Supporting New Parliamentarians: Parliamentary Assistance Handbook and Inaugural Orientation Session

Since the end of 2001, the Cambodia-Canada Legislative Support Project (CCLSP) has organized trainings for Cambodian parliamentarians in order to assist them in their roles and responsibilities as lawmakers. Following the general election of July 2008, CCLSP undertook a number of activities to prepare new MPs for their parliamentary duties, and to publicize the positive role of parliamentarians in the Kingdom. Drawing on the experience of the project over the previous seven years, CCLSP produced a “Parliamentary Assistance Handbook” for parliamentarians, which represented a consolidation of training materials and lessons learnt over the lifespan of the project. In cooperation with other partners, CCLSP also arranged an Inaugural Orientation Session for new parliamentarians, designed to teach them international best practice relating to the role of parliament and general parliamentary procedures. Both activities were highly praised by parliamentarians as being of great importance in helping them settle into and understand more about their roles.

The Handbook was first produced in 2007, and based on requests from readers it was edited and reproduced for parliamentarians following the 2008 election. It contained five main parts: the role and responsibilities of a legislator, tools and mechanisms for reviewing and analyzing legislation, policies and tools for legislators, how to monitor gender activities in parliament and the duties of the commission staff and constituency staff. The Handbook has been commended and recognized by parliamentarians as an essential tool in helping them become accustomed to different parliamentary roles and responsibilities, with 2000 copies being distributed to parliamentarians, parliamentary staff, civil society, donor organizations and the media. Following its distribution, extra copies were requested and this handbook has been added to the parliamentary library. All MPs who were contacted by project staff, representing both government and opposition parties, said that the handbook contained all the tools necessary to assist them in their daily work. The Handbook has also been commended by the Chairs of the Commissions on Economy, Finance, Banking and Audit on Public...
Works, Transport, Telecommunications, Post, Industry, Mines, Energy, Commerce, Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction, as well as the Vice-Chair of the National Assembly Commission on Legislation and Justice, as being a key publication for MPs and Senators.

The Inaugural Orientation Session for new parliamentarians was a two-day event, held on October 22nd and 23rd 2008, attended by around 110 legislators, including 20 female parliamentarians and 30 Senators. The event was organized jointly by the National Assembly, the UNDP, CCLSP and KAF and focused on legislative review and management, the role of the opposition, the role of the parliamentary administration and the role of female parliamentarians.

The objective of the activity was to introduce the current practices and internal rules of the National Assembly, and topics covered included the essential issues to focus on when reviewing legislation, how to conduct gender analysis when reviewing legislation, ensuring that the laws are worded in accessible language and cooperating with NGOs in the policy and legislative process. Participants praised the high quality of presentations, and felt that the sessions were beneficial for them in strengthening their awareness of crucial aspects of parliamentary procedure. During the inaugural session, five of the presenters recommended studying and regularly using the Handbook as a complete reference tool for new parliamentarians.

Visit to Cambodia by the Clerk of the Canadian Senate

In January 2009, Mr. Paul Bélisle, Clerk of the Senate and Clerk of the Parliaments, traveled to Cambodia as part of CCLSP. Deepening further the strong working relationship between the Senate of Canada and the Cambodian Parliament established under the project, Mr. Bélisle delivered several workshops and roundtables for parliamentarians and parliamentary staff covering the topics of communication strategy and practices, support services in parliament and strategic planning and human resource management.

Cambodian Senators that participated in the roundtable on communication strategies and practices reported that it helped in their efforts to improve communication to constituents, the public and the media.

A workshop on Strategic Planning and Human Resources Management delivered on January 14 by Mr. Bélisle assisted managers in the parliamentary administration in their work on continued modernization of human resources management policies and practices, including the consideration of gender issues and a better understanding of the well being of staff.

Mr. Bélisle also delivered an overview of support services to parliamentarians during a workshop for parliamentary staff from the Cambodian National Assembly and Senate held on January 16, 2009.

The visit was regarded as a great success by CCLSP’s partners in both the National Assembly and the Senate. While it contributed greatly to the achievement of the goals of the project, it also signified another step in fortifying the close friendship between the Senates of Canada and Cambodia.
Legal and Research Staff Training

This ongoing activity aims to assist research and legal staff in increasing their practical skills in the area of legislative analysis. The training involves detailed analysis of legislation and draft legislation, laws being reviewed by commissions and bills on the government agenda (see page 8 for a list of legislation passed this year). During the weekly sessions at the CCLSP office, participants look at particular legislative cases in the Cambodian context and develop briefing materials for commissions, and also assist and follow up on the work of commissions. During the course of the training, participants analyzed both the Civil Code and the Land Law, detecting inconsistencies between the two. One result of the training will be the production of a Legislative Practice Handbook/ Lexicon of Legal Terms Used in Cambodian Laws to be used by parliamentarians. (please see Legislation passed in the 4th Legislature on page 8)

