

Practical Grassroots Advocacy in Cambodia Analysis of 80 Case Studies

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Cambodia is a tropical country with biodiversity and pristine natural resources, including land, forest and fisheries. These natural resources play an critical role in providing a safety net for millions of rural people. In particular, these resources are the main source of income for the majority of the rural poor.

Natural resources and land management issues are at the core of the poverty-environment nexus in Cambodia. Landlessness, insufficient land, insecure title over land, barriers to women's access to land and unclear land rights leading to conflicts all contribute to insecure livelihoods. This situation has been exacerbated by the lack of progress on defining the extent of forest concessions, the continuing approval of large-scale economic land concessions, land speculation, mining activities, and ambiguities on the location and extent of state land¹.

Government development policies, to some extent, also have an impact on local community livelihoods. In addition, some communities report human rights abuses, particularly abuse of the collective rights of indigenous minority people. A number of human rights NGOs have raised concerns about the impact of sub degree on economic land concessions and lack of law enforcement by the Royal Government of Cambodia. Within the past decade, human rights NGOs have received many complaints about human rights violations and violence related to land and natural resources.

Increasingly concerned by these issues, Cambodian NGOs that focus on human rights advocacy, including the NGO Forum on Cambodia (NGOF), Advocacy and Policy Institute (API), ADHOC, Center for Social Development (CSD), DPA, GAD/C, LWF and Star Kampuchea have organized a series of national advocacy conferences each year since 2006. These conferences highlight key challenges and opportunities of civil society groups and human rights NGOs advocacy.

150 to 350 people were invited to each conference. More than half of the participants came from local communities in different parts of the country. During each conference, community representatives noted their complaints about local issues, including issues related to land, forestry, fisheries and mining. Most of these issues were not resolved during the conferences.

In the December, 2008, conference, organizers surveyed participants on land and natural resources issues and their advocacy responses. The two-day National Advocacy Conference² included 180 participants from government, NGOs, the media, the private sector, academic institutions and local communities. Representatives from 79 communities were asked to participate in the survey.

¹ DFID ref. no: 144 508 006

² The conference was held on December 25-26 at the Sunway Hotel in Phnom Penh.

The data generated by the survey will be used as baseline information for monitoring and evaluation of advocacy efforts in Cambodia over time.

Community Reports on Case Studies

Survey participants came from the provinces of Kg.Chhnang (2), Batambang (7), Kg.Cham (16), Bantey Meanchey (15), Stung Treng (1), Kg. Spue (15), Preah Sihanouk (4), Kg. Thom (9), Mondulkiri (6), Svay Reing (2), and Pursat (2). Interviewees also came from different backgrounds, as shown in the table below, with nearly one-third (26) as community leaders.

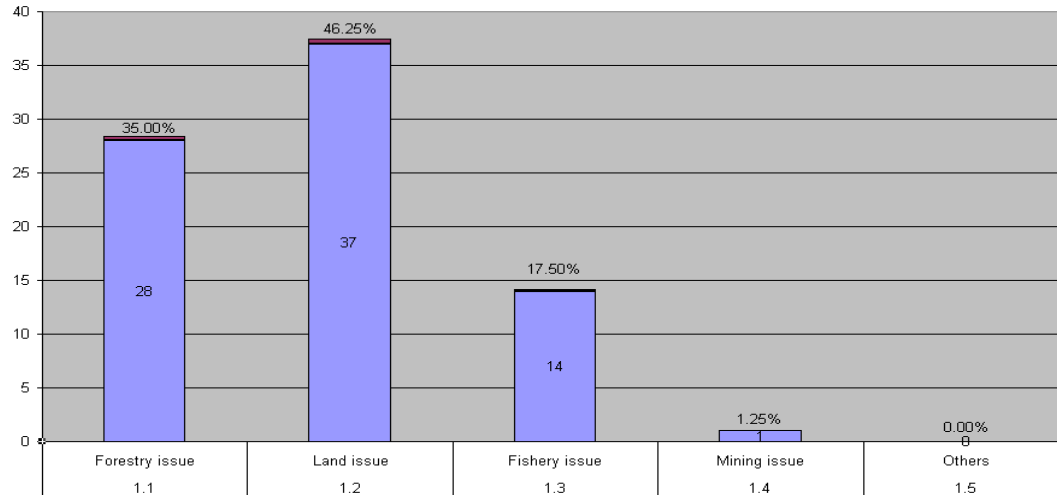
Position of Participants	Number
Village Development Committee	1
Community leader	26
Community Representative	18
Fishery Community Representative	7
Village Chief	1
Forestry Community Representative	8
Advocacy Network member	3
Human Rights Network member	1
Community Land representative	3
Community Advocacy network leader	1
Commune Council Member	3
Local Non-Government Organization	6
Village health support group	1
Village Development Committee	4
Total	83
Invalid cases	4
Valid cases	79 persons

The structured questionnaire³ asked participants about issues in their communities, challenges that they are facing, and responses to these issues and challenges. Questions were multiple choice, and some questions allowed participants to choose more than one answer. The survey questions were explained in great detail to participants to ensure that they had a common understanding of the questions. The participants responded to the survey questions below as follows.

1. What are the issues in your community?

Participants were given a choice of identifying five types of issues: land, forestry, fisheries, mining and other issues. As shown in the bar graph below, the 79 community representatives identified a total of 80 issues. Please note that the figure located in the middle of each bar is the raw number of responses, as distinct from the percentage at the top of each bar. The highest response was for land issues, reported by 46.25%. An additional 35.00% said that forestry is a challenge in their communities, while 17.50% reported problems with fisheries.

These responses reflect other signs that land issues are a major cause for concern. The RGC has recognized land issues as a top priority since 2007⁴. Furthermore, the NGO Forum on Cambodia reported 173 land dispute cases in 2008, and noted that the majority (82.08%) had not yet been resolved⁵ by the end of 2008.



