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CHALLENGES FOR INDEPENDENT MEDIA DEVELOPMENT IN CAMBODIA

Report, March 2013

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Created in 2007, the Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM) is an independent organization committed to using media production and capacity building as tools for promoting social justice and change. Its goal is to promote democratic governance by creating a pluralistic and independent media environment in Cambodia. Its primary medium for doing this is VOD radio, which is broadcast through the radio station Sarika FM in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap, and online through www.vodhotnews.com. CCIM also publishes news content, research and reports online through its website.

The political environment in Cambodia has played, and continues to play a central role in shaping the country's media landscape. Although technically (according to the Constitution and political framework that was created after the Paris Peace Agreements of 1991) Cambodia is a liberal parliamentary democracy, the party which has ruled for much of the time since - the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) - has established and maintained an authoritarian rule. A significant consequence and enabler of their continued stronghold has been their control over the media in Cambodia. Although there are sections of the media which can be considered independent, and civil society organizations and NGOs such as CCIM work arduously to keep and increase this independence, much of the media in Cambodia today (television, radio, print and online) is controlled by the government. This control comes in the form of direct or indirect ownership, censorship and influence by way of manipulation of the law. For example, the widespread practice of self-censorship among Cambodian media professionals has been borne out of a fear of being prosecuted for criminal offences under the country's penal code for reporting on issues which highlight any controversial activities by the government.

It is within this context that CCIM operates, working to promote democratic governance, freedom of expression and independent media. It does this by reporting on news that impacts the daily lives of citizens, giving the public a forum to voice their opinions, conducting research to both inform public awareness and use as evidence to lobby government to act on key issues, conducting training for professional and citizen journalists and facilitating opportunities for media professionals to come together and establish common standards and codes of conduct.

All of the work that was done in this vein during the three-year period from January 2009 to December 2011 fell under the scope of CCIM's Enhancing Independent Media in Cambodia project. This report provides a detailed summary of the initiatives which were carried out as part of the project, as well as an overview of the outcomes of the project as a whole, the challenges that CCIM faces moving forward and the plans it holds for the future.

Two key research studies were conducted during the project period. The first one was a qualitative study which aimed to identify, analyze and offer solutions to the ethical dilemmas facing Cambodian journalists, with the belief that by identifying and targeting those problems CCIM would be better placed to cater its programs to fill the gaps hindering Cambodia's media environment. Three areas of focus were identified:

1. Strengthening the legal framework for free media activities

2. Raising the awareness of responsible and professional practices among Cambodian journalists
3. Establishing a standardized code of ethics for Cambodian journalists.

Based on the insights from the research, CCIM made a series of recommendations for media practitioners, the government and NGOs and donors.

The second study, titled Freedom of Information: Advancing Research and Actions, was conducted to document the public's opinion and gain stakeholder feedback about the proposed Freedom of Information (FOI) law which was drafted and submitted to the Cambodian National Assembly on 23 December 2010. The study aimed to seek public opinions and provide strategic policy recommendations to politicians, decision makers, development partners and civil society organizations on how to accelerate adoption of the law.

The survey results showed that the majority of respondents agreed they had a right to access public information and that the government and public bodies had an obligation to publish such information. The recommendations made by CCIM focused on the need to develop an FOI law in consultation with the public, as well as relevant mechanisms to facilitate access to information, and the requirements for further research and a public awareness campaign to engage with all levels of society about this issue.

Since 2009, CCIM has organized three journalist conferences to tackle the issues and problems affecting the media and journalists in Cambodia. Over the course of the three conferences, CCIM facilitated first the agreement on a resolution to develop a standardized code of ethics for Cambodian journalists, then the drafting of such a code, and finally the approval of the code and establishment of the Cambodian Journalists Council for Ethics to provide guidance on strengthening, monitoring and enforcing the code.

As part of its work to enhance the quality of journalistic reporting in Cambodia, CCIM organized a series of training programs for various representatives of the media community. The training covered fundamental journalistic principles and practices relating to reporting on democratic governance, investigative reporting and ethics and accountability. The training aimed to provide participants with a strong theoretical grounding and practical skills in these areas, as well as expose them to an international perspective of journalism.

Another type of training conducted by CCIM was under the International Program for the development of Communication project (IPDC). This was a project aimed at improving grassroots participation and freedom of expression through citizen journalism. The objective of the project was to empower marginalized and ethnic communities to express their views and interests through active participation in media broadcasting. Through the training CCIM hopes to build the capacity of communities to advocate for their rights, strengthen independent media networks and bolster media diversity in Cambodia. The training was conducted in three target provinces - Preah Vihear, Mondulkiri and Ratanikiri, and utilized a variety of teaching methods such as group discussions, team building games, field practice and creative teaching. The expected outcomes of the training were:

- To have 60 trained community people capable of reporting community news
- To have at least 50 news reports from citizen journalists edited and broadcast via Sarika FM and five other radio stations
- To give employment opportunities to the three most promising citizen journalists as correspondents for the CCIM network.

An early evaluation of the overall success of the Enhancing Independent Media in Cambodia project was carried out over the period of December 2010 and January 2011 and found that over the period of implementation; most of the project's set targets were achieved. Importantly, according to the key informants interviewed for the evaluation, there was a noticeable improvement in the quality of the articles in newspapers and increased awareness among many journalists about the media code of ethics.

