Democracy, Human Rights and Governance Assistance in Cambodia

Recommendations to the National Endowment for Democracy for the 2017 and 2018 Elections

By: Dalia Antoon, Caryn Fisher, and Sakineh Roodsari
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### Acronyms

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<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADHOC</td>
<td>Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association</td>
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<td>CBO</td>
<td>Community-Based Organization</td>
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<td>CCC</td>
<td>Cooperation Committee for Cambodia</td>
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<td>CCHR</td>
<td>Cambodian Center for Human Rights</td>
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<td>CCIM</td>
<td>Cambodian Center for Independent Media</td>
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<td>CNRP</td>
<td>Cambodia National Rescue Party</td>
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<td>COMFREL</td>
<td>Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia</td>
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<td>CPP</td>
<td>Cambodian People’s Party</td>
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<td>CPS</td>
<td>Country Partnership Strategy</td>
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<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil Society Organization</td>
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<td>DRG</td>
<td>Democracy, Human Rights and Governance</td>
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<td>DFAT</td>
<td>Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)</td>
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<td>ERA</td>
<td>Electoral Reform Alliance</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>GIZ</td>
<td>Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit</td>
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<td>IFES</td>
<td>International Foundation for Electoral Systems</td>
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<td>INGO</td>
<td>International Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<td>IRI</td>
<td>International Republican Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>KAS</td>
<td>Konrad Adenauer Stiftung</td>
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<td>LANGO</td>
<td>Law on Associations and NGOs</td>
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<td>LEMNA</td>
<td>Law on the Election of Members of the National Assembly</td>
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<td>MP</td>
<td>Member of Parliament</td>
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<td>NDI</td>
<td>National Democratic Institute</td>
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<td>NEC</td>
<td>National Election Committee</td>
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<td>NED</td>
<td>National Endowment for Democracy</td>
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<td>NGO CEDAW</td>
<td>The Cambodian NGO Committee on CEDAW</td>
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<td>NICFEC</td>
<td>Neutral and Impartial Committee for Free and Fair Elections</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<td>PFM</td>
<td>Public Financial Management</td>
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<td>RGC</td>
<td>Royal Government of Cambodia</td>
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<td>SIDA</td>
<td>Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency</td>
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<td>SK</td>
<td>Star Kampuchea</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<td>UNTAC</td>
<td>United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia</td>
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<td>USAID</td>
<td>U.S. Agency for International Development</td>
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<td>YCC</td>
<td>Youth Council of Cambodia</td>
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<td>YRDP</td>
<td>Youth Development Resource Program</td>
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Assessment Purpose and Acknowledgements

The Elliott School of International Affairs at the George Washington University is one of the nation’s leading professional schools in international affairs. The International Development Studies (IDS) Program is a multidisciplinary program designed to provide students with a broad understanding and application of current development issues and theories as well as the process involved in formulating policy and implementing development projects. The IDS program culminates in a capstone project, where student groups, under the guidance of a professor and client organization undertake a real-world consulting experience. The IDS program has implemented capstone projects for close to a decade, during which students have successfully helped to implement development projects for dozens of leading development organizations.

For this capstone project, IDS students partnered with the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a private, nonprofit foundation dedicated to the growth and strengthening of democratic institutions around the world. Each year, NED makes more than 1,200 grants to support the projects of non-governmental groups abroad who are working for democratic goals in more than 90 countries. Such support fosters the growth of a wide range of democratic institutions abroad, including political parties, trade unions, free markets and business organizations, and civil society to uphold human rights, an independent media, and the rule of law.

While a large portion of NED’s grants are provided through discretionary funding to local organizations, in the late-2000s, the NED chose to discontinue discretionary funding to local organizations in Cambodia due to the changing political environment. However, in advance of the 2017 and 2018 elections, NED is exploring the feasibility of restoring support to local organizations in a limited, targeted manner to advance democratic principles and increase political participation. Ultimately, this capstone project sought to assess the existing landscape of democracy, human rights, and governance (DRG) programming in Cambodia as well as the ability for local NGOs to operate efficiently without repercussions from the government. This assessment of the DRG landscape in Cambodia will be used by NED to guide discretionary funding decisions and determine not only potential areas of intervention that remain currently unfunded by other donors, but also which local NGOs would have the capacity to utilize a modest grant to conduct pre-election programming within the current operating environment.

As we conclude this five-month assessment, we’d like to extend our sincere gratitude to the IDS program at the Elliott School of International Affairs, the National Endowment for Democracy – and in particular Ms. Lynn Lee, Senior Program Manager, and the 19 individuals who made the time to meet and speak with our capstone team as part of this process. The quality of our assessment and findings are in large part thanks to the time and effort that others provided through their expert guidance and wisdom.

The opinions reflected in this paper do not represent the views of the Elliott School of International Affairs or the National Endowment for Democracy.
Background

Cambodia’s Recent History
The Kingdom of Cambodia has experienced significant turmoil and change in the century and a half since Western influence first entered the country. Beginning with the colonization of France from 1867 to 1954, Cambodia began along a path which it has not been able to untangle itself from the West. The country felt the pressure of Western forces during the Vietnam War from 1955 to 1975 – a time in which the U.S. dropped 2.7 million tons of explosives (more than the Allies dropped in the entirety of World War II) on Cambodia alone, much of which still remains littered across the country today. Once the horrors of the war subsided, the Cambodian people were faced with the rise of the Khmer Rouge which plunged the country into one of the darkest parts of its history. During the years in which the Khmer Rouge was in power, an estimated 1.5 to 2 million Cambodians died from execution, forced hardships or starvation. Following the three years of Pol Pot’s reign over the Cambodian people came another three years of war with the Vietnamese, resulting in the West again intervening to broker negotiations for peace.

On October 21, 1991 the Paris Peace Accords were signed by nineteen nations to mark the end of the Cambodian-Vietnamese war which paved the way for what they hoped would become Cambodia’s democracy. The signing of the Accords authorized the creation and deployment of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), which operated in Cambodia from 1992 to 1993 with the goal of establishing a peaceful, democratic country. As a result, the first United Nations-sponsored democratic elections occurred in 1993, establishing Cambodia as a multi-party political system. Yet, despite the efforts of the international community to encourage and foster democratic principles and norms, Cambodia remains a one-party dominant state with the Prime Minister serving in various leadership roles over the country since the first democratic elections were held. Despite the will of the Cambodian people in subsequent elections, such as the 1997 elections which were won by political party FUNCINPEC (only to be denied victory as a result of a coup orchestrated by Hun Sen), to oust Hun Sen from his position of power, both Hun Sen and the now-ruling Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) continue to use their power to suppress any opposition, as well as the voices of citizens, civil society, media and human rights defenders.

However, the most recent National Elections in 2013 marked a turning point in Cambodia’s history. As a result of the merger of the Sam Rainsy Party and the Human Rights Party (which occurred following the 2012 Commune Council Elections), and the popularity of Sam Rainsy himself, the CPP felt increasing pressure on the long-term viability of its party’s reign. It could be said that Hun Sen’s allowing of Sam Rainsy to return to Cambodia without harm a mere week and a half before the elections ultimately brought upon himself the near defeat of the CPP at the polls. In the end, it was the closest race for power that Hun Sen himself had endured in over a decade - with CPP winning nearly 49 percent of the popular vote and the newly formed Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) having won 44.5 percent.

Although the CPP claimed victory, criticisms arose from both the opposition CNRP, as well as international donors and organizations including the European Union (EU) and the United States regarding election irregularities – thus sparking protests for CNRP supporters on the streets of the capital and the opposition party’s boycott parliament. The protests against the election results gradually interspersed with calls from citizens for Hun Sen’s resignation, as well as for the
greater well-being of the Cambodian citizenry, including increased wages for garment workers (Cambodia’s largest export industry). The mass demonstrations and protests led by the CNRP lasted well into 2014 – with thousands of supporters flooding into the capital in what the ruling government called ‘inciting anarchy’ through illegal protests. Tensions heightened in January 2014, when a CNRP-mass protest was violently dispersed at Freedom Park – resulting in the death of six protesters. The government then issued a ban on public protests in Phnom Penh and placed barbed wire about Freedom Park to deter further demonstrations. At a later protest in July, dozens more were injured and three CNRP Members of Parliament (MPs) were arrested.

Given the increase in violence and the parliamentary deadlock between the two parties, in July 2014 the CPP and CNRP attempted to negotiate with one another through an informal political deal that was later coined the “Culture of Dialogue.” The primary agreements made between the two party leaders included the release of seven opposition lawmakers and one CNRP party activist from prison, allowing the first Vice President role in the National Assembly to be filled by a CNRP MP, and allowing five of ten of the National Assembly Commissions to be led by CNRP MPs. The agreement between the two parties also allowed Sam Rainsy to join parliament as an elected MP – despite not being able to stand as a candidate in the 2013 National Elections due to the National Election Committee (NEC)’s refusal to reinstate him on the electoral register at that time. As a result of the agreement, both parties agreed to work together within the parliament to find solutions to challenges facing the country.

Most importantly, the negotiations resulted in an agreement to reform the NEC into an independent body comprised of nine members. Of the nine, four would be representatives selected by the CPP, four would represent the CNRP and one would be an independent individual determined following consensus from both political parties. This last agreement was a point which Rainsy had argued for in the months of protest following the elections, noting that the party’s main priority in future negotiations with the CPP would be to achieve the overhaul of the NEC. In April 2015, the nine members of the NEC were agreed to following approval from the lower house of the National Assembly. The ninth and independent member of the NEC selected was Hang Puthea, director of the Neutral and Impartial Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (NICFEC).

**Current Political Challenges**

While some gains were made as a result of the Culture of Dialogue, the informal agreement between the two parties was quick to fall apart from mid-2015, when increasing use of legal and physical force against the CNRP resulted in a closing space and crackdown on all who spoke out against the ruling party and the Cambodian government. In July 2015, eleven CNRP party activists were sentenced for their roles in the ‘insurrection’ in Freedom Park in January 2014. Among those sentenced, three received 20 year sentences while the additional eight received seven years in prison. Tensions continued to rise in October 2015 when two CNRP MPs were beaten outside of the National Assembly amidst pro-CPP protests that called for Kem Sokha - then first Vice President of the National Assembly – to step down. While the CPP denied being linked to the organization of the protest, two drivers quoted by the *Phnom Penh Post* noted that they picked up over 200 men working as bodyguards for Prime Minister Hun Sen to participate in the protest. The calls for Kem Sokha to step down were eventually successful - a couple of weeks following the beating of the CNRP MPs, lawmakers within the National Assembly voted to remove him from his position.
Meanwhile, attacks against CNRP President Sam Rainsy also flared up again towards the end of 2015. While Rainsy was conducting international travel in the latter half of the year, an arrest warrant was issued in November 2015, stemming from a defamation case against the Foreign Minister from seven years prior. Following the public issue of the warrant, Rainsy was then stripped of his status as an MP a couple of days later, which also concurrently removed his immunity. This was only the first of several cases filed against Rainsy towards the end of 2015, resulting in his decision to go into self-exile in France for fear that returning to Cambodia would result in arrest and having to face the Cambodian courts. Nearly a year later in October 2016, the Cambodian government formally exiled Rainsy from returning to the country.

During this extended period in which Sam Rainsy has been unable to return to the country, the oppression against the opposition has significantly worsened. In an attempt to cripple the CNRP, the CPP again shifted its focus towards attacking Kem Sokha. In mid-2016, the Cambodian courts issued a case against Sokha on the grounds that he procured a prostitute. As a result of Sokha refusing to appear in court against the allegations, the courts appeared set to arrest him. However, in late-May, Sokha entered a de facto house arrest within the CNRP headquarters in response to the threats of arrest and primarily remained there until he received a royal pardon at the end of the year. The few times that he left the safety of the CNRP headquarters were to participate in the mass protest against the killing of human rights activist, Kem Ley, and in October 2016 to register to vote in the 2017 Commune Council Elections.

Amidst the legal challenges that have left the CNRP without free movement of its leadership in the past two years, additional challenges that have hamstrung Cambodia’s democracy as of late have included the passing of the Law on Associations and NGOs (LANGO), which was seen as a legal means to restrict the operations of international and domestic NGOs in the lead up to the elections; and the crackdown on civil society and NGOs that was marked by the killing of prominent vocal political activist and head of the Grassroots Democracy Party, Dr. Kem Ley, and the arrest and detention of the ADHOC five and land rights activist Tep Vanny. These challenges were complemented by CNRP’s inability to negotiate with the ruling party through the National Assembly, which they have boycotted on and off for the past two years.

Most recently, the ruling party has taken again to using legal action to restrict the ability of the CNRP to competitively compete in the elections. As a result of the CNRP’s boycott of the National Assembly, in early 2017, new amendments to the Law on Political Parties were easily passed. The amendments to the law bar anyone who has been previously convicted of a crime from holding leadership positions within a political party, with parties found in violation of the law under threat of being dissolved. As a result, on February 11, 2017, Sam Rainsy stepped down as President of the CNRP “for the sake of the party.” His decision to resign was to ensure the party’s ability to participate in the upcoming local elections as the ostensible law would have dissolved the party had he remained the leader. While interpretation of the law remains vague, it also seems to restrict the ability of parties to use any foreign funding – which may have direct impact on the ability of parties to receive technical assistance from foreign donors or organizations, as well as restrict their ability to fundraise amongst Cambodian diaspora abroad.

“I think that these elections coming up are really crucial. Cambodia is moving into unchartered territory. The government has shown that it’s not interested in fundamental reform. Its idea of reform is just tweaking the system to serve the parties so well for so many years but not really fixing the system in any
As Cambodia moves towards local elections in the coming months, many questions still remain as to whether the elections will be conducted in a free, fair and credible manner – despite pressure and assistance from the international community to conduct them in such a manner. Representative of Cambodia’s multi-party political system, however, twelve political parties have successfully registered and been recognized by the NEC for participation in the upcoming Commune Council Elections: the CPP, CNRP, FUNCINPEC Party, Beehive Democratic Society Party, Grassroots Democracy Party, Khmer National Unity Party, Cambodian Nationality Party, Republican Democracy Party, Cambodian Youth Party, Khmer Power Party, League for Democracy Party, and Cambodian Indigenous Democracy Party. The coming year will remain critical to gauging whether or not Cambodia will be able to defend its claim as a democracy, or whether continued backsliding and lack of a respect for human rights and freedom of speech will be a continued trend as the ruling party consolidates its hold on power.

