

Perceiving and Fighting Corruption in Cambodia

A quantitative and qualitative survey in five provinces

February 2007



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Executive Summary

The aim of this study was to describe how Cambodians perceive corruption in their country.

Corruption and its consequences

Corruption is perceived as abuse of power. As reported by respondents in this research, corruption is pervasive, a permanent part of Cambodian life. Its two main causes are thought to be officials' low salaries and high officials' greed for power and wealth. On the other hand, ordinary Cambodians lack community solidarity, have little awareness of their rights, and are afraid. These factors combine to maintain the status quo.

Corruption greatly damages the country. It widens the gap between the rich and the poor, slows the economy, perpetuates high unemployment and inflation, and compromises hope for the future.

Standards expected from public services

Public offices are commonly perceived as an opportunity to make money. Cambodians expect to give some money to any official who provides them with a service, either to speed things along or simply as a token of gratitude.

There is a limited sense of citizens' rights. Most interviewees don't check on the cost of a given government service before applying to receive it, and few request receipts when asked for money by officials.

Social acceptability of the corruption discourse

People don't talk much about corruption episodes. They keep quiet, or limit any discussion to family, neighbors or friends. They are not happy with the widespread corruption, but do not dare to express it openly. Most Cambodians just think about their own lives, and do not care or want to help people around them. Moreover, they are afraid they will be in danger if they try to take action.

Information about corruption

Nearly all respondents heard of or witnessed some anti-corruption campaigns or actions. The most frequently cited examples are land disputes protests, garment workers' demonstrations, and protests against the price of petrol. This is because any protest against the establishment is seen as anti-corruption, since the establishment is equated with corruption.

The respondents' information about corruption comes from TV and radio news - in rare cases from newspapers. Half the sample watch TV, especially CTN, at least 2 hours/day - and about 40% listen to the radio everyday - but newspapers are read by very few. Awareness of corruption-related matters is growing.

What should be done to fight corruption

Corruption is perceived as impossible to eliminate completely, but respondents unanimously thought it could be reduced if the salaries of officials were substantially raised. Most officials would be then ashamed to keep asking for money. This action should be combined with a strong anti-corruption law, to be vigorously enforced, and with more pressure on the part of donor countries, IOs and NGOs.

At the light of the interviewees' own descriptions of Cambodian society and culture, such hopes may seem thin. However, most respondents also feel ordinary people should contribute - for instance by denouncing corruption cases if a good anti-corruption law is enforced.

Nearly half the sample feels they should do something against corruption. A further quarter agrees, but says it is difficult. And, somehow contradictorily, two thirds of the sample don't want to have anything to do with politics. Moreover, most are palpably afraid.

1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to describe how Cambodians perceive corruption in their country. The study broadly evaluated:

- The public understanding of what corruption is (i.e. what corruption represents to people, how does corruption relate to Cambodian tradition, etc)
- Standards Cambodians expect from public services
- The social acceptability of talking about corruption issues
- Whether people feel they have enough information to conduct anti-corruption activities
- What people feel should be done to fight corruption

2 Methodology

The study was an integrated one, conducted using two main research instruments:

2.1 Qualitative Study

Two different but complementary methodologies were employed: in-depth face-to-face interviews (IDIs), and focus group discussions (FGDs). The results of the two studies were concurrent, and were combined together into a single qualitative report.

The research specifications for both studies were very similar:

- **Locations:** Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and Battambang townships; rural areas in Kampong Cham (IDIs only) and in Takeo.
- **Target Group:** All Cambodians who at the date of the IDI were past their 16th birthday and before their 50th.
 - For IDIs interviewees were stratified by gender and age groups (25% 16-20 y.o., 25% 21-24 y.o., 50% 25-49 y.o.).
 - For FGDs (each of 8 participants and 1 moderator) there were two female-only FGs and two male-only FGs (in both cases, one 16-24 y.o. and one 25-49 y.o.).
- **Sample Size:** 30 IDIs were conducted: 10 in Phnom Penh, 5 each in the other locations. 4 FGDs: women in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap, men in Takeo and Battambang.
- **Sampling Method:** Random choice, stratified as above. All respondents were screened according to selection criteria pre-determined by IRL and Pact.
- **Survey Scope:** Each IDI respondent was subject to a face-to-face non-structured interview by a specialist interviewer, lasting about 45 minutes. Each FGD respondent participated in a structured focus group facilitated by a specialist interviewer, lasting about 120 minutes.