The three key challenges that CCIM faces in future are:

- Political pressures - the continued control which the CPP exercises over the media and the consequent restrictions, dangers and threats which they pose to those in the media profession;
- Lack of professional journalists - the skill shortage within the media in Cambodia which affects the quality of news content; and
- Sustainability - being able to continue operating in the face of rising costs and limited fundraising opportunities.

CCIM's vision for the future is to build organizational capacities and media skills to foster knowledge exchange and collaborative action. It has already started doing this through the establishment of a nationwide media network known as the Media Promotion Alliance (MePro), and is working to develop a professional journalist academy, and planning to create community information centers which will play a role in promoting free media and freedom of expression at the community level.

INTRODUCTION

About CCIM and VOD Radio

Created by the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR) with funding from USAID/IRI, Voice of Democracy Radio (VOD) opened on January 16, 2003 with just two journalists. It was to act as the vehicle through which CCHR's activities could be promoted and the public could be educated about human rights and advocacy for freedom of expression in Cambodia. In June 2007 VOD was formally separated from CCHR in order to make it more independent and allow it to grow. The Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM) was created and registered at the Ministry of Interior as a fully independent legal entity. It would be an independent media organization committed to using media production and capacity building as tools for promoting social justice and change, and the entity under which VOD would operate.

CCIM's goal is to promote democratic governance by creating a pluralistic and independent media environment in Cambodia, and to report on human rights issues which are under-represented in media production and content. We seek to produce and disseminate independent news through radio broadcasting and the internet, promote media professionalism through networking and capacity building, and improve media literacy and citizens' engagement through skills training and public dialogues.

Around the end of 2009, CCIM began operating two radio stations named Sarika, in Phnom Penh on 106.5FM and in Siem Reap on 95.5FM. Through these two stations VOD was able to provide hourly breaking news and broadcast other programs all day long. In late 2010, CCIM adopted a strategy to diversify its media outlet through multiple approaches. Subsequently, in early 2011, VOD began producing and airing its programs not only through radio but also via the internet (on www.vodhotnews.com) and in newspapers. In addition to its radio output, CCIM also issues daily press releases and investigative reports on pressing human rights issues online, with more than 1.5 million visitors so far.

CCIM has two main offices - headquarters in Phnom Penh and a regional office in Siem Reap - and currently works in 14 Cambodian provinces. Our primary target groups are our approximately 2,380,000 radio listeners and online visitors, radio and newspaper professionals, citizen journalists and activists, and all citizens who participate in our public forums. Our final beneficiaries include the approximately 8.5 million adults and youth living in CCIM's radio coverage area.

Today, through the efforts of 50 staff and 28 journalists, VOD airs 16.5 hours of broadcasts daily and is 46% self funded. Through its activities, VOD aims to continue:

- Strengthening independent media and professionalism by cooperating with partners
- Creating more professional and citizen journalists
- Reporting on human rights via radio and online mediums
- Building a nationwide radio network known as MePro

Cambodia Overview

Cambodia's recent history has been marked by war, civil unrest and of course, the devastating period of the Khmer Rouge regime. In the more than 20 years since the signing of the Paris Peace Agreements, which ushered in the first national elections and creation of a new Constitution, the promise of a liberal parliamentary democracy for Cambodia has gone unfulfilled. In its place, authoritarian rule by the dominant Cambodian People's Party (CPP), which has engendered great legitimacy thanks to the continued political stability and sustained economic growth that the country has experienced over the past decade¹. During this time, the CPP's patronage-based politics² has persistently hampered the ability of the rule of law, human rights and democracy to work effectively and independently³. As a result, despite the economic growth and relative stability, 13 percent of the population of 14.3 million lives below the poverty line (as of 2010⁴). Corruption, and the judiciary, parliamentary and executive's lack of transparency, integrity and willingness to secure and uphold the human and constitutional rights of citizens are ongoing concerns⁵.

Beyond the Commune elections and National Assembly elections held every five years, the quality and level of political participation in Cambodia is low⁶. Perhaps more than at any other time, the elections are when the dominance and level of control which the CPP yields become most apparent. During the most recent commune elections in 2012, COMFREL's research and investigations highlighted issues such as vote buying, ineffective control of campaign finance, misuse of state resources and unequal access to media⁷. According to Freedom House's Freedom of the Press Index for 2013, Cambodia is considered 'Not Free', with a Press Freedom score of 63, a rating based on the assessment of a country's degree of print, broadcast and internet freedom⁸.

Although the Constitution secures freedom of expression through explicit guarantees under

¹ Un, Kheang. 2011. Cambodia: Moving away from democracy? *International Political Science Review* 32:546

² Ibid

³ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia, Surya P. Subedi, 16 July 2012, http://cambodia.ohchr.org/WebDOCS/DocReports/3-SG-RA-Reports/A-HRC-21-63_en.pdf

³ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia, Surya P. Subedi, 16 July 2012, http://cambodia.ohchr.org/WebDOCS/DocReports/3-SG-RA-Reports/A-HRC-21-63_en.pdf

⁴ National Strategic Development Plan Update 2009-2013, for Growth, Employment, Equity and Efficiency to reach Cambodia Millennium Development Goals.

