

Cambodia–Canada Legislative Support Project

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Supporting Strategic Parliamentary Reform: Lessons Learned from the Cambodia-Canada Legislative Support Project (CCLSP)

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As we are near completion of the six years of CCLSP programming, it is timely to look back from where we started, assess progress and share lessons learned. At the inception of the program, the baseline study conducted on the state of the Cambodian parliament identified several areas for capacity building in three key functions of parliament - legislation, representation, oversight, as well as the area of professional institutional support for parliamentarians. Significant results in all these areas have been achieved, which were confirmed by an independent evaluation conducted in Fall 2006.



Amelita Armit, Vice President, Programs, Parliamentary Centre

Legislative Function

There is a growing awareness of the role of parliament in Cambodia's governance process. The development of a legislative agenda and its wide dissemination to the public has contributed to the visibility and accessibility of parliament. The adoption and/or modification of internal rules to allow for adequate review of draft laws has expanded the space for political debate and opened the doors for exercising parliament's oversight function.

Parliament's use of public hearings and consultations with experts and civil society, its participation in policy-themed seminars and workshops and study missions and site visits have contributed to improved legislative policy-making. This was demonstrated in the initiation of draft laws (e.g. draft laws on Domestic Violence, Senate Election Law, Monogamy, Legislative Servants Law), where parliamentarians had better informed analysis and review.

Representative Function

Many indicators attest to the improved responsiveness and outreach of parliament to its constituents and the wider public. The number of hearings in the National Assembly increased by more than half. The number of constituencies visited by parliamentarians has grown more than 5 times in 2004-2005 compared to 2003-2004. There was also a significant increase in the volume of individual and civil society group submissions and requests for appearance in Commissions' hearings. All these factors clearly indicate Parliament's improved accessibility to the public and its recognition of civil society as partners in Cambodian development.

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Parliamentary Centre
Le Centre parlementaire

Institutional Support

Major headways were achieved in the area of legislative support and parliamentary administration. Skills training and capacity building activities were provided to staff in research analysis, report writing, and preparation of briefing notes to the extent that parliamentarians surveyed noted improvement in the support they received in these areas. Efficiencies were gained in parliamentary management and administration through assistance provided in establishing planning processes and HR and financial policies and procedures. The progress achieved by the General Secretariat of the Senate is particularly notable.

Lessons Learned

The leadership at the highest level and political will are essential to the success of the legislative support project. Both the Presidents of the National Assembly and the Senate actively supported the implementation of the CCLSP, which was an important factor that contributed to the success of the project. The Secretary General of the Senate and the leaders within the Women's Caucus were champions that followed through on activity implementation, built project momentum and served as models of change.

Clear project delivery principles must be established at the outset. Flexibility, neutrality, engagement of all political parties remained core principles of the CCLSP. The project delivery principles served as buffer to changes in project environment. These allowed the project to sustain its activities during period of political impasse. An effective field presence was also critical in building confidence in the project. Its solid understanding of the local context and extensive network of contacts helped to establish trusting relationships with partners.

The impact of training activities can be maximized through mutually reinforcing strategies:

- training design based on a long-term strategy, with training modules that build on one another, rather

than one-off activities,

- establishment of criteria for the selection of participants, such as motivation, readiness and absorptive capacity,
- reinforcement of training outcomes and practice of acquired skills through handbooks, guidelines and similar learning resources that can be used over and over again.

The use of local resources as an integral part of the program design and delivery ensures buy-in and confidence in the capacity building activities, as well as sustainability. Knowledge acquired and skills learned remain in Cambodia as lasting legacies of the Project.

The overarching lesson learned from the CCLSP experience is that parliamentary development is a long term process; reforms cannot happen overnight - working with parliaments must be seen as a continuing work in progress.

These lessons learned will serve as guideposts to future parliamentary strengthening programs in Cambodia. The CCLSP laid solid foundations and achieved results, but much remains to be done. There are clear challenges and opportunities ahead: a renewed focus on capacity building for the National Assembly; expanding on the representative capacity of the Senate as it defines its new roles with commune councils; establishment of provincial offices to deepen citizen engagement and enhance constituency relationships and accessibility of parliamentarians; an invigorated focus on the oversight function to address donor concerns about accountability and aid effectiveness; the continuing professionalization of staff in the Secretariats and many others.