Training Workshop for Parliamentarians on Policy Analysis: Capital Markets and the Cambodian Stock Exchange

In preparation for the establishment of the Cambodian stock exchange, and in the midst of the global economic downturn, CCLSP commissioned Dr. Sam Ghanty, former Associate Professor of Finance at the University of Wisconsin, USA, to deliver training workshops for parliamentarians and parliamentary staff on the theme “Importance of the capital markets and the stock exchange as means for raising long-term capital for the development of Cambodia”. These workshops were in the context of the Law on Government Securities, passed in November 2006, and the Law on Issuance and Trading of Non-Government Securities, passed in September 2007. The workshops were designed to improve the knowledge, awareness and practical skills of parliamentarians in policy analysis by providing them with expert input regarding a topic of key importance in the financial development of Cambodia. The content of the training was also designed to strengthen parliamentarians’ oversight role relating to the implementation of the two laws passed in 2006 and 2007.

The first workshop was delivered on the afternoon of May 27th at the National Assembly, and was attended by around 80 parliamentarians and staff. Further workshops took place on June 4th at the Senate, and on June 23rd there was a roundtable at the National Assembly for stakeholders from the government, the parliament and the private sector on the Cambodian Stock Exchange. In order to help parliamentarians in their oversight role over legislation relating to the establishment and operation of the upcoming Cambodian stock exchange, and to help them make recommendations to the government about the issue, these seminars provided MPs and Senators with knowledge of the risks, advantages and disadvantages and mechanisms of the stock market. Parliamentarians praised CCLSP for the valuable and informative content of the workshop, and spent a considerable length of time asking a variety of questions after the presentation by Dr. Ghanty.
Roundtable on Indigenous Minority Issues

In April 2009, CCLSP organized a roundtable on Indigenous Minority Issues/Domestic Violence at the National Assembly, facilitated by Mr. Sopheak Ok Serei. This activity followed a fact-finding mission to indigenous minority communities in the North-Eastern provinces of Cambodia by members of Commission 8 of the National Assembly. The commission felt there was a need to investigate the causes of domestic violence in those communities, and to examine the effectiveness of the implementation of the law on domestic violence. A number of key stakeholders representing the government, the commissions of parliament and the indigenous minority community were invited.

The roundtable helped to increase awareness amongst those present of issues affecting the indigenous minority communities and the content of the law on domestic violence, and resulted in some consensus on the causes of domestic violence in indigenous minority communities. Poverty, lack of education and alcohol abuse related to these issues were highlighted. A lack of effective dissemination of the law on domestic violence in the language of the indigenous minorities was also seen as a contributing factor.

As a result of the findings it was decided that the commissions of parliament would further investigate this issue, with the provincial offices of the National Assembly in the affected areas to take a monitoring role, while promoting educational programs about the dangers of alcohol abuse. There was also a call for the Ministry of Interior to speed up the sub-decree on the conditions and rights of women in the indigenous minority communities. (Please see also Political Developments in Cambodia on page 9)

Regional Study Mission for Members of the National Assembly and Senate on Legislative and Consultation Processes

From 13-17 April 2009, CCLSP arranged for a delegation from the National Assembly and Senate to visit Japan with the aim of learning details of Japan’s policies and studying Japan’s parliamentary and legislative processes. In particular, delegates on the mission learned from Japan’s experience in public consultation and research support to parliamentarians, as well as gained an understanding of the constructive role of opposition parties, and the involvement of minority parties in the parliamentary process.

Following the study mission, the members of the delegation spoke very highly of their Japanese counterparts’ experience and expertise in the areas of public consultation and research support to Parliamentarians, and felt that the lessons they had learnt provided them with ideas for public consultation and outreach activities in Cambodia, including information programs on parliamentary activities for the public, and ways for the public, including children, to access parliament. They planned to debate in the National Assembly how elements of the Japanese system they had studied could be adapted to Cambodia. Moreover, it is the intention of all parties to initiate a tripartite working relationship between the Secretariats of the Japanese Parliament, the Cambodian Parliament and the CCLSP project, so that joint activities can be conducted in the future, such as training on the role of parliament in the budget process.
Delivery of Staff Training and Development Programs

An evaluation of the capacity of the Information Departments of the National Assembly and Senate showed that both departments were very limited in their communication of the activities of the respective houses. Between April 21 and May 21, 2009, CCLSP organized a series of training programs, conducted by Mr. Sebastian Drans, communications and media expert, for press officers of the Cambodian National Assembly and Senate to improve their professional writing skills.

