



Report on Constituency Dialogues in Cambodia

Covering the Program Period of
November 2011 to September 2012

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This report is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under Award No. 486-A-09-0000. The opinions expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

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

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

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

NDI in Cambodia

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

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I. Background

In Cambodia, the relationship between parliamentarians and their constituents is weak. Citizens rarely enjoy opportunities to express their views or advocate reforms to their elected representatives, and many legislators do not regularly visit their constituencies to report on their activities and programs. Although individual Members of the National Assembly (MNAs) have made efforts to conduct outreach visits and meetings on their own or through their political parties, they continue to face time constraints, limited facilities at the local level, and a lack of an effective mechanism for constituents to communicate with them. Because of such limited interaction, citizens have a very narrow understanding of the role of parliament or its legislative, representative, and oversight responsibilities.¹ Elected parliamentarians have limited knowledge of their constituencies, and the Assembly falls short in representing the needs and interests of their voters.

To provide an avenue for such interaction, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI or the Institute) has organized multiparty constituency dialogues (CDs) since 2004 with elected representatives in the National Assembly (NA) from all political parties.² These dialogues aim to enhance MNAs' knowledge of and relations with their constituencies and educate citizens on the roles and responsibilities of an MNA in a democratic society. Another important goal of the program is to increase citizens' understanding of their political options, as there are limited opportunities for them to hear alternative viewpoints and policies from non-ruling parties. The constituency dialogues aim to normalize and demonstrate the importance of debate in Cambodia, where policy exchanges between political opponents are rare and viewed with caution.

From November 2011 to September 2012, NDI held 14 constituency dialogues in eight Cambodian provinces: Battambang, Kampong Cham, Kampong Chhnang, Kampong Speu, Kandal, Kratie, Kampong Thom, and Siem Reap. All provinces were selected based on their multiparty representation³ in the National Assembly, where members are elected from two or more parties. Twenty-five MNAs representing these provinces from four parties – the Cambodian People's Party (CPP), the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP), the Human Rights Party (HRP), and the Norodom Ranariddh Party (NRP) – participated.⁴ CDs were held three times in Kampong Cham, Kampong Chhnang and Kratie, each time in a different commune, and once in the other provinces.

¹ In a recent NDI survey in three provinces, Kratie, Kampong Cham, and Kampong Chhnang, 21.8% of citizens reported that they had never heard the word National Assembly, and 53.1% said that while they had heard the word, they had no idea what it meant. Additionally, 48.1% had never heard the word "member of the National Assembly."

² USAID has provided financial support for the dialogues since their inception. In October 2009, the CD program was included in the five year, USAID-funded *Cambodia: Accountability in Governance and Politics* (AGAP) program.

³ Cambodia's province-based constituencies have between 1 to 18 members based on population. NDI holds CDs in provinces where representatives are elected from two or more parties.

⁴ From 2004 to March 2008, only three political parties – the Cambodian People's Party (CPP), the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP), and FUNCINPEC – had seats in the Assembly. With two new parties, the Human Rights Party (HRP) and Norodom Ranariddh Party (NRP), gaining seats in the 2008 elections, five parties have now participated.

Provinces	Parties Participating in CDs			
Battambang	CPP	SRP		
Kampong Cham (x3)	CPP	SRP	HRP	NRP
Kampong Chhnang (x3)	CPP	SRP		
Kampong Speu	CPP	SRP		
Kandal	CPP	SRP	HRP	
Kratie (x3)	CPP	SRP		
Siem Reap	CPP	SRP		

The constituency dialogue format is similar to that of a town hall meeting, and anyone is welcome to attend. Between 250 and 1,000 community residents participate in each event, which is moderated by experienced NDI staff. Members of the National Assembly from different parties, all representing that province, are seated at a table in front of the participants and offer brief opening remarks to the audience. The floor is then open to participants to voice their concerns, raise questions directly to members of the National Assembly, and request that actions be taken to resolve problems. During their allocated response time, MNAs use the opportunity to update citizens on the activities of the legislature and government and provide other information relevant to their constituents. The dialogues encourage two-way communication and are unscripted, allowing for often challenging questions and demands from citizens. The forum thus provides a rare opportunity for policy debate and showcases the distinctions between legislators from different parties and their approaches to both local and national concerns.

To ensure equity and neutrality and foster constructive dialogue, NDI developed a code of conduct⁵ for MNAs, participants, and NDI moderators. The code specifies such items as the allotment of speaking time, appropriate and inappropriate topics for discussion, and the rules regarding audience participation. Local authorities such as commune councilors, village chiefs, and district and provincial officials are often present at CDs, and in 2010, at the request of the parties, the Institute began providing them an allotted time to speak at the end of the dialogues as well. Two radio stations – FM95.5 and FM93.5 – broadcast CDs across 20 of the country’s 24 provinces,⁶ expanding the reach of the program by ensuring a wider audience.

NDI works with locally-based civil society organizations (CSOs) or community volunteers in each CD province.⁷ These civil society organizations play a pivotal organizational and logistical role in planning for and implementing the CDs, as well as

⁵ NDI developed the code of conduct in 2008 to clarify misunderstandings and avoid confusion about the CD process and allegations of bias. It also serves to prevent verbal attacks and personal insults during the dialogues. This method of preventing and resolving disputes was agreed to by the five political parties represented in the program. NDI regularly reviews the code with the parties to ensure its relevancy and make modifications, if necessary.

⁶ Provinces covered are: Kandal, Kampong Chhnang, Kampong Cham, Kampong Speu, Kampong Thom, Pursat, Battambang, Banteay Meanchey, Siem Reap, Kratie, Prey Veng, Svay Rieng, Kep, Takeo, Kampot, Koh Kong, Pailin, Uddor Meanchey, Preah Vihear and Phnom Penh.