⁵ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia, Surya P. Subedi, 16 July 2012, http://cambodia.ohchr.org/WebDOCS/DocReports/3-SG-RA-Reports/A-HRC-21-63_en.pdf

Role and achievements of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in assisting the Government and people of Cambodia in the promotion and protection of human rights. Report of the Secretary-General, 21 September 2011, http://cambodia.ohchr.org/WebDOCS/DocReports/3-SG-RA-Reports/A-HRC-18-47_English.pdf

⁶ Un, Kheang. 2011. Cambodia: Moving away from democracy? *International Political Science Review* 32:546

⁷ The Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL). Final Assessment and Report on 2012 Commune Council Elections. October 2012. http://www.comfrel.org/eng/components/com_mypublications/files/620271Final_Report_Commune_Elections_2012_Final_Final_06_11_2012.pdf

⁸ Freedom House. World Press Freedom Index 2013. <http://en.rs.org/press-freedom-index-2013.1054.html>

Articles 41⁹ and 35¹⁰, in reality these constitutional rights are rarely upheld when called into question. The CPP wields its influence over the judiciary through the use of the Penal Code to negate the press laws and prosecute journalists and citizens who would purport to speak or act out against the policies and activities of the government, particularly in relation to current controversial land rights issues¹¹. In addition to physical intimidation and threats of violence, the risk of facing charges of incitement and/or disinformation for exercising their right to freedom of expression has bred a culture of self-censorship among Cambodia's media professionals¹².

While there exists a network of print, radio, television and internet media outlets in Cambodia today, the CPP maintains a heavy influence on the information disseminated through each medium. Despite several attempts to introduce a Freedom of Information Law in Cambodia no such law has yet been passed. The latest attempt made in 2010 by an opposition Member of Parliament from the Sam Rainsy Party was rejected to be put for debate by the National Assembly. This had been preceded by a draft political framework, which was created by the Ministry of National Assembly and Senate Relation and Inspection (MoNASRI) in 2007, but never discussed among policy makers despite continued advocacy by civil society organizations¹³.

Following is a brief overview of the existing media landscape in Cambodia. This is only a cursory glance at a complex media environment which is continually changing and facing new challenges.

Newspaper

As of 2012, Cambodia had 30 newspapers published on a regular basis, although there are approximately 300 registered (according to the Ministry of Information), many of which have at least partisan ownership by a government party and are used as platforms for spreading propaganda and discrediting the opposition. Overall, print media faces less government restriction than broadcast media because of its limited coverage. Due to low literacy rates and affordability, only 2 percent of Cambodians, mostly in urban areas, read newspapers, making the captive audience for print media quite small and concentrated¹⁴. This in turn affects the financial viability of publications which are not politically backed as they struggle to attract commercial funds from advertisers who do not see the value in investing in a medium with limited distributional reach.

⁹ *Freedom of expression, press, publication and assembly*

¹⁰ *Khmer citizens of either sex the right to participate actively in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the nation*

¹¹ Role and achievements of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in assisting the Government and people of Cambodia in the promotion and protection of human rights. Report of the Secretary-General, 21 September 2011, http://cambodia.ohchr.org/WebDOCs/DocReports/3-SG-RA-Reports/A-HRC-18-47_English.pdf

¹² Cambodian Center for Human Rights. New Media and the Promotion of Human Rights in Cambodia. July 2012. http://www.cchrcambodia.org/admin/media/report/report/english/2012_07_24_New_Media_and_the_Promotion_of_Human_Rights_in_Cambodia_ENG.pdf

¹³ Article 19, Cambodia: Draft Law on Access to Information, <http://www.article19.org/data/files/medialibrary/2739/11-09-20-Cambodia.pdf>

¹⁴ Un, Kheang. 2011. Cambodia: Moving away from democracy? *International Political Science Review* 32:546

Television

Broadcast media are by far the most popular way through which the majority of Cambodians receive information¹⁵. Television is overtaking radio as the primary means through which to communicate with the voting public¹⁶, and is the most tightly controlled medium in the country¹⁷. As of 2012, all 11 television stations in Cambodia were either owned by the government or a hybrid of government and private (CPP-allied) ownership¹⁸. Television content is mostly entertainment driven, and because all of the stations are subject to pre-broadcast vetting of news content, they are virtually identical in their presentation of the news¹⁹.

Equal access to media for all parties was a concern addressed by COMFREL in their report on the 2012 commune elections, and one that has been raised in the past²⁰. As COMFREL reported, access to TV coverage for opposition parties was limited to the Equity News Programme, a joint United Nations Development Programme-National Television of Cambodia project, established to give equitable access to all political parties on the national television channel TVK²¹. During their monitoring period from 1 September 2011 to 15 January 2012, they found that CPP received on average more broadcasting time in all TV stations than any other political party²².

Internet

While high costs and lack of computer access and electricity have meant a relatively low penetration rate for the internet in Cambodia (only 4.4% of the population in 2012²³), it is still an influential medium which has the potential to grow exponentially as access widens and costs fall. With the introduction of wireless broadband services, Internet Service Providers (ISPs) have been quick to invest in the Cambodian market, enabling greater high-speed coverage throughout the country.