"When asked about the current situation in Cambodia I would say that it’s better than people dying or being killed, obviously, but that’s not a very high standard to judge Cambodia against. It’s basically saying that you’re not murdering people, except for the one guy who did die last year - political analyst Kem Ley, but there’s really not much to be happy about. I suppose that technically it’s an improvement, again, over the use of mass violence." - Political Analyst

During the assessment period, when questioned about the current political environment in Cambodia, twelve of sixteen interviewees defined the political environment is tense, tightening or narrowing. Related to that question, a further ten remarked on the ruling party’s oppression of the opposition CNRP, while ten also commented on the oppression of NGOs and human rights activists.

International Influence in Cambodia

The signing of the Paris Peace Accords and subsequently the arrival of UNTAC laid the foundations for the current Cambodian political system. Consequently, foreign assistance poured into the country in the 1990s and set the stage for international influence. Today, between 30 to 40 percent of Cambodia’s central government budget consists of funds provided through foreign aid.¹ For the purposes of this section, the assessment team examined the various roles that international actors have played in Cambodia since the early 90s and took stock of which countries remain influential. As part of the process, interviews conducted assessed not only views on international donors, but also how geopolitical dynamics could impact development – and particularly democratic governance development – in Cambodia.

Paris Peace Accords

The Paris Conference on Cambodia was twice convened in 1989 and 1991 to respond to growing international concern over the conflict in Cambodia. While during the first conference the 19 countries in attendance were able to agree upon the elements necessary for the achievement of a comprehensive settlement for the conflict in Cambodia, they did not come to a final consensus until the second conference on adopting the framework for national reconciliation. However at the second convening in October 1991, the 19 signatory countries at the Conference adopted two agreements and a declaration that formed what is known today as the Paris Peace Accords. The Accords focused upon restoring and maintaining peace in Cambodia, while also promoting national reconciliation and ensuring that the Cambodian people have the ability to exercise the right to self-determination through free and fair elections. The three documents focused on: 1) a comprehensive political settlement of the Cambodian conflict – including the mandate and role of the United Nations in facilitating free and fair elections, the military, repatriation of refugees and displaced persons, and principles for a new Cambodian constitution; 2) the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and neutrality of Cambodia; and 3) the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Cambodia.²

The Agreement on the Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict produced as a part of the Accords established UNTAC which is composed of civilian and military components and tasked with oversight and implementation of reforms towards the mandate of the agreement. A Supreme National Council was also established to serve as a source of authority for Cambodia at the United Nations and to ensure the implementation of the agreement, including the conduct of free and fair elections to form a new and legitimate government. The agreement also mandated a ceasefire and cessation of outside military assistance, assistance to refugees and displaced persons, the release of prisoners of war and civilian internees and economic and financial support for the rehabilitation of Cambodia.³

Most importantly, the Agreement outlined the initial framework for Cambodia’s own determination of its own leadership through a democratic process. The Accords established the basis UNTAC needed to facilitate Cambodia’s first democratic elections for a constituent assembly which, once elected, would draft and approve the new constitution and transition into a legislative assembly to form the new Cambodian government. For the conduct of the elections, UNTAC was mandated through the Accords with a significant number of tasks, including: establishing laws, procedures and administrative measures necessary for the conduct of a free and fair election – including an electoral law and code of conduct; design and implement a voter education program; design and implement a platform for voter and political party registration; ensure free access to media; adopt measures for political campaigning, balloting and polling; facilitate foreign observation of the elections; provide overall direction of polling the vote count; investigate all irregularities and complaints; and finally, determine whether the election was free

and fair and issue certification of the individuals elected. As part of this process, UNTAC was also in charge of establishing a system of safeguards to keep fraud out of the electoral process.\(^4\)

The Accords also attempted to ensure that Cambodia was compliant with international standards for human rights. In Part III of the Agreement, the Accords outlined that “all persons in Cambodia and all Cambodian refugees and displaced persons shall enjoy the rights and freedoms embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human rights and other relevant international human rights instruments.” It furthermore noted that Cambodia ensures respect and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms, supports the rights of all citizens to undertake activities that promote human rights and fundamental freedoms, takes effective measures to ensure that policies and practices of the past do not return, and adheres to international human rights instruments. The concluding section of Part III also ties the signatories of the Accords to the foundation of human rights in Cambodia, noting that they need to promote and encourage respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms.\(^5\)

Unfortunately, the mandates of the Paris Peace Accords largely remain unfulfilled despite the generally positive conduct of the first elections in 1993. Following the exit of UNTAC, subsequent elections and the state of democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Cambodia have gone through multiple periods of backsliding. It could be said that the inability of international actors to coordinate and remain engaged with Cambodia in a productive manner - rather than just providing billions of dollars of aid – resulted in the inability of the Accords to have a long-term positive effect on democracy in the country. The massive influx of foreign aid that was provided to the government following the signing of the Accords may have resulted in the fostering of corruption and cronyism and the development of the extensive patronage networks facilitated by Prime Minister Hun Sen and his family. Furthermore, the uncoordinated efforts of international donors possibly hindered, rather than helped, the long-term development strategy for the country by not upholding promises made as part of the Accords or by lacking a long-term comprehensive and coordinated strategy.

As the environment in Cambodia continues to deteriorate, particularly in regards to human rights, local NGOs are lamenting on the need for the international community to once again re-engage in Cambodia and support free and fair elections, as well as the protection of human rights. It is the two aforementioned sections, in particular, which are driving local NGOs to call for the signatories of the Accords – primarily the United States and other Western donors – to support Cambodia in advance of and following the upcoming local and national elections. A total of four of the seven local organizations interviewed referenced the Paris Peace Accords as part of their interviews. Of those organizations, two of the seven local organizations interviewed during this assessment noted that the signatories of the Accords need to reinforce the principles that they signed on to support over 25 years ago, the third local organization noted how international donors used the Accords in the past to support Cambodia and advance democracy, and the fourth noted how their own organization uses the accords for their own reporting purposes.

“If you would like to address and to promote democracy issues in Cambodia, the Paris Peace Accords is one of the important instruments that can bring all the

\(^4\) Ibid.

\(^5\) Ibid.
Whether or not the approach of using the Paris Peace Accords to renew a focus on and strengthen democracy and human rights in Cambodia is questionable. It remains unclear whether or not local organizations have the capacity to lobby the international community for support, can fully articulate the mandates of the Paris Peace Accords, or that the pre-conditions for the Accords to be effective are in place. As some local organizations indicated that it is difficult to coordinate efforts on programming, that same challenge of coordination is also likely to affect any efforts to lobby the international community for a re-commitment to the Accords. Additionally, of the seven local NGOs interviewed, only one fully articulated the the mandates of the Accords alongside their argument that the international community needs to re-engage to support the promises made over two and a half decades ago. Finally, it could be that some of the pre-conditions needed for the Accords to be effective are lacking. For example, the Paris Peace Accords were largely a byproduct of international actors with limited buy-in from the Cambodian government, civil society and citizenry itself. There are further no real repercussions that the Accords place on the Cambodian government should it not comply with the mandates, and the international signatories have shown no sign of using leverage (i.e. withholding of foreign aid, trade sanctions, etc.) to hold the government to its promises.

**International Donors and Multilateral Institutions**

“International donors play another important role because they are behind local donors, the ones who provides funds, best practices, and good lessons learned to local and active citizens in Cambodia. Without them there is no activity. Without them, there is no funding for them to work, there is no technology, connectivity, advocacy, or network.” - Local NGO Representative

Various international donors and multilateral organizations provide financial and technical support to Cambodia. Some of the major international donors are: China, United States, European Union, and Japan. Also, some of the major multilateral organizations that provide financial and technical support to Cambodia are the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and United Nations Development Program.

A few key themes were determined on the effectiveness of international funding from the interviews conducted from political analysts, local and international NGOs, and international donor. Five of the sixteen respondents determined that the international community needs to continue to support Cambodia. Two of the sixteen respondents (one international donor and one political analyst) noted that the international donors provide ineffective short term assistance for elections. Two political analysts noted that donors are generally ineffective.

“You know but I think we could perhaps all agree without too much knowledge in any country that to try to set up a democratic space truly you know liberal democratic space in a 2 to 5 year project, just sounds absurd without really knowing anything about that project.” - Political Analyst
Three respondents noted that the international donors lack a unified approach. Four respondents mentioned that Cambodia receives financial assistance from China without any conditions. Also, three respondents noted that the United States supports human rights and NGOs in Cambodia.

“Yes I think the international community while they are trying to support the new NEC, it’s very difficult when you know China is trying to invest more and more in Cambodia as well. Including the NEC also received some tenable and financial support from China, from Japan, from the EU. So I think it’s, it has the international politics implications in terms of reforming Cambodia I think more or less the international politics cold play some part in terms of effecting the commitment of our government to ensure human rights and democracy.” - Local NGO Representative

An International donor noted how United States’ involvement in pushing for human rights in Cambodia has significantly shrunk the U.S. space for dialogue.

“That certainly shrinks the space for constructive engagement for international Western donors or partners of Cambodia on a more structured and strategic level. Also sensitivity of the government which is sensitive to criticism is certainly limiting...But there are different categories of international powers, for instance USA, which in my personal view is always trying to stand up for civil society and democratic rights but so then has disqualified itself as a partner for dialogue with the Cambodian government.” - International Donor Representative

A local NGO representative characterized both Japan and EU for taking on a closed door approach to human rights.

“To some extent I think the EU delegates to Cambodia and other main countries like Canada, Japan, even though Japan is not publicly critical of the government, but they try to convince the government that the government of Cambodia needs to ensure the principle of democracy, free and fair elections.” - Local NGO Representative

**Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)**
The Australian government’s official development assistance to Cambodia for 2016-2017 is $90 million. This figure includes $62.3 million in bilateral funding to Cambodia, which is managed by DFAT. Australia’s aid supports diplomatic and security efforts, such as transnational crime, people smuggling, and pandemics.

For the period of 2015-2018, DFAT has laid out three key objectives for Cambodia: 1) improving access to infrastructure, 2) increasing agricultural productivity, and 3) better health and education.

“Across all our programs we will focus on inclusive participation, governance, women's empowerment and disability. Our support will prioritise innovative approaches to delivering aid which work closely with the private sector to drive
growth and poverty reduction, and will contribute to achieving Australia's overall aid for trade target by 2020.⁶

DFAT’s approach to governance and inclusive participation is by investing in community policing, with a focus on gender based violence and investing in community safety, and crime prevention. The Australian government is also supporting electoral reform in Cambodia. Their goal is to improve Cambodia's civil registry. This can essentially benefit voter lists and provide data that improves Cambodia’s public service delivery, such as healthcare and education. DFAT is also supporting the rule of law by being the third largest contributor to the Khmer Rouge Trials.

Australia's foreign aid is also focusing its efforts on empowering women and the disabled. It is integrating gender analysis into the design for future investments. They also work with the Ministry of Women’s Affairs in order to end violence against women. They are helping the government of Cambodia to build evidence base, assist the disabled, and fund rehabilitation services for the reported 2 million disabled in the country.⁷

**China**

China and Cambodia are strong allies. China is a non-traditional donor that has made a lot of impact in Cambodia. As of 2010, Cambodia has joined a ‘Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Cooperation’ with China. The trade between the two countries increased from $2.34 billion in 2012 to $3.3 billion in 2013 and it is anticipated that trade will increase to $5 billion in 2017. China has invested heavily in infrastructure and economic development. The majority of these investments are cooperative investments in the form of foreign direct investment. China has even gone as far as forgiving $1 billion in Cambodian debt, a debt from the 1970s. Chinese investments has led to great economic growth, but not always in the best interests of Cambodians, due in part to not being mindful of Cambodian civil society.⁸

“My country is very close to China and... our Prime Minister and leaders don’t shy away to claim that China is one of the close allies of my country and we have seen a lot of project developments and loans from China, including you know infrastructure development and investments from China, without any human rights implications, without any democratic principles implications. And at the same time our senior figures criticize the principles of human rights and democracy principles from the West.” - Local NGO Representative

The assistance from China to the NEC comes at an interesting point in Cambodia’s relationship with other traditional foreign aid donors, such as the United States and other signatories of the Paris Peace Accords. Several interviewees reached through this assessment noted that while China’s foray into elections assistance is nothing new, it clearly further emphasizes the shift in

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the ruling party’s reliance on a country that is seen to have “no strings attached” funding. Compared to other Western donors who push for greater democracy and human rights in response to received aid, Cambodia can receive funding from China without having to positively respond to calls for decreased pressure on the political opposition, civil society and NGOs, human rights defenders and journalists. Instead, Cambodia supports China through statements that reaffirm China’s claims to various states and territories. One political analyst noted that:

“China, of course, has continued to fund Cambodia through underwriting of projects - a lot of infrastructure projects, but also some less-seen activities - without really any conditions which of course results in the authorities saying that China is a friend to Cambodia, never puts any strings on its aid. But of course what is expected is loyalty to China when it comes to issues like “One China” and the “South China Sea” and so on, and it certainly doesn’t care about human rights.” - Political Analyst

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GiZ)
As of 1994, German international cooperation has been providing assistance in Cambodia on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. German international cooperation is working with the Cambodian government and national and international partners to enhance the social and economic development of the country. GiZ is focusing its work on health and social security and rural development in Cambodia. It puts a lot of emphasis on capacity building both at the national and local level by supporting the Government of Cambodia and CSOs.9

European Union
The European Union development assistance to Cambodia is roughly 410 million euros (approximately 457.3 million USD) in bilateral cooperation for 2014 -2020. The EU focuses on priority sectors that have major impact on Cambodia’s development. The key sectors of focus are: agriculture and natural resource management, education and skills development, and governance administration. The EU is focusing on improved governance by supporting the government of Cambodia with implementing “all of government” reform. These reforms include, Public Financial Management reform, Sub-National Democratic Development reform (decentralization), by focusing on transparency and citizen’s voice. The EU also provides support to Electoral reform for voter registration and to the Extraordinary Chambers in Courts of Cambodia, which is the Khmer Rouge Tribunal.10

However, EU is noted by most of our respondents to take a “closed door approach” to providing financial assistance to Cambodia. An International donor noted that EU delegation keep face in order to have a more constructive relationship with the Cambodian government.

“There are others, like the EU can be counted in group of actors, they are trying a more balanced their approach. They indeed make it clear what they stand for but they are rather a little restrained in public appearance and public criticism.”

