Grassroots Advocacy in Cambodia

109 Community Case Study Analysis

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Table of Contents

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I. Introduction

The Kingdom of Cambodia is a new democracy struggling to assimilate changing roles and shifting responsibilities of its society in the 21st century. Cambodia is at a crossroads in its development and moving towards becoming a more genuine democracy. As Cambodia has developed, so have the needs, demands, concerns, and capabilities of its people. There have been noticeable political, economic and social advances in recent times, however there are still many Cambodians (32%) living at or below the poverty line. People in rural Cambodia have benefited least from Cambodia's progress while this 'progress' itself has brought with it a number of new problems.

Government development policies can, to some extent, have negative impacts on local community livelihoods. These policies can also lead to human rights abuses, particularly abuse of the collective rights of indigenous minority people. Human rights NGOs have raised concerns about these policies in the past decade, as they filed numerous complaints related to land and natural resources (OHCHR, 2005).

Increasingly concerned about these issues, Cambodian NGOs working on human rights advocacy have organized a series of national advocacy conferences beginning in 2006. Hundreds of people from NGOs, government and media participated in each conference. The third National Advocacy Conference[1] in December, 2008 included 180 participants from government, NGOs, the media, the private sector, academic institutions and local communities. The fourth National Advocacy Conference in December, 2009 in Phnom Penh focused on land and natural resources management governance. A total of 289 people from all 20 provinces and cities in Cambodia participated, including 163 representatives of community-based organizations (CBOs), 113 representatives of civil society organizations (CSOs) and 13 representatives of government, development partners, embassies and the Cambodian Parliament.[2] These conferences created an opportunity for participants to learn from each other and discuss strategies for working together with key stakeholders to achieve positive change.

II. Survey on Advocacy Activities

In both 2008 and 2009, conferences organizers conducted surveys to analyze the participants' advocacy experience in addressing community issues. In 2008, conference organizers surveyed 79 people from a total of 11 provinces about the problems in their communities and their advocacy work to address them. However, the 2008 survey had many different questions than the 2009 survey, and although there was some overlap, the two surveys were administered to different respondents. Nonetheless both surveys covered some of the same

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

[2] The conference was organized by 12 organizations, including Cambodia Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC), the Advocacy and Policy Institute (API), Center for Justice and Reconciliation (CJR), Development and Partnership in Action (DPA), Committee to Promote Women in Politics (CPWP), Housing Rights Task Force (HRTF), Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Star Kampuchea, NGO Forum on Cambodia, Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), Vigilance and World Vision Cambodia (WVC).

ground, and responses to each survey were cumulative, therefore some advocacy campaigns were likely mentioned in both surveys.[3] This report will focus primarily on the 2009 survey, with selected findings from the 2008 included for the purposes of comparison.[4]

1. Objectives of 2009 Survey

The data generated by the survey will be used as baseline information for monitoring and evaluation of grassroots advocacy efforts in Cambodia and to assess grassroots advocacy skills and best practices of community advocates.

2. Methodology of 2009 Survey

Organizers used a structured questionnaire[5] and group discussions and a purposive sample selection method. The survey asked 109 respondents about issues in their communities, main advocacy issues in their communities, community experiences in conducting advocacy, grassroots advocacy processes, advocacy tools and approaches, use of active non-violence principles, leadership qualities, challenges in advocacy and results. 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.

III. Summary of Key Findings

Findings from both the 2008 and 2009 surveys demonstrated that the vast majority of respondents reported that they had comprehensive advocacy experience. They are truly community advocates who have served their communities for many years. Respondents in 2008 reported a wide range of advocacy activities, and the 2009 respondents reported conducting advocacy activities on a total of 361 cases by the end of 2009.

In both the 2008 and 2009 surveys, informants reported a high number of problems with land issues. Nearly half (46.25%) reported problems with land issues in 2008, and this figure jumped to 58.70% in the 2009 survey.

In the 2009 survey, fewer than half the respondents reported that they planned ahead by discussing possible risks/threats/conflicts, and creating and following strategies to address these factors. The 2009 respondents also reported high levels of networking and cooperation with others, as well as mobilizing the community to discuss problems and select advocacy leaders. Although the 2008 survey had much broader questions, it yielded a similar emphasis on mobilizing communities and building networks.

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[3] Please see Appendix A for a copy of the 2008 questionnaire.
[4] For a complete copy of results from the 2008 survey, please contact API.
[5] Please see Appendix B for a copy of the 2009 questionnaire.

A full 57.80% of the respondents in 2009 reported that they considered their efforts successful or partially successful. Very few people (3.70%) termed their advocacy efforts unsuccessful. These results show improvement from those in the 2008 survey, when 54.80% of the respondents reported being successful and partially successful. 20.20% cases result is unknown.