The internet holds great potential for dramatically changing the media landscape in Cambodia, and to some extent already has. Its increasing influence on the way that news and public opinion is aired is evidenced by the growing number of news websites, blogs and passing social

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia, Surya P. Subedi, 16 July 2012, http://cambodia.ohchr.org/WebDOCs/DocReports/3-SG-RA-Reports/A-HRC-21-63_en.pdf

¹⁷ LICADHO, May 2008, Reading Between the Lines: How Politics, Money & Fear Control Cambodia's Media, <http://www.licadho-cambodia.org/reports/files/119LICADHOMediaReport2008.pdf>

¹⁸ COMFREL. Final Assessment and Report on 2012 Commune Council Elections. October 2012. http://www.comfrel.org/eng/components/com_mypublications/files/620271Final_Report_Commune_Elections_2012_Final_Final_06_11_2012.pdf

¹⁹ LICADHO, May 2008, Reading Between the Lines: How Politics, Money & Fear Control Cambodia's Media, <http://www.licadho-cambodia.org/reports/files/119LICADHOMediaReport2008.pdf>

²⁰ See for example, the past reports of the Special Rapporteur on Human rights in Cambodia

²¹ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia, Surya P. Subedi, 16 July 2012, http://cambodia.ohchr.org/WebDOCs/DocReports/3-SG-RA-Reports/A-HRC-21-63_en.pdf

²² COMFREL. Final Assessment and Report on 2012 Commune Council Elections. October 2012. http://www.comfrel.org/eng/components/com_mypublications/files/620271Final_Report_Commune_Elections_2012_Final_Final_06_11_2012.pdf

²³ According to <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats3.htm>

commentary originating from Cambodia that can be found online today²⁴. It is a difficult medium to control, though there has been no lacking of trying on the part of the government. Recent attempts to censor the Internet in Cambodia include a decree issued by the Ministry of Telecommunications in December 2012 stating that "Internet cafes cannot be located within 500 meters of a school or allow their clients to gamble, porn surf, visit websites selling drugs or commit crimes that threaten national security or "traditions"²⁵.

Radio

As with television, permission to broadcast on radio is granted by the Ministry of Information. Radio is also a highly regulated in Cambodia but it has greater penetration throughout the country because it is a more accessible and affordable medium for the majority of the population who live in rural areas, especially those with no TV coverage or newspaper distribution²⁶. In light of the limited access afforded to opposition political parties on television, radio in Cambodia plays a significant role in providing more equitable and balanced media access for parties other than the CPP²⁷. Of the 160 radio stations registered with the Ministry of Information (as of 2013), only two could be considered truly independent – CCIM's Sarika FM, and Radio Beehive. However they, Radio Beehive in particular, face frequent government obstruction, harassment and intimidation²⁸. Despite being shut down on a number of occasions, and facing repeated restrictions, Radio Beehive has played an important role in paving the way for independent radio in Cambodia, selling airtime to other parties who are unable to obtain licenses to broadcast²⁹. In July of 2012, its owner Mr. Mam Sonando was arrested and charged on allegations that he had incited villagers embroiled in a land conflict in Kratie province to secede from Cambodia, and sentenced to 20 years imprisonment. Following strong condemnation by NGOs, including CCIM, civil society organizations and the media and governments internationally, those charges were dropped, and the sentence for an additional charge of illegal logging was reduced and suspended in March 2013.

As outlined in CCHR's new media report, the momentum being gathered by new media such as mobile phones and internet is already ushering in an evolution of the way the media operates in Cambodia, with the hope that it will encourage greater quality independent news reporting and freedom of expression. "There are a number of independent Cambodian news websites, many of which use video and radio to spread their information, and which are often connected to social media platforms and websites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, through which

²⁴ Cambodian Center for Human Rights. New Media and the Promotion of Human Rights in Cambodia. July 2012. http://www.cchrcambodia.org/admin/media/report/report/english/2012_07_24_New_Media_and_the_Promotion_of_Human_Rights_in_Cambodia_ENG.pdf

²⁵ <http://www.ccimcambodia.org/press-release/28-some-internet-cafes-ordered-to-close>

²⁶ COMFREL. Final Assessment and Report on 2012 Commune Council Elections. October 2012. http://www.comfrel.org/eng/components/com_mypublications/files/620271Final_Report_Commune_Elections_2012_Final_Final_06_11_2012.pdf

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Un, Kheang. 2011. Cambodia: Moving away from democracy? *International Political Science Review* 32:546

²⁹ LICADHO, May 2008, Reading Between the Lines: How Politics, Money & Fear Control Cambodia's Media, <http://www.licadho-cambodia.org/reports/files/119LICADHOMediaReport2008.pdf>

they also disseminate their news features. Similarly, many Cambodian radio stations use the internet to disseminate their programs: Channels like VOD, VOA and Voice of Civil Society (run by COMFREL) and others broadcast online.”³⁰

CCIM: PROMOTING INDEPENDENT MEDIA IN CAMBODIA

Research

CCIM has conducted or commissioned several significant research studies aimed at uncovering insights and establishing baseline information on key issues relevant to the media and Cambodian society at large. By undertaking these research studies, CCIM has provided a means for the public and other stakeholders to voice their opinions and concerns, not only about the state of media and journalism in Cambodia, but also about important human rights and social issues which affect all Cambodian people.