- International Donor Representative

Japan

Japan has extended Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Cambodia to increase the welfare of the Cambodian people since 1968. Japan has provided support through diplomatic efforts for peace and stability, and has also provided resources and support for the restoration of war-torn Cambodia. Approximately 20 percent of the total ODA is made by Japan; making Japan one of the top donors in the country. Japan works closely with the government of Cambodia and provides grants, yen loans, and technical cooperation. Japan support following main areas: 1) Development of social and economic infrastructure, 2) Improvement of basic social services, including health and education, 3) Promotion of agriculture and rural development, and 4) Human resource development.11

“The international community concluded that the elections in 1998, for the most part, were free and fair, and the government's current policies pay serious attention to democratization. On top of that, the Cambodian government is promoting the transformation to a market-oriented economy and the reduction of its military expenditure. It can thus be said that, in accordance with the principles of Japan's ODA Charter, the Cambodian government is heading in a desirable direction. However, careful attention is still necessary with respect to the securing of basic human rights.”12

Japan’s ODA to Cambodia over the past ten years, on a net disbursement basis has been $720 million, with $170 million through international organizations and $550 million on a bilateral basis. Japan believes that it is critical to provide assistance to Cambodia for reform and good governance, in order for the country to reach steady economic growth and for its government to become fully functioning. Japan provides assistance to the following: administrative reform, financial and fiscal reform, natural resources management, demobilization of armed forces, improvement of social sector, and the strengthening of good governance.13

Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS)

KAS is a political foundation that is connected with the Christian Democratic Union of Germany. KAS works on the promotion of democracy, rule of law, and a social market economy. It encourages dialog at the national and international levels and interactions between cultures and religions. KAS promotes social justice and democratic freedom through its work. They develop active networks and provide direction on political knowledge. KAS works in cooperation with government institutions, political parties, CSOs, and some elites. KAS has initiated its work in Cambodia since 1994, with its major efforts going towards strengthening democracy, the rule of law, and human right. The foundation contributes to economic and social development of the Cambodia. KAS is working in the following areas in Cambodia: 1) Decentralization and administrative reform, 2) Strengthening political parties, 3) Parliamentary reform, 4) Media development, 5) Promotion of civil, political, and legal education and political participation, and 6) Foreign policy dialogue.14

12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
**Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)**

SIDA initially provided humanitarian support towards Cambodia in 1979. However, over the years they formed long term cooperative agreements. The most recent cooperative agreement (2014-2018) is on democracy, gender equality, human rights, education, and climate and environment. SIDA is providing support and assistance at the grassroots by putting power in the hands of local NGOs. SIDA values civil society’s role in the democratic processes of the country. SIDA provides support to NGOs through legal advice, observations and documentation of human rights violations, anticorruption, and the development of a free press. SIDA also works on human rights by providing support for trails against the Khmer Rouge war criminals. SIDA promotes democratic development through public administration reform and supports the decentralization of the Cambodian government through the support of UNDP by establishing publicly elected local authorities in rural areas. SIDA also finances infrastructure services. SIDA also supports the government’s reform for public financial management in order to enhance greater transparency and accountability towards managing the state budget.  

**United States**

United States foreign assistance to Cambodia in 2014 totalled to over $77.6 million. The assistance included health education, governance, economic growth, and demining of unexploded ordnance. United States has spent millions of dollars alone to improving democracy, human rights, and governance in Cambodia.

It is within the interest of U.S. foreign policy to engage in the development of a sustainable democracy for Cambodia through the following principles: participation in governance, adherence to the rule of law, and respect for human rights. U.S. has a global interest in engaging with its economic and diplomatic ally to boost Cambodia’s presence in the region. “Cambodia’s location at the heart of a growing and dynamic region gives it added strategic importance.”

**United States Agency International Development (USAID)**

USAID has been pushing for more democratic change in Cambodia. It is engaged at the grassroots to improve civil liberties. “USAID works closely with civil society organizations to promote human rights, civil and political liberties, and strengthen the role of women and youth in the political process.” USAID encourages public debate through transparent and accountable mechanisms to encourage political change.

Some of the major contribution USAID has been making are: improving voter awareness and engagement for elections, and providing information and services to youth at risk of being trafficked on how to best protect themselves and to migrate safely. Also in 2015, the Cambodian government with the support of USAID launched Victim Identification Guideline for human trafficking. In 2015, USAID provided legal advice to hundreds of factory workers and supported

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labor rights and advocacy for garment workers to increase their minimum wage. In 2012, USAID launched a TV show called, “Next Generation” to engage and educate youth on civic, social, and political issues, reaching an audience of over 2 million. USAID Supports Documentation Center of Cambodia by digitally storing the Khmer Rouge era documents. These documents were used during the Khmer Rouge Tribunal. USAID also provided assistance on the first LGBTI law conference in Cambodia, which brought together lawyers, students, advocates, activists, and government officials. This has resulted in an organization which includes a list of lawyers supporting LGBTI cases.  

USAID Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) (2014-2018) - The CDCS’s goal is: “Cambodia’s transformation to a democratic and prosperous country accelerated.” There are three clear objective: 1) strengthened democracy and government accountability, and enhanced respect for human rights, 2) improved health and education status of vulnerable populations, and 3) poverty reduced in selected geographic area and targeted populations. Objective one aims to engage citizens through participatory mechanisms and allows greater democracy, government accountability, and promotes human rights. This objective is in line with USAID’s Democracy, Human Rights and Governance (DRG) Strategy. The second objective is, improved health and education status of vulnerable populations. The second objective aims to strengthen the health delivery mechanisms and finances. And the third objective is, reduction of poverty in selected geographic areas and targeted populations. The third objective aims to improve food security, natural resource management, and finding solutions for climate change.  

At the end of the five year strategy, the specific development objective of CDCS will be met by “underpinning a sustained democratization and economic development” in Cambodia.

“This will include a much broader and deeper democratic political culture, a more sustainable Cambodian civil society capacity, greater civic engagement in governing processes, and more responsive governing institutions protecting human and civil rights across a variety of sectors— all of which are critical for Cambodia’s democratization process. USAID will have supported a significant increase in citizen engagement in health services, land management, early grade education quality, agriculture production and sales, and environmental conservation. Citizens will better be able to mobilize and demand increased government accountability and transparency in the health, education, agriculture, and environment sectors. Youth and women’s civic engagement will have increased, including the number of women in leadership positions...The rights and needs of the vulnerable and marginalized populations will be recognized by government and civil society, and progress made in building systems to address them.”

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19 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
**Multilateral Organizations**

**Asian Development Bank (ADB)**

ADB has provided $2.86 billion in loans, grants, and technical assistance to Cambodia since 1966. ADB is the largest multilateral development partner to Cambodia.\(^{24}\) ADB has a Country Partnership Strategy (CPS) for 2014-2018. The CPS aims to reduce poverty and vulnerability. The CPS includes three main agendas from the Midterm Review of Strategy 2020: 1) inclusive economic growth, 2) environmentally sustainable growth, and 3) regional cooperation and integration.\(^{25}\) The CPS clearly states it will expand on good governance through combating corruption, legal and judicial reforms, public admin reforms, which include public financial management and decentralization and deconstruction, and armed forces reform. Also, the governance and capacity development component of the CPS is in line with ADB’s second Governance and Anticorruption Action Plan (2006).\(^{26}\)

Country Governance Risk Assessment and Risk Management Plan (GRARMP) (2011) - The GRARMP is the first country-level risk assessment and risk management plan prepared by ADB. It cover three main governance areas, which is public financial management, procurement, and corruption. The GRARMP provides recommendations for groundwork for the Country Partnership Strategy.\(^{27}\)

ADB is working on a number of projects that support the CPS. Here are a couple of example of recent active projects: 1) National Rollout of the Regulatory Impact Assessment in Government - ADB provided technical assistance to the Office of Council of Ministries (OCM) in Cambodia in the amount of $800,000 to push for inclusive economic growth. The drivers of change for this project include governance and capacity development, knowledge solutions, partnership, and private sector development. “The main objectives of the [regulatory impact assessment] system and documentation is to enhance transparency in the regulation making process and promote a more systematic way to assess the impact of regulations and consultations for improved decision making.”\(^{28}\) Another project ADB has contributed to be: 2) Decentralized Public Service and Financial Management Sector. The projects strategic agenda is to enhance inclusive economic growth and the drivers of change include governance and capacity development and knowledge solutions. “Reforms aim to improve the management capacity of local administartions, and to involve citizens in the decision-making processes, enabling more efficient public service delivery which fits local needs and reduces these regional inequalities.”\(^{29}\)

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**United Nations Development Program (UNDP)**

UNDP had been working in Cambodia for over 50 years. UNDP is currently working in cooperation with the Royal Government of Cambodia to implement a new Country Programme Action Plan 2016-2018. “UNDP aims to enhance the government’s ability to deliver public services to the population in an efficient, effective, equitable and accountable manner, to consolidate a participatory democracy with a responsible civil society and to create an enabling environment for inclusive growth, private sector development and sustainable use of natural resources.” UNDP works with development partners to clear landmines and other dangerous objects from the war. Other key priorities are climate change, gender and disaster risk management. UNDP is also working with youth multimedia programs through BBC action to encourage Cambodian youth in civic life and community work. UNDP strongly believes that Cambodian youth are the key drivers of the economy and they can further improve the social, and cultural context of the country.  

UNDP has a specific program by the name of Strengthening Democracy Programme (SDP). SDP focuses on advancing the formal and informal methods to dialogues, representation and participation in democratic governance. The programs main outputs are to engage the citizens and elected bodies at the national and sub-national level and to strengthen civil society, media and political parties to advance democratic processes. Here are some of the outcomes of the DSP project:

- Production and broadcast of 43 shows with diverse topics including commune elections in 2012, voter registration and voter list revision for 2013 national elections, traffic accidents, land disputes, land mine victims, impact of extractive industries, child rights and sexual abuse, environmental pollution and climate change, migrant workers’ rights violation at Thai border and Malaysia, dengue fever epidemic and disaster management, etc.
- Supported three Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) with grants to Cambodia Disable People Organization (CDPO), Khmer Youth Association (KYA)/Cambodia Indigenous Youth Association (CIYA), and Building Community Voices (BCV), to launch civic/voter education campaigns aiming at raising awareness of their rights to vote and at promoting community media.

The project's aim was increase the democratic decision making in Cambodia through dialogue and participation between both the national and subnational level government.

**World Bank**

The World Bank provided its first funding to Cambodia in 1993, supporting the reconstruction of social and economic institutions and the development of infrastructure. However over the years, efforts have become keyed in on governance reform, macroeconomic stability and sustainable economic growth, private sector development, rural development, sustainable natural resource management, and health and education. The World Bank Country Assistance Strategy to

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32 Ibid.
Cambodia, from 2005-2008, and extended to 2011, showcased two major priorities: eliminating obstacles to governance constraints on growth and poverty reduction and assisting the strategies and investments essential to achieve Cambodia’s development goals.

The World Bank projects were created to aid Cambodia in implementing its National Strategic Development Plan for 2006-2011 (extended to 2013) and to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. In 2015, World Bank implemented country consultations with stakeholders, which helped create the World Bank Country Engagement Note (CEN). This is a two year inclusive strategy aimed to reduce poverty. This strategy in turn illustrated in CEN supports Cambodia’s 2014-2018 National Strategic Development Plan, with the goal to aid the country to improve businesses, deliver enhanced social and infrastructure services, and create opportunities for the poorest by investing in productive assets. The CEN program, including analytic and advisory activities encompasses seven investments programs, which is a total of $250 million from the International Development Association.

In December of 2008, World Bank approved a $25 million Demand for Good Governance (DFGG) project in Cambodia. The project’s objective was to support both state and non-state institutions and implement design and leaning by raising awareness, building capacity and implementing DFGG institutionally. It supported the state by providing assistance to the following institutions: 1) the Arbitration Council, 2) the Ministry of National Assembly -Senate Relations and Inspection, 3) One Window Service Office and District Ombudsman Office, 4) and Radio National of Kampuchea.

2002 marked the year Cambodia began decentralization and held its first commune elections. In order to improve local governance and accountability, World Bank supported decentralization efforts through the government’s Rural Investment and Local Governance Project (RILGP) in 2008. The World Bank financed the RILGP with $36.25 million in grant and $22 million in interest-free loan. Since Cambodia’s first commune election 11,353 counselors have participated in fiscal, administrative, and political decentralization process. Commune chiefs and leaders can now have “ownership” of their commune development plan. One of the commune chiefs from Stueng Sen District, Kampong Thom province mentioned that,

“Back then, we had no right to make any decisions especially on commune development. We just waited for orders from the top. Now, we can make decisions on our priority needs and have a budget in hand to do it.”

The RILGP allows councils and villages to have the right to make decisions and gives voice to people at the commune level.

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36 Ibid.
In December of 2010, the World Bank ceased funding to Cambodia. This occurred due to the Cambodian government's ineffective strategy to stop eviction of 10,000 Cambodian people from around the Boeung Kak Lake in Phnom Penh. Prior to this eviction incident, World Bank provided anywhere between $50-$70 million dollars annually to Cambodia. Forced evictions is a major issue facing the country. Nearly 30,000 people are forced to leave farmland or urban areas for real estate, mining and agriculture projects. The evictions around the lake were resulting from a Chinese led luxury real estate development. The firm responsible for the project, China's Inner Mongolia Erdos Hongjun Investment Corp was unlisted and had pledged $3 billion to Cambodia on real estate, metal processing, and power generation. The World Bank had a prior agreement with the Cambodian authorities to aid in land management and administration and resettled people. However, the Cambodian government was not receptive to World Bank’s financial and land management advice to provide housing on site for the residents of the lake. Evictions in Cambodia had angered many human rights organizations and international donors, who had threatened to pull out their funding. “Such threats may not be effective as Cambodian tycoons and their friends in local and central government are profiting by selling or leasing farmland and prime real estate to foreign firms, mostly from China, which is offering more development money than the donors, with fewer strings attached.” Land rights remains a major issue in Cambodia since the Khmer Rouge regime destroyed many legal documents.37

Elections Assistance

For the upcoming 2017 Commune Council Elections and the 2018 National Elections, there are four main donors providing financial, material and technical assistance to either the National Election Committee or to international and local NGOs supporting election related efforts such as voter education, political party candidate trainings, and other related areas. For financial, material and technical support to the NEC, it was reported in April 2017 that China has provided $12 million, the EU has provided $7.1 million, the U.S. has provided $1.8 million and Japan has provided $1.2 million to date. However, a spokespersons from the NEC noted that they expect that around $52 million will be needed to fund the election process.38

In total, the EU and Japan constituted the second and fourth largest contributors to the NEC, respectively, for the 2017 and 2018 elections. Since 1998, the EU has provided substantial financial and technical support to the electoral process in Cambodia. In total, assistance from the EU is expected to be around $11.3 million over three years (2016 to 2019), as announced in June 2015, although only $7.1 million of that pledge has been provided to date.39 The EU is working closely with Japan, which has provided approximately $1.2 million in assistance, to provide technical assistance to the NEC for the redrafting of traditional manual, paper voter lists - which previously left room for irregularities and voter manipulation – into a biometric, computerized system where eligible voters will be identified by their ID card, a photo and their thumb prints.40 A total of 7.87 of 9.6 million eligible voters were registered for the 2017 local elections from

August 23 to December 6, 2016 through the new biometric system. The registration process was observed by 1,000 members from Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL) and the Election Reform Alliance (ERA) in 546 communes. The voter lists were then audited by COMFREL, which noted that the accuracy of names, birth dates, gender, and the verification of voters all scored over 95 percent accuracy—a significant improvement from the quality of the previous voter list.