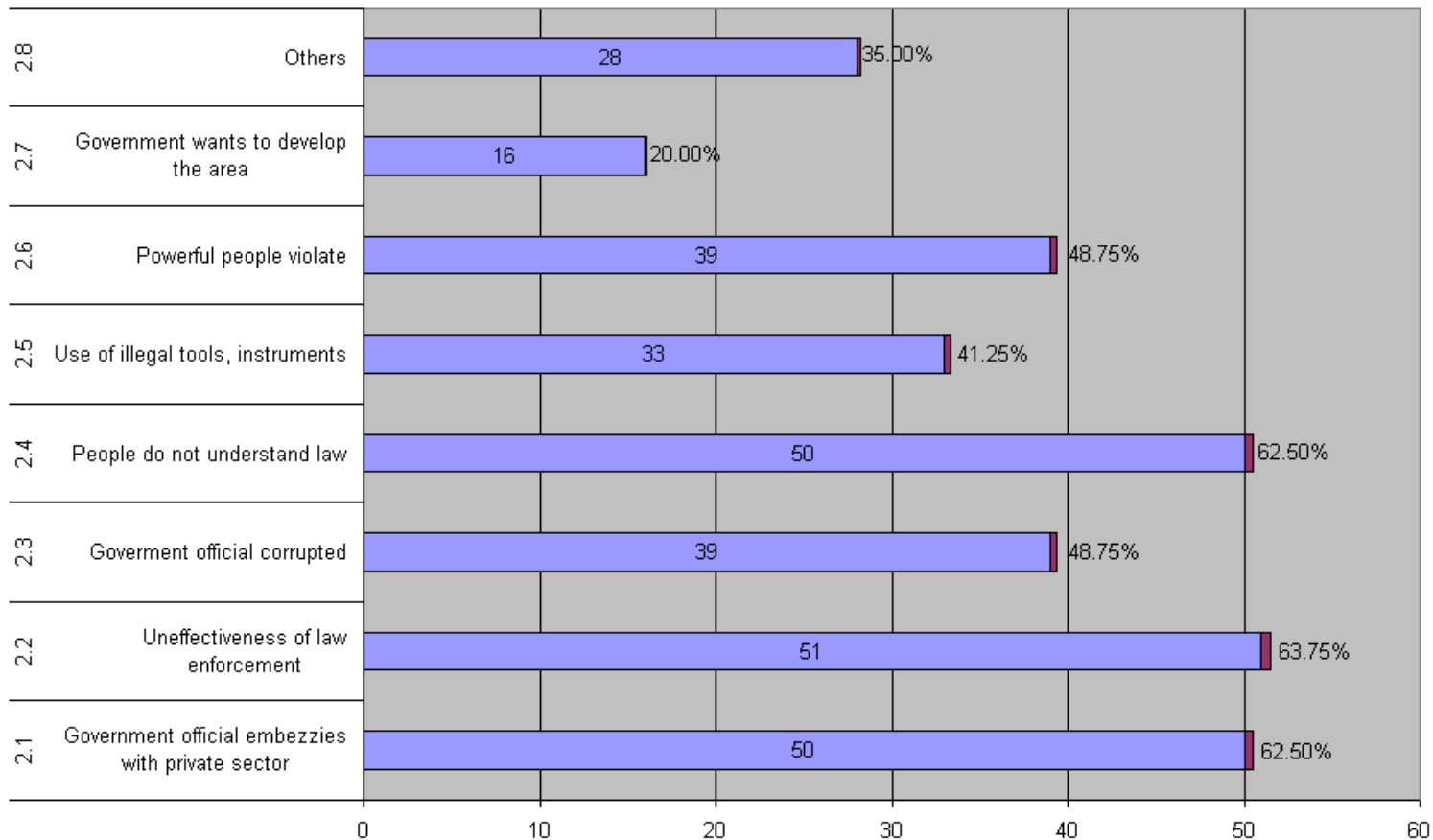
³ Please see Appendix A for a copy of the questionnaire.

⁴ Hun Sen' speech

⁵ Statistical Analysis on Land Dispute Occurring in Cambodia 2008, NGOF's Land Information Centre

2. Why has this happened? Reason(s) leading to conflict in your community

Participants said that the three main factors that caused these problems were ineffective law enforcement (63.75%), followed closely by a lack of understanding of the law (62.50%) and situations where government officials and people from the private sector embezzle resources (62.50%). In addition, 48.75% said that government officials were corrupt. A lower number of participants (20.00%) attributed these problems to government development plans.