Enhancing Independent Media in Cambodia (July 2009)

The first phase of CCIM’s Enhancing Independent Media in Cambodia project was a qualitative research study that aimed to identify, analyze, and offer solutions to the ethical dilemmas facing Cambodian journalists. By identifying and targeting those problems CCIM would be better placed to cater its programs to fill the gaps hindering Cambodia’s media environment. The areas of focus identified were:

1. Strengthening the legal framework for free media activities, particularly broadcast radio through policy and legislation.
2. Raising the awareness of Cambodian journalists on responsible and professional journalism practices.
3. Establishing a standardized code of ethics for Cambodian journalists reflecting professionalism, independence in reporting, and respect for the rights of journalists.

The study consisted of 33 field interviews with journalists, editors, media business people, government officials, academics and media trainers, conducted over a period of 3 months. It drew on, and was informed by data from existing quantitative studies carried out by other organizations. Some of the key observations gleaned from the interviews were that:

- Press freedoms had improved in the 10 years leading up to the study;
- Radio is considered to be the most free medium, relative to others such as newspapers, magazines, television and Internet;
- Access to government information remains limited for journalists;

³⁰ Cambodian Center for Human Rights. New Media and the Promotion of Human Rights in Cambodia. July 2012. http://www.cchrcambodia.org/admin/media/report/report/english/2012_07_24_New_Media_and_the_Promotion_of_Human_Rights_in_Cambodia_ENG.pdf

- There is a lack of respect for journalists in Cambodia, and;
- Journalists tend to run stories with biased nationalistic content during key events or crises.

As a result of the insights gained from the research, CCIM made a series of recommendations to key stakeholder groups, some of which are outlined below:

For media practitioners

- Hold regular training for journalists, actively checking their knowledge and application of professional ethics when reporting.
- Raise journalists' pay levels to livable standards so they are less likely to resort to taking kickbacks for favorable reports.
- Establish an independent umbrella institution to aid newspapers, magazines, and broadcasting stations with marketing, typically a shortfall among media outlets.

For the government

- Pass a freedom of information law that sets guidelines for government officials disclosing documents not deemed confidential by the state.
- Repeal the defamation and disinformation law in Cambodia's criminal code, amending the civil Press Law for defamation and libel.
- Abolish Article 12 of the Press Law, which is often misused by the government. Article 12 refers to threats to national security and political stability, and is vaguely termed.
- Establish a neutral, transparent process for licensing radio and television in accordance with international standards.

For NGOs and donors

- Actively promote press freedom as integral to democracy, regardless of the focus of NGOs.
- Hold the government accountable for ensuring press freedoms, investigating murders and threats against reporters, and maintaining liberal press laws as a stipulation to donor aid.
- Seek out collaboration and communication with groups advocating freedom of the press, checking on their concerns and programs regularly.

Freedom of Information: Advancing Research & Actions (April 2012)

On 23 December 2010, a draft access to information law was submitted to the Cambodian National Assembly by a member of parliament from the opposition Sam Rainsy Party. While there has been pressure on the government to enact the law since the submission, similar drafts have been submitted in the past with no success. However, in response to these efforts, the Ministry of National Assembly and Senate Relation and Inspection (MoNASRI) drafted a policy framework on access to information. To date, the policy framework has been in the hands of this Ministry and has not progressed past the original draft.

In October 2011, CCIM commissioned a research study to document the public's opinion about access to information in Cambodia and gain stakeholder feedback on the proposed law. The findings of the study would then be used as grounding to provide strategic policy recommendations to politicians, decision makers, development partners and civil society organizations on how to accelerate the adoption of the law.

Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, including interviews with 30 key informants, six focus group discussions, and a quantitative survey (with a sample size of 1522), the study yielded the following key findings:

- More than 80% of respondents agreed they had the right to access public information, such as national budgets, national expenditures, and salaries of public employees.
- More than 80% of respondents agreed that government and public bodies, including elected bodies, should be obliged to publish public information.
- 19.1% of respondents reported having sought information about national statistics, commune budgets and expenditures, and the cost of civil registration, and of those, 32.5% faced difficulty in seeking such information.
- Almost all respondents tended to be confused between the concept of public information and general news, as the majority (98%) reported they had access to public information, mostly through radio (79%), television (78%), and word of mouth (50%).

Based on the findings, CCIM made the following recommendations in relation to Freedom of Information legislation in Cambodia:

1. Public information and the right to access such information should be well defined and guaranteed by law. The law should be developed in consultation with civil society and the general public at the community, sub national and national levels.
2. Mechanisms, such as means and procedures, for accessing information should be developed with meaningful involvement from relevant stakeholders. The national congress should enact a constitutional law and strengthen or create mechanisms for obtaining such information.
3. Further research on freedom of information and freedom of expression should be conducted. Moreover, the Cambodian Ministry of Planning should consider including questions relating to freedom of information or access to information in future national surveys.
4. Ongoing discussion to raise awareness about freedom of information and public information should be engaged in at various levels of society.

JOURNALIST CONFERENCES

Since 2009, CCIM has organized three journalist conferences to tackle the issues and problems affecting the media and journalists in Cambodia. The conferences have enabled members of the media profession to engage in an open dialogue about those issues and take action to

address them, while also providing them with an opportunity to network with each other. Attendees to the conferences included journalists, reporters, editors and other representatives from media organizations in Cambodia, as well as national and international guest speakers.