⁷ In 2011 to 2012, NDI’s partner CSOs included: Indradevi Association (IDA) in Kandal province, the Nokor Phnom Community Empowerment Organization (NPCEO) in Kampong Cham, the Vulnerability and Illiteracy Reduction organization (VIR) in Siem Reap, the Village Support Group (VSG) in Battambang, Community Capacity for Development (CCD) in Kampong Chhnang, and Kampuchea Women’s Welfare Action (KWWA) in Kratie. NDI worked solely with community volunteers in Kampong Speu province.

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



CPP MNA H.E. Ly Son and SRP MNA H.E. Sok Umsea at the constituency dialogue in Kraing Boeung village, Taing Samroang commune, Phnom Srouch district in Kampong Speu province on August 18, 2012

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

The constituency dialogue program has fostered an understanding among the Cambodian public of the link between local problems and the responsibilities of elected officials. The dialogues provide an opportunity for MNAs to further strengthen relationships with their constituents and be responsive to the public's requests and needs.

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

II. Key Issues in 2012⁸

Close to 7,500 people – 42 percent of them women – and 25 national legislators (including three women) attended the 14 constituency dialogues between November 2011 and September 2012. Across eight provinces, dialogue participants echoed the same three problems affecting their lives: land conflicts; discrimination, corruption, and unequal enforcement by local authorities; and infrastructure needs and development. Inequity was the underlying theme of these problems, and participants expressed their concern that the rich and powerful received all the benefits – land, development, and justice. Across provinces, people reported the pervasive influence of money on all aspects of life and the sense that they were losing their country to foreign companies and private interests. One participant stated that “unlike the problems of the wealthy, the problems of the poor are rarely resolved.”

A. Land Conflicts

Land was unquestionably the most frequently raised concern of citizens, and the number of conflicts reported was even greater than in previous years of the CD program. In every CD, participants described having land taken from them or others in their community by a company or a concession. In some dialogues, few other issues were discussed. Many of those who spoke described the difficulties they were facing in holding on to their property and often reported the negative involvement of local authorities in their situation. In some instances, people had traveled long distances to be heard by representatives of the National Assembly, as neither the authorities nor the courts in their own communities were solving their problems.

In Kratie, a woman traveled to the CD from almost 70km away in order to complain about a land concession to the Vietnamese Dai Nam company displacing many families from their land. The woman hand-delivered a letter of complaint with thumbprints to the MNAs in the middle of the dialogue. Despite previous attempts to contact authorities, there had been no resolution.

Dialogue participants criticized government concessions and complained of the corruption of local authorities and courts in land cases and of the corrupt and slow land-titling procedures. Land conflicts described usually involved a group of families displaced by a concession to a private company. Participants consistently questioned the country's

⁸ The opinions expressed by participants and MNAs during the proceedings of the constituency dialogues do not necessarily reflect those of NDI. These “key issues” represent the most frequently raised issues by participants at the dialogues, and this report serves to summarize their remarks, concerns and impressions. Full reports of each dialogue are available upon request, in English.

concession policies, demanding explanations for why companies, often foreign ones, appeared to be favored over citizens. They also criticized the small amount of money companies had to pay for these concessions, expressing their own willingness to pay the same amount for their land. They rejected the argument that these concessions brought employment to Cambodians, pointing out that new workers were often foreign or the land was deforested and left vacant.

In Kratie, a man complained vigorously about the government’s land concession policy. He asked for evidence that the government was developing the country as they claimed. “Since 85 percent of the citizens are farmers, how could development occur through 99 year land leases?” The participant asked the audience to clap if they agreed, and he received an enthusiastic round of applause. He closed by asking what their children will do in the future when there is no land left.

In many cases, the families claimed to have official titles but were forced off their land by more powerful people with the help of local officials and, often, the police or the military. In a few instances, people described violent acts, including the burning down of their homes by military officials, and being hurt by armed guards of land concessions. In other cases, citizens had been displaced from their land but had not received due compensation from the government or companies involved. Moreover, CD attendees repeatedly described the difficulty in obtaining titles for their property due to demands for bribes from local officials.



Deputy Provincial Governor of Kratie province responding to issues during the constituency dialogue in Veluk Angkeaream Orussey Pagoda, Sre Sdao village, Sangkat Orussey, Kratie District, Kratie province on January 21, 2012.

At CDs, citizens were often angry and demanded answers from the government about the unfair distribution of land, lack of transparency in the granting of concessions, and absence of responsiveness to people’s landlessness. Participants argued that the land law was ineffective, unenforced, and flawed in its design. Participants also expressed their

exasperation at hearing government leaders at all levels dismiss land problems by saying that the country “followed the law,” refusing to address the flaws inherent in the law or the lack of enforcement. Citizens repeatedly reported that the government and courts were not helping them. Participants also frequently described how they were completely in the dark about concessions, as government officials failed to inform them, and did not realize their land was being taken until bulldozers appeared.

In Kampong Chhnang, a participant explained that he had lived on his land since 1981 but he had not received a title despite applying. He asked the MNAs to explain where the people’s land goes if concessions are all around. “Farmers need land to sustain their very low standard of living. Will farmers be the owners of their farms or merely workers on foreign-owned land?”

In general, MNAs from the same party gave similar responses on land issues, although occasionally varied in approach as compared to previous years. Cambodian People’s Party representatives defended the government’s concession policies, arguing they were needed for the country’s development. CPP MNAs repeatedly maintained that the “rule of law” was followed, although they did not address people’s concerns about the content of the law in the first place. Several ruling party MNAs actually denied that there were problems related to land and stated that everyone was protected fairly by the law. On multiple occasions, MNAs referenced the Prime Minister saying, “Hun Sen always protects people.” Some CPP MNAs dismissed participants’ complaints and provided no response, simply saying that all land issues and disputes were a “matter for the courts.” Others assured people that the land issue “was being settled.”



