	Cambodian Humanitarian Foundation	CHF	Takeo	Jul. 94 – Oct. 96
3	Food for the Hungry International	FHI	Kampot	Dec. 94 – Dec. 96
4	Healthnet International	HNI	Svay Rieng	Jan. 94 – Nov. 96
5	Hellen Keller International	HKI	Nation-wide	Apr. 94 – Mar. 96
6	International Medical Corps	IMC	Svay Rieng	Jul. 92 – Feb. 94
7	International Catholic Migration Commission	ICMC	Battambang	Mar. 94 – Feb. 96
8	Khmer Buddhist Society	KBS	Kampong Speu	Jun. 94 – May 96
9	RehabCraft-Maryknoll		Phnom Penh	Aug. 95 – Jan. 96
10	United Cambodian Community	UCC	Kampot	Aug. 92 – Apr. 96
11	University of Massachusetts Foundation	UMF	Kampong -Chhnang	Apr. 94 – Mar. 96

Cambodia-based Sub-grantees

No.	Name	Abbreviation	Location	Grant Dates
1	Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association	ADHOC	Phnom Penh	Dec. 92 – Nov. 93
2	Buddhism for Development	BFD	Battambang	Sep. 92 – Jun. 01
3	Battambang Women's Aids Project	BWAP	Battambang	Apr. 92 – Mar. 98
4	Banteay Srei	BS	Battambang, Siem Reap	Oct. 00 – Mar. 01
5	Committee of the Development for Friendship of Rural Youth	CDFRY	Phnom Penh	Dec. .92 – Apr. 93
6	Cambodia Association for Development of Economy Together	CADET	PP. & Takeo	Sep. 93 – May .95
7	Cambodia Family Development Services	CFDS	Phnom Penh	Jan. 94 – Mar. 97
8	Cambodian Volunteers for Community Development	CVCD	Phnom Penh	Mar. 94 – Aug. 97

No.	Name	Abbreviation	Location	Grant Dates
9	Cambodian Women's Development Agency	CWDA	Phnom Penh	Mar. 94 – Dec. 97
10	Cambodian Conductors Association	CCA	Phnom Penh	Jun. 94 – May 96
11	Cambodian Midwives Association	CMA	Phnom Penh	Jan. 95 – May 97
12	Chivit Thmey	CT	Battambang	Mar. 95 – Jun..98
13	International Cooperation for Development and Solidarity	CIDSE	Phnom Penh	Jun. 96 – Jul. 96
14	Cambodian Health Education Development	CHED	Battambang	Jul. 96 – Jun. 01
15	Cooperation Committee for Cambodia	CCC	Phnom Penh	Aug. 96 – Jan. 97
16	Coalition for Peace and Reconciliation	CPR	Phnom Penh	Mar. 95 – Jun. 97
17	Center for Advanced Study	CAS	Phnom Penh	May.97 – Oct. 97
18	Cambodia Migration and Development Committee	CMDC	Battambang	May 97 – Aug. 97
19	Culture and Environment Preservation Association	CEPA	Phnom Penh	Sep. 97 – June 01
20	Centre d'Etude et de Developpement Agricole	CEDAC	Phnom Penh	Aug. 99 – Sep. 99
21	Cambodians for Decentralization of Development	CDD	Phnom Penh, Nation-wide	Sep. 00 – Mar. 01
22	Friends-Mith Samlang	Friends	Phnom Penh	Mar. 96 – Mar. 97
23	Khmer Students Association	KSA	Phnom Penh	Mar. 93 – Sep. 93
24	Khmer Rural Development Association	KRDA	Battambang	May 93 – Mar. 98
25	Khmer Students and Intellectuals Association	KSIA	Phnom Penh	Jul. 93 - Dec. 94
26	Kratie Women Welfare Association	KWWA	Kratie	Sep. 94 – Jun. 01
27	Kasekor Thmey	KT	Kg. Cham	Jun. 96 – Jun. 01
28	Kottarak NGO Alliance	Kottarak	Battambang	Aug. 97 – Sep. 98
29	Khmer National Community Economic Development	KNCED	Battambang	Jul. 99 – Jun. 00
30	Minority Organization for Development of Economy	MODE	Kampong Thom	Feb. 94 – Jun. 01
31	Mother's Love	Mother's Love	Kandal	Nov. 95 – Aug. 96

No.	Name	Abbreviation	Location	Grant Dates
32	MEDICAM	Medicam	Phnom Penh	Jun. 96 – Jun. 01
33	Nyemo	NYEMO	Phnom Penh	May 00 – Oct.00
34	OXFAM UK/I	Oxfam UK/I	Phnom Penh	Oct.96 – Oct.96
35	Federation of Ponleu Khmer	FPK	Phnom Penh	Jun..95 – Jan..97
36	Ponlok	Ponlok	Phnom Penh	Nov.95 – Dec. 95
37	Rural Family Development	RUFADE	Banteay Meanchey	Jan. 94 – Jun.97
38	Rachana	RACHANA	Takeo	Jan. 97 – Jun. 98
39	Rural Development Association	RDA	Battambang	Jul. 99 – Jun. 01
40	Samakee	SAMAKEE	Svay Rieng	Mar. 94 – Jun. 01
41	Socio Economic Development Organization of Cambodia	SEDOC	Phnom Penh	Apr. 94 – Jun. 94
42	SABORAS	SABORAS	Battambang	May 95 – Oct. 95
43	Social Services of Cambodia	SSC	Kampong Speu	Nov. 96 – Jun. 01
44	SILAKA	SILAKA	Phnom Penh	Jan. 97 – Apr. 01
45	Star- Kampuchea	STAR-K	Phnom Penh	Sep. 97 – Jun. 01
46	Human Rights Vigilance	Vigilance	Phnom Penh	Mar. 94 – Jun. 97
47	Vaddhanak	Vaddhanak	Kampong Chhnang	Apr. 96 – Mar. 01
48	Training Institute for Organization Managers	VBNK	Phnom Penh	Apr. 97 – Nov. 98
49	Urban Sector Group	USG	Phnom Penh	Mar. 95 – Jun. 01
50	UCC Development Foundation	UDF	Kampot	Jan. 97 – Dec. 97
51	Women for Prosperity	WFP	Phnom Penh	Nov. 96 – Jun. 96