The 2009 survey included several questions about behavior and characteristics of advocacy leaders.[6] In answer to a question about practicing active non-violence, many respondents (71.60%) said they had remained calm despite criticism or accusations. More than half said they had kept the situation under control, had not used weapons as a mean to protest or protect themselves, had not drunk alcohol during an advocacy campaign, or caused damage to private or public property.
Similarly, a large percentage of the respondents to the 2009 survey (from 52.30% to 71.60%) reported that their advocacy leaders had shown positive traits, such as honesty, trustworthiness, politeness and calm at all times, compassion, not supportive of violence, courage, popularity in the community, impartiality, clear understanding of problems and efforts to avoid being a "dictator."
Few respondents (from 1% to 8.30%) said that their advocacy leaders have displayed negative characterisitics.

Case Studies from 2009 Survey
Tap Ry, the chief of a community named Km 4 in Banteay Meanchey province, has served his community since 1997. He has led seven successful advocacy cases using many of the steps identified in the survey, such as:

- organizing community discussions on the root causes and effect or local problems and their solutions
- mobilizing community people to select advocacy leaders
- preparing and using advocacy action plans
- leading discussions on possible internal conflicts, risks, threats to their plans, and strategies to address them
- collecting evidence to document community problems
- building strong networks and cooperation with community people, NGOs and other communities
- identifying powerful people who can help solve problems at all levels
- monitoring and evaluating advocacy results.

In addition, Tap Ry adhered to active non-violence principles by remaining calm and avoiding anger even when he was insulted. He assigned people to help him keep the situation under control. He not only avoided the use of weapons, he also sent other people home if they had weapons. He remained sober and sent drunken people home. He did not damage or take other people's property. In addition, Tap Ry applied positive leadership standards by avoiding corruption and being honest, compassionate, brave, trustworthy and neutral, and facilitating the participation of others.

[6] These questions were not included in the 2008 survey.

Tith Bun Chheoun has served as the chief of the Self Help Group for Development of O Vor Preng Communityin Battambang province for six years. He had led 12 successful advocacy campaigns and two unsuccessful campaigns. In these campaigns, he prepared and carried out comprehensive advocacy plans containing the key elements and processes identified in the survey, and adhered to the active non-violence principles and positive leadership standards.

1. Additional Key Findings from the 2008 Survey

The 2008 survey also included several questions that were not included in the 2009 survey.

When respondents were asked about the factors leading to conflicts in their communities that led to their advocacy efforts, respondents said that the three main factors were ineffective law enforcement (63.75%), followed closely by a lack of understanding of the law (62.50%) and embezzlement by government officials and people from the private sector (62.50%).

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%).

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%).

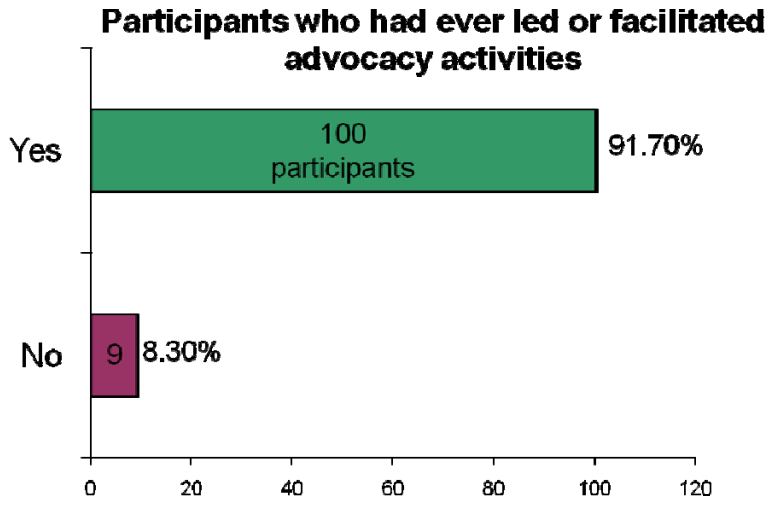
Loss of trust and solidarity within the community were cited as the biggest impacts of these cases, as reported by 53.16% of the participants. This was followed by the loss of careers, loss of wildlife and negative effects on the environment (all 50.63%). Still others cited loss of land, lost of forest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

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

2. Findings from 2009 Survey

This section includes the complete findings as reported by participants in the 2009 National Advocacy Conference. It highlights both the strengths and weaknesses of CBOs and CSOs in their grass roots advocacy efforts.

Question 1: Community Experience in Advocacy



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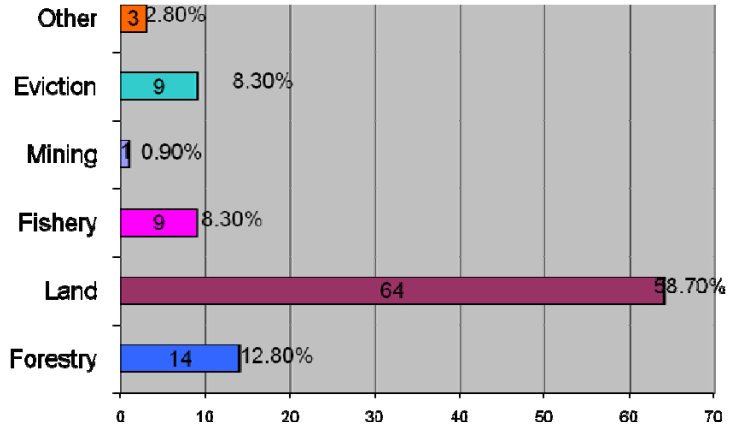
The vast majority of the 109 respondents (91.70%) said that they have had led or facilitated in advocacy activities. A few community members (8.30%) said they had no such experience.