A man raising a land dispute during the Constituency Dialogue in Anlong Kror Morl pagoda, Leang Dai Village, Leang Dai commune, Angkor Thom district, Siem Reap province on July 28, 2012.

Opposition MNAs criticized land concessions, particularly those with 99-year leases and those to foreign companies. They argued that land should be preserved for Cambodian farmers. As one MNA stated, “People should own their own property and make their own development decisions, not the government.” They criticized how companies paid practically nothing for their concessions or in taxes. Several opposition MNAs also pointed out that companies did not even hire Cambodian employees. Several SRP representatives warned that Cambodians were quickly becoming minority-land owners in their own country.



Citizens at the constituency dialogue in Kraing Boeung village, Taing Samroang commune, Phnom Srouch district, Kampong Speu province on August 18, 2012

Opposition MNAs described how engrained corruption was in all aspects of land ownership, titling, and the concession distribution process and there was no transparency. They reported that many land contracts in the country were illegal and local authorities frequently lied to national leaders for their own financial gain. The opposition also alleged that poor farmers could not receive justice in the courts or a resolution through the local government if they were in conflict with a rich and powerful person over land. Opposition representatives emphasized that many people did not have titles and were asked for bribes from local authorities if they tried to obtain one. They recommended that land titling be accelerated and implemented without corruption.

B. Discrimination, Corruption and Justice

The second most frequently raised issue related to discrimination, corruption, and the unequal enforcement of the law. This year, more participants than ever described discrimination by local authorities on the basis of either their political affiliation or lack of wealth and power. Many described how distribution of aid, either food aid or help to victims of flooding, was riddled with bias. Those families supportive of the government received the lion’s share of support, despite not always demonstrating the need.

A participant from Kratie complained that the forest protection law was not equally enforced. The authorities arrested individual poor farmers for cutting down trees, but they ignored the big trucks transporting illegal logs to Vietnam daily.

Participants at CDs described cases in which local authorities had: demanded bribes for the provision of services such as family books and national identification cards; extorted money; or unevenly enforced the law depending on the wealth and power of the individuals involved. Participants frequently described the discrimination against the poor in matters of justice and the perceived hopelessness of taking a case to court. Participants repeatedly referred to a culture of impunity for those in power.

A participant from Kampong Speu asked, "If the boss of a company violated the law, would they be punished? If the village or commune chief committed wrongdoing, would they be punished?" He reported that company guards shot at people and intimidated people but no one was punished.

A few participants linked these issues of justice and equity to democracy and human rights. One woman in Kampong Cham asked why national leaders of other countries always changed while Cambodia's leader stayed the same.

A participant from Kampong Cham complained that the people are the so-called owners of power in a democracy but can't make real decisions. "Parties only flatter the electorate during campaign periods and then take the power for themselves."

Overall, CPP MNAs did not respond in detail to these complaints, other than to say that such activities were illegal and rare, rule of law was enforced fairly throughout the country, and the courts were independent and not corrupt. Several ruling party representatives encouraged people to complain to higher authorities if they witnessed corruption. Occasionally CPP MNAs became defensive, and on more than one occasion actually said that there was no corruption or discrimination in Cambodia, despite just having been provided examples of both.

One CPP MNA emphasized that there was no differentiation between poor and rich and between powerful and powerless in law enforcement.

Few CPP MNAs responded to issues of democracy and human rights, although a couple representatives emphasized other values taking precedence.

One CPP MNA argued, “Duty and obligation are more important than democracy and human rights.”

Opposition MNAs responded vigorously to these issues, agreeing with participants’ concerns and demanding tougher action against corruption. Several provided statistics, such as those ranking Cambodia as 164 out of 183 countries on the corruption index. They also described how corruption was keeping Cambodia impoverished due to hundreds of millions of dollars lost every year into the hands of corrupt government leaders. One MNA explained that Cambodia was full of corruption and therefore the government had to create laws to protect itself. They also described in detail the lack of transparency in all aspects of government decision-making, including on spending and debt. The opposition put forward several recommendations to improve the problems with the judiciary such as prohibiting judges from being members of political parties. Opposition MNAs also tackled the issue of democracy, alleging that there was no real democracy in Cambodia because people lacked real power.

One opposition MNA said that power for people existed “only on paper.” He gave examples of the arrests of people who attempted to exercise their power through peaceful protest, like in Prey Long forest.

C. Infrastructure and Development

Citizens at the CDs raised many infrastructure requests, for roads, dams, and irrigation systems. People also discussed their need for services – healthcare, electricity, education, and clean water. The underlying theme of these needs was poverty, and people complained about the slow pace of development. Several participants argued that government policy “merely made people poorer.”

A participant from Kampong Cham asked, “Why are more than 50 percent of people in debt to microfinance organizations while the government can claim 6 percent economic growth?”

Participants also described the decreasing price of Cambodia’s agricultural products and lack of a market for their goods. Many participants asked MNAs to share their party’s specific agricultural and development policies. A few participants wanted a better understanding of where development money came from and posed questions about the country’s debt. Participants also questioned the names of individual leaders on development projects and asked if the money really came from those people.



CPP MNA H.E. Katoeu Toyeb and SRP MNA H.E. Long Ry at the constituency dialogue in Veluk Angkeaream Orussey Pagoda, Sre Sdao Village, Sangkat Orussey, Kratie Town, Kratie Province on January 21, 2012

In general, CPP representatives responded consistently to development concerns. Almost all CPP MNAs pointed out how the country was more developed and better off than it had been under the Pol Pot regime, and how people should appreciate the fact that the CPP had to “build the country up from scratch.” They pointed to foreign investment as evidence of confidence in Cambodia. In response to complaints about prices or access to markets, CPP MNAs explained that Cambodia adhered to free market principles and advised people not to sell their goods if the price was too low. They also repeatedly referred to the need for patience, arguing that development took time. Ruling party MNAs encouraged citizens to participate in commune council meetings to help set development priorities, and during the CDs, they frequently referred these issues to the local authorities.