IDIs and FGDs were carried out between the end of September and the end of October 2006.

2.2 Quantitative Survey

A survey based on a structured, mostly closed questionnaire administered by face-to-face interviews was carried out, as follows:

- **Survey Locations:** Same as the qualitative study – townships of Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and Battambang; rural areas of Kampong Cham and Takeo.
- **Target Group:** All Cambodians who at the date of the interviews were past their 16th birthday and before their 50th, stratified conventionally by age groups (25% 16-20yo, 25% 21-24yo, 50% 25-49yo), and proportionally by gender and educational levels (none to some primary, completed primary to some secondary, completed secondary and some tertiary, completed tertiary).
- **Sample Size:** N=600. The quota of interviews in each survey location was proportional to its population (as percentage of the sampled areas).
- **Sampling Method** - Proportional random sampling.
- **Survey Scope** - Each interviewee selected was subject to a face-to-face interview by a specialist interviewer, using a screening and main questionnaire lasting no more than 45 minutes.
- **Analysis:** The results of the quantitative survey were processed by SPSS, studied, analyzed and compared, together and in parallel with the results of the qualitative study.

Fieldwork was conducted between November 11th and November 20th 2006.

For a detailed sample profile, see Appendix.

3 Corruption Issues

The following discussion analyzes in succession the study's main corruption-related concerns.

3.1 What is corruption, and what are its consequences?

All interviewees ultimately perceive corruption as a result of the interaction between Khmer culture and political/ administrative/ economic power. (By “Khmer culture” we mean the set of beliefs, values, and norms shared by the Khmer population of Cambodia.) All respondents' definitions of corruption describe it as the action/ process of (on the part of the corrupted) taking advantage of somebody's position, and (on the part of the corruptor) bribing/ putting pressure on someone to do (or not to do) something.

Corruption invariably implies the notion of taking advantage, prevaricating, exploiting others. For all respondents, it is indeed against the law - but it thrives because of the disparities of power in Cambodian society. Corruption is an illegal activity; through which people with some degree of power (usually referred to as “the rich and powerful”) prevaricate over those who have less power: the strong violate the rights of the weak. Corruption is, if anything, unfair. First and foremost, corruption according to respondents is abuse of power.

This general perception derives from day-to-day routine. Most respondents report very similar personal encounters with corruption, linked to their daily living experience. Table 1 summarizes them well: people in a position of some power, even minimal, routinely ask for money to perform (or not to perform) their duty.

Table 1 – Who requested money from you or from your family in the past 12 months

| | |
|---------------------------|-----|
| Teachers | 44% |
| Commune/sangkat officials | 37% |
| Traffic police | 33% |
| <i>Nobody</i> | 25% |
| Local police | 21% |
| Govt officials | 8% |

Only a quarter of the interviewees say they've not been asked for money in the course of the past year. This figure is probably lower than reported since giving small “gifts” is not perceived as “real” corruption and fear and shame contribute to denial.

Teachers head the list of the corrupt which is compounded by several examples of corruption based on familism (*Krousa Niyum*) and partyism (*Pak Puok Niyum*).

Table 2 – Agreement with statements (scale -200 to +200. Significant agreement >50)

| | |
|--|----|
| Corruption will always exist in Cambodia | 77 |
| Corruption takes two people | 56 |
| A little corruption makes things easier | 55 |
| The powerful take advantage of the poor | 52 |
| Corruption is the illegal pressure to do something | 37 |
| Officials are poor, so they must ask for money | 30 |
| Corruption is part of everyday life | 22 |

Given the Cambodian daily experience, it's not surprising that there is a significant level of agreement on at least three subjects: corruption is a permanent part of Cambodian life; it implies co-operation between the giver and the taker; and it has some social utility. The under-25s and those with at least secondary education have the same levels of agreement as the others: the outlook on corruption is not tempered by education or youth.

Money is, as one would expect the main means of corruption, occasionally substituted, or complemented, by non-monetary gifts (from cigarettes and beer to cars and property). The routine of corruption within society involves all social strata, in a dual movement, top-to-bottom and back. Two parallel dynamics are involved:

On one hand, people in a position of power (typically, high officials) not only take bribes directly, but tolerate and encourage bribe taking by their subordinates, down to the interface with the public – who have no choice but to pay. On the other, in a bottom-to-top direction, subordinates routinely hand over a share of the bribes they extort to their own superiors (whom usually they've paid to get their job in the first place).