The data from other responses analyzed below will be limited to those responses from the 100 respondents with experience in community advocacy.

Question 2a: Main Community Advocacy Issues



Respondents reported a variety of issues facing their communities, including five high-profile issues in Cambodia:[7] land, evictions, fisheries, forestry and mining. More than half of the respondents had conducted advocacy on land issues (58.70%), and fewer respondents had conducted advocacy on other issues: forestry (12.80%), fishery (8.30%), evictions (8.30%) and mining (0.90%).

Compared to those in the 2008 survey, these responses show a growing proportion of advocacy on land issues. In the 2008 survey, fewer respondents (46.25%) said their communities were facing land issues, and more respondents named forestry (35.00%) or fishery (17.50%) issues.[8]

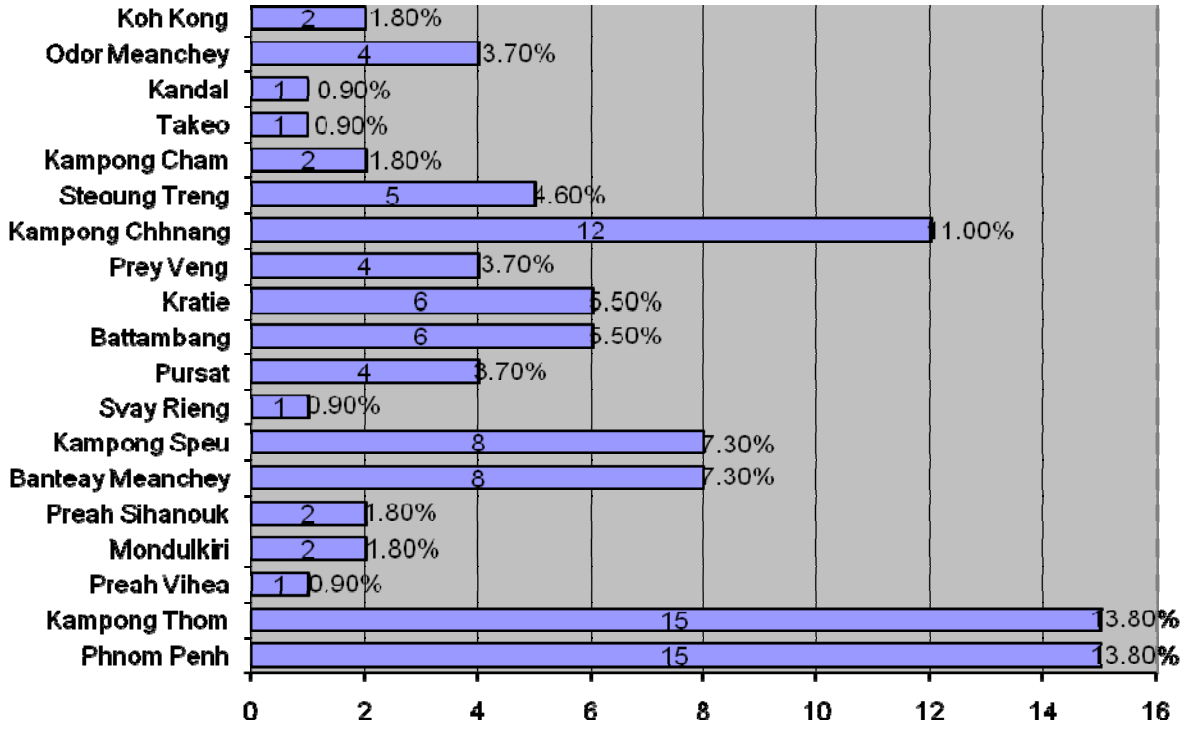
This heavy focus on land issues reflect other documented concerns that land is a major issue for local communities, despite interventions by Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen in recent years. According to the NGOF report *Land Dispute Statistical Analysis in 2009,* 236 cases nationwide, each involving more than five families, were unresolved or only partially resolved. Only 17% of these cases involved a process for resolution that yielded results, and 67% of the cases remained unresolved by the end of 2009. The remaining 16% were abandoned or no further information was available on them.[9]

[7] According to the Monthly Media Tracking List, these five issues hardly have a day off from local and international newspapers and websites. For further information please see www.ngoforum.org.kh/eng/lic

[8] Please note, however, the limitations of comparing results in the 2008 and 2009 surveys. Both surveys were cumulative, and therefore may include overlapping information. Furthermore, the surveys were not administered to the same respondents, although there was some overlap between the two samples.