A CPP MNA asked the audience to remember “all countries have debt, but foreign countries would not be willing to lend if they did not have confidence that Cambodia would be able to repay their loans.”

Opposition SRP and HRP legislators reacted directly to the ruling party responses and equated the slow pace of development to government corruption and incompetence and poor policies. Several opposition MNAs agreed with CPP legislators that Cambodia was better off than it was in 1979, but added that it was not a “very challenging achievement.” Instead they asked why South Korea only took 20 years to advance from a poor country to a rich one after war, but Cambodia had made little progress in more than 30 years. Several added that it was patronizing for the government to demand that people be happy with what they have.

One opposition MNA said, "Of course Cambodia is better off than in 1979. The question is whether the country is developing fast enough. It has been more than 30 years already."

The opposition explanation for poor growth was the fact that money was going to line the pockets of government leaders and foreigners and there was "improper development." Opposition representatives suggested an overhaul of agricultural policies and some interference with market pricing. They described the need for transparent budgeting and financial decision-making in the government.

A SRP MNA argued that people are living in poor conditions because of corruption. "Corruption in Cambodia steals resources from Cambodian people. Only the wealthy have happiness."

Opposition MNAs also described the large amount of donor aid and loans for development, explaining that this money went to the government, not to a political party. They emphasized the burden that debt would have on the country's economy, and frequently cited numbers and statistics about the growing debt. Regarding the names of individuals and political parties on projects, the opposition explained that development was funded by the government through aid and taxes, not by the CPP or the prime minister.

III. Focus Group Findings

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

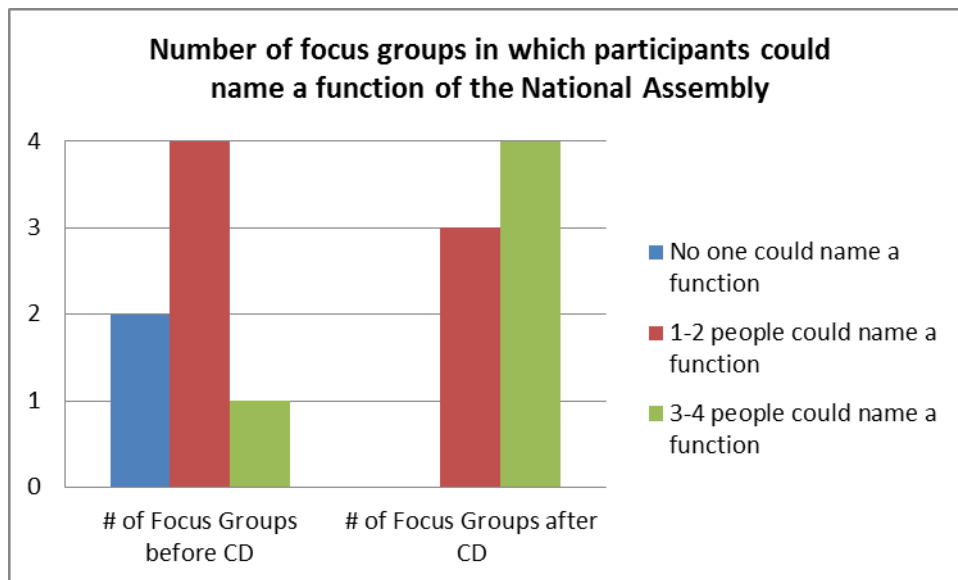
Focus groups were held at eight⁹ of the 14 CDs¹⁰ conducted between November 2011 and September 2012. The vast majority of participants were farmers, aged 25 and up. The focus groups lasted approximately one hour and included an average of 12 people, with just over 50 percent of them women. In sessions immediately before and after the CDs, NDI moderators asked similar questions and conducted word association exercises with the same group of people to capture any changes. NDI conducted the focus groups in Khmer and recorded the proceedings; the Institute later transcribed the recordings and translated them into English.

⁹ At the time of writing, focus groups had been conducted at only seven CDs. The following results are based on those seven focus groups, which excludes the final focus group in Kampong Thom province.

¹⁰ Focus groups were not conducted for six CDs that were piloting or conducting an alternative focus group methodology for NDI's impact evaluation research.

Focus group participants’ understanding of the National Assembly prior to the CDs was poor. The majority of the participants in all seven focus groups were unable to identify any aspect of the National Assembly’s work. Respondents indicated they did not know what the NA was or gave vague responses. In several cases, people mistakenly reported that “the government is the same as the National Assembly.” The Kandal focus group was better, with several participants discussing the law-making function of the NA, and one even mentioning oversight.

Immediately after the CDs, the focus groups held revealed changes in participant knowledge as a result of attending the event. There was a clearer sense of the role and function of the National Assembly, with every group showing at least a few participants able to identify an aspect of the NA’s work. Importantly, some respondents could distinguish between government and the legislative branch, although it was not always clear. A Kampong Speu participant said, “The NA creates peace for country, I don’t know what the government is doing.” Even those participants who could identify a function of the Assembly usually only mentioned the law-making aspect of its work, and only occasionally referred to representation. Only one person in all of the focus groups conducted mentioned oversight.



Before the CDs, focus group participants demonstrated a vague, imprecise understanding of the role of members of the NA. Most responded that MNAs were supposed to “help people,” “protect people,” or “solve problems,” and the majority of participants believed that the MNAs’ job was to provide tangible goods and services, most often infrastructure, directly to their constituents. Prior to the CDs, no focus group participant described a MNAs’ role as drafting legislation or providing oversight of government activities, although one participant mentioned representation.