The objective was to provide the Parliament’s press officers with the skills they need to adequately communicate the work of their institutions to the public. They needed to know which events to cover and how to deal with them in order to attract attention from the Parliament’s partners and the media, as well as gaining expertise in relevant writing techniques.

All trainees showed a firm interest in the content of the workshop, and were eager to learn and implement new techniques. Trainees developed skills in press release writing, writing on websites and monthly bulletins. They were quicker to decide on appropriate angles for their stories, focusing on the most important elements of each event. The post-training assessment also highlighted increased understanding amongst the participants of the importance for the Parliament of having its messages disseminated in a timely manner and which events to be covered.

Operational Set-Up of Training and Research Functions in the Cambodian Parliament

Based on needs assessments carried out in the National Assembly and Senate of Cambodia, CCLSP provided the two chambers with computer equipment that lays the foundations for the establishment of units within the parliamentary administration that will provide subject matter research and training for parliamentarians and parliamentary staff.

The donation ceremonies took place in Phnom Penh on June 25th and were attended by the Secretaries General of the Senate and National Assembly, H.E. Oum Sarith and H.E. Leng Peng Long, the President of the Parliamentary Centre, Mrs. Amelita Armit, senior parliamentary staff and members of the project team.
In the weeks following the installation of the equipment, research staff expressed satisfaction with the new equipment, stating that it enabled them to gather information quickly from sources such as foreign legislatures. These improvements should ensure that in the future, quality research is provided in a timely manner to parliamentarians.

**Project Team Update**

In January 2009, Mr. Dararith Kim-Yeat took the position of Field Manager for CCLSP based in Phnom Penh. Mr. Kim-Yeat brings to the project many years of experience in the design and implementation of development projects in Cambodia and Southeast Asia and a solid knowledge of and well established contacts with the Cambodian Parliament and other institutions. Having acted as a CCLSP evaluator in the past, Mr. Kim-Yeat is well familiar with the project, which helped to avoid a long learning curve, that such a change could bring. The previous Field Manager, Mr. Bunleng Men, who led the CCLSP field office for over 8 years, has taken the position of Director for the Canadian International Development Agency’s Cooperation Office in Phnom Penh. Mrs. Sokhayouk Mom, who has acted as Deputy Field Manager since the inception of the project remains at her position allowing for valuable corporate memory to be preserved.

Starting in December 2008, Mr. Ivo Balinov, Senior Program Officer for Asia and Eastern Europe, took over the management of the CCLSP file at the Ottawa Headquarters of the Parliamentary Centre. He brings to CCLSP extensive experience in developing, managing and implementing parliamentary strengthening projects in various countries.

**New CCLSP Field Office and Library**

At the end of April, CCLSP changed the location of its Field Office in Phnom Penh. The new premises are shared with the Swiss Tropical Institute (STI), complying with the Paris Declaration to optimize project resources.

The new office includes a library containing all project material produced over the lifetime of the CCLSP, as well as many documents relating to foreign legislatures, the National Assembly and Senate, Cambodian law, and other topics including anti-corruption, gender and human rights. The facilities of the new office allow for any interested parties to take advantage of these resources, and a list of documents is available on the website. The address and contact details of the new office are as follows:

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Website: www.parlcent.ca/asia/cambodia_e.php

(Picture shows staff of CCLSP and STI at the new CCLSP Field Office)
### Legislation in the 4th Legislature

#### Legislation passed by the Parliament
- Law on Financial Operations
- Law Amending the Budget Law 2009
- Law on Tourism
- Law on the Protection and Promotion of Disabled People
- Law on the Agreement of Investment between Cambodia and RD Lao
- Law on the Agreement of Investment between Cambodia and the Czech Republic
- Law on the Agreement of Investment between Cambodia and the Democratic Republic of Korea
- Law on the Agreement of Investment between Cambodia and Kuwait
- Law on Technical and Economic Cooperation between Cambodia and Kuwait
- Law on the Exchange of Labor between Cambodia and Kuwait
- Law on the Agreement of Investment between Cambodia and North Korea
- Agreement with India on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons
- Law on Metrology
- Law on State Reimbursement to the National Heavy Machinery Corporation
- Law on State Reimbursement to the Michelle Corporation
- Law relating to the Optional Protocol for CEDAW

#### Bills at the Parliamentary Commissions
- Bill on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons
- Draft of the Penal Code

#### Bills on the Agenda
- At the Office of Council of Ministers
  - Draft of the Anti-Corruption Law

- At the Ministry of Interior
  - Draft NGO Law

- At the Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning & Construction
  - Bill on the Ownership of Property by Foreigners

### Public Hearing - Public Selector Consultation Outreach Activities

This year parliamentarians have conducted public consultations to oversee the implementation of different legislation, and for fact-finding purposes to assess the situation of the population in different provinces. The staff of the Senate Territorial Department and the assistants to the commissions of the National Assembly assisted the legislators in carrying out their public consultations.