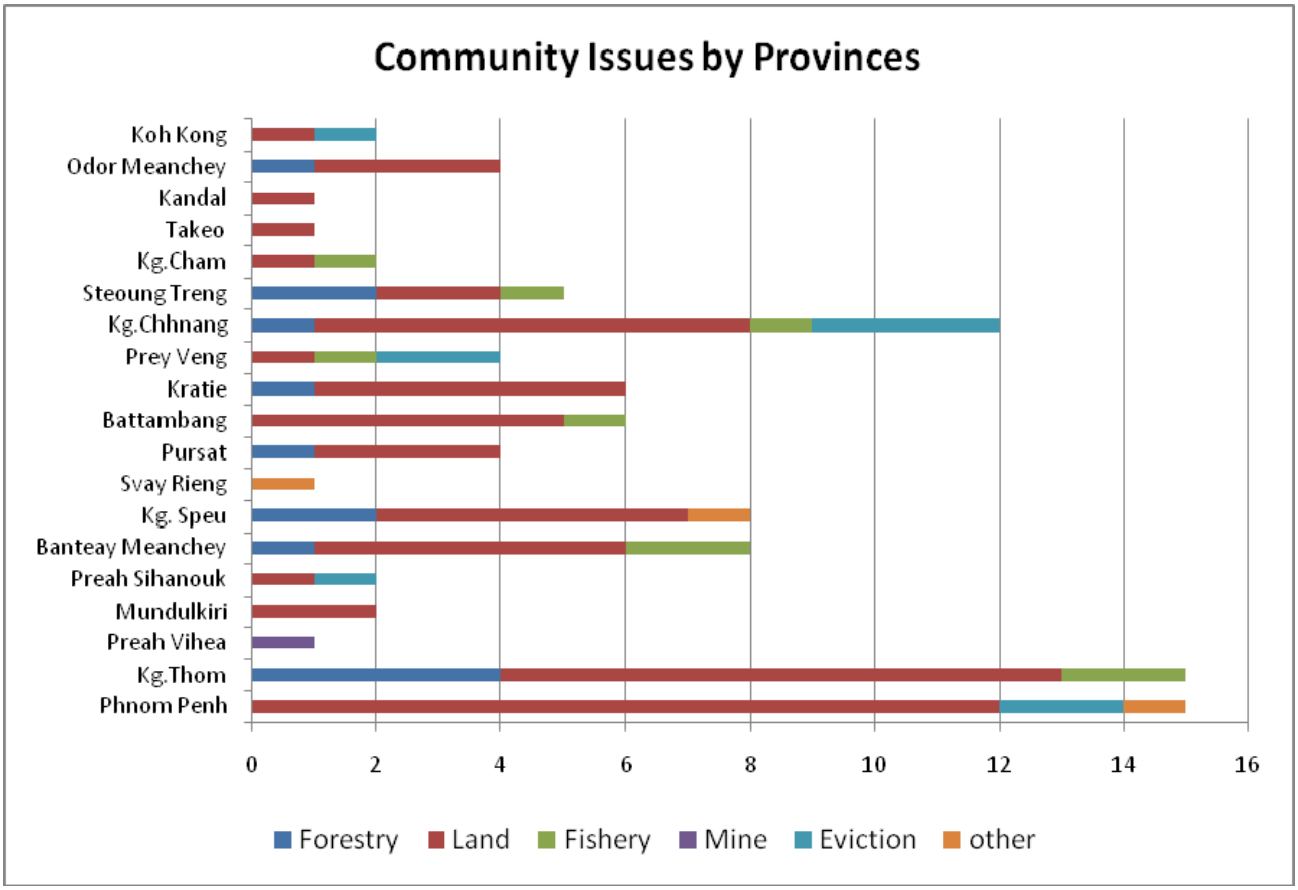
[9] NGO Forum on Cambodia, *Statistical Analysis on Land Dispute Occurring in Cambodia 2009.* The 2010. For further information please see www.ngoforum.org.kh/eng/lic