China, the largest contributor to the NEC for the election cycle so far, announced its provision of material support for Cambodia’s elections in the form of 44 cars, 29 motorbikes, 26 pieces of video conferencing equipment, 80 computers and 75 printers in December 2016. The contributions totaled nearly $12 million in value and were on top of the $237 million in infrastructure aid that Prime Minister Xi promised in October 2016.

“I met with the NEC spokesman and he was very proud to announce that China was the biggest donor to the NEC. If donors decide to withdraw assistance from NEC, then the NEC would operate under assistance from China.” - International Donor Representative

The United States constitutes the third largest, and most recent, donor for assistance to the NEC. The U.S Embassy in Cambodia recently announced in April 2017 the provision of $1.8 million in assistance to the NEC to be administered through a grant to U.S.-based international NGO, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). The press release noted that assistance from IFES will help the NEC implement voter education campaigns, strengthen the dispute resolution process, and enhance the NEC’s ability to identify and mitigate weaknesses in the electoral system. Further information is noted below in the summary of IFES’ work.

In addition to the assistance to the NEC, several other organizations provide assistance in the areas of voter education, civic engagement, political party strengthening and other areas. Assistance supported by funds from the U.S. government and provided via the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI) are noted below. German political foundation Konrad Adenauer Stiftung also provides elections related assistance in the form of strengthening political parties in a non-partisan manner and promoting political participation through the Youth and Politics program which trains students, party members, and other youth on how to get involved in the political process. KAS also supports the conduct of political dialogue of youth through support to Politikoffee, and, as of late, has also conducted trainings on election reporting for journalists and hosted a discussion on the relevance of youth engagement, youth potential and enforcing youth participation in politics.

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Challenges to International Elections Assistance

It is worth noting that while a decent amount of funding has been provided by these four core donors as part of the 2017 and 2018 election cycle in Cambodia, there are outlying questions regarding the efficiency of solely providing elections assistance-type funding right before the elections rather than taking a long-term approach for electoral integrity, voter and civic education, and strengthening political parties’ ability to run for office and govern effectively. Two interviewees noted that they felt that the short-term approach of international donors, which fund programs in three to five year cycles and primarily only support the elections a year prior, is problematic and not conducive to long-term impact in Cambodia.

“I believe you need to remain engaged for a longer time, to build trust and partnerships to build processes that cannot be fixed immediately before elections... Because if you want to work on sensitive issues and make contributions there, you need to work over many years to trigger changes. And if you come in for a quick fix with a long agenda then you will run into a lot of mistrust.” - International Donor Representative

Another challenge compounding the potential ineffectiveness of elections programming is the lack of institutional knowledge of both donors and international and local NGOs implementing elections assistance efforts. One interviewee noted that local NGOs themselves keep poor records regarding prior assistance provided for the elections. Although some local organizations have supported elections in the past, they do not maintain the knowledge or the lesson learned from the prior election cycle - and moreover, international donors do not appear to care about the lack of institutional knowledge when issuing new grants to organizations that they have worked with in prior cycles.

International NGOs Supporting DRG Assistance

With funding support from the international donors noted above, as well as some private organizations and companies, the following international organizations are the primary implementers of DRG assistance in Cambodia. Note that what the U.S. international development community considers as for-profit development contractors have not been included in the below summary. The vast majority of the international NGOs are based in the United States, with the two exceptions being OXFAM International, which originates from the United Kingdom, and ActionAid, which is based in Johannesburg, South Africa.

ActionAid

ActionAid has worked in Cambodia since 2000, with its first country office having been established in 2004. Through their vision of “a world without poverty and injustice, in which every person enjoys their right to a life of dignity,”45 ActionAid focuses support on long-term commitments to advance human rights and alleviate poverty. As part of their assistance to Cambodia, ActionAid empowers marginalized populations by raising rights awareness, strengthening grassroots organizations and social movements, and enabling people to have a say in formal power structures. Programs include supporting CSOs and marginalized populations to conduct campaigns and advocacy efforts to support communities that have been affected by land

grabbing, or by supporting women’s rights by combatting gender-based violence and gender inequality through education towards youth and the establishment of safe spaces for women, among other activities.

**Asia Foundation**

Since 1955, The Asia Foundation (TAF) has worked in Cambodia in areas such as economic, social and political development. Assistance for democracy, human rights and governance efforts has largely focused on the promotion of responsive governance and citizen engagement and the tracking civic engagement through the Cambodia Social Media Civic Insights Team, although the Foundation’s women's empowerment work serves as an umbrella under which women’s political and public participation is one of their three areas of focus. TAF has also previously implemented the Counter-Trafficking in Persons Program through USAID in the late-2000s.

In the area of responsive governance and citizen engagement, TAF most recently supported the World Bank in implementing the demand-side assistance for civil society organizations under the Demand for Good Governance Project (DFGG). From 2008 to 2014, the World Bank implemented a $25 million project that utilized a two-fold approach to strengthen government institutions, support partnerships in which the supply-side and the demand-side are able to work constructively together, and share lessons around Decentralization and Deconcentration (D&D) reforms in Cambodia. The two components of the project included: 1) Support to State Institutions that included direct financial and technical support to the Royal Government of Cambodia’s (RGC) Ministry of Interior, and 2) Support to Non-State Institutions that supported demand-side financial and capacity building assistance for international and local NGOs and CSOs through a grant to The Asia Foundation.

Under the DFGG project, TAF managed and provided seed funding for pilot activities to over 35 local and international NGOs and CSOs that subsequently were able to implement small-scale activities focused on the monitoring of public sector institutions and service delivery, improving citizen engagement in decision making through strengthened institutions and partnerships, changing policies and practices towards accountability and responsiveness, and promoting the DFGG project. Technical support from The Asia Foundation also provided capacity building, monitoring and learning, and management skills to local organizations as they designed and implemented their activities. As a result of learning roundtables conducted with key grantees, the Foundation was able to feed into the design of the Social Accountability Framework (I-SAF) for

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which now serves as a guide for increased citizen participation, transparency and accountability at the sub-national level in Cambodia.\textsuperscript{51}

The Asia Foundation is also well-known for their support and production of research materials on a variety of topics spanning from the prevention of violence against women to the reform of solid waste management in Phnom Penh.

\textbf{CARE}

CARE has worked with Cambodians since 1974 to support relief and development assistance in areas such as emergency relief, preparedness, health, education, livelihoods and gender-based violence.\textsuperscript{52} Currently, assistance related to democracy, human rights and governance under CARE’s portfolio includes two areas: support for I-SAF – the RGC’s strategic plan for social accountability in sub-national democratic development that aims to improve service delivery in primary schools, health centers, and communes in select districts,\textsuperscript{53} and providing women garment factory workers with access to information on sexual and reproductive health.\textsuperscript{54} Under the first area for local governance, CARE is partnering with four local organizations and 14 community-based organizations (CBOs) across four provinces to improve citizen monitoring of service delivery and community understanding of citizen-focused information on budgeting and getting involved with commune-based planning processes through the Information for Citizen packets used by all I-SAF implementers.\textsuperscript{55}

\textbf{East-West Management Institute}

The East-West Management Institute (EWMI) has operated in Cambodia since 2001 through various international donors including the Asian Development Bank, USAID, the U.S. Department of State Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, and the European Union. While programming has focused primarily on strengthening rule of law, EWMI has also supported the creation of the Open Development Initiative (including the flagship site \url{www.opendevcam.net}) and is currently implementing USAID’s Cambodian Civil Society Strengthening (CCSS) project.

Under their current CCSS project, slated to run from 2016 to 2021, EWMI is working with local CSOs in Cambodia to improve their management, planning and analytical skills through a small grants program, research activities and capacity building trainings. The project will also specifically teach local organizations skills related to designing and implementing data-driven programming by teaching hard skills in research activities such as public opinion polls and socio-economic assessments.\textsuperscript{56} Currently, EWMI is seeking to provide technical assistance and capacity building support to local organizations in two areas. Under the first series of small

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{52} CARE Cambodia, “About Us,” accessed April 15, 2017, \url{http://www.care-cambodia.org/untitled-c1f9e}.


\textsuperscript{55} East-West Management Institute, “USAID Cambodian Civil Society Strengthening Project,” accessed April 15, 2017, \url{https://ewmi.org/CCSS}.

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grants, EWMI intends to support local organizations that are providing legal services to human rights defenders or local organizations that are having difficulty in meeting legal and administrative challenges that may impede their work, such as registration under the LANGO. The second set of small grants is to help local organizations expand civic engagement in the political process by building their capacity for effective expression and engagement. Such grants may support empowering youth, women and vulnerable populations through advocacy and communication training, promoting engagement of local communities or other groups on environmental protection, or promoting evidence-based policy contributions.

Prior work in the area of legal reform has focused on promoting access to justice, improving the professional standards of legal experts, and strengthening grassroots advocacy and community networks in support of protecting biodiversity. While work in this area has already concluded, support from donors such as the EU and USAID over the years provided inroads to working the Ministry of Justice on the development of their internal capacity – including strengthening court administration and launching a training program for their staff, as well as creating a website portal to raise the transparency of the cases being processed in the courts. EWMI also supported emerging young law students to ensure that the next generation of lawyers in Cambodia had the skills and practice experiences they needed to succeed in their roles. The training programs included a Client Counseling Competition and a Mock Trial Competition. Finally, the project also allowed for collaboration with local organizations to create a pilot database of freedom of expression issues which later became the factual foundation for a submission to the UN Human Rights Council for Cambodia’s Universal Periodic Review.

International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)
IFES has worked in Cambodia since 1998 to build the capacity of institutions to conduct credible and fair elections through a two-pronged approach that is working with civil society and supporting the NEC with technical assistance. On the civil society site of the spectrum, IFES’ work is ensuring that marginalized populations such as women, persons with disabilities and others are able to voice their opinions as part of the political process. During their prior grant from USAID, the Accountability in Governance and Politics (AGAP) program, such assistance included providing information around the importance of participation in the voter registration update process, conducting public opinion research and bridging the gap between the NEC and civil society to conduct voter education campaigns. IFES also supported the training of 490 women representing 14 provinces in leadership skills and supported the Electoral Reform Alliance - an alliance consisting of 20 civil society organizations - to advocate for improvements to the country’s legal frameworks for elections. Assistance from IFES also resulted in the dissemination of voter education information through an Interactive Voice Response system,

which allowed hundreds of thousands of voters to receive simple and practical information about the 2013 national election.\(^{60}\)

Regarding technical assistance to the NEC, although engagement with the previous iteration of the committee (during the 2012 and 2013 elections) was significantly challenging due to lack of political will for electoral reforms,\(^ {61}\) opportunities to engage with the reformed NEC may prove more effective for this next set of elections given the reforms that occurred April 2015 aimed at making the committee a more independent, unbiased body. Nearly two years later in April 2017, the U.S. Embassy in Cambodia announced that USAID would be providing $1.8 million to the two-year Cambodia Election Management Project, implemented by IFES. Under this project, IFES will provide technical assistance to the NEC in the areas of voter education campaigns, election dispute resolution processes, and identifying and mitigating weaknesses in the electoral system - allowing the Committee to follow through on its commitment to effectively administer the 2017 and 2018 elections while advancing meaningful reform.\(^{62}\) Under this project, IFES will also work with civil society partners on voter education information dissemination to marginalized groups.\(^ {63}\)

**International Republican Institute (IRI)**

Since 1992, the International Republican Institute has worked in Cambodia strengthening accountability, expanding transparency and increasing access to information through support to civil society, youth and political parties.\(^ {64}\) From 2009-2014 under AGAP – funded by USAID – IRI’s work primarily focused on public opinion research and the generation of progressive leadership in the country. Public opinion research fielded by IRI provided information that encouraged political parties to use data- and citizen-driven policy development, while also showing consistently increasing support for the merger of the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP) and the Human Rights Party since 2009. Additional programming included components to increase youth involvement in politics, including sustained engagement with political party youth wings at the national and provincial level, civic education of youth through the conduct of Advanced Democracy Seminar workshops and Youth Festivals, and the active involvement of youth in ‘edutainment’-type televised programs such as Provincial Youth Activist, Future Leaders, Next Generation, and Youth Leadership Challenge - which alone reached over 2 million viewers.\(^ {65}\)

Currently, IRI – with support from the U.S. Department of State – is working with local organization the Youth Council of Cambodia (YCC) to conduct a multi-party youth leadership program called Political Leadership in Multiparty Systems. From October 2016 to March 2017, IRI and YCC conducted four training workshops to empower young leaders from multiple political parties (CPP, CNRP, GDP, KNUP and KPP) to gain tangible skills and learn to come


\(^{63}\) International Foundation for Electoral Systems.


together to express their views and cooperate with one another through peaceful competition and consensus building for a prosperous Cambodia. In March 2017, the trainings culminated in the conduct of voter education campaigns to promote youth to get-out-the-vote in advance of the June 2017 Commune Council Election.  

**National Democratic Institute (NDI)**

The National Democratic Institute has worked in Cambodia since 1992 to support Cambodian citizens, elected representatives, political parties, and CSOs to encourage transparent governance and inclusive political participation. During the last series of elections held in 2012 and 2013, NDI also implemented of AGAP through funding from USAID. NDI’s components of the project focused primarily on conducting town hall-style constituency dialogues between elected members of the National Assembly and their constituents, multi-party candidate debates at the sub-national and national level, issue-based policy dialogues and national women's roundtables, and both a voter registration audit of the voter registry and a sample-based observation of voting and countering operations in the 2013 national elections. The commune-level debates in advance of the 2012 elections were notable in that they created a modicum of political space where none existed before – allowing for an estimated reach of 20 out of 24 provinces in the country through in-person participation or listenership through the radio.

Moving forward into the next election cycle, NDI is implementing USAID’s Cambodia Democratic Reforms project – a four-year activity totaling around $8.5 million in funding. One aspect of the project is called My Open Commune – a series of public forums designed to increase the numbers of informed and engaged citizens in advance of the local elections. Through NDI’s partnership with the Cambodian Civil Society Partnership (CCSP), this aspect of the project’s aim is to help citizens express themselves willingly and in a constructive and peaceful manner with public officials. Activities will be implemented in six provinces (Battambang, Kampong Chhnang, Banteay Meanchey, Siem Reap, Kampong Thom, Kampong Cham) over the next couple of years.