In February 2009, the 8th Commission and the Women’s Group of the National Assembly conducted public consultations in several provinces of Cambodia to meet with local authorities and to oversee the implementation of the legislation on domestic violence. Specific issues within the indigenous communities that were focused on included maternal and child care and human trafficking. This field trip was conducted in order to prepare a workshop on ‘Domestic violence in the indigenous communities’ in April 2009 at the National Assembly and was supported by CCLSP.

To best exercise their new role of commune representatives, Senators conducted consultations in order to meet with Commune Council Members to oversee the implementation of the decentralization and de-concentration policies.

In February 2009, in Kampong Cham province, a forum on ‘Decentralization, De-concentration and Representation of the Interests of the Sangkat-
Commune’ was held, led by the 4th Commission of the Senate and prepared and organized by the staff of the Senate Territorial Department. Training on decentralization provided by CCLSP has enabled staff to understand better the implementation of the decentralization law, to collect information and to write reports for Senators.

In March 2009, in Koh Kong province, the Women’s Group of the Senate organized a Forum on ‘Enhancing the Capacity of Women Members of the Commune Councils’. The group learned about the small percentage of female compared to male commune council members, and that often suggestions by female commune council members are not taken into consideration by their male colleagues.

Following the forum, the representatives of the Women’s Group of the Senate planned to propose an amendment on the Law on the Election of the Commune Councils to promote the inclusion of more women members in the commune councils.

**Political Developments in Cambodia**

- On July 27th, the Sam Rainsy Party announced that it would be changing tactics and engaging the government constructively in place of its more confrontational tactics of the past. According to Mr. Sam Rainsy, in the past events such as street demonstrations and protests were necessary to increase the visibility of the party, and because there were few other options, however now is a suitable time to affect such as change as “we can be much more constructive and effective about bringing change through other mechanisms”.

The Sam Rainsy Party will use its voice in parliament to engage the government in a constructive manner, demonstrating the advances that have occurred in Cambodia’s legislature relating to both the role of the opposition and the increasing political importance of parliament as an institution. (Source: Cambodia Daily)

- This year the Cambodian Senate celebrated its ten-year anniversary on March 25th 2009. In the preceding ten years, the Senate has convened 15 plenary sessions and called 115 meetings and 6 extraordinary meetings to review and make recommendations on 205 items of legislation. Exercising its representative function, the Senate has organized 8 regional forums on Decentralization, Deconcentration and Representation of the Interests of the Commune/Sangkat Councils with 2,276 participants in 8 regions. Relating to its oversight function, the Senate has conducted 143 visits to provinces and cities to monitor compliance with laws and policies. The Women’s Group of the Senate has organized forums and conducted 47 visits to different regions.

- Under the leadership of the Senate President, His Excellency Samdech Tharmapothoslal Chea Sim, and the Senate Secretary General, His Excellency Oum Sarith, the Senate has made great strides in modernizing its operations and outreach to the public and to foreign legislatures, and, working alongside development partners, has developed a Strategic Framework and Activity Plan for Capacity Strengthening to run until 2018. (source: www.senate.gov.kh)

- Over the past decade Cambodia has began the process of transferring part of the decision-making process to authorities at the sub-national level under the Royal Government of Cambodia’s Decentralization and Deconcentration Policy. The May 2008 Organic Law on Administrative Management of the Capital, Provinces, Municipalities, Districts and Sections allowed for the election of administrative divisions of each council by the members of the already existing commune and quarter councils. The first elections were held on May 17th 2009, representing a major step towards decentralization in Cambodia.
Forthcoming Activities

Legislation
- Training workshop for parliamentarians on the budget process and budgetary oversight
- Completion of legal and research staff training through ongoing legislative assignments, and a Legislative Practice Handbook/Lexicon of Legal Terms Used in Cambodian Laws/Analysis the Civil Code and Land Law to underline the inconsistency provisions.

Representation
- Completion of consultation guidelines and training workshops for parliamentarians on public consultation and hearings
- Pilot consultations with a select commission using consultation guidelines
- Training for civil society on consultations and outreach to parliament
- Field mission by the Women’s Group of the Senate to Commune Councils in Administrative Region No. 4 in eastern Cambodia

Secretariat
- Technical assistance and training of permanent staff on capacity-building and parliamentary research and training programs
- Study mission to the Parliament of Indonesia to gather lessons learnt on parliamentary administration

Canada-Cambodia Legislative Support Program

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.

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.
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We hope you enjoyed this Issue. We welcome your questions, comments and suggestions! Please email them to Ivo Balinov at Balini@parl.gc.ca or to Dararith Kim-Yeat at eclsp_manager@online.com.kh

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