The perception of corruption as an all-pervasive, overwhelming force goes hand-in-hand with some difficulty in distinguishing the corruptors from the corrupted. Most respondents agree that in theory both parties - the bribe-giver and the bribe-taker - should be considered responsible for corruption; but most also state that the really guilty and corrupt one is the taker. "If no taker, no giver" is a very common remark. This is rationalized by arguing that it's takers who tell givers what they want. Givers – the public – just want to obtain some legitimate goal.

Hence the common perception – seen above – that corruption is, in a way, useful. This is a crucial socially attitude, which goes together with a feeling of obligation towards officials. Many respondents agree that in theory Cambodians have a right to receive services without paying bribes, but in practice "we should give [officials] some small gift for their labor, their time, and in case we want the work done in rush or on time." All interviewees remark that officials "are poor" – which actually is not true, what they mean is that their salaries are very low; this justifies giving them some money. The importance of this dual outlook cannot be overstated. It also reflects the sample group, who mainly encounter corruption at the lowest government administrative levels.

Such a perspective is matched by a limited awareness of one's own rights. For poorly-educated respondents, the most important rights are basic: to live and to do business. For the better educated, the most important rights are to speak one's opinion, to be free to move, and to join social/ political activities. In Cambodia, education is closely correlated to income (as shown by all field research on the subject): this is an example of socio-political options being determined by economic status.

Moreover, theoretical rights are of no avail if one is powerless. Respondents agree rights are natural (i.e., are not conceded by the State) and apply to every Khmer, yet most say in real life people do not have the same rights; they depend on one's status, power and wealth.

Typically, it is stated that Khmers and foreigners don't have the same rights, because in foreign countries the "rich and powerful" are subject to the law. And, crucially, most say the majority of Khmers (including themselves, they often admit) have only a fairly superficial knowledge of their own rights. In other words, the research shows that there is no strong introjected rights' awareness [as do several other previous studies- e.g., to only quote IRL's recent work, *Domestic Violence* (for GTZ, EWMI, Unifem, 2005); *Demand for Justice* (for UNDP, 2005); *Legal Aid* (for EWMI, 2006); etcetera].

All interviewees are aware of the impact of corruption on Cambodia. The most frequently quoted impact is that corruption is steadily widening the gap between rich and poor.

According to most interviewees, it damages human resources, and such damage can affect the economy. For all respondents, corruption's most important impact on individuals concerns their living standards. Corruption increases the costs of goods and services and, since job selection is often corrupt, decreases job opportunities and quality of service.

All agree that corruption is negative (in most interviewees' words, "a very bad thing") for Cambodia: basically, the economy's growth is slower, there is high unemployment and inflation, many people are unfairly treated and lose hope, and there is a loss of confidence in the government.

Interestingly, more than half the respondents are specifically worried about the educational system. The consensus is it is steadily degenerating, because teachers (from primary school to university) and education officials obtain their jobs through corruption, independent of qualifications and ability, and cannot impart knowledge to the next generation.

The outcomes of corruption for society at large are therefore described as very severe. Corruption keeps Cambodian society lagging behind other countries. Some respondents add that “the nation has lost its honor” in the eyes of foreigners. The “rich and powerful” have acquired a disproportionate share of the country’s already limited wealth, at the expenses of ordinary people.

3.2 Standards expected from public services

Table 3 provides a fairly reliable impression of how Cambodians consider public employment:

Table 3 - How much should one pay to obtain a simple Government job (e.g. police)?

| | |
|-----------------------|-----|
| <i>Nothing</i> | 7% |
| Up to 100 US\$ | 22% |
| Up to 500 US\$ | 27% |
| Up to 1,000 US\$ | 14% |
| More than 1,000 US\$ | 9% |
| Don't know/ No answer | 21% |

As in early modern Europe, public office is valued not because of the salary that goes with it, but because it is an opportunity to make money. Two aspects of this table are of interest: only a tiny minority (rising at most to 13%, among those who have completed secondary studies) thinks that one should not have to pay in order to obtain a civil service job; and, on average, becoming a low-level policeman is deemed to cost about 500\$ - quite more than one year’s salary.

This outlook pervades the discourse about the causes of corruption. All agree that the inefficient structure of Government bureaucracy favors corruption: for instance having many different collectors of tax payments - tax officers, local police, traffic police, firemen etc.