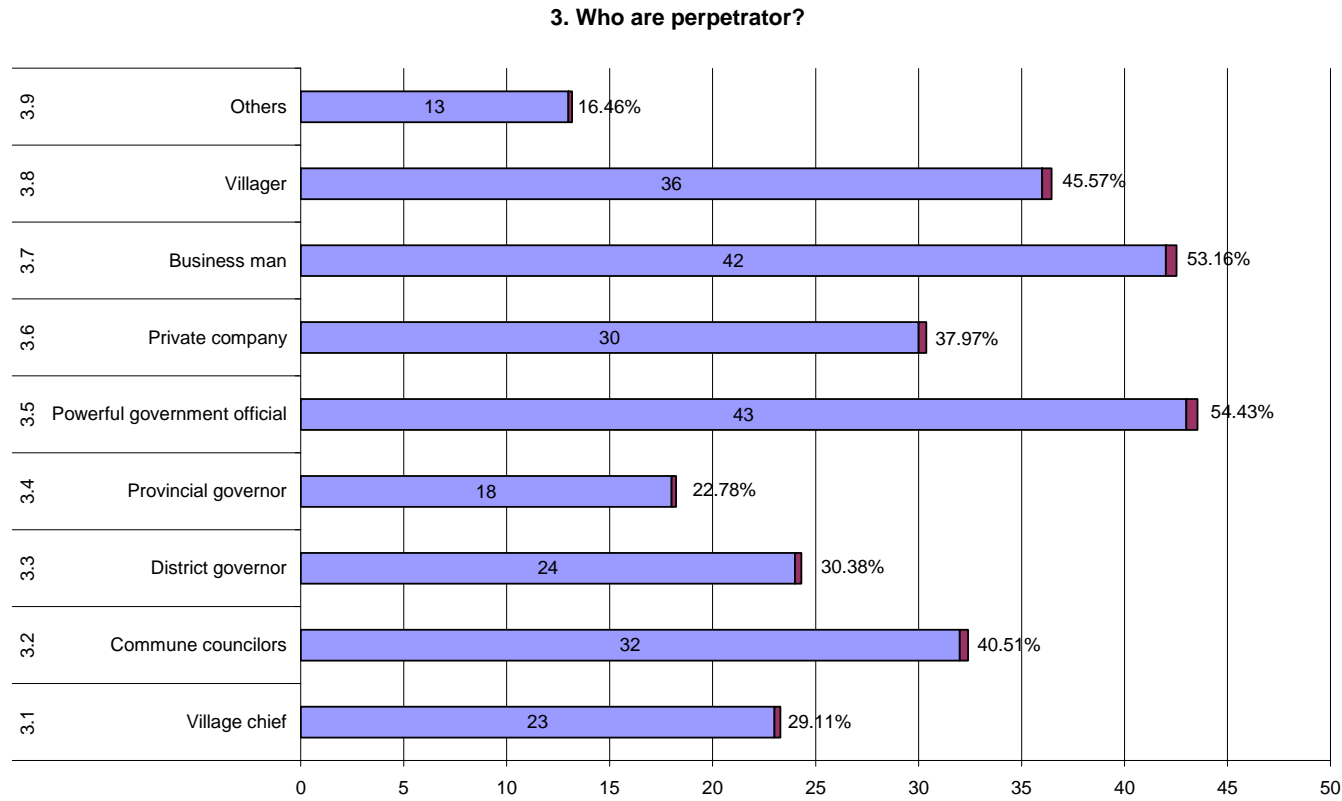


However, among land cases alone, the most common answer was embezzlement (67.6%), followed by powerful people violating the law (64.9%). These were followed by the same figures for lack of understanding about the law, ineffective law enforcement and corrupt government officials (59.5%)

Among the forestry cases, the most common answers were lack of understanding about the law and ineffective law enforcement, both reported by 67.9% of this subgroup.

3. Who are the perpetrators?

More than half the participants identified the perpetrators in these cases as powerful government officials (54.43%) or businessmen (53.16%). Villagers themselves were also named as perpetrators (45.57%), followed by commune councilors (40.51%) and private companies (37.97%).

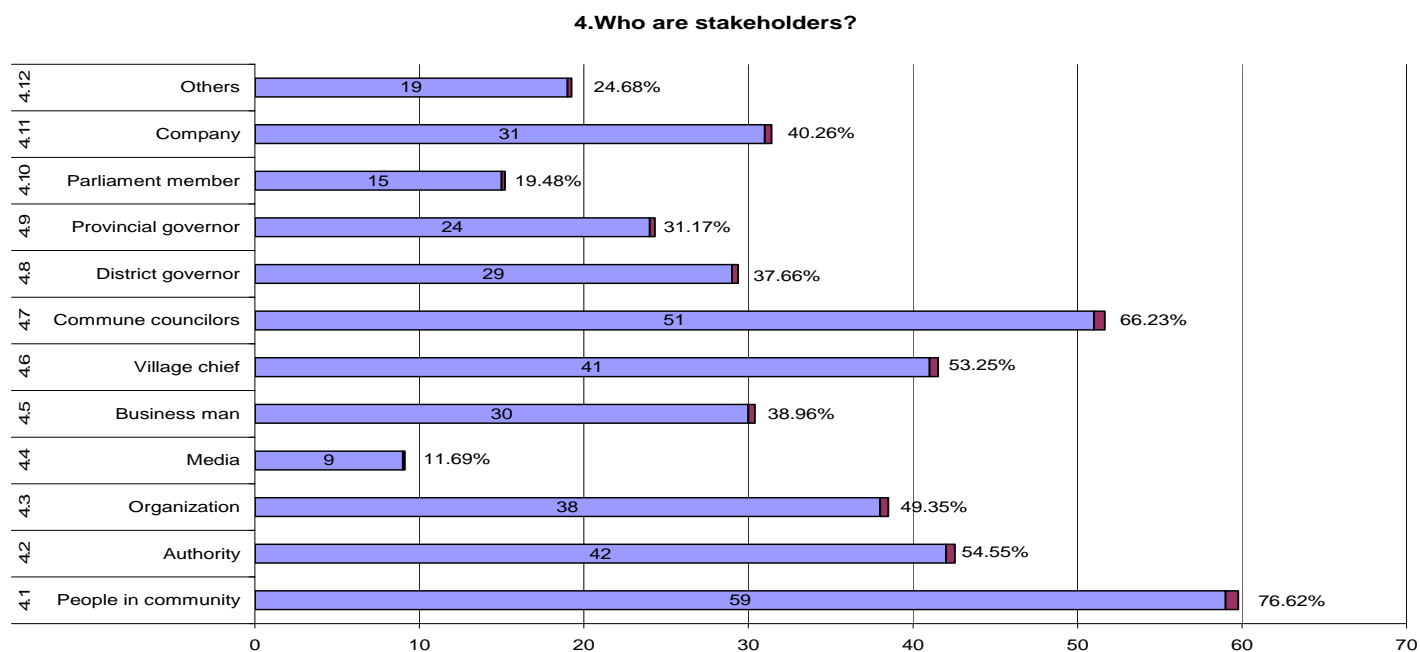


However, the perpetrators differ according to the type of case. Among the land cases, powerful government officials (59.5%) ranked at the top of the list of perpetrators, followed by commune councilors (54.1%) and three other groups (village chiefs, private companies and businessmen) who were each named by 48.6%. In the forestry cases, the most commonly named perpetrators were businessmen (64.3%) followed by powerful government officials (53.6%) and villagers (50.0%).