The first conference was held on 17 June 2009 and was themed: **Promotion of Professionalism and Ethics**. The key outcome of this first conference was the agreement on a resolution to develop a standardized code of ethics for Cambodian journalists.

The theme of the second conference, held on 27 October 2009, was a **Code of Ethics for Cambodian Journalists**. In line with this theme, one of the key activities of the conference was a group workshop to draft a common code of ethics for Cambodian journalists. Once a final draft of the code of ethics was developed, it was approved and undersigned by the entire group. The conference also included a second workshop focusing on Planning for Strengthening Journalist Professionalism and Freedom of the Press in Cambodia.

On May 4, 2010, CCIM partnered with the Cambodia offices of the United Nations Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNOHCHR) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to hold a conference celebrating World Press Freedom Day. Following the approval of a code of ethics for Cambodian journalists at the previous conference the focus of this event was on action to promote, implement and monitor the code of ethics. A workshop was held with Cambodian journalists during the second half of the conference and the outcome was an agreement among the journalists to bind themselves together as the **Committee for the Strengthening of the Code of Ethics of Journalists**. The Committee is composed of representatives and individuals representing the journalists' associations, media institutions, media NGOs, and freelance journalists. It was also decided that a Technical Team would be established to continue fine-tuning the code and set the direction for its implementation.

At the third journalist conference held on November 12, 2010, Mr. Pa Nguon Teang, Director of CCIM, announced the creation of the **Cambodian Journalists' Council for Ethics (CJCE)**. The CJCE would be comprised of no more than 15 nominated council members and would be responsible for providing guidance to journalists on strengthening, monitoring and enforcing the code of ethics. Those in attendance at the conference had the opportunity to participate in panel discussions to finalize the Terms of Reference for the CJCE which had been drafted by the Technical Team, and vote for the selection of Council Members. The excerpt below from the final Terms of Reference describes the CJCE and its roles and responsibilities.

The Cambodian Journalists' Council for Ethics (CJCE) was created with the aim to establish a mechanism to contribute in strengthening and promoting the professional ethics and responsibilities of people in the media sector, especially the Cambodian journalists through monitoring and helping them correct their media practices among journalists.

Role and responsibility of the CJCE

Monitor, evaluate, and discuss and publications in newspapers and magazines available and inform individuals or institutions about compliance with the Code of Ethics.

Receive reports from individuals and journalists about possible violations of the Code of Ethics.

Propose disciplinary actions for journalists who have been deemed to have violated the Code of Ethics such as informing the associations or institutions to which the journalist is a member of.

Conduct training for journalists on compliance with the Code of Ethics.

At present, the CJCE is actively and independently functioning to promote the journalist code of ethics by monitoring five television stations and eight newspapers.

TRAINING

As part of its continuing work to enhance the quality of journalistic reporting in Cambodia, CCIM organized a series of training programs for various representatives of the media community. Attendees included members of journalist associations, media institutions, media NGOs and freelance journalists who were chosen from among those who submitted applications to CCIM. The training sessions covered fundamental journalistic principles and practices relating to reporting on democratic governance, investigative reporting and ethics and accountability. The training aimed to provide participants with a strong theoretical grounding and practical skills in these areas, as well as expose them to an international perspective of journalism.

Media Reporting on Democratic Governance

The training on Media Reporting and Democratic Governance was held over two days on 25-26 May 2010 and was attended by 30 participants. The training was conducted by Mr. Karlon Rama, from the Philippines. Mr. Rama is a member of the Peace and Conflict Journalism Network (PECOJON), he was assisted by Mr. Stephen James Taylaran, an experienced training facilitator, also from the Philippines.

The training consisted of six modules covering different theoretical concepts related to democratic governance. The themes and outcomes of each module were as follows:

1. **Reporting on Democracy, Governance and Accountability** - learning how democracy is founded on the pillars of freedom of speech, equal rights and an efficient system of doing things, and how media has a very important role in its development
2. **Public Office is a Public Trust** - emphasizing the importance of establishing and adhering to the rule of law through a structured learning activity about creating systems.
3. **The Betrayal of Public Trust** - experiencing how corruption is detrimental to democracy because it puts forward the selfish interests of one person or group over that of everybody else.

4. **Dinner (The Scarcity Meal)** - developing a sense of sensitivity to social issues and learning that for media to be effective, it has to be sensitive so it can bring important issues to the awareness of society as a whole.
5. **Covering Corruption** - learning specific reporting skills that can help in covering issues of good governance and the accountability of public officials.
6. **The Tarp Flip** - empowering participants towards change. The module activity demonstrated how difficult it is to change a situation, reinforcing the message that while it is hard to change the “status quo” from the inside, with commitment and cooperation it can be done.

Investigative reporting

The Training on Investigative Reporting was the second in CCIM's series of training sessions, held over two days on 29-30 June 2010 and attended by 31 participants. The training was conducted by Ms. Amalia Bandiola-Cabusao, who is the editor in chief of Mindanao Times in the Philippines. The purpose of the training was to provide participants with an in-depth insight into the world of investigative journalism - what it is, how to identify and select a story, conduct an interview, and package a story - as well as practical tips and advice for those conducting an investigative report.