CCLSP has contributed significantly to improve the capacity, competence, and performance of the Cambodian Parliament. The project results are even more impressive viewed against the political/governance context surrounding the implementation

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of the project. During the six year period, the Project rode the wave of four elections, worked around a parliamentary boycott and a political deadlock, observed shifts in party alliances and celebrated, along with others, the auspicious inauguration of the new National Assembly building on the 7th day of the 7th month of 2007. These events demonstrate the truism that political

contexts are very dynamic and central institutions of governance like parliaments can be at its vortex. They also underscore the fact that parliamentary development programs can thrive in fragile and volatile environments, and can, in fact, be a rich source of learning for program design and delivery.

Royal Order Award



In June 2008, His Majesty King of Cambodia Preah Bat Samdech Preah Norodom Sihamoni signed the Royal decree awarding Mr. Bunleng Men, CCLSP Field Manager, and Mrs. Sokhayouk Mom, Deputy Field Manager, with the Royal Order of Monisaraphon with the rank of “Mohasena” and the rank of “Thipdin” respectively. The Royal Order of Monisaraphon was established in the late 19th Century by King Sisowath for distinguished services in the field of Education, Justice, Administration, Science, Literature and Fine Arts.

The Royal Orders are given to acknowledge the contributions that Mr. Men and Mrs. Mom made to the development of public institutions and public administration services in Cambodia. Mr. Men and Mrs. Mom were recommended for the awards by the President of the National Assembly and the President of the Senate of Cambodia.

The Award Ceremony was held on June 19th, 2008 at the Senate of Cambodia.

Presidents' Forum
“Moving Forward: Lessons Learned from the Cambodia-Canada Legislative Support Project”
December 4, 2007



The Presidents' Forum is an annual activity, unique to the Parliamentary Centre's Canada-Cambodia Legislative Support Project (CCLSP). It is a venue designed to explore issues of parliamentary reform crucial to the Cambodian context and to report on progress and future directions. The third Forum took place in Phnom Penh on December 4th, 2007. It was co-chaired by Samdech Heng Samrin, President of the National Assembly, and H.R.H Samdech Sisowath Chivanmonirak, First Vice President of the Senate. The Forum was attended by more than 200 participants including Cambodian parliamentarians and senior legislative staff, government officials, members of the diplomatic corps, representatives of international organizations and civil society. This Forum focused on the lessons learned from the implementation of the CCLSP over the last 6 years and the way they could contribute to increasing effectiveness of other capacity development projects for the parliament of Cambodia.

Participants discussed the state of parliamentary development in the world and evolving views on the role of representative institutions in governance processes. While the legislative function remains a significant one, the oversight and representative roles of parliament become increasingly important. Parliament is a key institution that ensures that the road to good governance is followed and continuous improvements are made on the way. However, in order to successfully fulfill all these roles, parliament

has to be an effective and efficient institution itself.

The CCLSP, as all speakers unanimously concurred, provided significant contribution to enhancing the Cambodian parliament's capacity to execute its responsibilities. Samdech Heng Samrin, President of the National Assembly of Cambodia, underscored the overall contribution CCLSP made to good governance and democratic development in the country through activities, which endowed the Cambodian parliament with strengthened ability to better exercise its law-making, representative and oversight roles. He also highlighted the fact that CCLSP, to ensure sustainability of the project, produced more than 50 manuals and guidelines on parliamentary procedures, among which are:

- Rule of laws norms guidelines;
- Key steps on gender analysis of legislation;
- Handbook for parliamentarians on poverty reduction policies;
- Parliamentary oversight of gender equity;
- Conflict of interest codes for members of National Assembly and Senate;
- Guidelines on public consultations;
- Guidelines on human resources management policies in parliament;
- Quarterly parliamentary bulletin.

