



NATIONAL
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INSTITUTE



Report on Constituency Dialogues in Cambodia

Covering the Program Period of
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**Written by Laura L. Thornton
Country Director
National Democratic Institute
#21A Street 352
Sangkat Boeung Keng Kang I
Khan Chamkarmorn, Phnom Penh
Kingdom of Cambodia**

**National Democratic Institute
455 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, 8th Floor
Washington, DC 20001-2621
USA
Tel: (202) 728 5500
Fax: (888) 875 2887
www.ndi.org**

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NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, nongovernmental organization that responds to the aspirations of people around the world to live in democratic societies that recognize and promote basic human rights.

Since its founding in 1983, NDI and its local partners have worked to support and strengthen democratic institutions and practices by strengthening political parties, civic organizations and parliaments, safeguarding elections, and promoting citizen participation, openness and accountability in government.

With staff members and volunteer political practitioners from more than 100 nations, NDI brings together individuals and groups to share ideas, knowledge, experiences and expertise. Partners receive broad exposure to best practices in international democratic development that can be adapted to the needs of their own countries. NDI's multinational approach reinforces the message that while there is no single democratic model, certain core principles are shared by all democracies.

The Institute's work upholds the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It also promotes the development of institutionalized channels of communications among citizens, political institutions and elected officials, and strengthens their ability to improve the quality of life for all citizens. For more information about NDI, please visit www.ndi.org.

NDI in Cambodia

Since 1992, NDI has aided democratic activists in Cambodia through work with civic groups and political parties and electoral support initiatives. The Institute's current programs in Cambodia seek to enhance the capacity of citizens and political parties to participate more effectively in the political process. The Institute works with local civil society groups to organize constituency dialogues that bring together citizens and parliamentarians to discuss local issues of concern. NDI also plans to organize candidate debates, train candidates, and conduct voter registration audits for the upcoming local and national elections.

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I. BACKGROUND

In Cambodia, the relationship between parliamentarians and their constituents is weak. Citizens rarely enjoy opportunities to express their views or advocate reforms to their elected representatives, and many legislators do not regularly visit their constituencies to report on their activities and programs. Although individual Members of the National Assembly (MNAs) have made efforts to conduct outreach visits and meetings on their own or through their political parties, they continue to face time constraints, limited facilities at the local level, and a lack of an effective mechanism for constituents to communicate with them. Because of such limited interaction, citizens have a narrow understanding of the role of parliament or its legislative, representative, and oversight responsibilities, and elected parliamentarians have limited knowledge of their constituencies and the Assembly falls short in representing the needs and interests of their voters.

To provide an avenue for such interaction, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI or the Institute) has organized multiparty constituency dialogues (CDs) since 2004 with elected representatives in the National Assembly (NA) from all political parties.¹ These dialogues enhance MNAs' knowledge of and relations with their constituencies and educate citizens on the roles and responsibilities of an MNA in a democratic society. Another important goal of the program is to increase citizens' understanding of their political options, as there are limited opportunities for them to hear alternative viewpoints and policies from non-ruling parties. The constituency dialogues aim to normalize and demonstrate the importance of debate in Cambodia, where policy exchanges between political opponents are rare and viewed with caution.

From November 2010 to September 2011, NDI held 24 constituency dialogues in the 12 Cambodian provinces with multiparty representation² in the National Assembly: Banteay Meanchey, Battambang, Kampong Cham, Kampong Chhnang, Kampong Speu, Kampong Thom, Kampot, Kandal, Kratie, Prey Veng, Siem Reap, and Takeo. The CDs were held twice a year in each province, each time in different communes.

The constituency dialogue format is similar to that of a town hall meeting, and anyone is welcome to attend. Between 400 and 1,000 community residents participate in each event, which is moderated by experienced NDI staff. Members of the National Assembly are seated at a table in front of the participants and offer brief opening remarks to the audience. The floor is then open to participants to voice their concerns, raise questions directly to members of the National Assembly, and request that actions be taken to resolve problems. During their allocated response time, MNAs use the opportunity to update citizens on the activities of the legislature and government and provide other information relevant to their constituents. The dialogues encourage two-

¹ USAID has provided financial support for the dialogues since their inception. In October 2009, the CD program was included in the five year, USAID-funded *Cambodia: Accountability in Governance and Politics* (AGAP) program.

² Cambodia has a proportional, party-list system with province-based constituencies of 1 to 18 members based on population. NDI does not hold CDs in provinces where all representatives are from a single party.

way communication and are unscripted, allowing for often challenging questions and demands from citizens. Two radio stations – FM95.5 and FM93.5³ – broadcast CDs across the country, expanding the reach of the program by ensuring a wider audience.



MNAs representing four political parties attend a constituency dialogue in Nak Ta Chey village, Kouk Kong Lech commune, Kanhchriech district, Prey Veng province on June 23, 2011.

The CD program is a multiparty event, involving representatives from five parties in the National Assembly – the Cambodian People’s Party (CPP), the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP), FUNCINPEC,⁴ the Human Rights Party (HRP), and Norodom Ranariddh Party (NRP).⁵ The forum thus provides a rare opportunity for policy debate and showcases the distinctions between legislators from different parties and their approaches to both local and national concerns. Local authorities such as commune councilors, village chiefs, and district and provincial officials are often present at CDs, and in 2010, at the request of the parties, the Institute began providing them an allotted time to speak at the end of the dialogues as well. To ensure equity and neutrality and

³ The broadcast range covers 20 of the country’s 24 provinces: Kandal, Kampong Chhnang, Kampong Cham, Kampong Speu, Kampong Thom, Pursat, Battambang, Banteay Meanchey, Siem Reap, Kratie, Prey Veng, Svay Rieng, Kep, Takeo, Kampot, Koh Kong, Pailin, Uddor Meanchey, Preah Vihear and Phnom Penh.

⁴ FUNCINPEC is an acronym for the National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia. It represents the party name in French, “Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Indépendant, Neutre, Pacifique, et Coopératif.”

⁵ From 2004 to March 2008, only three political parties – the Cambodian People’s Party (CPP), the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP), and FUNCINPEC – had seats in the Assembly. With two new parties, the Human Rights Party (HRP) and Norodom Ranariddh Party (NRP), gaining seats in the 2008 elections, five parties have now participated.

foster constructive dialogue, NDI developed a code of conduct⁶ for MNAs, participants, and NDI moderators. The code specifies such items as the allotment of speaking time, appropriate and inappropriate topics for discussion, and the rules regarding audience participation.

NDI works with locally-based civil society organizations (CSOs) or community volunteers in each CD province⁷. These civil society organizations play a pivotal organizational and logistical role in planning for and implementing the CDs, as well as monitoring their impact at the local level. The local partners determine the village where the CD will be held, liaise with the local authorities, and manage the event logistics. In addition, NDI has community volunteers (CVs) in each province who help mobilize citizens in advance of the event. Two weeks prior to each dialogue, the CVs and the provincial partners conduct small group discussions with approximately 35 residents in order to gather feedback on the problems facing the community. NDI then briefs participating MNAs about these issues to help prepare them for the dialogue. In addition, an NDI advance team travels to the CD site a few days before the event to introduce the concept of the CD program to local authorities and community groups and secure their support. During these discussions, NDI staff members describe the objective of the CDs, the importance of holding multiparty events, the concept of accountability, and the representative function of MNAs. Local officials have an opportunity to ask questions and share any concerns they might have about the event.

Following each dialogue, NDI develops a monitoring chart, outlining the issues raised and the actions proposed by each MNA. NDI then communicates with parliamentarians regularly to follow their progress in fulfilling pledges made during the CDs. Concurrently, NDI's local partner organizations visit the villages where dialogues were held to monitor any changes that may have taken place as a result of the CDs. All results and initiatives are recorded and reported back to the communities. This tracking is essential in promoting accountability by providing citizens with the information needed to judge the performance of their representatives. NDI also conducts focus groups prior to and following each CD to capture qualitative information and evaluate the effect of the CD program on people's knowledge, attitudes, and practices. NDI holds group interviews with local officials as well following the CD to gather their input and perspectives on the dialogue and lessons learned.

The constituency dialogue program has fostered an understanding among the Cambodian public of the link between local problems and the responsibilities of elected officials. The dialogues provide an opportunity for MNAs to further strengthen

⁶ NDI developed the code of conduct in 2008 to clarify misunderstandings and avoid confusion about the CD process and allegations of bias. It also serves to prevent verbal attacks and personal insults during the dialogues. This method of preventing and resolving disputes was agreed to by the five political parties represented in the program. NDI regularly reviews the code with the parties to ensure its relevancy and make modifications, if necessary.