Question 2b: Location of Community Advocacy Activities



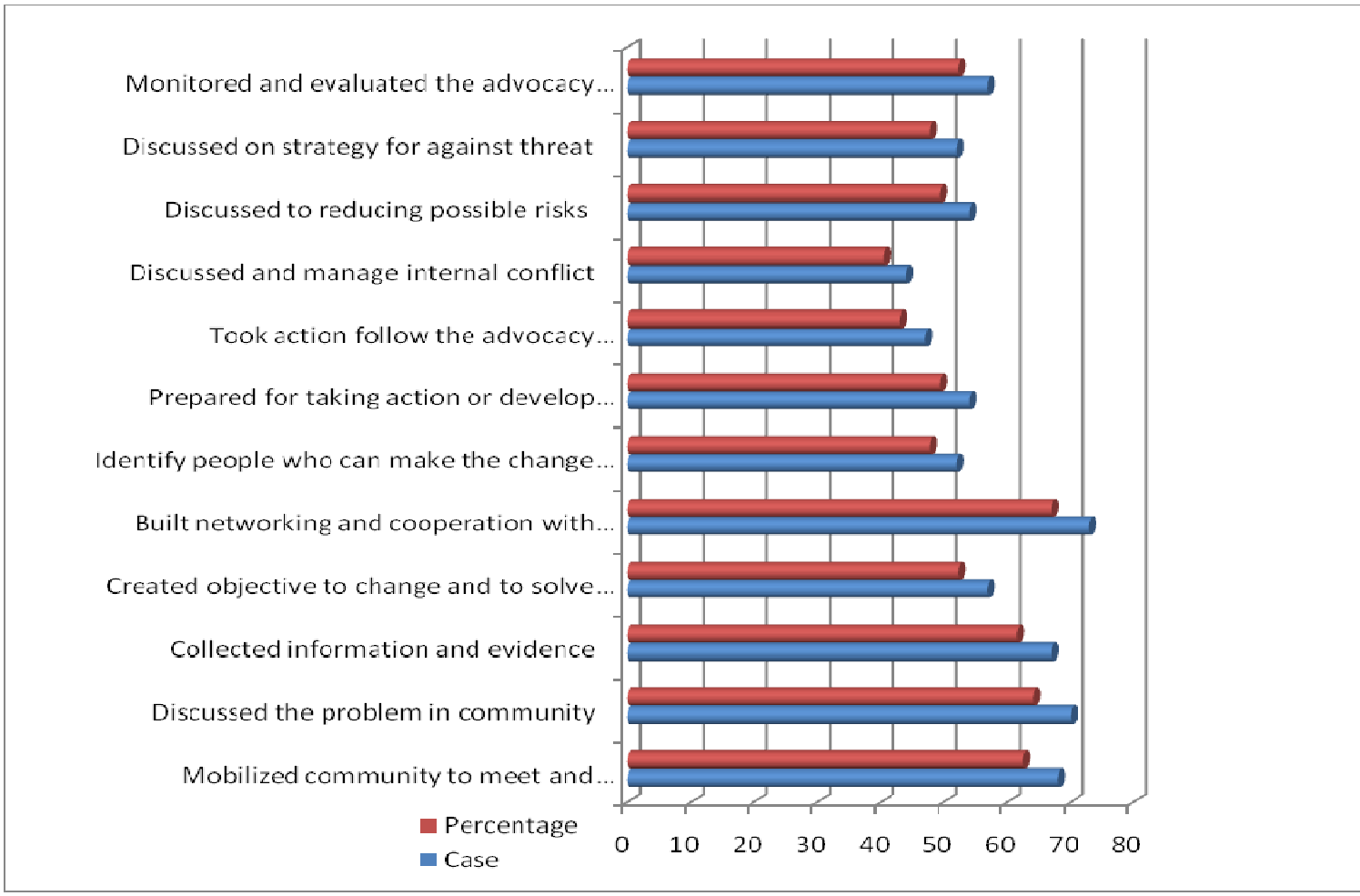
The highest number of advocacy activities took place in Kampong Thom and Phnom Penh provinces and (both 13.80%), and Kampong Chhnang (11%), followed by 7.30% in Banteay Meanchey and Kampong Speu provinces. One reason for the higher figure in Phnom Penh may that that Cambodia's capitol city offers opportunities for advocacy aimed at national government officials, as well as more local efforts.

Question 2c: Community Issues by Province



These results show a large proportion of land issues in all provinces, with the highest number in Phnom Penh, followed by Kampong Thom and Kampong Chhnang. Forestry issues were identified mainly in Kampong Thom, as well as Steoung Treng and Kampong Speu. Evictions were concentrated in Kampong Chhnang province, followed by Phnom Penh and Prey Veng. Fishery issues were named most often in Kampong Thom and Banteay Meanchey.

Question 3: Use of Grassroots Advocacy Techniques

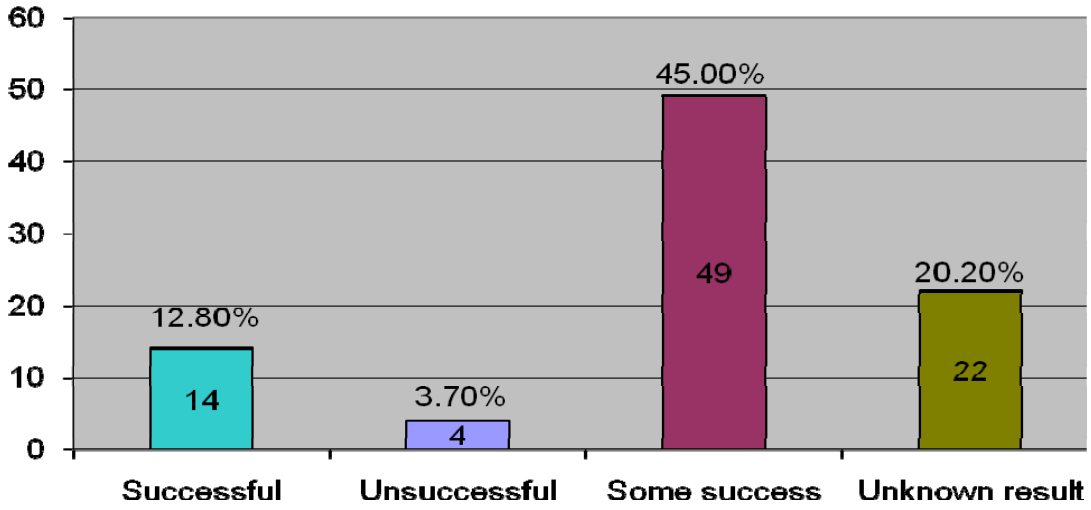


In fewer than half the cases, respondents reported that they planned ahead by discussing possible risks/threats/conflicts, and creating and following strategies to address these factors. In all, 26 of the 109 cases were well planned, and among these cases, none were reported to be unsuccessful. Respondents said they fully succeeded in five of these cases, and partially succeeded in 19 cases.

