

IMPROVING LIVES BY FIGHTING CORRUPTION

Curbing corruption is widely recognized as the key to boosting a nation out of economic and social lethargy into a vibrant, thriving state. After more than two decades of war and constant conflict, corruption in Cambodia has been allowed to metastasize from its bureaucratic core and currently plagues all levels of society. It impacts everyone, whether they are perpetrators or victims, and has corroded trust between the government and its people. Corruption in Cambodia that remains unchecked threatens to undermine social and political stability gains as well as discourage foreign investors who demand transparency and accountability.

Cambodia consistently ranks on international monitors as one of the most corrupt nations in the world. Recent reports by the UN, the World Bank and other international organizations have also identified corruption as one of the most pressing concerns among the Cambodian people. Tackling the problem, therefore, requires the resolve of all of Cambodia's citizenry, from farmers in the most rural reaches of the nation to the political elite in the capital. Particularly, it demands active public oversight of public resources, and specific laws to regulate corruption, neither of which currently exist.

Pact believes in a holistic approach to fighting corruption that engages a variety of stakeholders, providing education, technical assistance, and funding for activities that serve to significantly reduce the incidence of corruption. Pact's distinctive anti-corruption program serves as a linchpin for sustainable reform by paving the way for a more transparent and responsible government. It accomplishes this through five innovative projects carried out within the context of one of Pact's defining principles: building a fair and just society. The anti-corruption program works in tandem with Pact's good governance program to form a web of complementary activities and initiatives that target corruption head-on and help move Cambodia closer to a sustainable democracy.



DIRECT GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

Implementing reform measures that limit opportunities for corruption requires building a solid policy and regulatory framework that is supported by the national government. Without laws that are supported in the courts to guide behavior, corruption will continue to flourish. Pact has worked directly with the Cambodian government, providing technical assistance through the Ministry of National Assembly and Senate Relations and Inspections (MoNASRI) on a draft law on anti-corruption that outlines clear provisions for banning corrupt practices and that would comply with international standards. To further strengthen accountability and ensure transparency in government processes, Pact has closely guided initial, concrete steps toward a future Access to Information law by working with MoNASRI to develop a policy paper that would be used as a foundation for such a law, which is currently under review by government leaders.

CREATING A COLLECTIVE VOICE AGAINST CORRUPTION

Coordinating activities with more than 40 civil society organizations to form a strong and united front against corruption has been a successful tool in capturing the attention of government authorities, who have the power and ability to directly influence public policy decisions but have so far been indifferent to the demands of the people for reform. In an unprecedented feat, Pact conceived, funded and coordinated a nation-wide education and signature-gathering campaign to call attention to the stalled draft anti-corruption law. The "Million Signature Campaign" involved a cavalcade of signature gatherers dispatched to 19 of Cambodia's 24 provinces where they conducted grassroots outreach to educate people about the costs and impacts of corruption, and collected 1.1 million thumbprints and signatures in support of an international standard law on anti-corruption. The initiative was the biggest advocacy campaign ever conducted in Cambodia and garnered both local and international media attention. It effectively mobilized public support



and helped persuade all but one political party to place passage of the anti-corruption law as its top party platform.

The “Million Signature Campaign” builds on the objectives of Pact’s ongoing and widely-successful “Clean Hands” campaign, which aims to educate the public about corruption through a simple, eye-catching brand and slogan. The campaign includes the distribution of thousands of blue stickers with an open hand, cadastral and civil fee posters detailing proper fees for services such as marriage and motor vehicle licenses, and billboard and media advertisements designed to increase awareness and lower the incidence of corruption. The Clean Hand logo has become an ubiquitous symbol in Cambodian society, recognized by 75% of Cambodians according to a 2006 independent survey.

WORDS AS A VEHICLE FOR CHANGE

Journalists play a critical watchdog role in combating corruption by shining a spotlight on government waste and malfeasance. The hotter the spotlight on corrupt officials, the less likely they are to continue behaving dishonestly. Beginning in 2005, with a subgrant from Pact, journalists working in the Khmer-language press have increased and expanded their capacity to report and write about corruption through a groundbreaking project conducted by Internews Network that trains journalists in the skills and techniques of investigative reporting. The program emphasizes fact-based, ethical and analytical reporting that is accurate, balanced and fair. Armed with the tools to report professionally and effectively, Cambodia’s media has seen an increase in both the quality and quantity of stories about corruption, with more than 100 journalists in the program trained. The number of corruption-related stories grew four times, from roughly 100 stories per month in 2005 in select print media outlets to 417 stories per month in 2008, according to data from the media monitoring company, MC&D.

The project’s success has reverberated throughout the nation as its journalists have exposed a range of corruption cases, from an illegal logging syndicate operated by key government officials in Northeastern Cambodia to a human trafficking scandal involving kickbacks paid to Ministry of Labor officials in exchange for fast-tracking fraudulent work permits for young Khmer women. Overall, the program has spurred a competitive media environment in which media outlets are vying to uncover corruption.

MONITORING CORRUPTION

Establishing a comprehensive picture of corruption and its impacts on Cambodian society helps guide priorities in fighting it. Pact routinely commissions top quality research and studies on the impacts of corruption, including the 2006 and 2007 Transparency International Corruption Barometer survey and the Economic Institute of Cambodia’s study on the impact of corruption on the private sector—documents that have been used as benchmarks for progress in the overall anti-corruption effort. In addition, the Pact-funded “Corruption Monitor” provides monthly reviews of corruption-related stories published in major Khmer language newspapers and broadcast on private and publicly sponsored radio to further track corruption cases.

Pact’s campaign to route out corruption achieves even broader reach through the Pact-supported anti-corruption website, www.SaatSam.info, that targets a youthful and increasingly tech-savvy audience.

PRIVATE SECTOR SUPPORT

Corruption between public and private sector has also seriously impeded growth, causing the loss of millions annually to government coffers as well as to companies doing business in Cambodia. According to a recent World Bank report, 82 per cent of companies that operate in Cambodia expect to pay bribes in order to operate; meanwhile, Cambodia loses up to \$330 million annually to corruption and unpaid business taxes, according to the Economic Institute of Cambodia.

In order to ensure a fair business environment where private sector can thrive and the government can properly collect taxes to create programs or build infrastructure that benefit its people, Pact launched its innovative “Clean Business Initiative.” The project promotes integrity in business operations and a vigorous business environment with the ultimate goal of helping companies increase profits and market share, attract foreign investment and new business partners, and earn public respect and recognition for being a Clean Business. As the public becomes more educated and aware of its market choices, it is also becoming more discerning about how dollars are spent. With corruption ranking as one of the public’s most important challenges, public and private companies see an advantage in marketing themselves to consumers as clean. The program incorporates networking opportunities, conferences, trainings and workshops with exposure to international business experts in an effort to cultivate mutual understanding between the Cambodian government and private sector regarding the dual need for anti-corruption reform and corporate social responsibility practices.

PACT CAMBODIA

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