⁷ In 2010 to 2011, NDI's partner CSOs included: Indradevi Association (IDA) in Kandal province, the Nokor Phnom Community Empowerment Organization (NPCEO) in Kampong Cham, the Vulnerability and Illiteracy Reduction organization (VIR) in Siem Reap, the Khmer Farmer Development (KFD) in Banteay Meanchey, the Village Support Group (VSG) in Battambang, Cooperation for Development of Cambodia (CoDec) in Kampong Thom, Community Capacity for Development (CCD) in Kampong Chhnang, and Kampuchea Women's Welfare Action (KWWA) in Kratie. NDI worked solely with community volunteers in Kampot, Prey Veng, Takeo and Kampong Speu provinces.

relationships with their constituents and be responsive to the public's requests and needs. In addition, by showcasing the differences between political parties, citizens have had the opportunity to learn more about their MNAs' diverse opinions, affiliations, and platforms and are more aware of their political options. In many cases, the CDs have resulted in concrete actions by participating lawmakers that have directly impacted the communities in which they were held, including the resolution of land disputes and fulfillment of infrastructure and agricultural needs.



An MNA responds to issues raised by participants at a CD in Bos Ta Oem village, Chaom Ta maou commune, Memot district, Kampong Cham province on July 30, 2011. NDI staff (right) moderated the event.

II. SUMMARY OF CONSTITUENCY DIALOGUES⁸

More than 11,000 citizens (almost 50 percent of them women) and 35 national legislators (including seven women) attended the 24 constituency dialogues between November 2010 and September 2011. Across 12 provinces, dialogue participants echoed the same three problems affecting their lives: land conflicts; infrastructure and irrigation needs; and corruption and unequal enforcement by local authorities. Inequity was the underlying theme of these problems, and participants expressed their concern that the rich and powerful received all the benefits – land, development, and justice. Across provinces, people reported the pervasive influence of money on all aspects of life and the sense that they were losing their country to foreign companies and private interests. One participant described how government policies “always favored rich people” and asked, “Do rich businesspeople control the government or does the government control businesspeople?”

A. Land Conflicts

Land was unquestionably the number one concern of citizens, and the number of conflicts reported was even greater than in previous years of the CD program. In every CD, participants described having land taken from them or others in their community by a company or a concession. In some dialogues, few other issues were discussed. In the second CD held in Kandal, 11 out of the 14 participants who asked a question raised a land-related issue; in the first Kampong Speu dialogue, 13 out of 16 did; in the first Kratie CD, 13 out of 16 did; and in the second Kratie event, seven out of 10 raised land problems. Many of those who spoke described the difficulties they were facing in holding on to their property and often reported the negative involvement of local authorities in their situation. In some instances, people had traveled long distances to be heard by representatives of the National Assembly, as neither the authorities nor the courts in their own communities were solving their problems.

Dialogue participants criticized government concessions, and complained of the corruption of local authorities and courts in land cases, and corrupt and slow land-titling procedures. Land conflicts described usually involved a group of families displaced by a concession to a private company. Participants consistently questioned the country’s concession policies, demanding explanations for why companies, often foreign ones, appeared to be favored over citizens. They also criticized the small amount of money companies had to pay for these concessions, expressing their own willingness to pay the same amount for their land. They rejected the argument that these concessions brought employment to Cambodians, pointing out that new workers were often foreign. In many cases, the families claimed to have official titles but were forced off their land by more powerful people with the help of local officials and, often, the police or the military. In several provinces people described violent acts, including the razing of their homes. In other cases, citizens had been displaced from their land but had not received due compensation from the government or companies involved. Moreover, CD attendees repeatedly described the difficulty in obtaining titles for their property due to demands for bribes from local officials.

⁸ The opinions expressed by participants and MNAs during the proceedings of the constituency dialogues do not necessarily reflect those of NDI. This report serves to summarize their remarks, concerns and impressions. Full reports of each dialogue are available upon request, in English.



A woman raises a land dispute between the Meng Tek Company and 88 families during a constituency dialogue in Pou village, Damnak Raing commune, Oddong district, Kampong Speu province on July 9, 2011.

At CDs, citizens were often angry, even shouting, and demanded answers from the government about the unfair distribution of land, lack of transparency in the granting of concessions, and absence of responsiveness to people’s landlessness. Participants argued that the land law was ineffective, unenforced, and flawed in its design. One Kampong Speu participant angrily asked why the country had a land law if it was not enforced and citizens continued to be abused by more powerful people. He suggested that it made no sense to have a law on paper but not in practice and recommended that the land law be eliminated. Participants also expressed their exasperation at hearing government leaders at all levels dismiss land problems by saying that the country “followed the law,” refusing to address the flaws inherent in the law or the lack of enforcement. Citizens repeatedly reported that the government and courts were not helping them. Another Kampong Speu resident brought up the Constitution, to demonstrate that it was the government’s responsibility to solve people’s problems. Participants frequently described how they were completely in the dark about concessions, as government officials failed to inform them, and did not realize their land was being taken until bulldozers appeared.

In general, MNAs from the same party gave similar responses on land issues and demonstrated party discipline by adhering to a unified party message and position. Cambodian People’s Party representatives defended the government’s concession policies, arguing they were needed for the country’s development. They made the case that the country must cooperate with the private sector and encourage investment through economic concessions. Several MNAs spent much of their time reading from the land law, arguing that problems occurred because citizens did not understand the law well. Many CPP representatives repeatedly emphasized that Cambodia was a “rule of law” country, and any land taken was done so according to the law. They did not, however, address people’s concerns about the content of the law in the first place. CPP MNAs emphasized the “systematic process” followed for evictions and policies for compensation. As the CPP MNA in Kampong Chhnang stated, the government always

found a place for the people to live, adding that if the government was failing people they would not have voted for the CPP.



A participant states that a foreign company grabbed land from people in his community. CD held in Kork village, Sangker Satob commune, Oral district, Kampong Speu province on February 26, 2011.

Unlike previous years of the CD program, this year the CPP response was occasionally defensive, and several representatives expressed their discomfort at citizen criticism of the government’s land policies. One CPP MNA in Kandal denied that anyone had lost their land at all. In Kampong Speu, the CPP representative responded to participants’ land concerns by shouting, “You criticize now. Why didn’t you criticize during the Pol Pot regime? Then we wouldn’t have had the Pol Pot regime!” Later she threateningly added that people had the “right to talk but had to watch what they said.” She warned people that if they criticized there would be civil war again.

Opposition MNAs criticized land concessions, particularly those with 99-year leases and those to foreign companies. They argued that land should be preserved for Cambodian farmers. Some stated that they agreed with the government’s master plan on land concessions in principle but argued that it was not taking place as planned and Cambodians were not receiving the benefits of concessions. They criticized how companies paid practically nothing for their concessions or in taxes so, as one Kratie MNA said, “The people remain poor, the government remains poor, but the companies become wealthy.” He asked why Cambodians were not offered the opportunity to pay the same price for the land as the companies. Several opposition MNAs also pointed out that companies did not even hire Cambodian employees. A SRP representative in Kandal said that land seizures by companies in the name of development were making people fear development.

Opposition MNAs described how engrained corruption was in all aspects of land ownership, titling, and the concession distribution process. They reported that many land contracts in the country were illegal and local authorities frequently lied to national leaders for their own financial gain. The opposition also alleged that poor farmers could not receive justice in the courts or a resolution through the local government if they were in conflict with a rich and powerful person over land. Opposition representatives emphasized that many people did not have titles and were asked for bribes from local authorities if they tried to obtain one. They recommended that land titling be accelerated and implemented without corruption. They urged those unsatisfied with the country's land policies to vote for different leaders.



A participant raises a concern about the length of a land concession provided to a private company by the Cambodian government. CD held in Svay Chreah village, Svay Chreah commune, Snuol district, Kratie province on April 23, 2011.

B. Infrastructure and Development

In addition to land conflicts affecting people's livelihood, participants described how poor infrastructure and irrigation systems were sending them further into poverty. Requests for roads, dams, and electricity were overwhelming. At the second Siem Reap dialogue, 11 of 15 speakers requested better infrastructure and more irrigation projects. Participants across the 12 provinces also complained about the decreasing price of Cambodia's agricultural products and lack of a market for their goods. Many participants asked MNAs to describe their party's specific agricultural and development policies. A few participants wanted a better understanding of where development money came from. One Takeo participant noted individual's names on development projects and asked if the money really came from those people.

In this context, at several of the dialogues participants criticized the SRP and its failure to “deliver development” and praised the CPP for providing infrastructure. At the second Kampong Thom dialogue, for example, many participants read prepared remarks about the contributions of the CPP and appeared to have been instructed to speak. At the first Kampot CD, 10 of 14 participants used their speaking time to criticize the opposition, and at the second Kampot dialogue, seven out of ten did. Most asked why SRP had not provided infrastructure projects or implemented any development activities.

In general, CPP representatives responded consistently to agriculture and development concerns. Many first pointed out how the country was more developed and better off than it had been under the Pol Pot regime, and how people should appreciate the fact that the CPP had to “build the country up from scratch.” Frequently, CPP MNAs listed the number of schools, health centers, or even motorcycles in the area to demonstrate that achievement, often using the words “CPP” and “government” interchangeably. They also repeatedly referred to the need for patience, quoting the Prime Minister, “development happens at frog’s leaps” (i.e. slowly), and declared comparisons with the West unfair. Several CPP MNAs told citizens to “work harder” to improve their living conditions.