Over the two days, participants took part in three sessions:

1. **What is investigative journalism?**
Introduction and background into investigative journalism, followed by an open discussion to give participants the chance to share their experiences in this area and talk about relevant issues in both Cambodia and the Philippines.
2. **Conducting an interview.**
Covering the fundamentals of conducting an interview and putting this into practice through a group role playing exercise on holding a press conference
3. **Packaging a story.**
Looking at ways to present a story, focusing on answering questions like: How will you present your story in a way that is interesting and compelling? How do you hook people? How do you make them continue listening, reading, watching?

Media ethics and accountability

The training on Media Ethics and Accountability was the third in the series of training sessions organized by CCIM. It was held on 27-28 July 2010 and attended by 39 participants. The training was conducted by Mr. Kavy Chongkittavorn of Thailand, the editor in chief of the Nation and a journalist with over 27 years of experience.

The training gave participants a broader perspective about the media environment in which they work and the influences which shape that environment, such as ethical considerations, international standards and the political climate not just in Cambodia but also in surrounding nations. The training consisted of four sessions:

1. **Ethics and Media**

Getting participants to think about what ethics means in practice through discussion about the trainer's own experiences and examples of ethical dilemmas faced by journalists from around the world. Further group discussions gave participants the opportunity to reflect on ethics in the context of Cambodia's media, analyzing the negative and positive aspects of it, what it looks like now, and what they hope for the future.

2. New Media Trend: ISO Media Standard

An introduction to the ISO media standards (broadcast media, print media and administration of media organizations), explaining how their creation and implementation are contributing to improving media credibility and trustworthiness, increasing circulation, readership, volume of information, competitiveness, response to market and economic pressure, and preventing outside interference.

3. Reporting During Conflict Situations

A presentation about reporting during a conflict, including a showing of the video documentary created by a young Burmese journalist about the monk demonstrations in Burma in 2007. The trainer talked about the dangers present, and precautions that journalists should take when reporting from an area of conflict.

4. ASEAN and Human Rights

A presentation about Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), discussing its background and the current political and media landscape.

International Program for the Development of Communication (IPDC) Project

The IPDC is a project to improve grassroots community participation and freedom of expression through citizen journalism. The project's objective is to empower marginalized and ethnic communities to express their views and interests through active participation in media broadcasting. It aims to do this by training citizen journalists from three target communes and actively involving them in the production of radio broadcasts. Through the training CCIM hopes to build the capacity of communities to advocate for their rights (not only the right to freedom of expression), strengthen independent media networks and bolster media diversity in Cambodia.

The three provinces targeted for the training were Preah Vihear, Mondulkiri and Ratanikiri. In line with the project's immediate objective – *to establish a sustainable mechanism for the production and dissemination of community focused radio broadcasts, facilitating self-expression and improving information sharing* – the expected outcomes of the training were:

- To have 60 trained community people capable of reporting community news on topics such as human rights violations.
- To have at least 50 news reports from citizen journalists trained by the project edited and broadcasted via Sarika FM and 5 other radio stations.
- The creation of a community's sustainable self-management for information sharing between the citizen journalists and media.
- To give employment opportunities to the three most promising citizen journalists as correspondents for the CCIM network.

The training in all three target provinces was completed between December 2012 and February 2013. Various teaching methods, such as group discussions, team building games, field practice and creative teaching, were used to increase participants' engagement levels and enhance their learning experience. The training was well received by participants in all provinces and since its completion CCIM has received four calls about news reports from participants. One of the unexpected discoveries of the training was the significance of social media as an enabler for freedom of expression and as an important tool for citizen journalists. After finding during the training in Preah Vihear that there was much interest in this area and a need to cover it in more detail, social media was included in the agenda for the other two provinces' training sessions.

With the training completed, a bridge forum was conducted in late February 2013 to facilitate dialogue between the media and the citizen journalists. The next steps for the project will be:

- Further training/mentoring of the trainees in each of the target provinces by VOD news editors.
- Developing a plan for, and providing assistance to the three trainees who were selected as competitors for VOD freelance reporter recruitment.
- Negotiating with five network radio stations to broadcast citizen journalist news reports.
- A final focus group discussion with participants to measure the results of the training and achievement of desired outcomes in comparison to the baseline information obtained before the training commenced.

EVALUATION

In December 2010, CCIM commissioned preliminary research to evaluate the success of the Enhancing Independent Media in Cambodia project (EIM), which was implemented over the period from January 2009 to December 2011. The evaluation process took place from December 2010 to January 2011 and included document reviews, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, a quantitative survey with newspaper readers and journalists and a consultation meeting to discuss preliminary findings with stakeholders and staff.

Some of the key findings of the evaluation were:

- Over the period of implementation, the project mostly achieved its set targets. Furthermore, the stakeholders consulted and journalist community welcomed the project, especially the adoption of a Journalist Code of Ethics.
- The project was very relevant and there was a need for it in the existing media environment in Cambodia as low standards of journalistic professionalism have resulted in a population with almost no access to accurate and independent information.
- The project was very effective in terms of completing most of the activities as given in the annual work plan, achieving most of their targets and submitting various reports to donors, and other stakeholder; and facilitating partnerships between a cross section of stakeholders.
- The project implementation was very efficient. CCIM has clear management structures and there was a high level of involvement of the media community at many consultations

and trainings.

- According to all key informants interviewed, there has been a noticeable improvement in the quality of articles in the newspapers in the two years leading up to the evaluation, and increased awareness among many journalists about media code of ethics is evident in the articles, however many journalist still do not follow all components of the code.