HE Samdech Heng Samrin, President of the National Assembly of Cambodia, also mentioned that the parliament was able to develop its own “Strategic Framework and Action Plan for Capacity Strengthening”, which outlined the intended short, medium, and long term results, which are critical for the successful functioning of the parliament. This plan will also be instrumental in coordinating current and future legislative development assistance programs.

Cambodian parliamentarians from both chambers that have been actively involved in the program

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commended CCLSP not on just the knowledge and expertise it had imparted, but also on a professional, impartial approach it assumed in its cooperation with the parliament of Cambodia. The parliamentarians also praised the responsiveness and flexibility of the project towards the real needs of the legislature. All the speakers agreed that strengthening democratic institutions is a long term process and while CCLSP developed a strong foundation for strengthening the work of the Parliament of Cambodia, still a lot remains to be done. Therefore they all reiterated their strong hope for the continuation of the program.

In officially closing the forum, H.R.H. Prince Chivanmonirak mentioned that the need to strengthen institutions and mechanisms of good governance is one of the greatest challenges facing Cambodia today. The CCLSP through the President's Forum created a highly effective venue to network, foster dialogue, develop cooperation, and share knowledge, experiences, best practices and lessons learned on issues relating to governance and transparency among parliamentary leaders, which is a key to success in strengthening good governance in Cambodia.

Cambodia Election Observation Mission

Parliamentary elections for the National Assembly (lower chamber of the National Parliament) were held in the Kingdom of Cambodia on July 27, 2008. Mr. Bunleng Men, Field Manager of the Canada-Cambodia Legislative Support Project (CCLSP), was invited to serve as one of the international observers to the electoral process. Mr. Men's monitoring mission took place in Kampong Cham province. This constituency has the largest number of seats (18 out of 123) allocated to it in the National Assembly. Mr. Men was observing the electoral process and procedures in about 20 polling stations in the province.

While mixed, his observations of the elections were generally quite favourable. He praised the more transparent, free and democratic election process and also stressed the fact that the election day was devoid of violence that used to accompany such events in the past. It is important to mention that this was the first time since 1976 that the ballots were counted in the polling station, instead of being stored overnight and sent to be counted in tallying stations. That new procedure contributed to the accountability and transparency of the process, allowing for the results to be transmitted faster and eliminating opportunities for electoral fraud. Among other positive trends, he particularly mentioned that electors were able to fill their ballots in secret. While the overall results of the elections were not surprising, it is interesting to note that this is the first time that five political parties will be represented in the National Assembly.

Negative aspects were less prominent and appeared rather as mistakes inevitable in a transition period than deliberate attempts to impact the electoral outcome: some electors complained of having their names misspelled on the electoral lists or their dates of birth being partially incorrect. Another observation was that while the staff of the National Election Commission (NEC) was working quite efficiently, they often seem to be not well aware of the procedures they needed to follow according to the NEC guidelines, which showed the need of more rigorous training for the NEC employees.

Overall, the elections were perceived as another step on the path to more democratic governance regime in the country.

National Stakeholder Workshop on "Pro-poor Development, Women's Affairs, Water Resources Management, and Communications. As a result, the budgets for three ministries responsible for some of these areas have been significantly increased in the 2008 draft budget law. Taking into account that the poor reside predominately in rural areas and their livelihoods heavily depend on agricultural activities, the 42% increase in the budget of the Ministry of Agriculture is a particularly encouraging sign.

On November 27, 2007, the Canada-Cambodia Legislative Strengthening Project, in collaboration with the 2nd Commission of the National Assembly of Cambodia, the Senate of Cambodia, the Economic Institute of Cambodia, and the NGO Forum on Cambodia organised the Fifth Annual Workshop on the National Budget Law. The workshop was attended by almost 100 participants: members of the National Assembly and the Senate, senior legislative and government officials, representatives of the international donor community, civil society, and the media.

The purpose of the workshop was to discuss the concerns raised by civil society in regards to the draft 2008 budget law submitted to the National Assembly and evaluate the way the new budget addresses the pressing issues Cambodia currently faces.