A participant raises a question on the high price of goods at the market and the poor medical care available in his community at a CD in Tang Trapeang village, Pech Changvar commune, Baribour district, Kampong Chhnang province on August 13, 2011.

Many ruling party MNAs described the country’s specific policies, reporting that the country would “pump its own oil” by 2012 and would have cheap electricity in 2013 due to hydroelectric dam projects. Several CPP MNAs explained the government’s plan to export a million tons of rice per year and efforts to encourage

Thai businesspeople to buy and transport rice. In response to complaints about prices, CPP MNAs explained that Cambodia adhered to free market principles and advised people not to sell their goods if the price was too low. Ruling party MNAs encouraged citizens to participate in commune council meetings to help set development priorities.



A participant asks the MNAs whether all the country's achievements, including new bridges, schools, roads and hospitals, are built by the government or by the CPP. CD held in Ta Reach village, Trapeang Reang commune, Chum Kiri district, Kampot province on June 04, 2011.

In response to questions about the names of individuals or political parties on projects, one Takeo MNA explained that donors insisted on having Prime Minister Hun Sen's name on their donations because "without Hun Sen there would be no peace or stability." Another CPP representative in Kampot claimed that all development came directly from the CPP, not the government's money, including schools and infrastructure. CPP MNAs also frequently used the phrase, "One party is the doer; while the other is the speaker."

Opposition SRP and HRP legislators explained that the political party that won in the elections formed the government and had the ability to determine and control development spending for the country. They emphasized that they did not hold any power over the budget or planning and could therefore not provide infrastructure and other developmental goods. Opposition legislators explained that if people voted for the opposition, they would form the government and be able to implement development and infrastructure projects. Several SRP MNAs emphasized that although a minority party, SRP could still represent people and take their concerns and requests to the government.

Opposition MNAs described the large amount of donor aid and loans for development, explaining that this money went to the government, not to a political party. They emphasized the burden that debt would have on the country's economy. Regarding the names of individuals and political parties on projects, the opposition explained that development was funded by the government through aid and taxes, not by the CPP or the prime minister. As the SRP MNA in the second Kampong Thom dialogue said, "I do not know why the party [CPP] puts its or the prime minister's name on projects when it is government money," reminding people that the prime minister earned only \$1400 a month.

Several opposition MNAs responded to the CPP's constant comparison of Cambodians' current situation to the Khmer Rouge's genocidal regime, suggesting that it was not a particularly challenging yardstick by which to measure current development. The SRP MNA in the second Kampong Thom dialogue acknowledged that Cambodia was indeed better off than it was in 1979 and agreed that it was also unfair to compare Cambodia to countries like the United States. He asked, however, why the country could not be compared to its neighbors, Thailand and Vietnam. He argued that given the poverty in the country it was natural for people to expect more.

SRP described the "negative impact of improper development" and suggested expanding markets through an overhaul of the country's agricultural policies. SRP representatives repeatedly explained that their party had requested increased budget line items for agriculture, education, and healthcare. They also suggested that the government should indeed interfere with free market pricing by subsidizing gas and other agricultural inputs, as well as setting a higher price for rice. In addition, they stressed their proposals to increase training and technology for farmers in order to improve output. Opposition members encouraged people to participate in the development of the country and help oversee government spending.

C. Corruption

The third main issue raised at the dialogues involved corruption and unequal enforcement of the law at the local level. Participants at CDs described cases in which local authorities had: demanded bribes for the provision of services such as family books and national identification cards; set up illegal checkpoints; extorted money; or unevenly enforced the law depending on the wealth and power of the individuals involved. Participants frequently described the discrimination against the poor in matters of justice and the perceived hopelessness of taking a case to court. In the first Kratie dialogue, a participant read Article 31 of the Constitution, which grants equality under the law, and asked MNAs if they thought it was true. People also raised concerns about the local authority's handling of elections, including bribery for identification cards necessary for voting, the use of 1018 forms (a substitute ID), and votebuying.

Overall, CPP MNAs did not respond in detail to these complaints, other than to say that such activities were illegal and rare, rule of law was enforced fairly throughout the country, and the courts were independent and not corrupt. One CPP MNA from Kandal emphatically stated that there "was no corruption in Cambodia." Some ruling party representatives responded to criticisms about corruption by explaining that, as the CPP MNA in the second Banteay Meanchey dialogue said, "A doer always makes mistakes, but a non-doer does not." They all encouraged people to take complaints to

the Anti-Corruption Unit. On elections-related concerns, CPP MNAs reported that people would be allowed to use expired ID cards for the next electoral exercises. The CPP MNA in the first Kampong Chhnang dialogue responded that “votebuying was legal.”

Opposition MNAs agreed with participants’ concerns and described the need for tougher action against corruption and for an independent judiciary. The HRP lawmaker in the second Kandal dialogue reported that Cambodia ranked 154 in the world on corruption and hundreds of millions of dollars were lost every year. Responding to a question in the first Kratie dialogue about whether citizens had equal rights before the law, the SRP MNA argued that the laws in Cambodia were good but were not enforced. He explained that the only real law in Cambodia was “the ‘big boss’ was never wrong, and if the big boss did something wrong, see rule one.” As an example, he described how influential people could cut down trees with impunity, but if a poor person did the same, he or she would be arrested. The opposition put forward several recommendations to improve the problems with the judiciary such as prohibiting judges from being members of political parties.

D. Other Issues

Partisan issues emerged during some of the dialogues, usually related to the debate about the appropriate date to mark the country’s independence or the border with Vietnam. As mentioned, in some CDs, participants expressed strong criticism of the SRP for its failure to “provide development,” i.e. provide the services normally provided by the government. MNAs verbally sparred on occasion, with CPP representatives repeatedly arguing that the opposition was capable only of criticizing the government but was otherwise ineffective. As a Kandal MNA said, “The dog keeps barking, the human keeps walking.” A CPP MNA in the second Siem Reap dialogue suggested that the opposition was unreasonable and people should not listen to “incitement.” The CPP representative in Kampong Speu asked where these “critics were during the Pol Pot regime.” Ruling party representatives continually reminded people that the more the opposition criticized, the more votes CPP would get. The opposition MNAs acknowledged that, given their position as the minority, they could only “speak,” not act on government policy. One HRP MNA readily adapted the barking dog analogy, saying that dogs only “barked at criminals and trespassers.”

In many communities, local officials posed a hindrance to the organization of the constituency dialogues and caused problems during the dialogues themselves. In some instances, they demanded bribes from NDI’s local partners in order to hold the CD or tried to prevent people from attending the event. Nonetheless, community residents demonstrated their resoluteness by participating in the dialogue. At the first CD in Kampot, military police surrounded the event. Villagers reported that local authorities claimed only those people who had been personally “invited” by the authorities themselves could attend the CD, although the dialogues are open to all. Following the second Kampot CD, three participants who raised land complaints were separately summoned to the district office to explain their actions to the district governor. They were asked why they criticized the government during the CD, and all three reported feeling threatened. Another woman who raised a concern at the dialogue was followed home after the event and threatened by unidentified men who asked her why she spoke.

At the request of political parties, in November 2010 NDI revised its CD program to allow for speaking time for local officials. The officials who spoke often failed to provide clear answers to the concerns raised and adopted a defensive posture. In some cases, the local officials used their time to verbally attack others, violating NDI's code of conduct. One local official in Kampot threatened the SRP MNA, saying that if the event were not public, "there might be a problem."

III. FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

NDI held focus groups with select CD participants to gather qualitative information used to evaluate the effect of CDs on participants' knowledge of and attitudes toward the National Assembly and its members, and their perceptions of their political options and multiparty democracy. Through these discussions, NDI collected information on common practices for problem-solving in the community and the level of communication between citizens and their representatives.

Focus groups were held at 18 of the 24 CDs⁹ conducted between November 2010 and September 2011. The vast majority of participants were farmers, aged 25 and up. The focus groups lasted approximately one hour and included an average of 12 people, with almost 250 people (just over 50 percent of them women) participating over the entire period. NDI moderators asked similar questions and conducted word association exercises with groups immediately before and after the CDs to capture any changes. NDI conducted the focus groups in Khmer and recorded the proceedings; the Institute later transcribed the recordings and translated them into English.

Focus group participants' understanding of the National Assembly prior to the CDs varied, but on the whole was fairly minimal. Half of the participants in only nine out of the 18 focus groups were able to identify any aspect of the National Assembly's work. Most respondents indicated they did not know what the NA was or gave vague responses. Prior to the second Kampong Speu CD, for example, one person said, "When I hear the word National Assembly, I think that it is a manager." However, in some instances, participants could clearly articulate the functions of the NA. A Kampot participant stated, "The National Assembly is established to represent the people...The National Assembly collects requests from the people and sends to the government." Participants' understanding of the NA's functions was most evident in the focus groups prior to the Prey Veng CD, the first Kampong Speu dialogue, and the second Siem Reap dialogue. Respondents in these groups mostly described the law-making function of the NA. In only one focus group, prior to the first Kandal CD, did a participant allude to oversight: "The National Assembly is established to control the powerful people. Then, the government can't do anything they want."