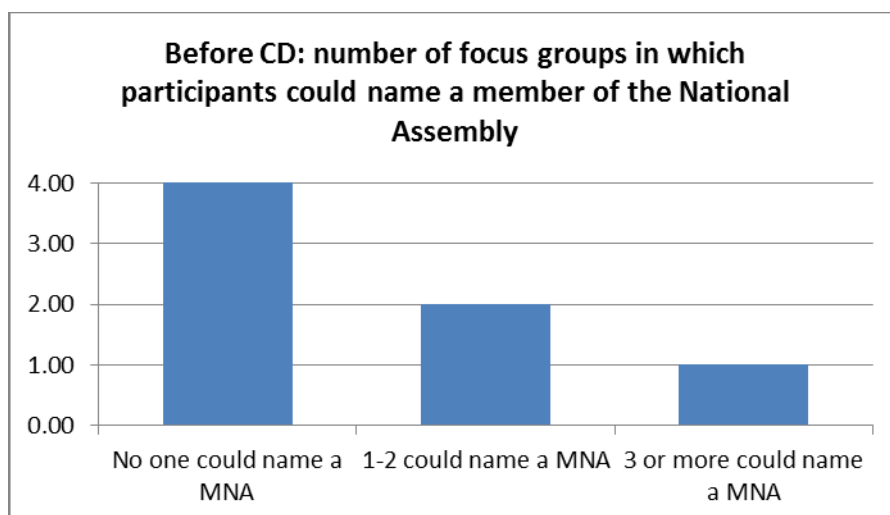
Participants’ beliefs about the responsibilities of MNAs became most apparent when discussing their expectations from their representatives. In almost all the focus groups, participants expected MNAs to provide gifts and developmental goods. Roads, canals, bridges, electricity, schools, health centers, and toilets were most commonly mentioned. More than in previous years, participants described their expectation that

MNAs solve land problems. One Kampong Chhnang respondent said he wanted the MNAs to “take our land back.”

Participants’ understanding of the specific role of MNAs showed little change following the CDs, although a few focus group participants referred to the law-making and representative functions, in addition to the provision of goods. In Kampong Speu, a respondent specifically said a MNA was to “visit constituents.” A Kandal participant stated, “I voted but in four years have never seen my MNAs. I have many problems and want to meet my representative and ask for help but I cannot find them.” The vast majority of focus group participants continued to expect the delivery of concrete goods such as roads, irrigation systems, and schools from their MNAs following the dialogues. However, they also frequently referred to their expectation that MNAs solve land problems, provide justice, and visit them more often.

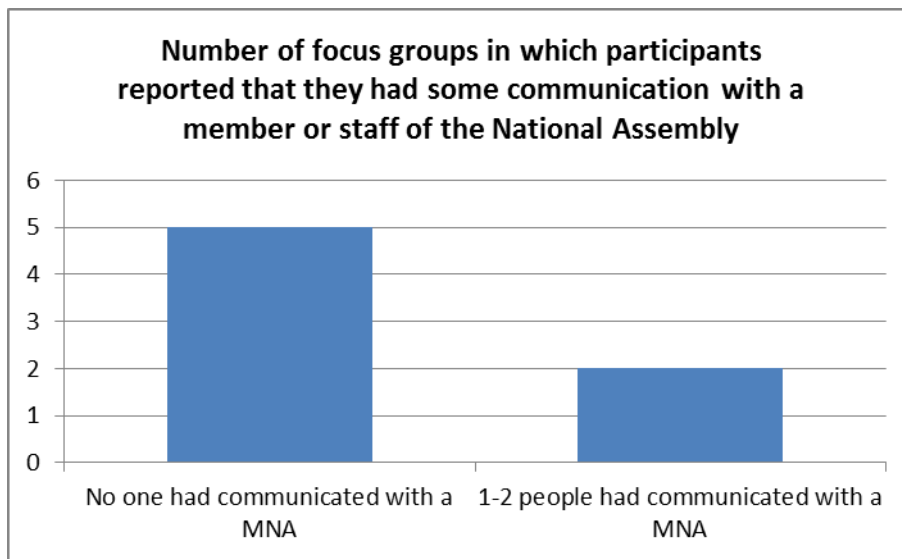
Participants in the pre-CD focus groups had clear ideas about the qualities they looked for in an MNA – capable, good, fair, clean, educated, and ethical – and these did not shift following the dialogues. Many said an MNA should “visit people often.” Association with the word “MNA” was vague and generally positive, with people thinking of representatives as “problem solvers.” One Battambang respondent said, “When I hear the word MNA, I feel excited because I want to see my MNA.” A Kampong Speu respondent reported, “When I hear the word MNA, I think that people vote for them to be a parent of Cambodians.” There was only one negative association vocalized: “When I hear the word MNA, I think that MNAs never help to solve people’s problems.” Interestingly, when discussing representatives, political affiliations never came up.

Prior to the CDs, focus groups revealed that MNAs’ outreach efforts were falling short, and participants had had no previous contact with their representatives and had never communicated with their MNAs. Only three respondents in all the focus groups could name a single member of the NA. Following the dialogues, all focus group participants could name at least one of the MNAs they had met at the CD.



To solve problems in their community, focus group participants had turned to local authorities – village chiefs, district chiefs and commune councilors – or NGOs for help. The majority of participants had never communicated with their MNAs about an issue. In only two focus groups did one respondent say they had contacted their representative.

Despite an overall lack of communication, focus group participants recognized that they had the right to bring their concerns to their MNAs. When asked if they would contact Assembly members in the future, the vast majority said they would.