The respondents also reported high levels of networking and cooperation with others, as well as mobilizing the community to discuss problems and select advocacy leaders.

Although the 2008 survey had much broader questions, it yielded a similar emphasis on mobilizing communities and building networks. In fact, the most common advocacy activity reported in 2008 was mobilizing the community (79.75%), following by holding a meeting of stakeholders (75.95%), and building a network or submitting a complaint to local authorities (both 67.09%).

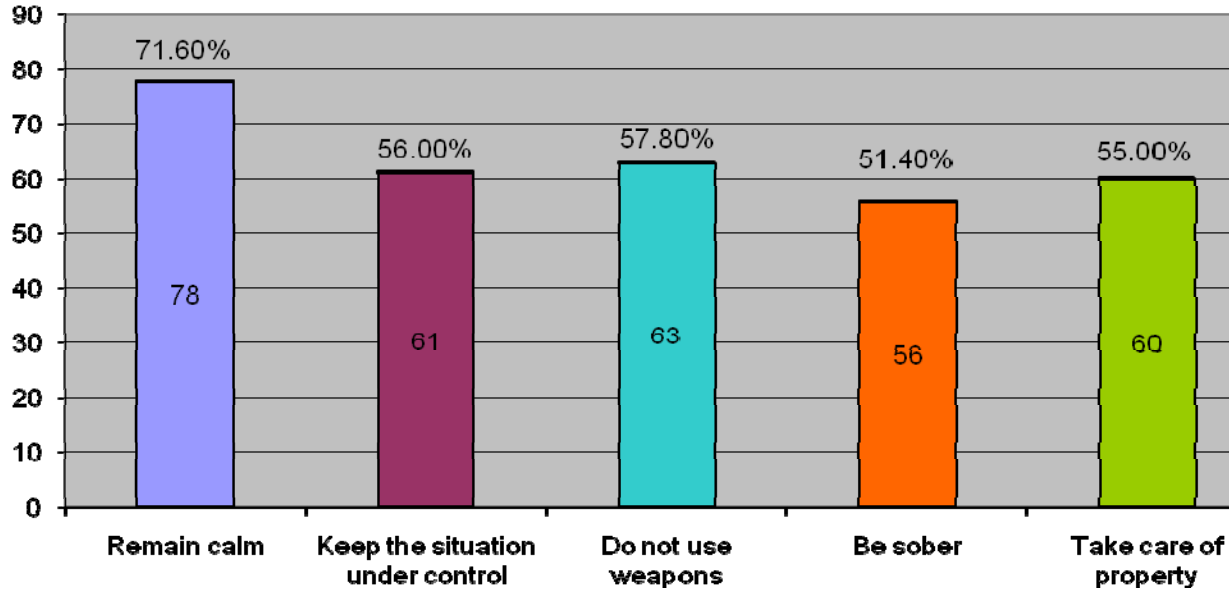
Question 4: Results of Advocacy Activities



A full 57.80% reported that they considered their efforts successful or partially successful. Interestingly, very few people (3.70%) termed their advocacy efforts unsuccessful, and 20.20% respondents did not know the result or saw no progress.

These results show improvement from those in the 2008 survey, when 54.80% of the respondents reported being successful or partially successful. Similarly, the number of unsuccessful cases (4.11%) was slightly higher in 2008.