In addition to facilitating dialogue between supply and demand sides of governance at the local level, NDI is also supporting voter education and empowerment of women in the political process in advance of the elections. In partnership with the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC), NDI has launched a series of voter education workshops targeting rural voters in a planned 24 provinces across the country. ADHOC has planned for 350 workshops to take place, reaching over 35,000 rural voters in Cambodia. NDI is also partnering with SILAKA to train women candidates from the CPP and CNRP for local leadership. An initial Training of Trainers workshop was conducted initially in February 2017, and those trained will

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conduct ‘echo-trainings’ to women candidates on effective commune management, community organizing, and political campaigning.\textsuperscript{72}

**OXFAM International**

OXFAM has provided assistance in Cambodia for over 35 years, with the focus of its next three years of planning (until 2020) focused primarily on supporting voices of change; resilience in agriculture, climate change and natural disasters; and natural resource governance.\textsuperscript{73} OXFAM’s Voices for Change program provides assistance to the most vulnerable in Cambodia, including migrants, youth, informal workers and women within these groups. Partnering with government and CSO stakeholders, OXFAM is empowering target groups to hold the government accountable for their actions and meaningfully participate in policy development and decision making, and is empowering women to realize their rights to justice and play a leadership role within their communities.\textsuperscript{74} Assistance in the area of natural resource governance also helps to further empower youth and women in realizing their rights to challenge decisions regarding governance of natural resources.\textsuperscript{75}

**PACT**

Since 1991, Pact has worked in Cambodia to build the capacity of civil society and strengthen the capacity of institutions to tackle poverty and injustice. Current and recent programs funded by USAID, the World Bank, UNDP, Chevron and others include a focus on local governance, anti-corruption, microfinance, health and education, community forestry and support to local organizations.\textsuperscript{76} In the area of local governance, PACT has most recently supported the Promoting Citizen Engagement in Democratic Development (PROCEED) project funded by SIDA. Through PROCEED, PACT helped increase opportunities for citizens to participate in local governance with three main objections: 1) helping citizens increase well-informed communication amongst themselves, 2) ensuring that citizen participation influences district council actions, and 3) enabling civil society to help influence sub-national government policies. The project, which ran from November 2012 to October 2015 was implemented in eight districts across Battambang, Pursat, Kampong Cham and Mondulkiri provinces.

**Save the Children**

Save the Children has operated in Cambodia since 1970 providing relief assistance, and development assistance focused on education, child protection, health, child rights, governance and disaster relief.\textsuperscript{77} In late 2015, Save the Children was awarded funds from the World Bank and the Japan Social Development Fund to implement the Social Accountability for Improved Services Delivery project from 2015 to 2018 in Prey Vent, Kratie, Pursat, Stung Treng and Tboung Khmum provinces. The project will implement the I-SAF to strengthen constructive engagement between citizens and sub-national administrations by building the capacity of


communities and CSOs to monitor government services, and strengthen the capacity of the government as quality service providers in health, education and local administration.78

**World Vision**

World Vision first entered Cambodia in 1970 providing various relief services and development activities to date. Currently, the organization works in nine provinces across the country with a focus on four key areas: 1) education, 2) malnutrition, 3) youth empowerment, and 4) child protection. In the area of governance, World Vision also implements efforts under the I-SAF for improved local service delivery to communities. As part of this project, World Vision has worked closely with 442 Community Accountability Facilitators to strengthen the relationship between community members and local service providers to take action for positive change in Kampong Thom, Siem Reap and Banteay Meanchey provinces. Support for these efforts comes from the Japan Social Development Fund, via the World Bank.79

**Local Non-governmental Organizations**

“There are hundreds of NGOs in Cambodia. It’s very hard to elbow your way to the top with so many.” - Political Analyst

The first local NGO in Cambodia was established in 1991 and the UNTAC opened the door for the establishment of many more. NGOs were most involved in human rights and voter education activities, however, many of these NGOs have switched their focus to development-based activities in response to the availability of external funding.80 Cambodia has the second largest NGO per capita in the world, after Rwanda.81 According to the Cooperation Committee for Cambodia (CCC) there are approximately 3,500 registered NGOs in Cambodia. Although fewer than half are active, that is still about one active NGO for every 10,000 Cambodians.

Although the local NGO sector is vibrant, according to the UNDP, “local NGOs have relatively weak grassroots foundations”.82 However, international and local NGOs are active across all sectors ranging from advocacy and human rights organizations to service delivery, humanitarian and service organizations.

Local NGOs must register with the Ministry of Interior while international NGOs must register with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the Law on Associations and NGOs. Depending on the sector of development assistance provided, international NGOs may also be required to have cooperative agreements with other Ministries as well, such as the Ministry of Health or Ministry of Education.

**Local NGOs Supporting DRG Assistance**


82 Asian Development Bank, “Civil Society Briefs: Cambodia.”
Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)

The Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC) is an independent, non-partisan, non-profit NGO founded by a group of former political prisoners in December 1991 after the signing of the Paris Peace Agreements. ADHOC currently has the following three main programs: Human Rights program, Land and Natural Resources Rights program, and Women’s and Children’s Rights program.

The Human Rights program monitors and assesses the status quo of human rights in Cambodia by investigating received complaints, assisting victims, and monitoring prisons. ADHOC also partakes in advocacy and lobbying and engages in national and regional campaigns.

As an increasing number of Cambodians are getting evicted from their homes due to business development without proper impact analysis or compensation, the Land and Natural Resources Rights program seeks to addresses these violations by community empowerment (educating communities of their land rights), investigation and intervention (legal assistance, petitioning, and filing of complaints to the courts), and finally by creating a culture of dialogue through workshops between grassroots communities and the local, provincial, and national authorities to encourage cooperation and collaboration. ADHOC also engages in land rights advocacy through the release of press statements, reports and the attendance of conferences and closely cooperates with the National Human Rights Commission.

The Women’s and Children’s Rights program works to improve the situation for Cambodian women who are victims of domestic violence, and who are faced with criticism and stigma if and when they report abuse. The program conducts investigation, provides support to women by informing them of their rights and assisting with their reintegration back into their communities and also conducts anti-discrimination training for both men and women.

Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)

CCHR is an independent NGO that works to promote and protect democracy and human rights by empowering civil society to demand its rights. Through public forums, CCHR (as a moderator) provides a platform for communities to discuss human rights issues and violations in a less formal setting where Cambodians are encouraged to voice their opinions.

Among its many programs, CCHR provides community training to increase the understanding of human rights amongst marginalized rural and urban communities involved in land conflicts and then equip those affected with the skills to claim their rights and negotiate a resolution of land of conflicts. The Community Hearing “is a case-driven alternative conflict resolution mechanism that seeks to bring those affected by rights violations together with Royal Government of

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Cambodia representatives, alleged perpetrators and other stakeholders in order to resolve the conflict at hand.\textsuperscript{88}

Another notable project is the Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) project which seeks to protect Cambodians who in their professional or personal capacity stand up for the rights of others, making them in particular more at risk and to promote the right to defend human rights. An HRD Committee is to monitor HRDs and coordinate NGO support for HRDs who are threatened or intimidated. The project also aims to seek funding from the private sector should increase financial support be secured.\textsuperscript{89}

In addition to empowerment, CCHR conducts research and analysis and develops innovative policy which it advocates for at the national level.

CCHR donors include U.S. Department of State, Australian Embassy, Freedom House, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the Open Society Institute.\textsuperscript{90}

\textbf{Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCiM) / Voice of Democracy (VOD)}
The Cambodian Center for Independent Media was established in 2007 as a product of the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR). CCiM promotes democratic governance, freedom of expression, and independent media by reporting on news, and establishing a space for the public to voice their opinions.\textsuperscript{91} CCiM also conducts research to inform and raise public awareness and uses its research as evidence to lobby government. Additionally, it conducts trainings for professional and citizen journalists and creates opportunities for media professionals to come together and establish common standards and codes of conduct.\textsuperscript{92}

CCiM recently relaunched its radio program on corruption issues. Radio programs include, “Let’s Go Show” a radio program for youth on politics and good governance and VOD radio program “Good Service, Good Society, a Window of Opportunity to Promote Good Governance at the Local Level.”\textsuperscript{93}

Donors include the International Republican Institute, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), DanChurchAid (DCA), Diakonia, Freedom House, GIZ, the Asia Foundation and the United Nations.

\textbf{Committee on Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL)}
The Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia is an independent, nonpartisan NGO, founded in 1998, whose programming focuses on the following areas: parliamentary watch,
elections, voter voice and government watch, citizen participation in local democratic governance, democratic governance, youth political participation, gender equality, and civil society. The committee participated in the 1998, 2003, 2008, and 2013 National Assembly Elections, and the 2002, 2007, and 2012 Commune Council Elections and lobbies for improvements to the legal framework for political and electoral reforms. It also monitors the performance of parliamentary members to assess their fulfillment of political platforms and works to build the capacity of its own network as well as the capacity of its partners at the national and provincial levels. Additionally, it conducts public forums and assesses the performance of the commune councils by focusing on the issues of local governance and the participation of citizens in local bodies to build democracy from the local level.

During election cycles, COMFREL concentrates its efforts on election monitoring. COMFREL established a ‘situation room’ in advance of the elections (in March, 2017) to ensure increased and effective collaboration among civil society organizations in anticipation of the June 2017 commune elections. The ‘situation room’ allows a space, or a platform, for organizations to have a concerted effort, or joint intervention if needed.

In the early months of 2017 and in alignment with current events in Cambodia, COMFREL released the 2016 Voter Registration Monitoring and Observation Report, its annual democracy report titled, Elections and Reform in Cambodia 2016, and the Voter List Audit in Cambodia.

**Cooperation Committee for Cambodia (CCC)**

The Cooperation Committee for Cambodia is the longest-established membership organization in Cambodia since 1990. It works to strengthen cooperation, professionalism, accountability, governance, and development effectiveness of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) working across different sectors in Cambodia. Its goal is to achieve sustainable development by providing services to various civil society organizations and by influencing on the ground actors.

Since 2004, CCC has been implementing the NGO Governance & Professional Practice program (GPP), originally called the NGO Good Practice Project, which aims to promote professionalism and good practice within NGOs operating in Cambodia. Initially, the GPP team redeveloped an existing Code of Ethical Principles for NGOs and developed accompanying minimum standards. Subsequently, the Voluntary Certification System (VCS) was developed following examples of other NGO accountability and good governance models from around the world. Along with the supporting Code of Ethical Principles and the minimum standards for NGOs, the VCS is an important tool that helps ensure accountability and good governance in the NGO sector. It is currently one of only two known NGO self-regulation practices operating in Southeast Asia.

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CCC also has a Research and Learning (RL) component. This component offers a wide range of capacity development programs, and research and learning opportunities for members, NGO-GPP applicants, partners and provincial networks, and other interested NGOs. Services are generated through the following key areas of activities:99

1. Learning Forums specifically on HR, M&E, Finance, and ICT for CCC members that encourage peer-learning, network building, and new knowledge initiatives.

2. Training courses for organizational and program development, coupled with mentoring and coaching support.

3. Board function workshop for applicant NGOs and interest NGOs, to promote the effective function of Board Members to support and lead the organization.

4. Research capacity development for evidence-based advocacy programming.

**Coalition Building, Advocacy and Networking (CAN)**

CCC houses information on an array of subjects relating to the NGO sector in Cambodia, and “fields inquiries from NGOs, government, donors and the private sector, on topics ranging from government regulations affecting NGOs, to the number of NGOs working in specific sectors, to NGO contact details, to potential partners in regional or sectarian networks, to name but a few.”100

The Governance Hub Program (GHP) seeks to lead an innovation that shifts how knowledge is generated and shared between active NGOs. This component of the GHP encourages monitoring and evaluation of the performance of the NGO sector, conducts surveys and research, provides advice and referrals, and facilitates cooperation among the different actors in the NGO sector to advocate collectively and cohesively on cross-cutting issues affecting the NGO sector and its ability to effectively contribute to the development of Cambodia.101

Among its donors are CARE, Australian Aid, Catholic Relief Services, Oxfam America, and the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL).

**Future Forum**

“All of Future Forum’s outputs are grounded in the idea of the ‘Cambodia We Want’ i.e. on focusing on the longer-term ways forward for Cambodia and in establishing a positive vision for Cambodia, rather than on reiterating the problems.”

Future Forum is an evidence based think tank started by Ou Virak, a Cambodian human rights activist in late 2015, which focuses on research, analysis and public policy to provide a solution

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to gaps in policy. Future Forum’s mission is to nurture a community of young thinkers, develop positive policy solutions and engender critical debate, especially among youth.\textsuperscript{102}

Future Forum has four main areas of work: research, policy development, advisory services, and civic education. The think tank is a space for young researchers to work on developing policy, experts and prominent figures can conduct seminars and conferences, and stakeholders can present policy to the Cambodian public.

Public policy recommendations, briefing papers, and other publications are produced by both Future Forum’s core staff as well as external researchers and fellows who base their publications on in-depth research and evidence-based analysis. The research and publications heavily inform other programmatic areas and activities by providing policy analysis and support.\textsuperscript{103}

Additionally, Future Forum provides advisory services and policy recommendations to the private sector in a wide range of fields such as business, legal, political, and institutional. Services range from “client-adapted, needs-based analyses to hands-on training of staff.”\textsuperscript{104}

Lastly, through their Civic Education project, Future Forum develops new ways to increase involvement of the Cambodian public in issues related to politics and policy. In the months leading to the upcoming 2017 local elections and 2018 national elections, Future Forum is producing videos and material related to government and politics, especially aimed at youth.\textsuperscript{105}

“By adopting a measured, analytical and considered approach, we conduct rigorous, in-depth research that involves all stakeholders in finding concrete, creative and principled solutions to Cambodian policy issues. Future Forum’s objective is thus to encourage intellectual research and thinking, to positively influence the policy narrative in Cambodia at a local, national and international level, employing evidence-based policy debate, analysis and recommendations to inspire Cambodian people – especially youth and young professionals – to achieve democratic, political and socio-economic change that will benefit all of Cambodia.”\textsuperscript{106}

\textbf{LICADHO}

Established in 1992, LICADHO is a national Cambodian human rights organization which has been at the forefront of efforts to protect civil, political, economic and social rights in Cambodia and advocate for their recognition and respect for them by government institutions. LICADHO pursues its activities mainly through the Monitoring and Protection program and the Promotion and Advocacy Program.\textsuperscript{107}

Through the Monitoring and Protection program, LICADHO provides legal representation and advice to victims of human rights abuses. Staff monitor and investigate human rights violations perpetrated by the state in addition to violations against women and children while victims are


provided assistance via interventions with local authorities and officials. LICADHO staff monitor 18 different prisons to assess their conditions and ensure detainees have access to legal representation. A medical team provides medical assistance to prisoners in 14 prisons, and to victims of human rights violations and families in resettlement sites.108

Through the Promotion and Advocacy program, the organization provides protection and legal services to unions and various grassroots groups and affected communities to enhance their capacity to campaign and advocate for human rights. Advocates raise awareness among specific groups via information based trainings and along with youth, advocate for social and legal changes. Human rights cases are compiled into a central electronic database in order for accurate information to be easily accessed, analyzed, and produced into periodic public report.109

Lastly, LICADHO lobbies for reform at the national level in collaboration with other local and international NGOs. It regularly produces reports, and briefs and is one of the main sources of information on human rights in Cambodia.110

Donors include Amnesty International, Canada Fund, Catholic Relief Services, Oxfam, and USAID.