Answers also varied according to the roles played by specific respondents. For example, community leaders and community representatives were more likely to name powerful government officials as perpetrators. But community forestry representatives were more likely to name provincial governors, and community fishery representatives were more likely to name other villagers.⁶

4. Who are the stakeholders involved in the conflict?

By far the most commonly named stakeholders were community members (76.62%) followed by commune councilors (66.23%), authorities (54.55%) and village chiefs (53.25%).



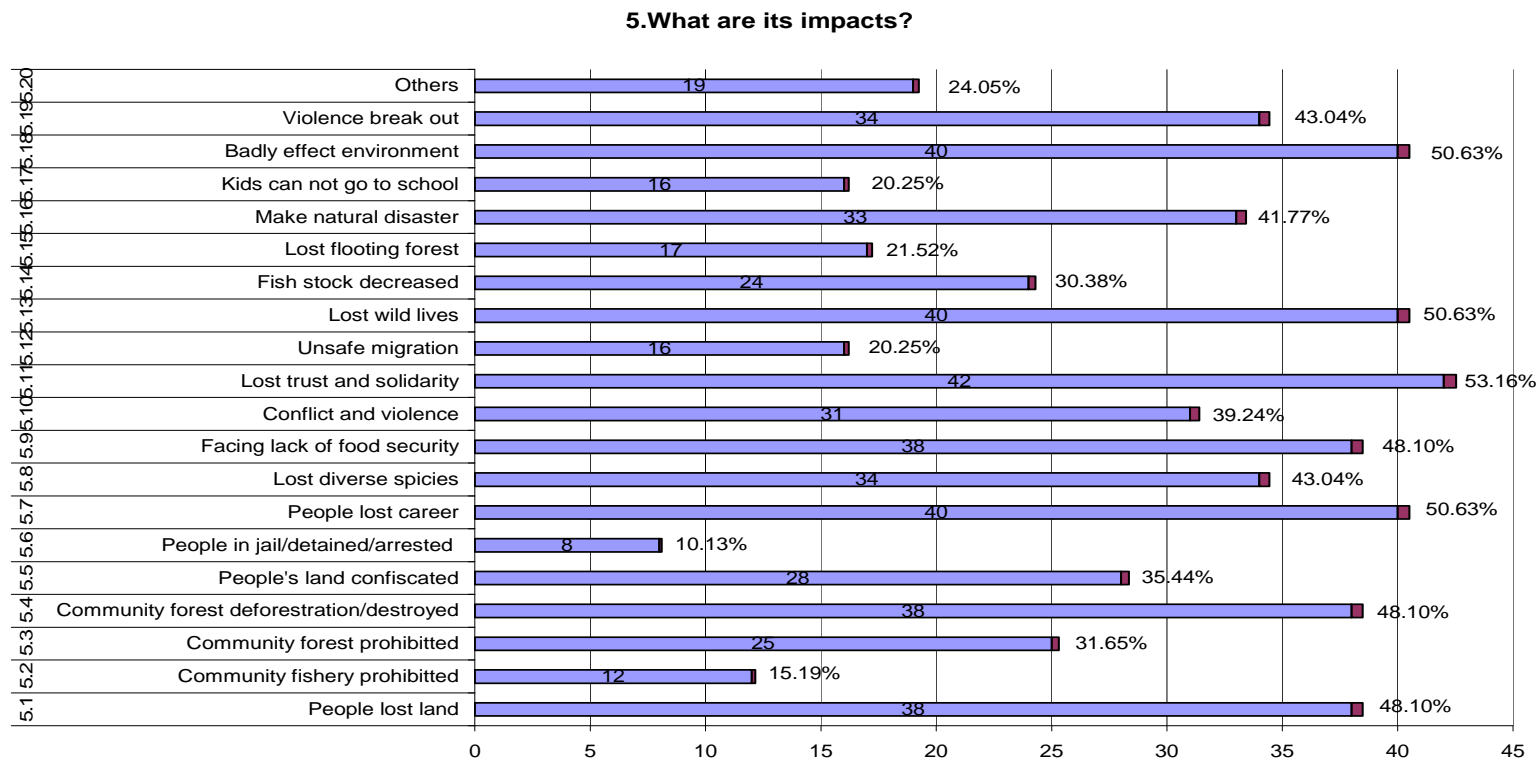
⁶ A total of 15 of the 25 community leaders, and 11 of the 18 community representatives named powerful government officials. (Eleven community representatives also named businessmen as perpetrators.) Half of the 8 community forestry representatives named provincial governors. A total of 5 of the 7 community fishery representatives named villagers as perpetrators.

However, the stakeholders are a bit different for different types of issues. For land issues, the two most commonly named stakeholders are community members (83.3% of the land issues) and commune councilors (72.2%). But the third most common stakeholders are village chiefs (69.4%) followed by a more significant drop-off to authorities (55.6%).

Among the forestry cases, the top stakeholders are community members and commune councilors (both at 65.4% of the fishery cases), followed by authorities (53.8%).