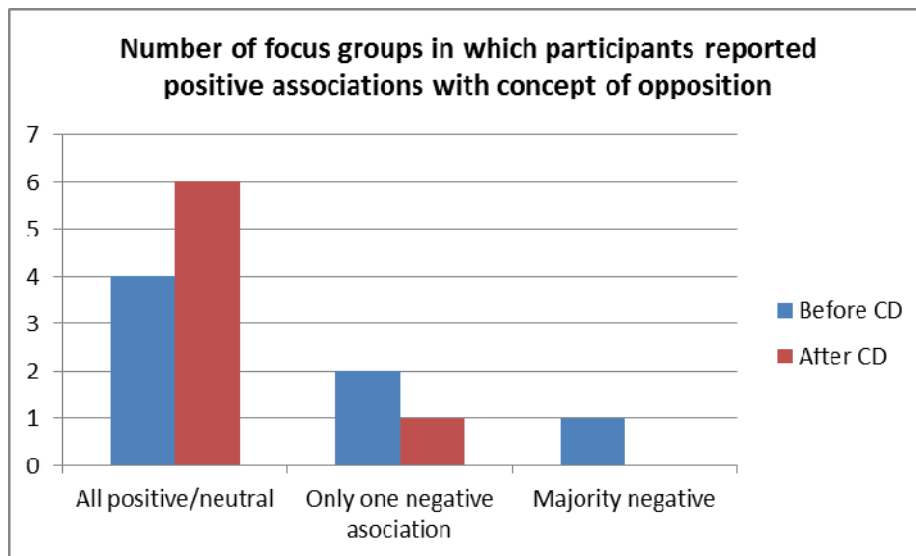
In addition to limited communication with their MNAs, focus group participants could not identify activities or initiatives MNAs had taken on their behalf or their communities, or efforts MNAs had made to solve problems. Following the CDs, in Kampong Speu, respondents could recall that a SRP MNA had helped in a land dispute, although possibly because of MNAs’ remarks at the events.

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

Through the focus groups, NDI also explored people’s perceptions of political competition and options. Overall, there were positive associations with the opposition and multiparty democracy prior to the CD. People usually described a constructive, corrective role of the opposition. One Kampong Chhnang respondent stated, “When I hear the word opposition party, I think that both ruling and opposition parties must exist.” Others held no judgment but stated quite simply, “The opposition has a different opinion.” In only one focus group were negative opinions expressed. A Kampong Cham participant reported, “When we hear the word opposition party, we think that they oppose or criticize to win the elections.” Interestingly, one focus group respondent thought the opposition was actually illegal: “the opposition is illegal, against the law.”

Following the CD, there were no focus groups in which people expressed negative associations with the concept of an opposition. In Kampong Cham, where participants held negative associations before the event, there was a complete reversal after the dialogue with all participants voicing positive thoughts about the concept of opposition. As one respondent said, “When we hear the word opposition party, we think about a party that monitors the ruling party.” Again, the corrective and oversight roles were

emphasized: “When I hear the word opposition party, I think that the government won’t know about their mistakes without criticism from the opposition party.”



Following the CDs, NDI moderators asked focus group participants several questions to gauge their opinions of the dialogue in general, their perception of the MNAs’ performance, and their confidence in the MNAs’ ability to deliver on promises. Virtually all post-CD focus group participants were pleased with the performance of the MNAs and felt their problems had been addressed. Most affirmed that their perception of their representatives had improved as a result of the CD. Only a few people added that although their perception of MNAs improved, they wanted more interaction and results.

Focus group participants reported a high degree of confidence in MNAs following the CD and said they believed MNAs would take action on the concerns raised. However, expectations were vocalized and people wanted to see delivery. As participants in one group said, “We are not yet confident in MNAs, unless they solve all the problems we raised in the dialogue.” Participants also provided their opinions on MNA performance. As one respondent said, “I have less confidence in my MNAs’ interest to represent me because they only asked local authorities to solve issues; and the authorities never solve them.”

IV. Post-Constituency Dialogue Actions and Results¹¹

Following each CD, NDI tracked the main problems identified by CD participants; the pledges made by MNAs to address each concern; the results based on self-reporting from MNAs; and the results as reported by the community. NDI staff followed up with individual MNAs to discuss their activities since the CD, recording any information on a monitoring form.¹² In addition, NDI’s local partners visited the CD village and nearby communities in the months following the dialogue, meeting with participants and local authorities to enquire about any changes or progress made on the issues raised at the CD

¹¹ At the time of writing, most but not all monitoring meetings with MNAs have been held. In some communities, not enough time has elapsed since the CDs were held to allow for follow-up at the local level. The results reported here are partial.

¹² NDI staff usually met with MNAs in the members’ offices. Occasionally, members were not available for one-on-one interviews and, per their request, completed NDI’s monitoring form on their own.

and to cross-check the validity of the MNAs' reports. For the most part, the actions and results reported by the MNAs were confirmed by and consistent with the observations at the community level by local officials and citizens. These results were then compiled and reported back to each community by NDI's local partners and volunteers in August and September 2012.



CPP MNA H.E. Ker Chanmony and SRP MNA H.E. Cheam Channy reviewing documents during the constituency dialogue in Krasang Doh Laeung village, Kbal Tuek commune, Tuek Phos district, Kampong Chhnang province on August 11, 2012.

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

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

- SRP MNA Chan Cheng of Kandal province asked the SRP district councilor to meet the commune chief of Chheu Khmao commune in Koh Thom district in order to discuss a solution to an issue with a sand dredging company that was affecting Chong Khsach village. The company halted their business as a result of the negotiations.