Having stated this background, all respondents agree that the main cause of corruption is the civil servants’ low salaries. Neither in the IDIs nor in the FGDs was there a single respondent who didn’t mention the miserly salaries of Cambodian officials as the basic reason for corruption. Quantitative results, albeit in a less pervasive, more analytical way, reflect the qualitative findings:

Table 4 – The two main causes of corruption

| | |
|--|-----|
| Officials have low salaries | 49% |
| Officials want money to become more powerful | 27% |
| Cambodia is getting richer and so officials are greedier | 25% |
| People don't understand well how damaging corruption is | 23% |
| Officials threaten people if people don't pay | 20% |
| Denouncing corruption can be dangerous | 18% |
| People are always ready to give a little gift to an official | 15% |
| Everybody knows that it is there, and so they go along with | 12% |
| People don't know the official fees for a service | 11% |

Interviewees who completed secondary education are even more convinced than the sample average that low salaries are the main cause of corruption. However, things are not perceived as that simple. As we remarked above, corruption is a two-way mechanism.

A second, concomitant, cause is frequently mentioned: greed and/or lust for power among those who already enjoy high living standards and power. In the respondents' perceptions, those people want to increase their current power, and/or want to get more goods (luxury cars, technology, etc – which are perceived as essential appendages of power and status). Many state explicitly that Cambodian corruption stems from “the competition of modern daily materialism”.

The people most involved in corruption – the “prime movers” - are considered to be those in the high ranks (civilian and military) of government where they tolerate bribery, cover abuses of power and grant impunity. Apart from taking their personal cut of big deals, they run a system based on pervasive corruption – down to the grassroots officials, who are forced by their minimal salaries to request bribes.

In the respondents' opinion, high officials are the most corrupt – but are closely mirrored by “rich people”, i.e. big businessmen who use their financial power to apply pressure on government officials in order to get illegal advantages. It is a somehow artificial distinction, since it is commonly agreed that to become really rich one must have official backing in the first place. And the single most corrupt part of the State is the judiciary [this confirms several previous research findings – e.g. the ones quoted above].

Another cause – which is also an effect – of corruption is said to be the poor quality of government staff. Interviewees think the wrong people are put in high positions of power, and that they then use the position to accumulate money. Thus, the choices made by political leaders (of all parties, with a partial exception for Sam Rainsy), high-ranking officials and military officers determine corruption – and that brings us back to the basic mechanism of top-to-bottom and bottom-to-top exchange described above.

However, this state of affairs is assisted by the fact that - as remarked above - few Khmers have any notion of how to assert their basic rights:

Table 5 – Do you check how much a Govt service costs before applying for it?

Do you ask officials for receipts of payments?

| | Costs of services | Written receipts |
|-----------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Always | 31% | 20% |
| Sometimes | 28% | 18% |
| Rarely | 18% | 12% |
| Never or nearly never | 22% | 50% |
| Don't know/ No answer | 1% | 1% |

The best educated and the young behave exactly like as anybody else. In other words, more than three quarters of Cambodians, if faced with a request of money from an official, very likely will pay and not ask for a receipt; and are unlikely to inquire about costs before requesting a service. This is obviously a point on which future campaigns will have to focus.

3.3 Acceptability of public discourse about corruption

In general, respondents say they don't talk much about corruption episodes. This is consistent with the common perception of corruption as the norm. People keep quiet, or just have a discussion with their family, neighbors or friends. They are content with looking after themselves and cutting their losses: all think corruption is now the rule more than the exception, so they don't care much.

Most respondents admit people are not happy with corruption, but they dare not express it openly. Reaction at an individual level is rare, since there is little support, and people think they will not win against corruption, “for the people have no supporters, no power, and are poor.”

Individual reactions of anger and frustration don't become the basis of serious or lasting action. There is little notion of the public interest, and even less of being all part of the same body politic. Interviewees state quite clearly that most Cambodians just think about their own lives, and do not care or want to help people around them. Moreover respondents often state they are afraid to get in a dangerous predicament if they tried to do something.

Corruption is of course something that gets aired in the media in general terms – but there is an enormous gap between such stereotypic discourse and an actual public discourse over real corruption episodes – especially the minimal ones which punctuate everybody's daily life and awareness.

3.4 Information about corruption

A probe on whether examples of anti-corruption fight could inspire others drew perfunctory assent – nobody seems to be really convinced of that. All say they could be inspired by examples, but usually add that people feel afraid of those who have power and can make life difficult. No respondent knows personally somebody who could be a good example.