5. What are impacts/ side effects from the conflict?

Loss of trust and solidarity within the community was cited as the biggest impact, as reported by 53.16% of the participants. This was followed by the loss of careers, loss of wildlife and negative effects on the environment (all 50.63%). Still others cited loss of land, lost of forest (deforestation) and lack of food security (all reported by 48.10%).



A closer look at different types of cases yields different results. The top impact reported in land cases was loss of land (75.00% of the land cases) while the top impact in forestry cases was the destruction of community forests (82.10% of the forestry cases). In addition, conflict and violence were reported at different levels for land cases (50.00%) than for forestry cases (32.10%).

6. What actions have been taken to solve issues?

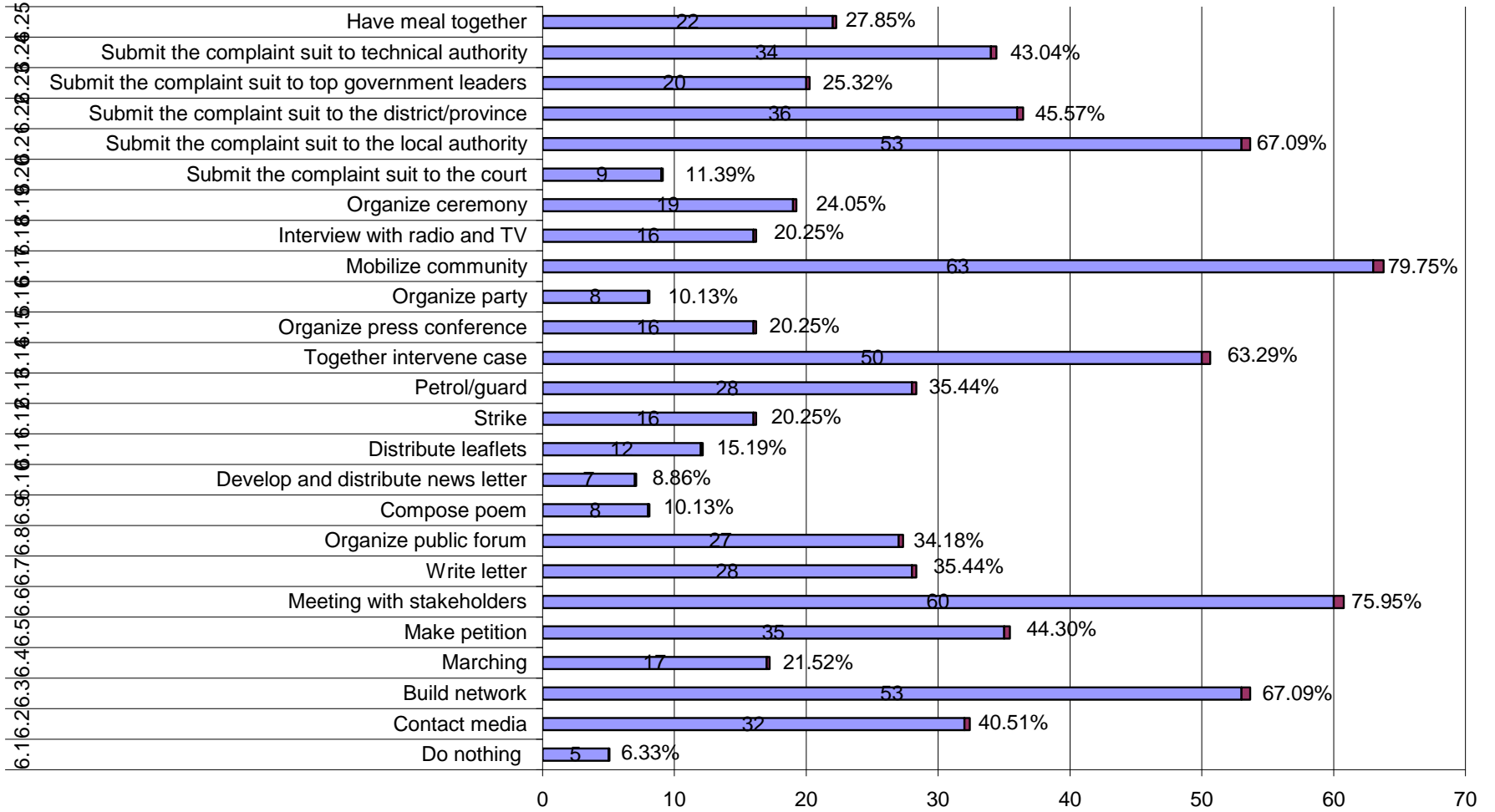
Through their wide range of answers, it is clear that participants employed more than strategy. Most often they reported that they mobilized the community, cited by 79.75% of the participants. An additional 75.95% said they held a meeting with stakeholders, and others said they built a network or submitted a complaint to local authorities (both 67.09%).

Other popular answers were:

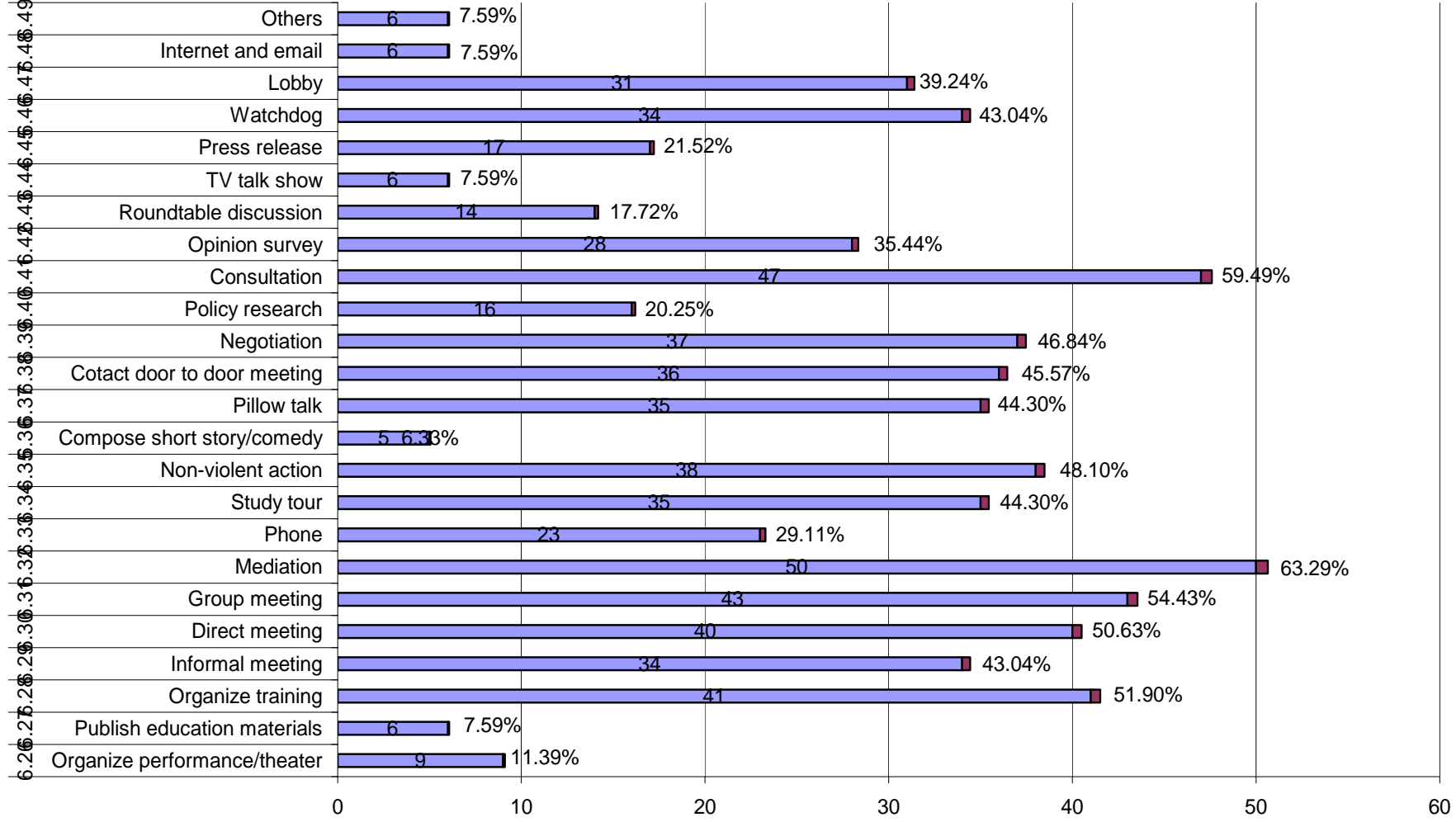
- intervene in the case (63.29%)
- mediation (63.29%)
- consultation (59.49%)
- group meeting (54.43%)

Actions varied among different types of cases. In all types of cases, the most common activity was mobilization, as reported in 80.60% of land cases, 75.00% of forestry cases (in a tie with meeting stakeholders) and 92.90% of fishery cases. The second most common activity in land cases was submitting a complaint to local authorities, as reported in 77.80% of land cases. But in the forestry and fishery cases, the second most commonly named activity was intervening, as reported in 71.40% of forestry cases and 85.70% of fishery cases (in a tie with meeting the stakeholders.)

6.1.What actions have been taken to solve issue?

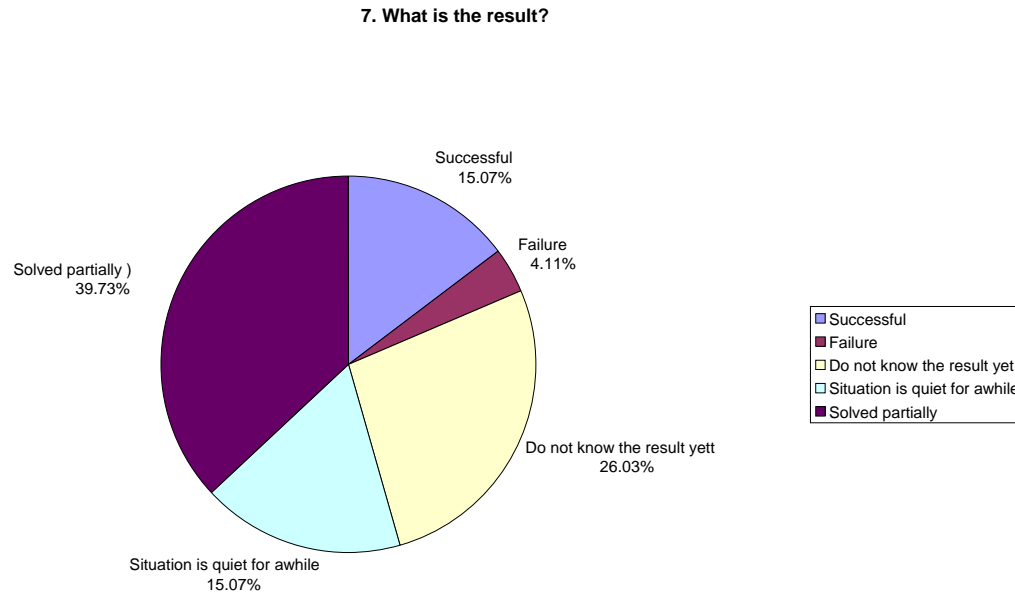


6.2.What actions have been taken to solve issue?



7. What were results of advocacy?

A total of 15.07% reported that they were successful full, along with 39.73% of the respondents reported that the problems are partially solved. On the other hand, 26.03% said they did not know the results, and 15.07% said the situation was quiet or awhile. Only 4.11% reported failure.