Question 5: Practicing Active Non-Violence Principles

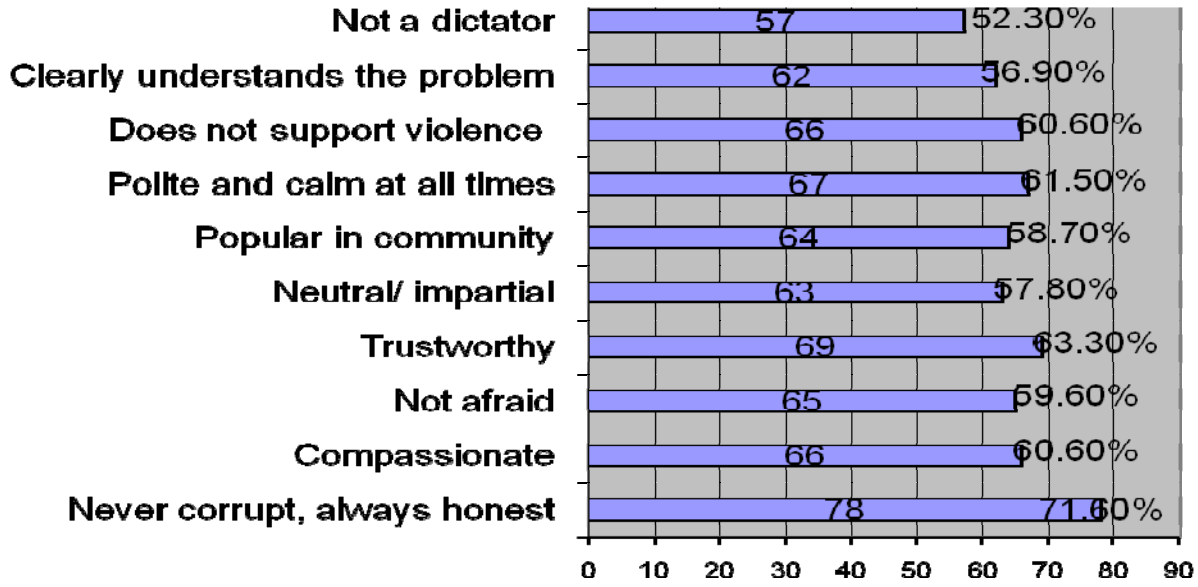


Survey organizers note the use of many different approaches for advocacy, from confrontation to engagement, either proactive or reactive, and that these approaches can

have an impact on final achievements. In practice, many respondents (71.60%) said they had remained calm despite criticism or accusations by local authorities or others. More than half said they had kept the situation under control, had not used weapons as a mean to protest or protect themselves, had not drunk alcohol during an advocacy campaign, or caused damage to private or public property.[10]

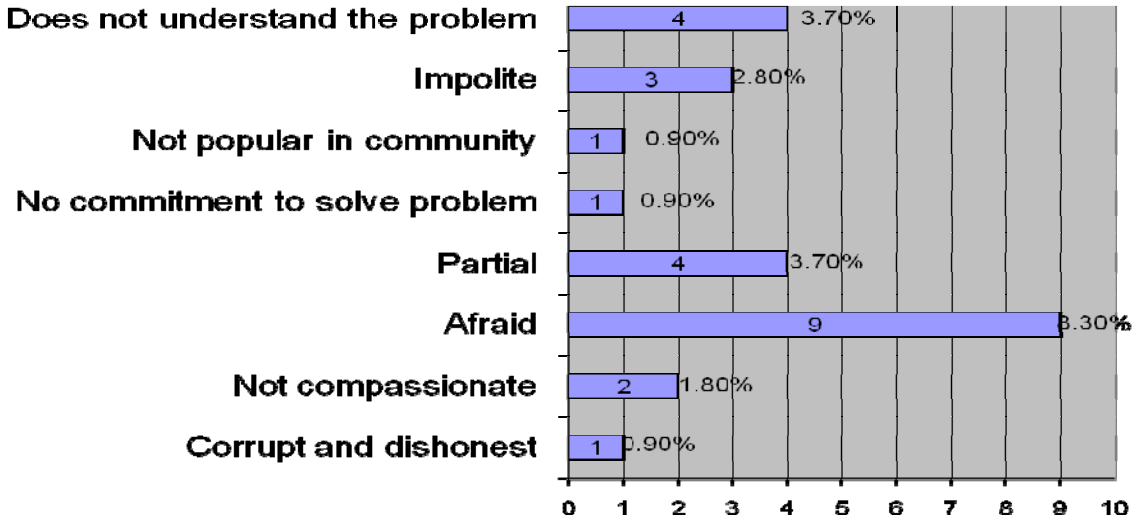
Question 6: Leadership Qualities Demonstrated by Advocacy Leaders

Question 6a: Positive Leadership Qualities Demonstrated by Advocacy Leaders



[10] Fewer than half (48.10%) of the respondents to the 2008 survey said they took "non-violent action," but this activity was simply listed as a choice among activities, rather than a separate question with examples of non-violence actions. Therefore comparing the responses in 2008 and 2009 are difficult to compare.

Question 6b: Negative Leadership Qualities Demonstrated by Advocacy Leaders



In an effort to find a link between leadership traits and advocacy results, the survey asked respondents to report positive and negative qualities that they had seen practiced by leaders of advocacy campaigns.[11] A large percentage of the respondents (from 52.30% to 71.60%) reported that their advocacy leaders had shown positive traits, such as honesty, trustworthiness, politeness and calm at all times, compassion, not supportive of violence, courage, popularity in the community, impartiality, clear understanding of problems and efforts to avoid being a "dictator."

Few respondents (from 1% to 8.30%) said that their advocacy leaders have displayed negative characterisitics, such as corruption, dishonesty, lack of compassion, fear of intimidation, partial, lack of commitment to solve problems, lack of popularity in the community, impoliteness or lack of understanding of the community's problems. The most commonly cited negative characteristic was being fearful or afraid, as noted by 8.30%.

Analysis of Findings

Many CBOs and CSOs have been established in recent years to respond to the needs and concerns of their communities. For example, Cambodia has about 400 fishery communities. With support from the Cambodian and international NGOs, these local groups have made great contributions to the development of Cambodia by addressing local issues and needs. However, they are facing a number of challenges due to the increasing limits on support from NGOs. In some cases NGOs do not have clear strategic direction when working with these groups or supporting them. As a result, some CBOs are at risk of losing opportunities for advocacy on important their issues.

[11] Unlike other questions that asked about respondents' own experience, this question asked about the behavior of others.