Immediately after the CDs, the focus groups held revealed changes in participant knowledge as a result of attending the event. Across the board, there was a clearer sense of the role and function of the National Assembly, with every group showing at least half of participants able to identify an aspect of the NA's work. This was particularly notable in those provinces with a limited understanding prior to the CD. However, in Kampong Cham, Kampot, Banteay Meanchey, and the second Kandal focus groups, half of the participants still could not identify what the NA did. In the second Kandal group, for example, four participants stated they had never heard of the "National Assembly," despite having just listened to MNAs during the dialogue. Even those participants who could identify a function of the Assembly usually only mentioned the law-making aspect of its work, and only occasionally referred to representation. Only two people in all of the focus groups conducted mentioned oversight. A respondent in the first Kandal group stated, "The National Assembly is a

⁹ Focus groups were not conducted for six CDs that were piloting or conducting an alternative focus group methodology for NDI's impact evaluation research.

body elected by people to create and pass and enforce laws. Also the Assembly oversees the performance of the government.”

Before the CDs, focus group participants demonstrated a broad, imprecise understanding of the role of members of the NA. Most responded that MNAs were supposed to “help people” or “solve problems,” and the majority of participants believed that the MNAs’ job was to provide tangible goods and services, most often infrastructure, directly to their constituents. A Kampong Thom participant stated, “My MNA is supposed to develop the community, provide sanitation, wells and roads.” In the second Kandal focus group, a respondent said, “Our MNA is supposed to build dams, canals, roads, and bridges for the people.” However, in the Banteay Meanchey, the first Kandal, and the first Kampong Speu focus groups, when asked about the role of MNAs, half of the participants did accurately describe the MNAs’ representative function. In Kandal, a respondent explained, “A MNA is a person who can bring citizens’ voice to the national level.” Prior to the CDs, no focus group participant described an MNAs’ role as drafting legislation or providing oversight of government activities. Given the ability of some participants to identify the law-making function of the NA, this perhaps indicated the absence of real understanding of legislation and its impact on the community.

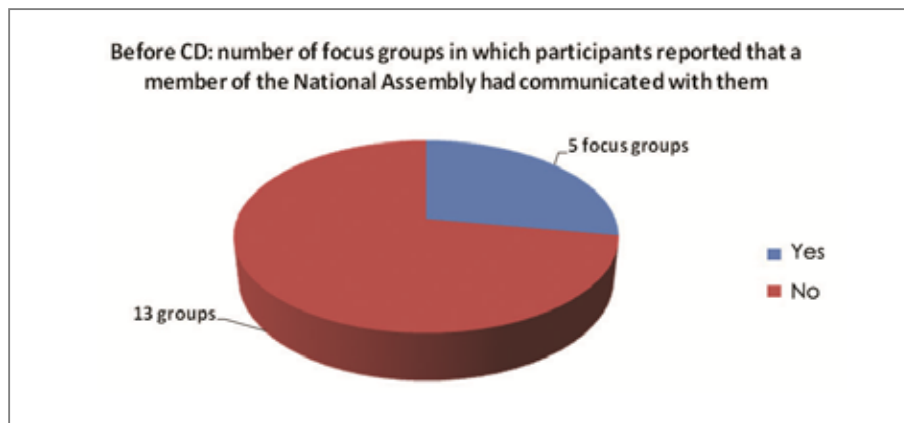
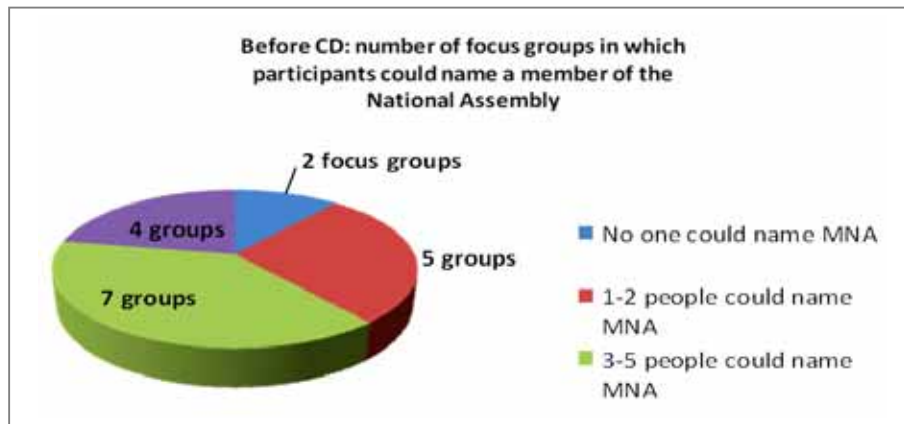
Participants’ beliefs about the responsibilities of MNAs became most apparent when discussing their expectations from their representatives. In almost all the focus groups, participants expected MNAs to provide gifts and developmental goods. Roads, canals, bridges, electricity, schools, health centers, and toilets were most commonly mentioned. A Kampong Thom respondent reported that his MNA should “provide electricity and build more schools, roads, wells, hospitals, and toilets, and provide cars and motorcycles to people.” There were a few exceptions. Prior to the first Kampong Speu dialogue, one focus group participant stated, “In the future, I want my MNA to provide a real liberal democracy, a multi-party system, and protection of territorial integrity.” In the Kratie, first Kandal, and Kampong Speu focus groups, participants described their expectation that MNAs solve land problems. A Kandal respondent stated, “We want MNAs to solve problems in our community related to land disputes.”

Participants’ understanding of the specific role of MNAs showed little change following the CDs, although slightly more focus group participants referred to the representative function in addition to the provision of goods. In a few provinces, there were greater improvements. Participants in both Kampong Speu groups, both Kandal groups, and in Kratie demonstrated an excellent understanding of the MNAs’ responsibilities following the CD. As one Kampong Speu woman stated, “My MNA is supposed to visit people, make laws based on the needs of the people, and send the people’s needs to the National Assembly.” A Kratie participant said, “My MNA is supposed to serve the people and bring the concerns to the National Assembly and relevant ministers.” A Kandal respondent stated, “My MNA is supposed to research documents from local areas and monitor the law enforcement of the National Assembly and Senate.” Following the second Kampong Speu CD, focus group participants no longer mentioned that MNAs should deliver development at all and focused instead on justice and land. As one respondent said, “In the future, we want our MNA to solve the land disputes and return land to the people.” The vast majority of focus group participants, however, continued to expect the delivery of concrete goods such as roads, irrigation systems, and schools from their MNAs following the dialogues.

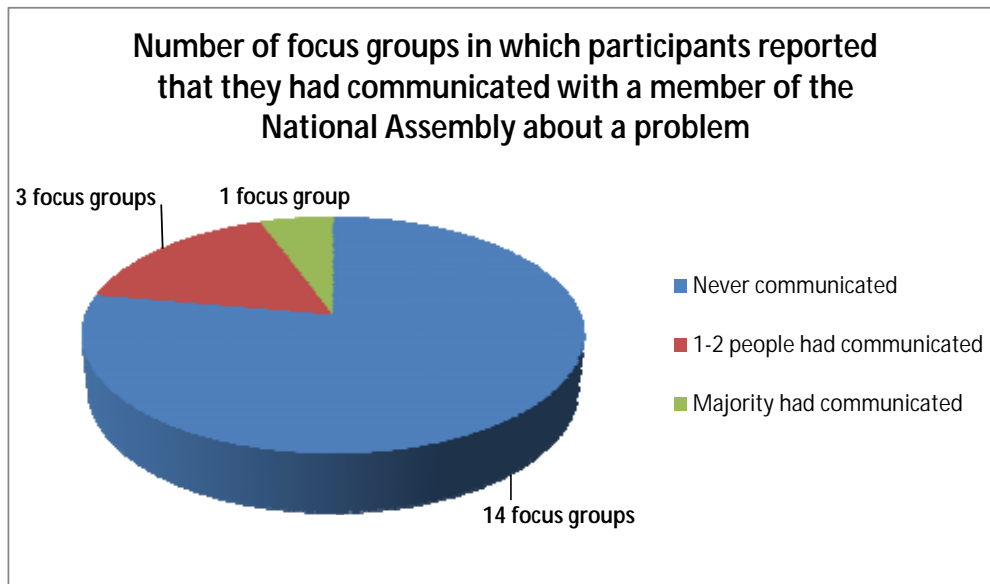
Participants in the pre-CD focus groups had clear ideas about the qualities they looked for in an MNA – namely fairness, honesty, compassion, education, experience and loyalty – and these did not shift following the dialogues. “Gentle” was an adjective repeated frequently, and many said an MNA should “visit people often.” The word “justice” was also raised frequently, with one Kratie participant saying, “My MNA should be a person who helps find justice for people.” Interestingly, the political affiliations of MNAs did not come up during the discussions.