These results vary according to several factors, however, depending on the causes, the perpetrators and the activities by the respondents, and the roles played by advocates in their communities, among other factors.

Among cases where the perpetrators were powerful government officials, the highest result was partial success (39.47%), followed by situations where respondents did not yet know the results (31.57%). In these cases, the ratio of complete success to failure was 10.52% (4 cases) for success to 2.63% (1 case) for failure.

Similarly, when perpetrators were businessmen, the highest results were partial success (51.28%), followed by situations where the respondents did not yet know the results (23.07%). Again, respondents reported more cases of complete success (7.69%, 3 cases) than failure (2.56%, 1 case).

Results also varied according to the causes of the issues. Among the cases with the most commonly reported causes, the highest results were partial success, as reported for cases involving lack of understanding (51.06%), embezzlement by government officials and the private sector (44.68%) and ineffective law enforcement (46.7%). In all these situations, respondents reported a much higher rate of outright success than failure. The highest rate of success reported by respondents, at 14.89%, was among embezzlement cases. In fact, these embezzlement cases account for a full 63.60% of the successful cases of all types. The highest rate of partial success was reported in cases where the government wanted to develop the area, as noted in 56.25% of the development cases. However, in all types of cases, a significant number of respondents reported that they did not yet know the result (27.65% for embezzlement, 22.22% for ineffective law enforcement and 17.02% for lack of understanding).

Different activities also yielded different results. The highest success rate was reported among those who conducted patrol, with a success rate of 22.2%, and this activity was cited in 54.5% of the successful cases. This was followed by interventions, with a success rate of 15.3%, which was noted in 63.6% of the successful cases. Among cases where the respondents mobilized their communities, the most common activity reported by participants, the most common result was partial success (38.3%), followed by situations where the respondents did not yet know the results (25%). Their rate of outright success (18.3%) greatly exceeded their failure rate (3.33%). Those who conducted meetings with stakeholders also most often reported partial success (40.4%), followed by situations where the respondents did not yet know the results (24.6%). Again, their rate of outright success (14%) exceeded their rate of failure (3.33%)

Results also varied according to the advocates themselves. The highest results for community leaders was partial success and not knowing the results, both at 33.33%. This group reported the highest success rate, at 25%, and no failures. In fact, they accounted for more than half (54.5%) of the successful cases. The community representatives, on the other hand, said their most common result was that the situation had been quiet for awhile (29.4%), followed by partial success and lack of knowledge about the result, both at 23.5%. They reported a much higher rate of success (17.6%) than failure (5.9%).

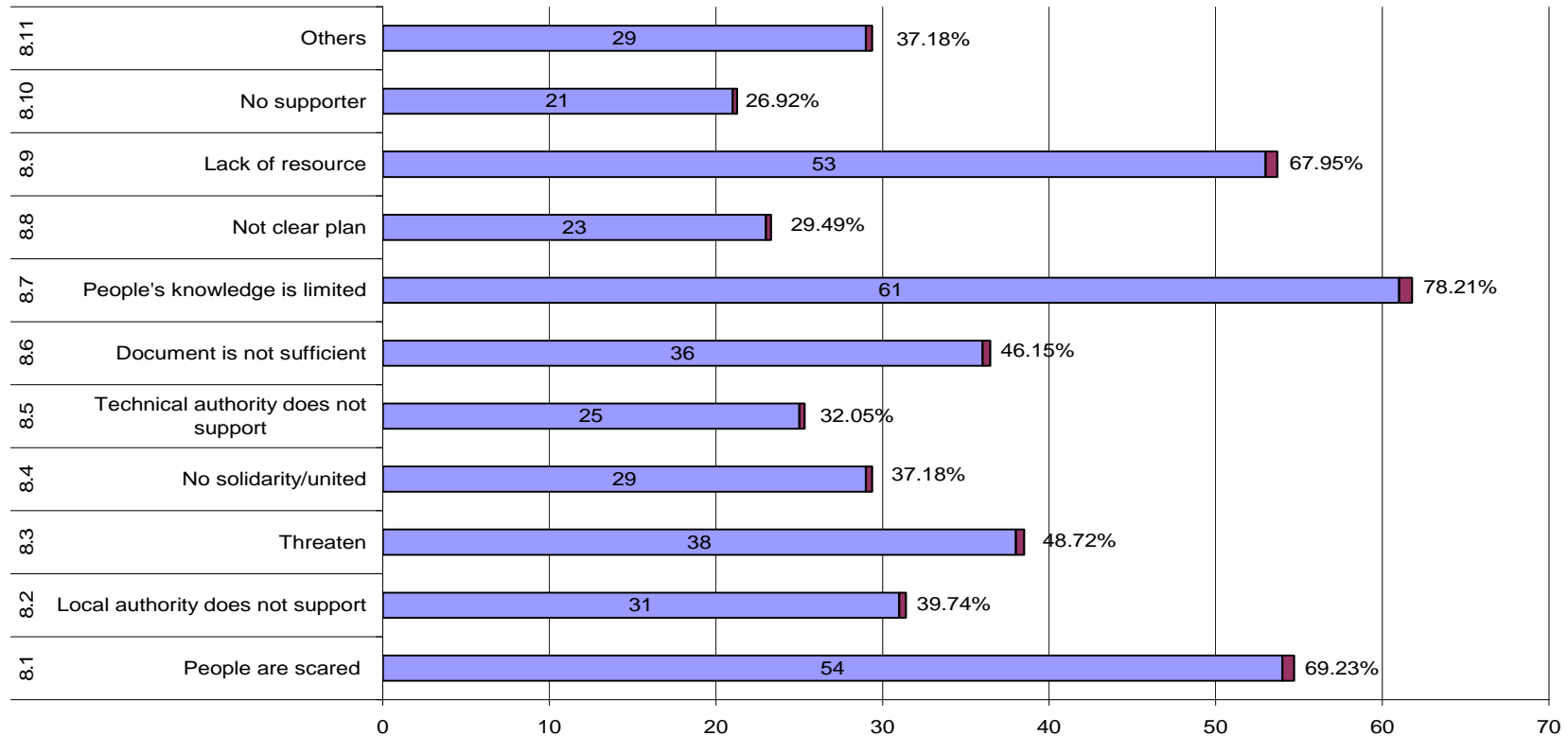
Among forestry representatives, the most common result was that they did not know (50%), followed by partial success (33.3%). They had no successes and one failure.