**Neutral and Impartial Committee for Free and Fair Elections (NICFEC)**

NICFEC is a grassroots network of advocates and volunteers supported by an alliance of seven non-governmental organizations which work together to strengthen and expand democracy in Cambodia. NICFEC’s core mission is to “encourage people to participate in local development and to exercise their democratic rights for making progress in their social lives.” 111 The organization strives to achieve their mission by educating voters, monitoring elections and engaging in advocacy.

NICFEC has a vast network of provincial coordinators in all 24 provinces/municipalities and more than 7,000 district coordinators and local volunteers. Youth are especially encouraged to volunteer and participate in NICFEC’s various programming. Its 7 member organizations are the Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO), Cambodian Association Development (CAD), the Architecture Student Association (TASA), the Khmer Literature Students Association (KLSA), the Organization of Community Development Economic (OCDE), the League of Professors for Development (LPD, and the Fine Arts Association (FAA).112

According to NICFEC’s website, the organization is currently implementing the Participatory Governance and Human Right Education for Indigenous People in Northeast Region project. The project’s objective is to increase participation of the indigenous groups in political processes and

democratization. The project has 4 key activities: 1) survey to establish baseline understanding of existing knowledge of indigenous groups, 2) production of training materials on local governance and indigenous rights to be distributed in 4 different languages, 3) applied training to indigenous groups from four communes (Mondulkiri, Ratanakiri, Stung Treng, and Preh Vihear) using material from activity two, and lastly activity 4) production of mid-term and final report.\textsuperscript{113}

Among NICFEC’s donors are the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation (PYD), United Nations Democracy Fund, and USAID.

\textbf{NGO-CEDAW}

The Cambodian NGO Committee on CEDAW promotes awareness-raising, monitoring, advocacy and engages in other various activities aimed at supporting civil society and government officials to reach a point where CEDAW principles (equality, non-discrimination, and State obligation) are permanently applied to all institutions and sectors of society.\textsuperscript{114}

According to their website, in their work centered around advocacy and lobbying, NGO-CEDAW has maintained a cooperative relationship with the Government of Cambodia and other NGOs which has led to the adoption of many of its recommendations into the official CEDAW report and influenced various Ministries and government to adopt certain laws such as the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence and the Protection of Victims, Optional Protocol on CEDAW, and Law on Regulating Concentrated Acid. NGO-CEDAW continuously advocates for the protection of domestic workers, land rights activists, release of female activists.\textsuperscript{115}

Among its activities are special campaigns organized on March 8th of every year, for International Women’s Rights Day and participation in the 16-Day Campaign Against Gender-based Violence during International Human Rights Day. Also, NGO-CEDAW organizes an annual conference for its members where steering and sub-committee members are elected to attend technical training sessions, exchange ideas and information, and to plan for the following year. For example, in 2016 members met in Kampong Speu Province to learn about the election process from a Cambodian youth activist who studied in the United States.\textsuperscript{116}

Also, as part of their awareness raising, NGO-CEDAW uses Khmer language radio programs to disseminate information and CEDAW principles and to invite the public to participate in discussions on various human rights issues on live call-in programs.

Furthermore, trainings are conducted throughout the year on women’s rights. Trainings for NGOs are centered on monitoring the implementation of human rights laws. Some trainings include training young women activists to become more effective in their work and knowledge sharing.\textsuperscript{117}

Donors include the National Democratic Institute, DCA, and Heinrich Boll Stifting.

\textsuperscript{113} Neutral and Impartial Committee for Free and Fair Elections on Cambodia, “Current Projects,” https://nicfec.wordpress.com/current-projects/
The NGO Forum on Cambodia
The large number of NGOs in Cambodia allow for the establishment of various forums and networks. The NGO Forum on Cambodia is a membership organisation that aims to build NGO cooperation and capacity while supporting NGO networks and other civil society organizations to engage in policy dialogue, debate and advocacy and actively supports transparent and accountable government, and the rule of law. According to their website, the forum’s long-term goal is to ensure citizens and CSOs are well-equipped to contribute and influence policy making and implementation processes. Its approach is mainly a combination of capacity building and advocacy activities. Advocacy is conducted through establishing platforms for policy dialogue such as workshops, meetings, and conferences. It also conducts research and produces evidence based policy that call for inclusive, equitable and sustainable development. The NGO Forum on Cambodia is currently working towards increasing cooperation with former and emerging community-based organizations to ensure grassroots participation.\textsuperscript{118}

International donors include Oxfam, Action Aid International Cambodia, Christian Aid, Catholic International Development Charity (CAFOD), Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, Diakonia, and GermanWatch.\textsuperscript{119}

SILAKA

“The word SILAKA is formed from the word “SILA” meaning moral character, moral principles, and moral conduct, and the word “KARA” meaning an act, function, or work.”\textsuperscript{120}

SILAKA, a leading capacity-building, nonpolitical, and nonsectarian local NGO, which aims to promote and implement democracy in Cambodian society in order to achieve sustained development with both women and men actively and equally participating for good governance. SILAKA started as a Cambodian-American Volunteer Project implemented by the Cambodian National Council (CNC) and funded by USAID in 1993. After four years of operation, the program became embedded in Cambodian society and localized.\textsuperscript{121}

Good Governance - Strengthening Procurement at the Subnational Level

The objectives of this program are divided into two phases. The three objectives under Phase I are: To build the capacity of local institutions to effectively monitor provincial public procurement and to document irregularities for improvement; to increase awareness within the business community of provincial procurement rules, regulations and opportunities; and to increase civic and private sector engagement in provincial public procurement processes. Phase II has the following three objectives: To deepen and increase the awareness among the public on citizen’s roles and rights in monitoring of state procurement system; to enhance public-private collaboration and partnership in monitoring public program implementation of contracting agencies through participatory monitoring approach of the procurement process and in public private dialogue; to set mechanism for private public engagement through establishing social


\textsuperscript{120} SILAKA, “About Us,” accessed April 1, 2017, \url{http://www.silaka.org/}.

\textsuperscript{121} SILAKA, “About Us,” accessed April 1, 2017, \url{http://www.silaka.org/}. 
accountability tools for private citizen engagement through the information disclosure mechanism and a complaint handling on the procurement system.\textsuperscript{122} The program has fifteen project outcomes some of which include, forming a Joint Procurement Monitoring Committee (JPMC), building the capacity of the established JPMC to fulfill their roles, training sessions on the procurement law and systems conducted in two target locations with a total of 27 participants, an Awareness Campaign implemented to further the awareness on the importance of the citizen involvement in the local governance system and what procurement system is and how it operates. Target groups for this program include citizens, private sectors, NGOs, and the Commune/Sangkat Procurement Committee (CPC) of three Sangkats; Sangkat Archarleak, O’Kuntor, Srayov in Stungsen municipality and three communes; Kampongsvay, Trappaignrussey and Sankor commune.

**Women in Politics - Women Leaders at the Subnational Level**

This project aims to strengthen leadership skills among Women Leaders at the Sub-National Level (WLSN) and Young Women Activists (YWA) through enhancing their knowledge on women and children’s issues to help build their advocacy agenda for their own community development. The WLSN project is implemented via partnership with four organizations which are members of CPWP such as SILAKA, Gender and Development for Cambodia (GADC), Partnership for Development in Kampuchea (PADEK), and Kampuchea Women’s Welfare Association (KWWA).\textsuperscript{123}

SILAKA’s donors include Oxfam, Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE), JASS Southeast Asia, Foreign Affairs/Trade and Development Canada (CIDA), Strey Khmer, Cambodia Young Women Empowerment Network (CYWEN), and COMFREL.\textsuperscript{124}

**Star Kampuchea (SK)**

Star Kampuchea (SK), a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, was established by the Ministry of Interior in 1997. SK’s mission is to “educate and empower people to advocate for good governance and sustainable natural resource management” and to build democracy by strengthening civil society.\textsuperscript{125}

Currently, SK has three programs, the Natural Resource Governance Policy Watch Program (NPW), Sustainable Natural Resource Management and Climate Change Program (SNC), and Volunteer Action of Cambodia.

The Natural Resource Governance Policy Watch Program (NPW) primarily focuses on policy compliance at the national level. The program conducts studies which are used for discussions with decision makers and shareholders and ultimately shared with the public via mass media. The program also seeks to serve as a mediator between local society and government officials, the donor community and other stakeholders. More specifically, at the grassroots level, the

program aims to positively influence the behavior of the public officers to be more transparent, accountable, and timely in public service delivery.\textsuperscript{126}

Through the SNC program, SK provides technical support to specific communities and empowers them to demand legal registration of their fishery and forestry areas. SK provides lawyers to represent individuals in court where necessary and provides psychological support to families through social community support. For the climate change element, the program engages and encourages communities to advocate for inclusion of climate change in the Communal Investment Plans (CIPs). The program has a good governance component which is to monitor the responsiveness, transparency, accountability, and participation in public services.\textsuperscript{127}

The Volunteer Action of Cambodia Program where volunteers, primarily current college students or recent graduates, are invited from all over the world to work with various Cambodian NGOs. The objective of this program is to instigate cultural and work experience exchange. Currently, the program has 50 partner organizations, which work across all sectors, in seven provinces where volunteers can be placed based on their personal interests.\textsuperscript{128}

SK has received funds from the Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC), The Affiliated Network for Social Accountability in East Asia and the Pacific (Foundation) (ANSA-EAP), the British Embassy, World Alliance for Citizen Participation (CIVICUS), Danida, DCA, Forum Syd, Netherland Embassy, Norwegian People’s Aid, Oxfam, Southeast Asian Community Alliance (SEACA), The Asia Foundation, and the World Bank.

\textit{Transparency International Cambodia}

Transparency International (TI) Cambodia, a fully-accredited local chapter of Transparency International, was officially founded on July 5, 2010 by anti-corruption activists and professionals in Cambodia. TI works with individuals and institutions at all levels including government, civil society, businesses, media and the wider public to achieve sustainable economic development, promote integrity, and fight against corruption.\textsuperscript{129}

Building upon its \textit{Together against Corruption} strategy for 2012-2015, TI Cambodia is currently implementing its \textit{Collective Action for Transparency and Integrity} strategic plan aimed at strengthening demand and participation from civil society, the private sector and the public in addition to enhancing the capacity of public institutions to respond to that demand. TI Cambodia’s 5-year strategy is primarily based on six core programmes: Public Sector Engagement and Reform Program, Partnership and Coalition Building Program, Citizens and Youth Empowerment Program, Promoting Business Integrity Program, Governance Foundation and Capacity Strengthening Program, and Research and Advocacy Program.\textsuperscript{130}


Under the Public Sector Engagement and Reform Program, TI Cambodia provides technical support in the establishment of the Ministry of Interior’s School of Good Governance. TI Cambodia aims to enhance the capacity and expertise of the trainers at School of Good Governance and equip them with tools to train public officials at the national and sub-national levels on good governance, social accountability, integrity and anti-corruption. Additionally, the program partners with other CSO technical working groups to further constructive dialogue with existing partners to advocate for the passing of the Law on Access to Information and Whistleblower Protection Act, and amendments to existing core legislation including the Anti-Corruption Law and Law on the Organization of the Courts, the Law on the Status of Judges and Prosecutors and the Law on the Organization and Functioning of the Supreme Council of the Magistracy. TI Cambodia supports the National Assembly’s Commission 10, whose role is to oversee the enforcement of the Anti-Corruption Law, in its capacity development through training and workshops, and provides technical expertise in developing anti-corruption guidelines and manuals for the Commission.\(^{131}\)

Donors include Swedish International Development Cooperation (SIDA).

**Youth Focused Programming**

Sixty-five percent of the Cambodian population is under the age of 30, according to UNDP Cambodia.\(^{132}\) This large percentage of youth is indicative of an open space for programming and an opportunity to capitalize on the youth dividend. There are many local organizations capitalizing on this space, however for the purpose of this assessment three are focused on, below: Transparency International, Youth Council of Cambodia, and Youth Development Resource Program.

**Transparency International-Cambodia**

TI-Cambodia has programming focused on youth and civic participation. One of TI’s goals is to “empower people to fight corruption and promote integrity individually and collectively”.\(^{133}\) As such, by building upon the existing youth network and past citizen engagement activities, TI seeks to empower youth to increase their engagement at the community and grassroots levels by organizing them into community-based groups with proper structures and building their capacity to utilize various social accountability tools and take initiatives.

Activities include: citizen monitoring of community development projects, infrastructure construction, forestry management, public service delivery, teacher performance, and auditing expenditures at the commune-level. TI Cambodia utilizes social media, such as Facebook and YouTube, to reach out to as many Cambodian youth and citizens as possible.\(^{134}\)

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**Youth Council of Cambodia (YCC)**
The Youth Council of Cambodia was founded in the year 2001 and has a vision in which youth actively participate in strengthening democracy, good governance, economic development, human rights, and standing up for the environment, health provisions and gender equality. Its mission is to foster greater participation among Cambodian youth and strengthen their capacity to be an informed and influential voice in the development of Cambodian society.\(^{135}\)

Funding from donors such USAID, the National Council of Swedish Youth Organization (LSU), International Republican Institute (IRI), Save Children International, EU, Care International, and Oxfam America has allowed YCC to implement four programs between 2016 and 2020: Education and Training, Advocacy and Networking, Climate Change and Livelihood, and Research and Development. The programs are implemented in 13 provinces where YCC has an existing network of 45 youth clubs and 25,894 youth network members, 18,358 of whom are female.