- In Kampong Cham, HRP MNA Yem Ponhearith submitted several letters to the government about the conflict between villages 32, 33 and 35 and the An Mardi Company.
- NRP MNA You Hockry of Kampong Cham sent a letter of intervention on January 5, 2012 to the Ministry of Social Work and Professional Training to help bring back a domestic worker who had been sent to Malaysia and not allowed to return.
- CPP MNA Chem Savay of Kampong Cham discussed the construction of 10 wells in Chamkar Leu district with the Ministry of Rural Development in response to a request for access to clean water.
- In Kratie, SRP MNA Long Ry wrote to the Minister of Land Management in response to complaints over a land conflict with the Vietnamese company Dai Nam. The provincial land dispute resolution committee arrived to conduct systematic land titling for 20 out of 50 families. However, 30 families still have not received titles for their land.
- SRP MNA Kuoy Bunroeun reported that he wrote a letter to the district governor, the chairman of the Kampong Cham cadastral committee, and the President of the National Assembly to request an intervention on a land dispute between two parties in Khpob village.

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

- The SRP commune councilor from Chheu Khmao commune, Kandal province, brought residents of Kbal Chroy village to register to vote without ID cards but with proper alternative documentation. The villagers were rejected, but an SRP MNA from Kandal province assisted in the filing of a complaint, and the applicants were allowed to register.
- CPP MNA Um Sokhan in Takeo province asked the district governor to negotiate with a sand dredging company that was destroying roads by driving over-loaded trucks. The company agreed to repair the road.
- In Kampong Cham, SRP MNA San Sang worked with the SRP commune councilors to ensure that the An Mardi Company and local authorities fulfilled their promise of providing land titles for the residents in villages 32, 33 and 35 if they vacated their land. The company fulfilled its promise; the villagers were required to move but were given titles for their new land.
- In Kampong Cham, SRP MNA Kuoy Bunroeun reported that the SRP district councilor had raised a land dispute among villagers from Kampong Reab Kraom and Kampong Sdai Leu villages at the monthly district meeting, resulting in mediation between the chiefs of both villages.

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

- In Kampong Chhnang, a group of villagers met with the provincial court from Boeung Kak village in conflict with the village chief over 8.5 hectares of land.
- Fifty-two families from La Peang village, Kampong Chhnang province went to court over a land dispute with the KDC company. The court has not yet issued a verdict.

- In Kampong Chhnang, SRP MNA Cheam Channy asked the SRP district committee to advise residents of La Peang village on how they could influence the provincial development plan in response to a request for repairs to a two kilometer road from La Peang village to Otasam village.

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

- CPP MNA Pal Sam Ourn of Banteay Meanchey province met with the district governor and requested the inclusion of a road in Svay Check district, pathway repairs in Kleng Por village, a reservoir in Kleng Por village, and an asphalt road in Kamnob village in the provincial development plan in 2012. These projects are all scheduled for 2012.
- SRP MNA Long Ry from Kratie province reported that a road and a bridge requested during the CD had been included in the 2012 provincial development plan.
- CPP MNA Nguon Sim An reported that one of two canals requested by a participant from Kampong Sdai Leu village in Kampong Cham province was constructed.
- In Kampong Cham, in response to a request from a participant from Kampong Reab village, 1,972 meters of road was constructed to Praeak Tanuong commune.
- In Kampong Cham, Kampong Reab commune is in the process of building a 700 meter canal in response to a request from a participant from Kampong Reab village at the CD.
- The provincial department of the Ministry of Rural Development agreed to rebuild a road with asphalt in March 2012 as requested in the Kampong Chhnang CD.
- According to the commune councilors from Kaoh Soutin district, Kampong Cham province, a 1,972 meter road was built from Kampong Sdai Kraom village to Kampong Sdai Kandal village.
- The Kaoh Soutin district governor in Kampong Cham province reported that the Department of Water Resources was in the process of building a 700 meter canal.

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

- In Kampong Cham, according to the village chief and a group of citizens, the activities of youth gangs in Svay Teab village decreased because local authorities and citizens cooperated to crack down on gangs.
- Participants from NDI's constituency dialogue in Kampong Chhnang province reported that after the dialogue, during which participants complained about corruption at local health centers, medical staff at the Krang Leav village health center began to provide better quality care.

V. Conclusion

NDI's November 2011 to September 2012 CDs revealed significant consistencies in the concerns facing Cambodians across various provinces and compared to previous years of the program – struggles with land, corruption and discrimination, and poverty. Land conflicts and insecurity regarding personal land ownership, however, dominated discussions, with the majority of questions raised involving land. Cambodians described their feeling that although their country's economy had been growing over the past decade, development was benefiting the rich, people with political connections, and foreigners rather than the average Cambodian. Feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction underscored people's remarks, and many participants were outspoken and critical at the events.



CPP MNA H.E. Tes Heanh and SRP MNA H.E. Sovanna Pisakha in discussion during the constituency dialogue in Mongkul Suosdei Traeng Pagoda, Phcheav village, Traeng commune, Rotonak Mondol district, Battambang province on June 30, 2012.

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

On a few occasions, political parties sent an MNA from a different provincial constituency to attend the CD or a senator, not directly elected by citizens, and this happened frequently in 2012.

MNA Name	Elected to Represent	Attended CD in
HRP		
H.E. Mr. Yem Ponhearith	Prey Veng	Kampong Cham
H.E. Mr. Ou Chanrith	Kandal	Kampong Cham
SRP		
H.E. Mr. San Sang	Takeo	Kampong Cham
H.E. Mr. Cheam Channy	Kampong Cham	Kampong Chhnang
H.E. Mr. Kuoy Bunroeun	Takeo	Kampong Cham
H.E. Mr. Kimsour Phirith	Kampong Cham	Kampong Chhnang
H.E. Mr. Sovanna Pisaka	Kampong Cham	Battambang
CPP		
Senator H.E. Mr. Am Sam Ath	Siem Reap	Siem Reap

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

The CDs produced some concrete results, many of which can be directly attributed to the actions of MNAs who participated in the event. MNAs demonstrated their strong commitment to their constituents and their duties as representatives, and many parliamentarians followed up on at least one of his or her promises. Other interventions were spearheaded by the communities or local authorities. In many cases, MNAs took steps such as writing letters to ministries or consulting with provincial governors to address an issue. Not all led to tangible results; nevertheless, NDI recognizes all the attempts of MNAs to respond to the concerns raised by their constituents.