Fishery representatives reported a partial success rate of 42.9%, followed by not knowing the result, at 28.6%, with one success and one failure.

8. What are challenges, difficulties and weaknesses?

Participants reported that their biggest challenges is the limited knowledge of the community (78.21%), and that “people are scared” (69.23%). A lack of resources was also reported by 67.95% of the participants.

8. What are difficulties, challenges and weakenes?



As in other areas, answers varied by issue. The top challenge in the forestry and fishery issues was limited knowledge, with 85.70% of participants in each of these groups naming this challenge. In each case, this figure was followed by lack of resources. However, in land cases, the top challenge named was fear, cited by 85.70%, followed by limited knowledge (68.60%).

Results reported by respondents also varied according to the challenges involved in these cases. In line with data noted above in the section on results, the most common result when respondents faced the top three challenges was partial success, reported in 43.6% of cases of limited knowledge (with an addition 12.7% reporting complete success), 34.6% of cases where people were scared, and 36.7% cases where lack of resources was a challenge. As in other breakdowns in the data, respondents reported a significantly higher rate of success than failure in all types of situations, with the highest rate of success (17.3%) reported where people were scared. (In fact, respondents noted this fear in a full 81.8% of the successful cases). All situations yielded a high response that respondents did yet know the results.

9. Conclusion and recommendations for Effective Grass Roots Advocacy

Respondents reported several different types of advocacy cases in their communities. Responses to individual questions yielded different answers, depending on whether they were cases on land, forestry, fisheries, mining or other matters. More specifically, the causes, perpetrators, activities and results all varied depending on the type of case.

Recommendation: Advocates should tailor their strategies to match the individual circumstances of their cases i.e. treat land cases differently than forestry cases.

The most commonly reported cases were land cases, and of these, the most common causes were embezzlement by government officials with the private sector, and powerful people violating the law. In land cases, the most commonly reported activities were mobilization and filing a complaint with local authorities. Similarly, in forestry cases, the second most reported cases, and these cases were most often caused by business men. Again, mobilization was the top reported activity, followed by intervention in specific cases.

The fact that these activities were the top answers for land and forestry cases is interesting for several reasons. Mobilization is a very broad term, and it is possible that advocates use this term to cover many types of activities. In addition, these are very different activities, because mobilization relies on community organizing and large numbers of people, while filing complaints or intervening are both set in a problem solving context requiring knowledge and skills, possibly involving official procedures. It is clear that advocates are skilled, since the second most successful activity was intervention in specific cases.

Recommendation: Advocates should track more detailed information to more specifically define what they consider to be mobilization activities.

Recommendation: Advocates should track and share lessons learned broken down by issue area and by the activities they engage in.

Recommendation: Advocates should reflect and share their lessons learned on how these two types of strategies (mass action and individual problem solving) work together to help them achieve results. (For example, it is possible that successful mobilization creates an atmosphere where government officials are more willing to listen and negotiate with advocates.)

The highest success rate was for petrol in fishery and forestry cases. Community leaders are active in looking for perpetrators and immediate interventions.

Recommendation: Advocates and communities leaders should strongly petrol or guard of community fishery and forestry including some material and financial support from CBOs and NGOs.

The challenge of lack of knowledge was the highest reported challenge for the entire caseload, and it was the top challenge in forestry and fishery cases. It appears that advocates address this challenge fairly effectively, since they achieved complete or partial success in well over half of these cases.

Recommendation: Advocates need to include efforts to inform and educate their allies in all advocacy campaigns, both because of the need for more information in their communities and their positive track record in addressing this problem.

Participants in land cases reported a much higher likelihood of violence and also that of fear in their communities is their top challenge. These findings can be viewed together with reports that many of the land cases were connected to powerful government, to demonstrate an atmosphere of fear surrounding land conflicts.

Recommendation: Advocates may need to obtain and provide more support for conflict resolution, and conduct outreach to provide assurance to community members, in order to create a calmer atmosphere more conducive to successful advocacy.

On the other hand, participants reported positive results when government development efforts were the cause of the problem, suggesting that the government may be more responsive to the advocates because they are their constituents.

Community leaders had a higher success rate than other groups, including forestry and fishery representatives. It is not clear whether this is due to a stronger base of skills, a broader range of contacts in the community or other factors.

Recommendation: Grass roots need to get community leaders involved in their campaigns, and these leaders need to share their techniques and lessons learned with other advocates. In the long term, community leaders should identify and mentor the community leaders of the future.

Despite a significant number of answers reflecting complete or partial success, a large number of participants reported that they did not yet know the results of their advocacy. It is not clear from the survey whether this is due to a long timeline for resolving these cases, or whether this information is not available to the advocates themselves, or whether the advocates have failed to follow up.

Recommendation: Advocates should examine these results and these cases more closely to find out why this information is not available. They should integrate any information on the timeline for resolving these cases into future advocacy plans to ensure that advocates remain active when they can be effective. In addition, they should determine how advocates can obtain information on results more quickly, to help inform future advocacy efforts.