YCC’s Education and Training Program strives to promote equal access to education for youth, particularly for girls, and to support the Government in the implementation of education policies. It is designed to provide youth an opportunity to gain meaningful work experience in their field of interest and equip them with skills that prepare them for jobs and enable them to lead and contribute to community development efforts.\(^{136}\)

The program includes an Advanced Democracy Seminar (ADS) designed to encourage active youth participation in politics. The ADS curriculum focuses on expanding democracy in Cambodia, youth participation in democracy, good governance, and elections. Throughout the course, trainers assist participants in identifying methods to engage in the political process by inviting local elected and government officials to speak on issues important to youth and identifying Members of Parliament for correspondence or petitions. An effective element of the program is that youth participants learn to identify a specific problem in their community and work with trainers to develop and then implement a plan to address it. It is worth noting that YCC has ADS Cham (Muslim) and ADS Cham (Khmer Muslim) which are parallel training courses to the Advanced Democracy Seminar designed for a typical focused group of young Khmer Muslim participants. After ADS training, youth are ready to engage in local events such as submitting petition letters on local youth issues to elected officials (commune councilors) and local authorities, and participating in commune council monthly public meetings.\(^{137}\)

**Youth Development Resource Program (YRDP)**
The Youth Resource Development Program is a youth organization founded in 1992 whose programming centers around civic and peace education and youth empowerment. On their website, the organization explicitly states that it is not affiliated with any political party or religion; “rather, YRDP exposes youth to different religions and political parties.”\(^{138}\)

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YRDP works mostly with Cambodian youth, particularly university students and its mission is to engage “youth in the development of their critical thinking skills, empowers them to utilize their civil and political rights, and strengthens their social conscience for positive social action on behalf of their own future, family, community and country.”

Per their website, YRDP currently has the following five programs.

The Empowering Youth for an Equitable Society (EYES) program aim to empower youth to explore and gain understanding of their personal roles and rights in society. Through various trainings, EYES allows youth to grow in the areas of civic and peace education.

YRDP’s Youth Engagement in Social Action program (YES ACT) seeks to capacitate youth to take concrete action towards democratization and sustainable development. The Youth Initiatives for Political and Social Action Project (YIPSA) and the Youth Mobilization for Good Governance in Extractive Industries Project (EI) fall under the YES ACT program. YIPSA prepares youth to invest, as volunteers, in community development and democratic processes by facilitating, through dialogues and internships, exchanges between youth and political parties while the EI project mobilizes youth to influence policy makers to take action on natural resource management and revenue transparency from Cambodia’s extractive industries by referencing and advocating for their rights as active citizens.

Youth Investment in Employment and Leadership (YIELD) program consists of two projects, Youth Empowerment for Employment (YEE) and Advocacy Youth for Employment (AYE). Through the aforementioned projects the program “is geared towards empowering youth to gain employment potential within an accommodating job market with decent and dignified work.”

Finally, the Publication and Communication Program (PCP) gives youth access to information sources and provides a public space for youth to share their voices via different media platforms, such as video documentaries, social media and publications. There is also a Youth Learning Center which provides a learning space and access to media, newspapers, and the internet.

Donors include Oxfam, Federal Republic of Germany, and Development and Peace - Caritas Canada.

**Operational Challenges**

During the assessment period, the capstone team assessed through interviews whether or not donors, organizations and political analysts felt that the current tense political environment is impacting the operations of organizations operating in Cambodia. It is important to note that

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during the eleven interviews with international donors and international and local NGOs and international donors, five interviewees stated that the political environment is impacting their programs and operations, while six interviewees stated that the political environment was having limited impact. Furthermore, of the five political analysts interviewed, all five stated that they felt the political environment is impacting the operations of both international and local organizations to various degrees.

While it is unclear whether the operating space for international and local NGOs and CSOs in advance of the 2017 Commune Council Elections and the 2018 General Elections will continue to close, it’s clear that the current level of constraints against human rights presents significant challenges to NGOs being able to operate freely and publically voice opinions without negative repercussions.

**Legal Challenges**

Despite protests from the international community, local civil society organizations, human rights groups, and citizens, the Law on Associations and NGOs was promulgated in August 2015. LANGO has presented NGOs operating or seeking to operate in Cambodia with an entirely new set of hoops to jump through to achieve legal registration within the country, while also placing restrictions on the operations of all NGOs regarding the types of activities they are able to implement and how they should carry out such activities. Further compounding upon its restrictive nature is the fact that the Government of Cambodia uses LANGO as a tool to break up meetings and trainings conducted by NGOs and CBOs and further challenges their operations through arrests of NGO staff on spurious charges without proper legal justification.144

In an article published by the Cambodia Daily, international NGOs anonymously voiced their concerns over the continued pressure of LANGO on their day-to-day operations in Cambodia – some of which have received threats from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to fully comply with the law. Many operate with heightened caution and carefulness, particularly those that deal with issues of sensitivity to the government. In advance of the elections it is quite possible that the government will harness LANGO to specifically target and shutdown elections-related activities that either directly or indirectly assist the political opposition – particularly as the law itself requires that NGOs “maintain their neutrality toward political parties.”145

As the country moves closer to the June 2017 local elections, both international NGOs and local NGOs funded by international donors should remain cognizant of the challenges and risks that their organizations and staff may face. Recently, Hun Sen himself has criticized the U.S. Government in response to issued statements about concerns stemming from the new amendments to the political party law. The Prime Minister noted that “In the recent past the United States has expressed concerns about foreign intervention in its own election. In a similar vein, Cambodia is also concerned about foreign interference, which is not just a possibility for already an obvious fact.”146 These statements clearly signal that Hun Sun is ready and willing to

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take actions against any perceived foreign influence in the elections, and therefore organizations implementing elections-related programming – such as political party strengthening – in particular should be cautious about the challenges that both their organizations and individual staff could face over the next year.

LANGO, in particular, was noted by local NGOs as causing administrative challenges to their programs. Challenges noted include: tedious administrative tasks relating to registration, such as detailed paperwork and processes for leadership changes; and unclear processes for conducting activities at the local level. For the latter, some organizations noted that although the LANGO only requires notification to local authorities to conduct activities, many local officials have required that formal permission be sought and received prior to the conduct of any NGO activities at the local level. As a result, activities have been, and could continue to be delayed as NGOs wait for formal approval. During the interviews conducted during the assessment period, eight interviewees noted the potential impact of legal restrictions under LANGO on the operations of local and international NGOs - particularly in advance of and during the conduct of the elections.

“The only other concern we have is the NGO law, because it has a lot of clauses that will potentially, if it applies, limit our potential to engage with the public effectively. For example, for a large gathering, campaign or forum, or even simply hold a public meeting or workshop that poses a threat as well... Even the Ministry of Interior said that they did not enforce the law yet – they are waiting for the guidelines to be finalized in terms of interpreting the law – but the authority have taken a step further on that law without guidelines to refer to the public that “you’re not allowed to do this because the law says so.” We have already felt the impact of that and that’s going to have a potential impact on our programs.” - Local NGO Representative

In addition to the challenges that the LANGO poses to the operations of the NGOs, the Law on Elections of Members of the National Assembly (LEMNA) presents further human rights and freedom of expression challenges for civil society writ large. In 2015, LEMNA was one of three laws passed relating to the conduct of elections – in addition to the Law on Commune Elections and the Law on Organization and Functioning of the National Election Committee (the government institution with oversight over the conduct of elections). However, while many provisions of LEMNA serve as useful guidelines for the conduct of the General Elections, certain provisions received criticism from the civil society and NGOs which stated that LEMNA places restrictions on rights of freedom of expression and assembly.

In particular, LEMNA notes under Article 84 that “local non-government organizations or associations and international associations or organizations performing work in the Kingdom of Cambodia or foreigners shall be neutral and impartial in the election of members of the National Assembly” before further outlining specific guidelines related to their operations.147 While all organizations providing elections assistance in Cambodia are likely aware of the contents of the law, they should also be particularly wary in advance of the 2018 elections. If any organization

appears to be tipping the scales towards the opposition, it is possible that such organizations would face significant fines and legal challenges or be barred from operating in the country. Noting again the Prime Minister’s recent statements about foreign influence in elections, it is also possible that the ruling party might take opportunities to leverage LEMNA to place a shadow of doubt on the elections results.

**Suppression of NGOs, Human Rights Activists and Journalists**

"...What local NGOs are seeing is that when they get arrested and they get thrown in pre-trial detention, there is no charge and there is no conviction. There is not much the international communities can really do... you can call for things but international human rights moves at a fairly slow speed and it’s very difficult to get momentum when someone is just in limbo... So I think that is having an incredibly negative impact on NGOs. A lot of people are scared, the people that I talk to, the local NGO workers. They are worried. They are scared and they are picking sides.” - Political Analyst

In addition to the challenges faced by organizations implementing elections assistance, the crackdown on human rights organizations and activists is also increasingly concerning and has the potential to escalate closer to the elections to serve as a sign of warning to all organizations that speak out against Hun Sen and the CPP. In April 2016, the four current and one former member of the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC) were placed in custody by the government’s Anti-Corruption Unit (ACU) under the claim of bribery of a witness. They were not allowed access to legal council and following sentencing from the Cambodian Supreme Court, were also not allowed bail. Human Rights Watch in particular noted that the detention of the ADHOC five was “in violation of their due process rights under international law.”

Another high-profile human rights case in the past year includes the jailing of activists against the Boeung Kak lake development project. In August 2016, two activists, Tep Vanny and Bov Sophea were arrested for their participation in a “Black Monday” protest related to opposition against the government’s jailing of the ADHOC five and the continued land rights abuses of the government. Yet the challenges for Tep Vanny did not end there. In February 2017, she was slapped with a $3,500 USD fine and sentenced to two and half years in prison for taking part in a protest in front of Hun Sen’s residence in 2013. However possibly more alarming was the fact that during protests that took place outside of the court, four protesters were severely beaten by district security forces. One man, who was a known opposition party candidate for the upcoming commune council elections, was even chased into a nearby market and beaten after he intervened to keep the security guards from attacking women.

The two cases noted above are merely two of an innumerable amount of human rights abuses and arrests of those who have chosen to stand up to the ruling party and voice their criticisms. Many more have occurred, and many individuals have also died as a result of their vocal criticisms – including political analyst and founder of the Grassroots Democracy Party, Kem Ley, who was assassinated in what is believed to be a politically-motivated attack in July 2016.

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**Self-Censoring and Safety Precautions**

As part of the assessment, the Capstone team questioned about the impact of the political environment on the operations of donors and international NGOs. As noted earlier, all sixteen of the interviewees felt that the current political environment was impacting operations of donors and NGOs to varying degrees. In addition, four interviewees noted that either individuals within their own organization or organizations that they know of have faced intimidation as of late. As a result, two organizations with whom the team met with noted that they had already started taking extra precautions for the safety of their staff, such as awareness raising on the risk of operations during such a tense period.

“The challenge is because it is the first time we are concerned about the insecurity and legal harassment risk. So we have to do awareness raising with our observers so they know how to manage their own risk.” - Local NGO Representative

Furthermore, as a result of the restrictive environment in which civil society organizations have to operate, and due to fear of further legal or safety troubles as a result of laws such as the LANGO and LEMNA, two interviewees noted that their organizations or others that they are aware of have been self-censoring their comments and actions as of late. It is extremely important moving forward that all organizations operating in Cambodia consider the risks against the well-being of both the organization, as well as their staff. As many have seen through the detention of human rights defenders, as well as the open threats against journalists and NGO leaders through public statements and the use of the law, the government is willing to target whoever it deems a threat.

“...Some of civil society groups become self-censored. They don’t speak up, they don’t do anything, because they are afraid of when they do this, the government will use different articles and different laws to arrest us, to close our mouths.” - Local NGO Representative

Therefore, as a recommendation of this report we encourage all organizations operating in Cambodia to consider this extra precaution, particularly in regards to actions or public statements criticising the government. Furthermore, international donors should provide additional technical assistance and training to international and local organizations operating in Cambodia to ensure that they are aware of all of the available software or means to encrypt data or emails, or to send messages or calls safely and securely.

**Donor-Recipient Challenges**

Although unrelated to the above topics regarding ability to operate in the current political environment, the Capstone team also sought to assess additional challenges that local NGOs face in Cambodia in regards to their ability to effectively implement DRG programming and to work closely with international donors providing the assistance. Several key themes appeared as a result of the interviews conducted.

First, it is important to recognize that while all local NGOs rely on funding for international donors, there remain significant criticisms on how some international donors operate in Cambodia. In addition to the criticisms noted earlier regarding donors’ preference for short-versus long-term programming, recommendations towards international donors also included:
moving beyond one-day workshops and teaching the basics to organizations that have received funding and technical assistance for the last twenty or so years; thinking outside of the donor framework and listening to local organizations and experts; stop copying the same formulas for success; and stop basing “success” on solely immediate and fast results.

Relatedly, while the international community has provided a significant amount of aid to Cambodia over the years, development programs themselves as still not Cambodian-owned and there are still no structures in place for the financial sustainability of local organizations. Several interviewees noted that donors still primarily use a top-down approach to development programming and that local organizations do not have opportunities to influence the development agendas in their country. Local organizations are greatly reliant on the existence of robust development assistance funding within Cambodia. Few have the structures of independent financial security needed to sustain programming, as well as continue to employ staff, should international donor funding to Cambodia significantly decrease or end.

“...A lot of NGOs inside Cambodia are very much dependent on outside funding. So they’re not really built on any significant political constituency. They’re very dependent on what the priorities of donors are and you know, sometimes the priorities are very good and sometimes the priorities are being set in capital cities far away. This of course is a problem in development across the world and not just in Cambodia, although I think Cambodia encapsulates these issues quite well. And so I think you talk to new leaders and you get the sense that they’re tired of checking boxes and writing grants/grant applications and constantly trying to tick donor boxes you know...with tightening aid across the world I think there is more demand for either quick results on the part of Western governments or more accountability on much money is spent and therefore less and less donor countries are willing to allow local organizations flexibility on how they go about spending money. So I think that remains a huge challenge.” - Political Analyst

In addition to the hurdles of donor-prioritized assistance and questionable funding sustainability, there are also some challenges related to the operations of local NGOs. Two interviewees noted that working within a coalition of local NGOs is more safe, given the constricting political environment, but also indicated that while such a method is safer, coordination remains difficult. To address this issue, it might be most useful for local organizations in Cambodia to cross learn with other regional NGO networks or NGO networks within similar, restrictive environments, to learn best-practices on coordination and communication for self-protection and a cohesive approach. Furthermore, subject to safety and security of information, local organizations should also consider using innovative methods to communicate with one another for better coordination. A couple of the organizations interviewed indicated that they are already using mobile phones and apps to communicate and coordinate, however they did note their concern of the risk that such methods might be made unavailable by the government (i.e. internet blackout) during the election period.

**Windows of Opportunity and Recommendations for Elections Assistance**

The assessment concludes with a final examination and identification – supported by interviews conducted with international donors, international and local NGOs, and political analysts – of the gaps in elections assistance that should be filled in advance of the upcoming two elections. While
at least two political analysts and one local organization were skeptical of the United States’ ability to provide additional democracy and governance assistance to Cambodia as a result of the budget cuts proposed under the current Trump Administration, it is clear from the interviews that many felt the work being done is not enough given the tense political environment and the restriction on NGOs. As such, the assessment team recommends that should the NED provide additional to funding through discretionary programs to local organizations, that the following areas of need should be considered as priorities.