The quantitative survey (two survey instruments, one for newspaper readers (Audience), n=111 and another for journalists, n=99) conducted as part of the evaluation also highlighted some positive and interesting results, including:

- 69% of the audience respondents perceive the quality of journalist as fairly good and 9% as very good. Surprisingly the journalist themselves do not perceive their quality to be the same as audience, only 47% of them said fairly good, and none very good.
- The majority of respondents (92% Journalist, 89% Audience) think that there has been an improvement in journalism in Cambodia.
- 73% of the journalist respondents had participated in the EIM project activities.
- 97% of journalist respondents know about the common and standard media code of ethics, however knowledge of individual component of the media code of ethics varies.
- 94% of journalist respondents agree to the establishment of the common and standard media code of ethics.
- 91% of journalist respondents think that there is a need for an umbrella association of Cambodian Journalists.
- 76% of journalist respondents think that the enabling of environment of legal framework for media is improving however 24 % also think that it is same (15%) and getting worse (9%).

CHALLENGES

As CCIM continues to work to secure an independent media for Cambodia, the key challenges we face are:

Political Pressures

The government and CPP maintain strong control over the media and do not support freedom of the press in Cambodia. As evidenced by the recent case of Radio Beehive station owner Mam Sonando's imprisonment, and the numerous journalist deaths in Cambodia over the years which have gone uninvestigated and unsolved, the dangers of reporting on public issues such as conservation, land rights and employment conditions are still present. Intimidation and threats from the groups in power and with power are commonplace for owners of independent media stations, journalists and reporters who attempt to report news truthfully and impartially.

As a result of the entrenched political influence over the media in Cambodia radio station owners have developed a tendency to always follow government orders and there is still a culture of fear among journalists. To deal with this challenge CCIM has to continue actively

opposing the government's repressive actions and policies, and keep advocating for changes which will encourage a free media in Cambodia.

Lack of professional journalists

Most Cambodian journalists who have graduated from a media faculty seek jobs with foreign institutions and media outlets which offer higher salaries. As a result, the quality of the content of news reports is still questionable. To help offset this skill shortage CCIM continues to recruit and train volunteers, and is committed to creating more citizen journalist training opportunities in various communities.

Sustainability

The media market in Cambodia is still small and developing. The operational costs for radio, as with other mediums, is high and the opportunity to raise funds commercially through advertising is low, making the market for selling advertising airtime highly competitive. To deal with this situation and secure the sustainability of its radio stations, CCIM needs to diversify its media businesses and strengthen the capacity of its business and marketing teams.

COMMITMENT AND VISION FOR THE FUTURE

CCIM is committed to using media production and capacity building as tools for promoting social justice and change. We seek to produce and disseminate independent news through radio broadcasting and the internet, promote media professionalism through networking and capacity building, and improve media literacy and citizens' engagement through skills training and public dialogues.

GOAL

To promote democratic governance by creating a pluralistic and independent media environment in Cambodia

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

1. To produce and disseminate independent news and media reports through radio broadcasting and the internet by:
 - Operating CCIM's radio and online media, and producing news, investigative reports, and radio drama related to democratic governance and current human rights issues faced by Cambodian society
 - Conducting feedback events and listener surveys on CCIM's radio program
 - Producing yearly media monitoring reports

2. To develop media professionalism through capacity building for media organizations and citizen journalists by:
 - Improving CCIM’s capacity building skills through Training of Trainers
 - Conducting training for professional journalists, media practitioners and citizen activists
 - Producing radio and online feature reports on media professionalism
 - Building the first nationwide media network, the “Media Promotion Alliance (MePro)”, and providing organizational and media development activities to its members
 - Coordinating the institutional development of the Cambodian Journalist Council for Ethics (CJCE)
3. To improve media literacy and citizens’ political engagement through skills training and public forums by:
 - Conducting community forums and trainings to foster information exchange and media literacy targeting youth and Cambodian public in general

BUDGET

Sources of CCIM's budget are self-generated income and institutional grants. CCIM garners income from radio commercial advertisement, radio airtime sale, radio program production fees, online advertisement, and media training. CCIM's self-generated income covers up to 40% of the total annual operation budget of \$500,000.

The remaining costs are secured through generous support by present and previous donors such as Open Society Foundations (OSF), DIAKONIA, Dan Church Aid/Christian Aid (DCA/CA), United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Embassy of Canada, Freedom House, The Asia Foundation (TAF), The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), The European Commission (EC), British embassy, Affiliated Network for Social Accountability-East Asia Pacific (ANSA-EAP), USAID/US embassy, German Development Service(DED), American Bar Association (ABA), International Republican Institute (IRI), East West Management Institute (EWMI), Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF), Pact Cambodia.

OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE

CCIM has recently created the first Cambodian media network linking radio stations and newspapers throughout the country. To this end, CCIM's main aim is to build organizational capacities and media skills, and to foster knowledge exchange and collaborative action. CCIM seeks to further develop this initiative into a professional journalist academy. Its main aim would be to foster media professionalism, and improve research in the Cambodian media landscape. Finally, CCIM plans to create community information centers (CIC), if sufficient funding can be secured, to be run by community people committee, who will play role in promoting free media and freedom of expression at the community level.