Prior to the CDs, focus groups revealed that MNAs’ outreach efforts were falling short, and most participants had had no previous contact with their representatives. However, compared to previous years, a greater number of participants could identify an MNA by name. In four pre-CD focus groups, five participants or more could name an MNA. Following the dialogues, all focus group participants could name at least one of the MNAs they had met at the CD.

In only five focus groups, however, did participants report that an MNA had communicated with him or her, usually in the context of a large public meeting. In several cases the participants remembered these meetings only after attending the CD. After the Kampong Speu dialogue, a participant recalled, “Yes, H.E. Mr. Nuth Rumduol had communicated with us about what they plan to do when they came to visit the people and we submitted a complaint letter to him.” This represents an improvement compared to previous years of NDI’s CD program, when focus group participants never reported that an MNA had communicated with them.

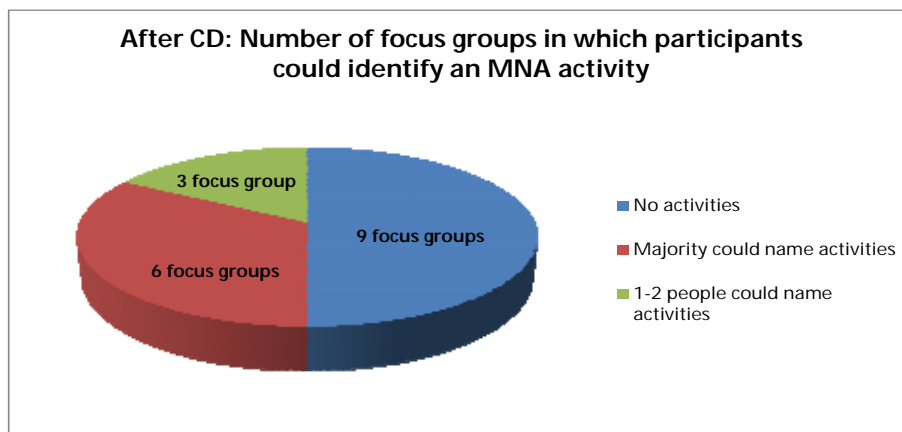
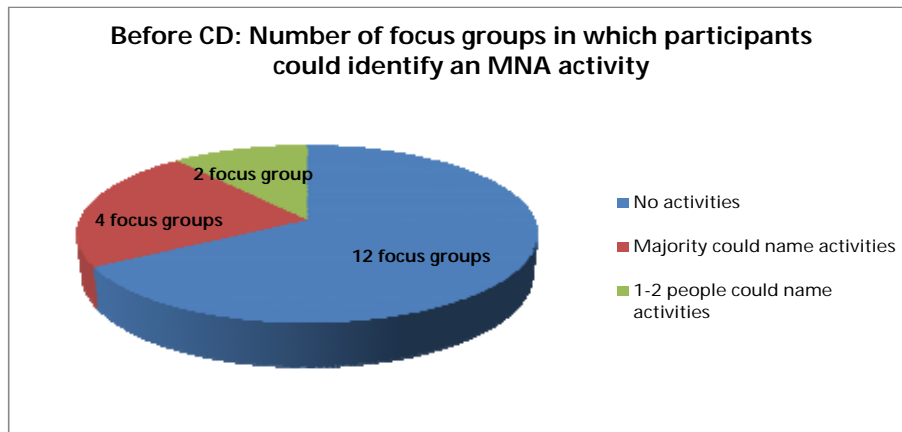


To solve problems in their community, focus group participants had turned to local authorities – village chiefs, district chiefs and commune councilors – or NGOs for help. The majority of participants had never communicated with their MNAs about an issue. In only three focus groups, a small number of people reported that they had contacted their representative. The second Siem Reap focus group was the outlier, with the majority reporting that they had communicated with their MNAs through forums like the CD. Despite an overall lack of communication, focus group participants recognized that they had the right to bring their concerns to their MNAs. When asked if they would contact Assembly members in the future, the vast majority said they would. Only in Kampot, Battambang, and both Kampong Thom focus groups did a few participants express their fear to do so. One Battambang participant explained, “If we have a problem in the future, we would not express to our MNA because we are afraid that we will say impolite words to him or her.” However, following the CD in Battambang, all focus group participants said they would communicate with their MNA in the future.



In addition to limited communication with their MNAs, focus group participants could not identify activities or initiatives MNAs had taken on their behalf or their communities, or efforts MNAs had made to solve problems. In 12 of the 18 focus groups, participants could not name an activity undertaken by an MNA or the Assembly prior to the CDs. In three focus groups, a few participants reported generally that MNAs had “done such things as building roads, bridges, schools, and pagodas,” without specifically naming an individual. In one focus group in Battambang, three people referred to the Minister of Interior’s contributions. Following the CDs, a greater number of participants could recall MNAs’ prior activities, although possibly because of MNAs’ remarks at the events. In Kampong Chhnang, for example, four people could recall that CPP MNA Ker Chanmony had in the past distributed gifts to local residents. Following the second Kampong Speu CD, two participants reported, “Yes, we have seen MNAs from the opposition party come to help solve the land dispute.” After the first Kandal dialogue, focus group participants agreed when one recalled, “Mr. Chan Cheng from the SRP helped bring our requests on a land dispute to the National

Assembly and the government.” After the Kampot CD, a majority of participants agreed that the CPP had provided goods in the past.



Many participants also described their own involvement in community-building, often in the form of monetary support for small, local development projects or participation in commune council meetings. The majority of participants in all focus groups reported feeling they had been a part of the decision-making process in their communities.

Through the focus groups, NDI also explored people’s perceptions of political competition and options. Overall, there were mixed associations with the opposition and multiparty democracy prior to the CD. In half of the focus groups (first Kampong Thom, Kampot, Banteay Meanchey, first Siem Reap, both Kampong Speu groups, both Takeo groups, and Kratie) a majority of participants held a favorable impression of the opposition. People usually described the constructive, corrective role of the opposition. As a Kampong Thom participant said, “When I hear the word opposition party, I think that someone did something wrong, that’s why they criticize or oppose.” In four groups, participants’ associations were neutral, mixed, or people did not know. One Prey Veng respondent stated, “When we hear the word opposition party, we think that it is the party that has different political ideas from the government.” A second round Kampong Thom participant said, “When we hear the word opposition party, we think

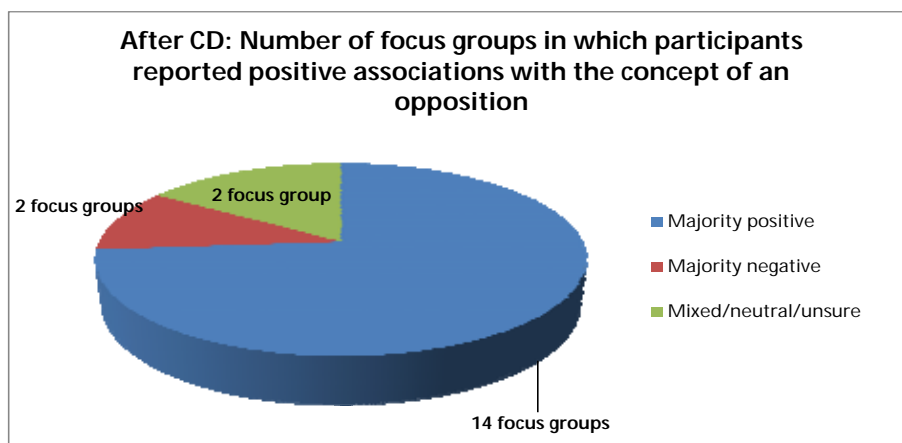
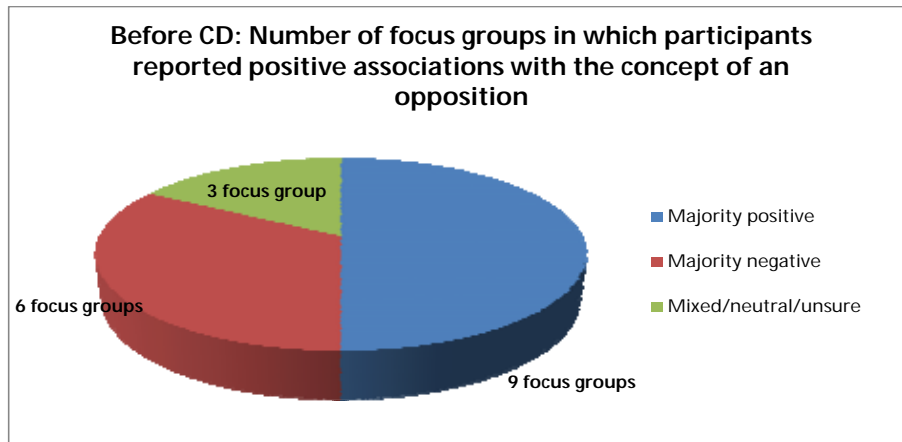
that it is a good party but sometimes there are right and wrong ways to speak against the government.”