The areas of support noted below are referenced in order of the total number of interviewees which cited them in their recommendations.

**Civic and Voter Education**

The most frequently recommended type of assistance raised by interviewees was to provide more civic and voter education through citizen engagement in advance of the elections. Eleven interviewees felt that additional civic and voter education would be useful beyond the limited assistance and programs already being implemented. Given the ruling party’s current rhetoric threatening that a civil war will break out in Cambodia if citizens vote for a party other than the CPP, the assessment team concurs that these types of programs would be effective by encouraging voters to not be intimidaded by threats, or by educating them on what they can do if voter intimidation occurs either before or during the elections. This type of civic and voter education is particularly useful for older generations in rural communities who, as noted by one of the local NGOs, are more likely to be intimidated by this type of rhetoric due to lingering fear from the days of the Khmer Rouge.

“The ruling party tries to create anxiety for the voter to fear that they have no choice - if they try to select change then war and instability will happen. So civic and voter education to reframe the situation [is needed] so that they see they can still be positive, that no matter what happens there will still be smooth change and transfer of power. They are the political power owners and believe in themselves to respond to their situation - this kind of education is something needed to reframe their hope, to not be frustrated, to not have too much negative anxiety... as well as issues of different political parties policies and they hope that change can happen without future instability.” - Local NGO Representative

Furthermore, this type of programming would also encourage all Cambodian citizens to participate politically by instilling within them the importance of voicing their opinions through the ballot box. Citizens must understand why their civil and political participation is important for the country in order to feel empowered to cast their vote. Unfortunately, a negative effect has already occurred where some citizens doubt the purpose of voting. One local NGO noted that, “We have seen some people pessimistic about Cambodian democratic development, some people do not want to go to vote. They said, ‘why should I go to vote because there’s no point. Whoever I vote for, it doesn’t matter because the same group of people will hold onto power anyways.’ So you can see that some people are hopeless and they do not go to vote or exercise their rights.” By providing civic and voter education, either through long-term programming or short-term get-out-the-vote assistance, local NGOs would be able to encourage citizens to understand why being involved and active is important and can help shape their country’s future.
“Working with people creates more impact, based on our experience. They are the foundation of democracy. If they are empowered, if they understand, then they will demand for change and demand for their rights to be protected, their voice to be heard and their concerns to be addressed. And step-by-step the government needs to come up with a better strategy, if they want to win votes, to respond to the needs...” - Local NGO Representative

Finally, voter education is important prior to any election cycle, but in Cambodia is even more dire due to the changes in requirements for voter identification. Voter education is important because citizens will need to be aware of not only their polling location and voting procedures, how to view party lists, and how to identify and report voter fraud, but also the forms of verification that are necessary to prove their identity so that they can cast their vote. For the purposes of the upcoming Commune Council Elections, a citizen must bring a voter card (being distributed around the country as of April 2017 to all citizens who registered with the new biometric system) as well as an ID in order to vote.

**Youth Engagement**

The second most frequently recommended type of assistance – noted by nine interviewees – focused on continued support for the next generation of Cambodia’s future, namely, youth. According to estimates from the United Nations, over two-thirds of Cambodia’s population is comprised of youth - who, in comparison to their parents, did not suffer through the horrors of the Khmer Rouge.\(^{149}\) Therefore, Cambodian youth are less likely to be affected by the ruling party’s recurring rhetoric – synonymous with the election cycles – threatening civil war within the country should the opposition party win. As such, donors should capitalize on this window of opportunity for change by increasing their support for local NGOs that have youth-focused programming centered around youth education and empowerment on civic, political, social and human rights. When youth are accurately informed not only will they become empowered to demand more government accountability, but their acquired knowledge and empowerment can have a transformative effect on assuaging the fears of the older generations.

“...the more young people are informed, the less they tend to support the ruling party because they learn about their rights and want to demand more accountability from the government and want issues facing their daily lives to be resolved by the government. Hun Sen sees this not as a threat but as something that would have a significant impact on his party if he is not capable of responding to people’s wants and needs.” - International Donor Representative

Furthermore, youth also need to be supported to step up as the next generation of Cambodia’s political and civic leaders. The leadership of the country has been held by older, political elite for several decades now – but at some point in the future the older generation will need to pass the baton to the younger population who represent the majority of the country’s population. Not only should youth be encouraged now through civic education, but they should also be provided the skills to become the country’s future leaders. One political analyst opined that despite twenty years of international aid and technical assistance,

Cambodia still doesn’t have many public policy researchers. They noted, “had we invested in that kind of education twenty years ago, we would be having talents left and right and all would be proposing changes…” In addition to long-term education in areas such as policy development, research, journalism and others areas, youth should also be provided with opportunities to build their leadership skills in areas such as public speaking, debate, negotiation, and management to assist them in taking on political or civic roles at the national or local levels.

**Technical Assistance to the NEC**

“We can push for the better performance of the National Election Committee (NEC), especially regarding reform of voter registration, regarding conduct of polling and counting of votes to be more transparent…” - Local NGO Representative

During the course of the interviews, five local NGOs and one international NGO noted their satisfaction so far with the reform of the National Elections Committee. The reform of the NEC has led to a more balanced structure to reflect a multi-party commission of four CNRP appointees, four CPP appointees and one additional appointee selected by both parties. However, although the NEC has overhauled its voter registration processes and is assumed to have political will, in order to hold elections of high technical standard that are free, fair and credible, one interviewee recommended further technical assistance to the NEC. Further assistance would help to ensure that there are adequate dispute resolution systems in place in the chance of elections irregularities, similar to the prior elections.

However, it is important to note that some organizations also still questioned whether the NEC has been able to function as an independent government body despite the reform and restructuring. One local organization noted that since one of the members of the NEC has been jailed, and since eight of the representatives are assigned by the two main political parties and thus act in the interest of party agendas, that there are still main questions as to whether or not the NEC would be able to independently function in the forthcoming elections. It is therefore important that electoral integrity assistance continue to ensure that the NEC can operate in an independent manner, and, if they cannot or do not, that there are international donors and international and local NGOs that can keep watch over the processes as the elections grow closer.

**Elections Monitoring and Observation**

Another recommended type of assistance is support for increased elections monitoring and observation. Five interviewees expressed that while international assistance has been primarily provided for technical assistance to the NEC, additional resources for domestic and international organizations to conduct elections monitoring and observation – before, during and after the elections – is needed to ensure free, fair and credible elections. Furthermore, such a show of support from the international and local community, would empower citizens to vote on elections day without fear of intimidation or coercion.

“The election monitoring, that we still do not have the full support for yet…to support the current need for observer to be aware on safety and how they can manage insecurity situation and have knowledge to respond. This needs some
Additionally, while audits of the electoral system conducted to date have seen few irregularities and issues, due to the fact that the 2013 elections were fraught with voting irregularities and issues it is important to ensure poll watchers and citizens know how to identify and report issues at the polls on voting day, and be aware of the existing system within the NEC to deal with reported issues of irregularities, such as a strong dispute resolution system. In its report released in February 2017 titled, 2016 Voter Registration Monitoring and Observation Report, COMFREL noted that a major concern is problematic polling stations where the establishment of nineteen polling stations, for police officers and soldiers, and the issuing of residential affidavits to police officers and soldiers in certain cases, could be interpreted as politically motivated, impacting election fairness, and infringing on the privacy of registered voters.  

One interviewee stressed increased citizen engagement, particularly youth, in elections observation. By increasing support to local NGOs and CSOs which have citizens serving in electoral observation, citizens and youth can be trained to observe the upcoming commune elections and national elections to uphold electoral integrity. Furthermore, youth can serve as a unique asset for citizen-drive observation and monitoring due to their vast social media use. Barring the shutdown of any internet or mobile phone services by the ruling party during the elections, youth can act as watchdogs to report instances of irregularities, voter fraud, coercion or manipulation by posting any instances of issues at their polling station on social media. This would provide a more transparent picture of issues that arise during the elections and allow appropriate donors, international and local NGOs, and the NEC to take action where needed and investigate issues flagged.

**Increasing Women’s Political Participation**

During the interviews, four interviewees noted the importance of involving women in the political process and strengthening their abilities to serve as candidates at the local and national level. While women in Cambodia already constitute an equivalent percentage of those in office than the worldwide average, supporting women’s political participation is still an important area of focus given the fact that as of 2015, women made up 51.2 percent of the population.

“I think women’s political participation should be the most focused topic, because when you talk about peace and democracy but women and other marginalized groups are still left behind, there’s no way to say there’s full peace and democracy. So women’s political participation both in politics and public affairs is really important to focus on. It’s not only about women’s issues but it also brings in other agendas and benefits to the society.” - Local NGO Representative

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Moving forward, more funding should be provided for international and local NGO to support increasing women’s political participation by advocating for a quota system within the national and local government, ensuring the government’s compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and providing women candidates at the national and local level with the hard and soft skills they need to serve as effective leaders. Local NGOs could also support platforms for women elected leaders in parliament to serve as positive role models for other younger women to become interested in running for office – for example through roundtable discussions, public forums or media campaigns. Furthermore, civic education activities could be targeted towards young women to garner their interest in politics and encourage more women to actively seek education and careers focused around politics or public service.

Utilizing New Media and Technology and Addressing Fake News

In September 2016, the Asia Foundation conducted and published an assessment in partnership with USAID, Development Innovations and Open Institute which used public opinion research to examine Cambodian citizens’ use of technology, internet, mobile phones and social media. The study noted that over 96 percent of Cambodians claim to have their own phone, while 48 percent have at least one smartphone. It also noted that in 2016, the internet and Facebook became the most important channel through which Cambodians access information although most of the Facebook users claim to believe that only 41 to 60 percent of the information they receive on Facebook. This study represents a growing global shift in the ways that citizens receive and share information, and communicate with one another. The findings are both timely and important to consider as the donors and implementing organizations continue to engage prior to the elections.

“You know it could force the people to change. And also at the age of technology, for example like social media including facebook who provides a platform for the general public, especially the youth to engage in freedom of expression and campaigning against the unfair issues in the country...” - Local NGO Representative

Partially as a result of the increasing use of Facebook within the country, the concern over the spread of fake news was mentioned during three interviews. As this phenomenon appears to be world-wide, there is space to address it in advance of the national elections. Historically in Cambodia, radio has been the main means of information dissemination and awareness raising among local NGOs and CSOs. While it remains an effective channel of communication – particularly in rural areas less permeated by internet and smartphones – with the increased use of the internet and social media, especially amongst youth, utilizing new media, technology and various platforms can be leveraged to tackle fake news, promote media literacy, raise voter awareness, and foster civic education. Four local organizations interviewed discussed leveraging technology for various aspects of programing including for voter and civic education.

International and local organizations should leverage opportunities to partner with the private and public sectors such as television, radio, and various online news agencies to develop programs, modules, guides, or toolkits that seek to promote media literacy and provide guidelines which equip citizens with the necessary knowledge to be able to differentiate between
fake news and facts. Smartphone applications and/or games would specifically resonate with the youth population.

Additionally, another recommendation related to the use of media and technology was to train and utilize citizen journalists, with a particular focus on social media activists, who can quickly report during the elections. Social media would be the quickest, and possibly the most powerful way, to report on irregularities and voter fraud during the elections. Particularly with so many of Cambodia’s youth tuned in to Facebook and, to a lesser extent, Twitter, news of elections issues at polls around the country would likely go viral more quickly and would create pressure on both the NEC and the government to respond to issues. For this aspect, however, the citizen journalists would have to be trained in safety and security protocols, or possibly even using accounts disassociated with their real name and identity to ensure their own personal safety.

**Supporting NGOs as Watchdogs**

Two interviewees stressed the need to increase support for NGOs to serve as watchdogs over the government, not only during the elections period but also for the longer-term. During the 2013 elections, NGOs monitoring the integrity of the election produced data and reports as a result of support from international donors. Such reports increased legitimacy of the claims of international governments and the opposition party that the election results were rigged. Although it is expected that the current, tense political climate will likely narrow the space for watchdog programming and implementation, that does not detract from its necessity and potential impact. More funding should be allocated to NGOs that plan to monitor the elections, produce reports, provide evidence-based data and facts, and educate the Cambodian people on what is happening during the time leading up to election day, at the polls, and soon thereafter. Longer-term support for this type of work would also be helpful, given the crackdown on NGOs, human rights activists and media in the country.

**Inclusivity of Cambodian Migrants**

An estimated 1 million Cambodians have emigrated and are working abroad. In its most recent report on voter registration and monitoring and observation, COMFREL noted that most eligible voters were unable to return to Cambodia and register to vote due to a wide range of difficulties such as financial burden, availability, and lack of identification documents to prove residency in their commune. Although there are certain issues that require intervention from the RGC such as negotiations with Thai authorities to issue free exit cards for Cambodians who cannot afford to pay for them, there is opportunity for local and international NGOs to assist Cambodians who live and work abroad. One interviewee noted that support to help migrant workers vote in the upcoming elections is important due to the sheer number of those that live abroad. Assistance from donors and international and local NGOs could include conducting informational campaigns to supply Cambodians abroad with necessary information regarding registration, how obtain the documents needed, and information on when the elections are to be held and what they need to bring with them to vote.
Appendix A: Research Methodology

From January through April 2017, the Capstone Team consisting of Dalia Antoon, Caryn Fisher and Sakineh Roodsari conducted desk research on democracy, human rights and governance assistance to Cambodia. Research focused on international donors, international and local NGOs, and political or capacity challenges in advance of the 2017 and 2018 elections. In addition to the desk research, the team kept abreast of the ever-changing political dynamics of Cambodia by tracking media through the Cambodia Daily, the Phnom Penh Post, Voice of America, and following various Twitter accounts of donors, journalists and news agencies, political analysts, non-governmental organizations, and Cambodian politicians.

From Thursday, March 2 through Sunday, April 16, 2017, the Capstone Team conducted sixteen semi-structured interviews with representatives of Cambodian non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international donors and international NGOs. Of the sixteen interviews, eleven were conducted in person in either Phnom Penh or Washington, D.C. The remaining five interviews were conducted via Skype. Depending on the interviewee affiliation, the interviews were shaped to included a series of open-ended questions that broadly touched upon Cambodia’s political environment; influence of international donors; operations of local NGOs; DRG programming; and ways to fill DRG gaps and needs in advance of the 2017 and 2018 elections. All interviewees agreed verbally to the informed consent statement provided by the Capstone team, and agreed to be recorded as part of the interview.

The final breakdown of interviews is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affiliation</th>
<th>Number of Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International Donor</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International NGO</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local NGO</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Analyst</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: References


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