Overall, Cambodian grassroots advocates still have long way to go. Advocacy work is about change, with the ultimate goal being positive change and adoption and implementation of pro-poor policies. Advocates need to change society's negative thinking, habits, system, policies and behavior to positive ones. CBOs, CSO and NGOs all need to be strengthened in order to succeed in their efforts in working towards for change.

The 2009 survey identifies several specific challenges facing local groups such as CBOs and CSOs. They said they lack skills in advocacy and communication, and knowledge of mining exploration and the laws relevant to their advocacy work. Community members also lack resources and legal assistance for sustainable and long term advocacy campaigns, and find it difficult to collect evidence to support their campaigns. Internally, communities are not always united, and members sometimes lack self confidence.

Community members also face challenges in their relationships with the government. They report poor cooperation by local administration and government line agencies, who sometimes allege that advocacy is simply the work of opposing political parties. More specifically, respondents said that community forest management committees have limited power, and have faced a range of threats, from imprisonment and death to limits on their freedom of expression and right to assemble. Community members also note a government preference for awarding economic land concessions to the private sector at the expense of others. Overall, respondents cited a lack of law enforcement, as well as poor transparency and accountability. Community members note that there is limited research on environmental impact, and that the government does not share such research with the community. Finally, they noted that some judges are influenced by politics, and lack independence.

Respondents to the 2008 survey reported similar challenges, and these varied by issue. The top challenge in the forestry and fishery cases 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%).

IV. Conclusion

Community representatives are highly experienced in advocacy on land and forestry issues but less experienced in fishery and evictions cases, and even less so on mining. Advocacy activities have been taken place mainly throughout Cambodia, with a higher concentration in Kampong Thom, Kampong Chhnang and Phnom Penh Community members have built their ties to community people, NGOs and other networks to discuss and address local problems, but only half or fewer effectively used the planning tools identified in the survey. More than half of the advocacy activities were successful or partially successful; only a few were considered completely unsuccessful. More than half of the advocates practiced active non-violence principles, and more than half demonstrated positive leadership qualities. Community advocates have faced many challenges internally, such as limited knowledge and skills, and externally, through a range of difficulties with government actors.

Based on above analysis, CBOs and CSOs need to meet higher standards as they develop and implement future strategic plans. In some cases, interventions will be needed. Specific recommendations include:

V. Recommendations

Recommendations for Community Advocates

- Improve Planning and Performance: Community advocates should improve their performance by preparing and following detailed advocacy plans that address internal conflicts, risks and threats; setting clear objectives to solve problems; mobilizing as many community people as possible to discuss local problems and select community advocacy leaders; collecting more evidence to document local issues; building more networks and improving cooperation by community people, NGOs and other community and CSO networks, including government working groups; identifying and building relationships with powerful people at sub-national and national levels who can solve problems; adhering to active non-violence principles and positive standards for community leaders; and monitoring and evaluating advocacy results.
- Pursue Common Objectives: Communities should advocate for improved cooperation from government agencies. Communities should call for improved law enforcement, particularly prosecution of government officials who abuse power, and for higher national budget allocations for law enforcement, and increased community participation in law enforcement mechanisms. They should advocate for government monitoring and reporting on cases involving mining, forestry, fishery, land, housing, etc. In addition, communities should call on government to pay more attention to community problems, by providing an enabling environment for community participation and consultation and increased cooperation with CSOs, by promoting good governance and by providing more resources for solving problem.
- Maximize Opportunities: Community advocacy leaders should maximize their impact when opportunities arise, such as the time period before national elections and during district public forum in June and provincial councilors annual public forum in fourth quarter and annual commune investment plan development. During these periods, advocates need to identify appropriate targets among potentially powerful allies, promote cross-community networking and campaigns, increase their focus on building and strengthening networks, stepping up their efforts to file complaints and reports, strengthen relationships with local authorities and improve their performance as outlined above.

Recommendations for Civil Society Organizations

- Strengthen community ownership, solidarity and cooperation: CSOs should contribute by building local capacity on advocacy skills, research, case documentation and legal knowledge; by providing legal assistance; by conducting regular monitoring and follow-up on advocacy campaign results to inform communities about solutions, new government laws, policy, Prakas, government investment plans, etc.
- Promote community access to public information: CSOs should promote effective communication between community members and government agencies. In

particular, they should encourage commune councilors to obtain information from higher levels of government in order to report to local people about ongoing progress.

- Advocate for government response: CSOs should increase their efforts to intervene in cases or complaints more effectively, support dialogues between community and responsible government agencies, and promote human rights and democracy in general.

VI. Survey Respondents

No.	Roles	# persons	Province/city
1	NGO staff	17	• Phnom Penh • Svay Rieng • Pursat • Kampong Thom • Kratie • Kampong Speu • Battambang • Prey Veng • Kampong Chhnang • Banteay Meanchey • Kampong Cham • Takeo • Kandal • Steoung Trieng • Mondulkiri • Preah Vihear • Oudor Meanchey • Sihanouk • Koh Kong • Pailin
2	Community representatives	92	
	Total	**109 persons**	