In six focus groups, participants had largely negative associations with the opposition before the CD (second Siem Reap, second Kampot, both Kandal groups, Kampong Cham, and Battambang). A common complaint was that the opposition only criticized and served no helpful role. As one Siem Reap participant explained, “When we hear the word opposition party, we think they are always against the ruling party all the time.” A Battambang participant stated, “When I hear the word opposition party, I think there are good and bad parties. The opposition party urges other parties to do bad things as they do.”

In provinces where focus group participants expressed negative or neutral associations with the concept of an opposition *before* a CD, the associations usually improved after attending the CD. For example, after the Kandal dialogue, a participant said, “When I hear the word opposition party, I think about the people who help reconcile issues and criticize for good and development.” In the second Siem Reap focus group, where all associations of the opposition were negative prior to the CD, after the event the majority of participants reported positive impressions. One person said, “When we hear the word opposition party, we think that they help correct and prevent corruption.” There was a greater understanding and appreciation of the diversity of opinion following the CD as well. One participant in the second Kampong Thom focus group said, “When I hear the word opposition party, I think that there are always two ideas when we do something.”

Public awareness of political competition and individual choice was also raised during the CD. Following the second Kampong Speu dialogue, a focus group member pledged, “If an MNA from any party could help solve the land dispute for me, I will vote for that party.” Following the CDs, participants also emphasized the value of multiparty debates and their appreciation in hearing multiple viewpoints. A Banteay Meanchey participant, when reflecting on the CD in general, stated, “I think that this dialogue is good because it is a multiparty dialogue.” A Kandal participant said, “I think that the dialogue was good because both non-ruling parties talked about the border issue.”

Participant impressions of the opposition did not always improve, however. Although associations with the opposition prior to the first Kampot CD were largely positive, following the CD the majority of focus group members reported negative feelings, perhaps indicative of a persuasive performance of the ruling party during the CD. One participant reported, “When we hear the word opposition party, we think it is a party that always criticizes the government.” After the second Kampot CD, only one focus group participant made a positive remark about the opposition.



Following the CDs, NDI moderators asked focus group participants several questions to gauge their opinions of the dialogue in general, their perception of the MNAs’ performance, and their confidence in the MNAs’ ability to deliver on promises. In general, post-CD focus group participants were pleased with the performance of the MNAs and felt their problems had been addressed. Most affirmed that their perception of their representatives had improved as a result of the CD. A Prey Veng participant responded, “Yes, it does improve my perception on the role of MNAs. There were MNAs from different political parties discussing the issues of concern of people.” People reported that the MNAs seemed more accessible. A participant in the second Kampong Speu focus group said, “Yes, it does improve our perception on the role of MNAs. I am not scared of them now and they will come to help the people when we have problems.” The word association exercise also captured these positive feelings after the events. In the post-CD focus group in Kampong Cham, a participant said, “When I hear the word MNA, I think about a person whom the people love and like.” Only three people in Kratie reported worsened perception of MNAs based on their performance during the dialogue. One stated, “We think that the MNAs did not respond to the questions asked by the people directly.”

Focus group participants reported a high degree of confidence in MNAs following the CD and said they believed MNAs would take action on the concerns raised. A participant in Takeo stated, “We have more confidence in our MNAs’ interest to represent us because they pledged to solve the problems.” Some indicated that they

were pleased just to have been heard. A Kampong Chhnang participant said, “I am more confident in my MNAs’ interest to represent me because they visited the people and listened to the concerns of the people.” While the majority of focus group participants in Kratie described heightened confidence, a few disagreed: “We are less confident in our MNAs’ interest to represent us because they responded to the issues based on laws only, not the real facts,” referencing responses by ruling party MNAs that the country followed the law despite being presented with violations of the law. All respondents in the first Siem Reap focus group reported less confidence: “I am less confident in the MNAs because they promised without any actual solution.” Two people from the second Kampong Thom and the Battambang focus groups reported less confidence in their MNAs following the dialogue, describing their lack of faith in follow through. The Battambang participant said, “I have less confidence in my MNAs’ interest to represent me because they never fulfilled their promises with the people.”

In most post-CD focus groups, increased confidence in MNAs came with greater expectations, and participants expressed high hopes that MNAs would fulfill their promises made during the CD and visit their constituents again. This focus on fulfillment indicates an increasing understanding of accountability. A Takeo participant stated, “I think that MNAs had pledged to solve problems for the people in the dialogue, but we need to wait and see their activities.” A participant from Kampong Speu also pledged his electoral support for the person who delivered on the needs raised at the CD.

When asked if they received useful information from their MNAs during the CD, most focus group participants responded in the affirmative. As a respondent in the first Siem Reap focus group stated, “I understood about the MNA’s role and responsibilities and received information on laws from their explanations in the event.” All participants expressed the value they placed on the concept of a constituency dialogue. When asked if they found the dialogue useful, a participant in the second Siem Reap group replied, “Yes, I do because there was an exchange of ideas and I was able to ask them about the development projects.” Many reported they valued the CD as a result of its multiparty element. A participant in the second Kampot focus group stated, “I think the dialogue was good because there were two political parties listening to the people’s concerns.” The focus groups showed participants were eager for more attention from their MNAs, and all participants said there needed to be more CDs in the future.

IV. POST-CONSTITUENCY DIALOGUE ACTIONS AND RESULTS¹⁰

Following each CD, NDI completed a monitoring form to capture: the main problems identified by CD participants; the pledges made by MNAs to address each concern; the results based on self-reporting from MNAs; and the results as reported by the community. NDI staff followed up with individual MNAs after the CD to discuss their activities, recording any information on the monitoring form.¹¹ In addition, NDI's local partners visited the CD village and nearby communities following the dialogue, meeting with participants and local authorities to enquire about any changes or progress made on the issues raised at the CD and to cross-check the validity of the MNAs' reports. For the most part, the actions and results reported by the MNAs were confirmed by and consistent with the observations at the community level by local officials and citizens. These results were then compiled and reported back to each community by NDI's local partners and volunteers in August and September 2011.

Many MNAs took action to address concerns raised by participants during the CDs, and their interventions took many forms. Often the MNAs filed reports or wrote letters to relevant government institutions. In some cases, MNAs held meetings with local authorities and actively intervened in the problem, often serving as an important mediator to resolve disputes. CDs and subsequent MNA attention frequently served to speed up pre-existing development plans for the local area, particularly on infrastructure requests. While most concerns raised by participants were not resolved as a direct result of the CDs, the dialogues had a significant impact – often in subtle and indirect ways – and sometimes did result in full resolution of a problem. Even without specific MNA involvement, the CDs exposed unfavorable and often illegal activities, often leading to official action at the local level or voluntary termination of the activities by their perpetrators.

As mentioned, MNAs often wrote letters or met with relevant government officials to draw attention to problems raised at the CDs. NDI recorded these interventions, regardless of whether the issue was ultimately resolved, as a demonstration of MNA intent and commitment. Examples include:

- *Siem Reap*: CPP MNA Chhim Ma held a meeting with the district governor and commune chiefs to discuss CD participants' complaints about the Authority for the Protection and Management of Angkor and the Region of Siem Reap (APSARA) and the need for clarity on its jurisdiction and regulations.
- *Banteay Meanchey*: CPP MNA An Sum met with officials in the provincial departments for rural development, water resource management, environment, agriculture and fishery, land management, education, health, and industry to discuss issues raised at the CDs. He urged provincial officials to find solutions for local residents.
- *Banteay Meanchey*: SRP MNA Yont Tharo reported that on February 25, 2011, he wrote nine letters to relevant institutions through National Assembly requesting information on development projects in the province.

¹⁰ At the time of writing, most but not all monitoring meetings with MNAs had been held. In some communities, not enough time has elapsed since the CDs were held to allow for follow-up at the local level. The results reported here are partial.

¹¹ NDI staff usually met with MNAs in the members' offices. Occasionally, members were not available for one-on-one interviews and, per their request, completed NDI's monitoring form on their own.

- *Kampong Cham*: NRP MNA You Hockry wrote to H.E. Mr. Bin Chhin, the Deputy Prime Minister and Chief of the National Land Dispute Resolution Authority, to request an intervention in the dispute involving the Long Sreng Company that seized land from farmers in Ou Pram Ti Pir village, Preak Kak commune, Stueng Trang district.
- *Kampong Cham*: NRP MNA You Hockry wrote to the Minister of Rural Development to request roads in Meakh Pir village, Preak Kak commune, Stueng Trang district; to the Minister of Water Resources to rebuild the Ta Porn dam and water gate in Preak Kak commune, Stueng Trang district; and to the Minister of Health to request a health center in Preak Kak commune, Stueng Trang district.
- *Battambang*: SRP MNA Mu Sochua asked the deputy provincial governor to intervene in the land conflict in Koas Krala and Banan districts. She also met with CPP and SRP commune assistants together with the Doun Ba commune police to request that they allow villagers to plant rice on the disputed land in Doun Bar commune.
- *Kampong Thom*: Following complaints at the CD that low salaries for civil servants was a contributing cause of corruption, SRP MNA Men Sothavarin wrote to the Prime Minister and relevant authorities about increasing civil servants' wages.