Speakers underlined that the increasing interest civil society expresses in the budgetary process is a very encouraging trend, which contributes to more effective and more accountable government. Civil society organisations that often work with poor regions and marginalised populations can provide meaningful inputs to the development and implementation of poverty reduction policies.

Participants also noted that the draft law was in line with the Royal Government of Cambodia's National Strategic Development Plan as it targets poverty reduction as one of its chief goals. The workshop's attendees noted a substantial increase of the revenue part of the budget, which they believed was a positive tendency that might significantly contribute to the combat against poverty. Those funds in the views of many of the workshop's participants should be allocated to poverty alleviating projects, rebuilding the country's infrastructure, and strengthening the judiciary.

The Royal Government of Cambodia identified seven areas as key to achieving poverty reduction - Education, Public Health, Agriculture, Rural

Development, Women's Affairs, Water Resources Management, and Communications. As a result, the budgets for three ministries responsible for some of these areas have been significantly increased in the 2008 draft budget law. Taking into account that the poor reside predominately in rural areas and their livelihoods heavily depend on agricultural activities, the 42% increase in the budget of the Ministry of Agriculture is a particularly encouraging sign.

The Workshop on the National Budget Law 2008 provided Cambodian civil society and the international community with the possibility to discuss the draft budget law, which contributes to more accountability and transparency in the state budgetary processes and also ensures that the government addresses urgent issues that the country aims to resolve.

Workshops on Parliamentary Communications Policies



In August 2007, Ms. Diane Boucher, Director of Communications in the Senate of Canada, travelled to Phnom Penh to conduct a series of workshops for staff of the National Assembly and the Senate of Cambodia. This activity was designed as a follow up to the visit of Paul Bélisle, Clerk of the Senate and Clerk of the Parliaments of Canada, that took place earlier that year.

The participants were familiarised with the structure of communications in the Canadian parliament and

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the partnership of the Senate, the House of Commons, the Library of Parliament and the Parliamentary Press Gallery. Ms. Boucher also talked about external and internal communications policies and led discussions and activities on the evolution of parliamentary communications through legislators' increased desire to communicate with the public, as a result of a changing perception of their own role in society, as well as changes in media technology. She emphasised the importance of having neutral, highly skilled staff, which would be able to deliver professional non-partisan services to legislatures of any political composition.

The participants discussed the role of parliamentarians as representatives of the people that elect them and how comprehensive communications strategy can contribute to enhancing this role by clarifying the parliament's role and providing accurate information about legislators' work. It can also help legislators to more effectively reach out to their constituents.

The workshop participants also received packages of information containing publications and tools produced by the Canadian Senate, the House of Commons and the Library of Parliament to promote Canada's national legislature. Cambodian participants highly appreciated the opportunity to take part in the training, which can help them play a more active role in fostering communications policies in the Parliament of Cambodia.

Canada-Cambodia Legislative Support Project

The CCLSP, funded by the Canadian International Development Agency, is based on a Memorandum of Understanding between the Governments of Cambodia and Canada. The Parliamentary Centre manages the project and works with local counterparts in order to promote sustainability and local ownership.



In the areas of legislation, representation and services of the Secretariats, and taking into account the principles of gender equality, the project aims to achieve the following sub-outcomes:

Project Objective

The main objective of the CCLSP is to contribute to good governance and democratic development in Cambodia through capacity development of the National Assembly and the Senate.

The project has three components:

1. Enhanced capacity of the National Assembly, the Senate and their Commissions to draft and review legislation;
2. Increased responsiveness of Members of Parliament to constituents;
3. Improved capacity of the Secretariats to support the National Assembly and Senate.

Legislation

- Improved management of the legislative agenda;
- Improved legislative drafting;
- Professional analysis provided by Commissions of Parliament;
- Incorporation of gender analysis in legislation.

Representation

- Improved public policy consultation by Commissions;
- Improved record keeping by Commissions of Parliament.

Secretariats

- Politically neutral services to all parties, through secretariats;
- Improved communication with the public about Parliament business;
- Improved legislative research support to Commissions;
- Improved management and administration;
- Improved recruitment and use of female staff.

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