Through these actions, the representative function of the MNAs has been enhanced, with MNAs conveying their constituents' concerns to the relevant bodies. As one CPP MNA said at a CD review workshop, "The CDs have changed the behavior and responsiveness of MNAs." MNAs have also conducted oversight, particularly with regard to illegal practices at the local level. However, it should be noted that none of the interventions have involved legislation. Rather, the issues have been addressed through the relevant government ministries and offices. Although many of the problems raised during the dialogues certainly fell under the jurisdiction of the executive, the Assembly could play an important problem-solving role through its legislative function. Citizens correctly identified the law-making, as opposed to simply approving government-drafted laws, task of the National Assembly and expressed their expectation that the NA exercise this power.

The CDs have also served the important role of demonstrating to Cambodians across the country the range of their political options. There are few opportunities – if any – in Cambodia for ruling party and opposition party MNAs to participate side by side in a public forum and answer citizens’ questions. Moreover, the CDs have inspired MNAs to work across party lines on a few instances. As one CPP MNA said at a review meeting of the CD program, “Only in the CD program do MNAs work together to help people.” The CDs also provide unique space for citizens to express themselves in a neutral environment. As a SRP MNA remarked, “The challenge for people in Cambodia is to express themselves. CDs allow this to happen. CDs strengthen democracy and freedom of expression. Khmer society needs this most.”

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

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

NDI’s CD program has provided an important opportunity for MNAs to build relationships with communities and fulfill the tasks they were elected to do. As a SRP MNA reported at NDI’s CD review workshop, “CDs make sure that people know their representatives and give chance to their representatives to solve problems.” However, the CDs are not enough on their own. The National Assembly and its members would be well-served to provide more information at the grassroots level about the NA’s work, agenda, and programs, and for its members to make greater efforts to reach out to and meet with their constituents more frequently.

APPENDIX
Summary of NDI Constituency Dialogue Events November 2011 to September 2012

Date	Constituency Dialogues Location (CD)				Participants			Member of National Assembly (MNA)	
	Province	District	Commune	Village	Male	Female	Total	Name	Party
19-Nov-2011	Kratie	Chitr Borei	Thmar Andaeuk	Chuor Krouch	215	174	389	H.E. Ms. Troeung Thavy	CPP
								H.E. Mr. Long Ry	SRP
26-Nov-2011	Kampong Cham	Chamkar Leu	Ta Prok	Ta Prok	345	306	651	H.E. Ms. Chem Savay	CPP
								H.E. Mr. San Sang	SRP
								H.E. Mr. Yem Ponhearith	HRP
								H.E. Mr. You Hockry	NRP
17-Dec-2011	Kampong Chhnang	Kampong Tralach	Ta Ches	La Peang	194	61	255	H.E. Ms. Ker Chanmony	CPP
								H.E. Mr. Cheam Channy	SRP
14-Jan-2012	Kampong Cham	Kaoh Soutin	Kampong Reab	Kampong Sdei Kraom	361	210	571	H.E. Mr. Nguon Sim An	CPP
								H.E. Mr. Kuoy Bunroeun	SRP
								H.E. Mr. Kem Sokha	HRP
								H.E. Mr. You Hockry	NRP
21-Jan-2012	Kratie	Kratie	Orussey	Sre Sdao	247	153	400	H.E. Mr. Katoeu Toyeb	CPP
								H.E. Mr. Long Ry	SRP
10-Mar-2012	Kampong Chhnang	Rolea B'ier	Krang Leav	Krang Leav	197	81	278	H.E. Ms. Ker Chanmony	CPP
								H.E. Mr. Kimsour Phirith	SRP
30-Jun-2012	Battambang	Rotonak Mondol	Traeng	Phcheav	455	310	765	H.E. Mr. Tes Heanh	CPP
								H.E. Mr. Sovanna Pisakha	SRP

Date	Constituency Dialogues Location (CD)				Participants			Member of National Assembly (MNA)	
	Province	District	Commune	Village	Male	Female	Total	Name	Party
7-Jul-2012	Kandal	Khsac Kandal	Vihear sour	Vihear Sour Cheung	373	268	641	H.E. Mr. Ouk Damry	CPP
								H.E. Mr. Khim Laky	SRP
								H.E. Mr. Ou Chanrith	HRP
14-Jul-2012	Kampong Cham	Srei Santhor	Preaek Rumdeng	Tnaot Ka	450	343	793	H.E. Mr. Van Sengly	CPP
								H.E. Mr. San Sang	SRP
								H.E. Mr. Ou Chanrith	HRP
21-Jul-2012	Kratie	Chhlong	Prek Saman	Prek Saman	288	240	528	H.E. Ms. Troeung Thavy	CPP
								H.E. Mr. Long Ry	SRP
28-Jul-2012	Siem Reap	Angkor Thum	Leang Dai	Leang Dai	179	246	425	H.E. Mr. Am Sam Ath	CPP
								H.E. Mr. Ky Vann Dara	SRP
11-Aug-2012	Kampong Chhnang	Tuek Phos	Kbal Tuek	Krasang Doh Laeung	352	368	720	H.E. Ms. Ker Chanmony	CPP
								H.E. Mr. Cheam Channy	SRP
18-Aug-2012	Kampong Speu	Phnom Srouch	Taing Samroang	Kraing Boeung	293	182	475	H.E. Mr. Ly Son	CPP
								H.E. Mr. Sok Umsea	SRP
1-Sep-2012	Kampong Thom	Santuk	Kakoh	Svay Kal	360	185	545	H.E. Mr. Sik Bunhok	CPP
								H.E. Mr. Keth Khy	SRP
TOTAL					4,309	3,127	7,436		