Perhaps the most frequent and useful role the MNAs played after the CDs was that of a negotiator in a variety of disputes, creating opportunities for mediation and lobbying on behalf of the participants' interests. Examples include:

- *Prey Veng*: CPP MNA Sok Ey San intervened in a land dispute with local officials and the land was returned to the proper owner. This was confirmed by local officials.
- *Kandal*: SRP MNA Chan Cheng met with SRP provincial councilors to discuss the high fees for drivers' licenses, an issue raised at the CD. The provincial councilors took action at the next council meeting, and the fee has been reduced from 80,000 Riels to 57,000 Riels.
- *Kampong Thom*: Participants at the CD reported lacking national identification cards. The MNAs intervened in the matter, and two weeks later the district authorities distributed 4,000 ID cards to residents from all communes in the district.
- *Kampong Thom*: Following complaints by participants from Sar Kream commune that they did not receive compensation from a company that cleared their land, the district governor held a meeting with 434 villagers at O-Khjong pagoda a month after the CD and eight families received compensation.
- *Kampong Thom*: SRP MNA Men Sothavarin and CPP MNA Sik Bunhok both intervened in a land dispute involving the Gold Fusion company. Community leaders from Thmey village in Sraeung commune reported that the company has not cleared any land to date.
- *Kratie*: CPP MNA Troeung Thavy wrote to the President of the National Assembly regarding all of the land disputes raised at the CD. The Assembly issued a letter to the provincial governor asking him to find a solution to the cases. As a result, 16 families received compensation for seized land from various companies, as confirmed by the district authorities.

In a few cases, the CDs inspired citizens to organize on issues they had in common. Examples include:

- *Kratie*: Following the CD, 200 people from three communes – Svay Chreah, Pi Thnou, and Kchsum – organized a prayer ceremony on land disputes at Ta Pom pagoda.
- *Kampong Thom*: Members of the forest community from Samaki, Kroya, and Sar Kream communes reported that they had met with the Kroya and Samaki commune councils and had come to an agreement on a boundary for the forest, an issue raised at the CD. The Forestry Administration used GPS and sprayed colors on trees to demarcate the 7,782 hectares of forest land.
- *Kratie*: In Snoul district, following the CD, approximately 300 people organized and blocked the road to Kratie, demanding the return of 5,600 hectares of land seized from them by companies, and the dismissal of the case against four community representatives charged with destroying company property during a land protest.

Land Dispute Addressed by Kratie MNAs from CPP and SRP

The local community and the MNAs in Svay Chreah commune, Snoul district in Kratie worked together to solve a land dispute involving the Dau Tieng Kratie and Dau Tieng Rubber companies. After the CD, the community organized and solicited the assistance of SRP MNA Long Ry and CPP MNA Troeung Thavy, who wrote to the National Assembly on the issue. The SRP MNA distributed copies of his intervention letter signed by the President of the NA to the community. The CPP MNA requested that the provincial and district governors write a detailed report on the conflict to the Assembly. The community also organized a demonstration in front of the Svay Chreah commune office. On August 12, 2011, approximately 100 people from Svay Chreah commune traveled to Phnom Penh to protest in front of the Prime Minister's house, seeking his intervention.

On September 21, 2011, the provincial governor and undersecretary of the ministry of agriculture responded to three of the four demands of the protesters. They summoned three representatives to court and asked the companies to stop clearing land until a solution was found. They allowed 15 days for community residents to inform the land dispute resolution committee of the exact location of their land. At the time of writing, 60 percent of the land has been surveyed.

In response to development requests, MNAs applied pressure to local authorities to speed up already planned projects or initiatives, frequently generating results for the community. While these results are not attributable to the CD alone, the CDs helped to raise the necessary awareness of the issue and provided an incentive to accelerate action, sometimes without MNA participation. In a few cases, MNAs were able to effectively lobby for new programs or activities requested by their constituents. Examples include:

- *Kampot*: Following requests from participants at the CD for canal repairs, 770 meters of the canal were repaired from Trapeang Sangkae village to Trapeang Pring commune.
- *Prey Veng*: In response to the requests made during the CD, CPP MNA Sok Ey San reported that two roads – a 15 kilometer road from Peanea to Sithor Kandal district and a 20 kilometer road from Prey Phnov market along the national road number 8 to Prek Sandaek market -- were under construction by the army engineering unit.

- *Banteay Meanchey*: SRP MNA Yont Tharo reported that two kilometers of the road from Sala Krohom to Chang Ha had been repaired using commune development money and donations.
- *Siem Reap*: CPP MNA Chhim Ma instructed local authorities to restore a damaged canal in the community, an issue raised at the CD. As a result, a five kilometer canal in Keo Por commune, Puok district was repaired.
- *Kampong Cham*: Preak Kak commune chief and residents of the community reported that after the CD took place, rural development and water resource department officials studied the three damaged roads and a dam, raised by participants at the CD, in order to draft a proposal for repairs.
- *Kampong Thom*: CPP MNA Sik Bunhok reported that local authorities had resolved the problem with the water gate raised at the CD in Taing Krasao commune. A new dam, requested by CD participants, was put into the commune investment plan.
- *Battambang*: Following requests at the CD, three roads were built: an eight kilometer road from the border of the Ou Doun Pov village to Buor Sangreach village; a seven kilometer road from Ou Doun Pov village to Prab Hoeb village; and a three kilometer road from Ou Doun Pov village to Trapeang Kbal Sva village.
- *Kampong Chhnang*: Following requests at the CD, the provincial rural development department repaired the road from Phnom Chey to Sras Tameth and built a retaining wall for Tameth pond.

Participants at the CDs also exposed irregular or illegal activities that were being conducted in their community. The combination of this exposure to the public, and subsequent MNA interventions, often led to a crackdown on ongoing activities and served as a deterrent for others. Examples include:

- *Banteay Meanchey*: During the CD, participants complained about brokers using faulty scales to cheat them on rice prices. Following an intervention from SRP MNA Yont Tharo, provincial authorities re-calibrated the scales at the millers and gave a new scale to the commune to compare weight amounts with those of brokers.
- *Siem Reap*: At the CD, participants complained about being charged a 2,000 Riel fee for health services they believed were supposed to be free. CPP MNA Chhim Ma met with the head of the district operational health office in Angkor Chum district and was told the fee was voluntary and should not have been required. This has now been communicated to the community.
- *Kampot*: At the CD, fisherfolk complained of a resort blocking their access to the water. Immediately following the event, villagers and the village chief of Preaek Ampil village, Kaoh Touch commune, Tuek Chhou district reported that the owner of the resort stopped blocking the road.
- *Battambang*: Illegal fishing and inaction from local authorities was raised during the CD. Following the dialogue, residents from the Moung Ruessei district reported that illegal fishing activity was reduced by 60 percent because authorities had taken action.
- *Kampong Chhnang*: Participants complained of local officials' interference in residents' establishment of a women's network. Following the CD, the women's network held meetings without incident or intimidation.

V. CONCLUSION

NDI's dialogues held from November 2010 to September 2011 revealed significant consistencies in the concerns facing Cambodians across the program's 12 provinces. Issues raised included: land conflicts; agricultural challenges, particularly irrigation needs and access to markets; endemic corruption, especially among local authorities; unequal application of the law and lack of justice for the poor; and infrastructure and development needs, such as roads, health centers, schools and electricity. Although there were remarkably few differences from the issues raised in NDI's CD program in previous years, this year the issues surrounding land grabbing and economic concessions featured even more prominently. Cambodians appeared to have a pervasive sense that although their country's economy had been growing over the past decade, development was benefiting the rich, connected, and foreign rather than the average Cambodian. Feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction underscored people's remarks, and many participants were outspoken and critical at the events.

In the majority of CDs, members of the National Assembly conducted themselves professionally, followed the event's protocol, and refrained from personal attacks and unconstructive comments. They also demonstrated excellent party discipline, staying on message and articulating their party's positions, resulting in consistent responses to key issues. The overall performance and speaking skills of parliamentarians were improved over previous years, and MNAs demonstrated their commitment to listening to their constituents and responding clearly to their concerns. Skill levels varied among individuals, but the quality of their performance was not correlated to party affiliation. Participants appeared to respond more positively to those MNAs who clearly and systematically addressed each of the issues raised, rather than those who spoke in generalizations or had local officials respond in their place.

On a few occasions, political parties sent an MNA from a different provincial constituency to attend the CD. MNAs are elected by province on provincial party lists, and they are ultimately accountable to voters in the province. When an MNA representing another province participated, he or she often performed less well than the MNAs representing that province, as he or she was not familiar with the local issues and leaders and was unable to provide substantial follow-up. CD audience members appeared confused, particularly when an MNA from a different province thanked them for their vote. Although the duty of the National Assembly is to represent all Cambodians, parties and MNAs should focus on proving themselves to potential voters, a strategy more likely to get them elected in the future, rather than spreading MNAs across the country.

Overall, the CDs produced concrete results, many of which can be directly attributed to the actions of MNAs who participated in the event. MNAs demonstrated their strong commitment to their constituents and their duties as representatives, and many parliamentarians followed up on at least one of his or her promises. Other interventions were spearheaded by the communities or local authorities. Often the CD itself served as a deterrent for further illegal practices by shedding light on the problem and publicly identifying culprits. Thus, although no one specifically took action against a problem, the problem stopped. In many cases, MNAs took steps to address an issue, but as of yet there are no results to report. Nevertheless, NDI recognizes all the attempts of MNAs to respond to the concerns raised by their constituents.

The representative function of the MNAs has been enhanced through the CD program, with parliamentarians taking critical steps to raise the concerns of their voters to the relevant bodies. As a Kratie SRP MNA stated, “I am your servant, I work for you.” MNAs have also been conducting oversight, particularly with regard to illegal practices at the local level. However, it should be noted that none of the interventions have involved legislation. Rather, the issues have been addressed through the relevant government ministries and offices. Although many of the problems raised during the dialogues certainly fell under the jurisdiction of the executive, the Assembly could play an important problem-solving role through its legislative function. Citizens correctly identified the law-making, as opposed to simply approving government-drafted laws, task of the National Assembly and expressed their expectation that the NA exercise this power.

The CDs have also served the important role of demonstrating to Cambodians across the country the range of their political options. There are few opportunities – if any – in Cambodia for ruling party and opposition party MNAs to participate side by side in a public forum and answer citizens’ questions. Following the CDs, focus group participants showed a greater awareness of the opposition and the value of a multiparty democracy.

Despite these gains, the focus groups revealed that citizens still have a limited understanding of the National Assembly and its purpose. Participants were often only able to identify law-making as a key role of the NA, but demonstrated little understanding of the impact of these laws. People were even more unclear about the role of individual members of the National Assembly, and confused their function with the government’s provision of goods and services. Although participation in the CDs enhanced their awareness somewhat, participants still lacked a comprehensive understanding of the role of the legislature and its members or the legislature’s connection with their daily lives. This is most likely due to the fact that the Assembly and MNAs have had a minimal impact on them to date. Few people have had any interaction with or news from the NA and its members prior to the CD. The majority of focus group participants could not name a single initiative or program conducted by the legislature on behalf of the people.

These results demonstrate that the Assembly and its members are falling short of fulfilling their duties, as people remain unaware of and unaffected by their work. In addition to initiating no legislation, the Assembly has no process for public hearings or in-depth research and investigation. The NA lacks coordinated constituency outreach efforts or other methods for disseminating information, for example through a newsletter, email list-serve, or other media. The executive branch determines the NA’s agenda and directs it in all matters of its work. Yet, Cambodians remain interested in hearing from their representatives and trust them to deliver on their pledges. Voters would like increased interaction with and information from the people they elected to serve them in the national legislative body.

NDI’s CD program has provided an important opportunity for MNAs to build relationships with communities and fulfill the tasks they were elected to do, but it is not enough on its own. The National Assembly and its members would be well-served to provide more information at the grassroots level about the NA’s work, agenda, and programs, and for its members to make greater efforts to reach out to and meet with their constituents more frequently.

APPENDIX

Summary of NDI Constituency Dialogue Events November 2010 to September 2011

Date	Constituency Dialogue Location				Participants	Member of National Assembly (MNA)	
	Province	District	Commune	Village		Name	Party
11/27/2010	Siem Reap	Puok	Keo Por	Kamphem	403	H.E. Mr. Chhim Ma	CPP
						H.E. Mrs. Ke Sovannroth	SRP
12/4/2010	Kandal	Kandal Stoeung	Ampov Prey	Tadorl II	793	H.E. Mrs. Ho Naun	CPP
						H.E. Mr. Chan Cheng	SRP
						H.E. Mr. Ou Chanrith	HRP
12/18/2010	Battambang	Bavel	Kdol Taken	O'Daunpov	427	H.E. Ms. Chuonh Sochhay	CPP
						H.E. Ms. Mu Sochua	SRP
1/15/2011	Kampong Thom	Prasat Balaing	Kroya	Kroya	604	H.E. Mr. Sik Bunhok	CPP
						H.E. Mr. Men Sothavarin	SRP
1/29/2011	Kampot	Teuk Chhou	Trapaing Sangke	Trapaing Sangke	192	H.E. Mr. Som Chen	CPP
						H.E. Mr. Ho Vann	SRP
2/12/2011	Banteay Meanchey	O'Chrov	Chang Ha	Ta Phouk	463	H.E. Mr. An Sum	CPP
						H.E. Mr. Yont Tharo	SRP
						H.E. Mr. Chea Kim	FCP
2/19/2011	Prey Veng	Sithor Kandal	Ampil Krao	Svay Teab	367	H.E. Mr. Sok Ey San	CPP
						H.E. Mr. Chea Poch	SRP
						H.E. Mr. Sao Rany	NRP
2/26/2011	Kampong Speu	Oral	Sangke Satob	Kork	401	H.E. Mrs. Lak Oun	CPP
						H.E. Mr. Nuth Rumduol	SRP
3/12/2011	Takeo	Samroang	Boeung Tranh Khang Tboung	Srey Chey	347	H.E. Mr. Um Sokhan	CPP
						H.E. Mr. Mao Monyvann	SRP
4/23/2011	Kratie	Snuol	Svay Chreah	Wat	848	H.E. Mrs. Troeung Thavy	CPP
						H.E. Mr. Long Ry	SRP
4/30/2011	Kampong Chhnang	Chol Kiri	Prey Kri	Prey Kri Cheung	615	H.E. Ms. Ker Chanmony	CPP
						H.E. Mr. Khy Vandeth	SRP

5/7/2011	Kampong Cham	Stueng Trang	Prek Kok	Mak II	413	H.E. Mr. Chin Kimsreng	CPP
						H.E. Mr. Kuoy Bunroeun	SRP
						H.E. Mr. Yem Ponhearith	HRP
						H.E. Mr. You Hockry	NRP
3/26/2011	Siem Reap	Prasat Bakong	Kantreang	Sreth	512	H.E. Mr. Sam Heang	CPP
						H.E. Mrs. Ke Sovannroth	SRP
5/21/2011	Kandal	Koh Thom	Chheu Khmao	Chong Khsach	523	H.E. Mrs. Ho Naun	CPP
						H.E. Mr. Chan Cheng	SRP
						H.E. Mr. Ou Chanrith	HRP
5/28/2011	Battambang	Moung Ruessei	Kear	Kear Bei	408	H.E. Ms. Ly Kimleang	CPP
						H.E. Ms. Mu Sochua	SRP
6/4/2011	Kampot	Chum Kiri	Trapeang Reang	Ta Reach	209	H.E. Mr. Som Chen	CPP
						H.E. Mr. Chea Poch	SRP
6/11/2011	Kampong Thom	Prasat Sambo	Taing Krosao	Taing Krosao	605	H.E. Mr. Sik Bunhok	CPP
						H.E. Mr. Men Sothavarin	SRP
6/25/2011	Banteay Meanchey	Svay Chek	Slar Kram	Kleng Por Choeung	368	H.E. Mr. Pal Sam Oeun	CPP
						H.E. Mr. Yont Tharo	SRP
						H.E. Mr. Nhek Bunchhay	FPC
7/2/2011	Prey Veng	Kanhchriech	Kouk Kong Lech	Neak Ta Chey	307	H.E. Mr. Sok Ey San	CPP
						H.E. Mr. Kong Bora	SRP
						H.E. Mr. Sao Rany	NRP
						H.E. Mr. Yem Ponhearith	HRP
7/9/2011	Kampong Speu	Oddong	Damnak Reang	Pou	430	H.E. Mr. Ly Son	CPP
						H.E. Mr. Nuth Rumduol	SRP
7/23/2011	Takeo	Bati	Puth Sar	Prey Sva	558	H.E. Mr. Prak Thuch	CPP
						H.E. Mr. Tok Vanchan	SRP
7/30/2011	Kampong Cham	Memot	Chaom Ta Mau	Bos Ta Oem	458	H.E. Mr. Van Sengly	CPP
						H.E. Mr. Kuoy Bunroeun	SRP
						H.E. Mr. You Hockry	NRP
8/6/2011	Kratie	Sambo	Koh Khjer	Svay Check	401	H.E. Mrs. Troeung Thavy	CPP
						H.E. Mr. Long Ry	SRP
8/13/2011	Kampong Chhnang	Baribour	Pech Changvar	Tang Trapeang	528	H.E. Mr. Keo Sosak	CPP
						H.E. Mr. Kimsour Phirith	SRP
Total citizen participation at NDI CDs in 2010-2011: 11,180						35 MNAs	