Some examples at national level are quoted: labor leaders, opposition leaders in general, Sam Rainsy and Kem Sokha. But several respondents are skeptical of their power to help the common people.

On the other hand, nearly all respondents heard of or witnessed some anti-corruption campaigns or actions. The most frequently cited examples are land dispute protests, garment workers' demonstrations, and protests against the price of petrol. This confusion between anti-corruption struggles and labor disputes is quite illuminating: any kind of sector campaign against the powers-that-be is seen as being an anti-corruption battle – because in Cambodia corruption is equated with power and vice versa. That of course does not mean that e.g. land disputes have nothing to do with corruption – on the contrary.

The respondents reported that information about corruption comes from TV and radio news, and from family and friends - in rare cases from newspapers. Half the sample watch TV, especially CTN, at least 2 hours a day – and about 40% listen to the radio everyday – but newspapers are read by very few. For instance, TV is the source for information on the black box (Pro Orb Khmao) located at the community level as one of the anti-corruption campaigns, and generally considered a good idea – if only officials acted on the information received.

Table 6 – Sources of information about corruption

| | |
|---|-----|
| TV or radio | 83% |
| Family or friends | 64% |
| Activities by NGOs or other organizations | 17% |
| Newspaper | 6% |
| My own self | 5% |
| Leaflet | 3% |

Knowledge is rather vague though – respondents don't distinguish between national and local cases, and the reliance on official information means that their perception of national level corruption is very limited to say the least. They can only extrapolate from their daily experience (reflected by the high percentage of family/friends in Table 6).

Table 7 - Compared to 12 months ago I know about corruption...

| | |
|-----------------------|-----|
| More | 28% |
| A little more | 23% |
| Same | 36% |
| Less | 5% |
| Don't know/ No answer | 8% |

A positive note is that awareness of corruption-related matters is growing (Table 7). Nearly all respondents know that an anti-corruption law is being discussed, but they aren't sure either of its contents or whether it has been approved by the National Assembly yet.

In any case, respondents tend to believe it will be approved because it is being requested by foreign donors and by the people; the most educated respondents remark that Prime Minister Hun Sen has committed himself (to donors or to ASEAN) to pass the law. However, there is some skepticism about the law's impact – and that brings us to the potential for anti-corruption initiatives.

3.5 What should be done to fight corruption

Often, the first reaction to such a question is rather negative. All respondents' state, one way or the other that ordinary people will never prevail against the “rich and powerful”. All remark that normal people, even those who are not passively resigned and feel strongly about corruption, dare not openly voice their feelings and protest, because it is dangerous: people could lose their job, be sent to jail, be assaulted, even lose their life.

Nevertheless, a large majority says that they should personally do something to fight against corruption:

Table 8 - Do you think you should do something against corruption?

| | |
|------------------------|-----|
| Yes | 47% |
| Yes, but it isn't easy | 30% |
| Maybe | 7% |
| No | 13% |
| Don't know/ No answer | 3% |

Even with a large group explicitly voicing their fears, more than 3/4 of the interviewees think they should do something. The most educated are the most committed (age doesn't play a significant role). The challenge is obviously how to enable this vast mass of people to do something without incurring unacceptable risks.

A disturbing result of the present study is that every interviewee is clearly convinced that any Cambodian who fights corruption is in real danger. Most interviewees therefore admit that reacting as a group (e.g. by demonstrations) should be better, not because demonstrations have more chances of making the powers-that-be change their ways, but because an individual will feel more protected by acting inside a group - better if a large one. Threats are very real.

Our interviewees prove that murder pays: Chea Vichea is an example quoted by most respondents to prove their fears are well-founded. As an aside it is interesting that, talking about Chea Vichea and other similar cases, political gangsterism is explicitly equated with corruption: this would not necessarily be true in other countries, but it is true in Cambodia. Cambodian corruption is perceived as an all-encompassing system of arbitrary, brutal power.

That's why measuring the degree of danger perceived by the interviewees is a necessary part of a study about corruption:

Table 9 - What anti-corruption actions would you take without feeling in danger?

| | |
|--|-----|
| Phone a radio show | 59% |
| Tell friends & family they should fight corruption | 48% |
| Sign a pact against corruption | 36% |
| Participate in a march/ demonstration | 16% |
| Don't know/ No answer | 7% |

Fear is inversely proportional to educational levels. Many add they would stop their protest and think about their safety if there is any threat. And it is clear that the only actions considered feasible are those protected either by anonymity or by the family circle. In terms of communication, anti-corruption messages will have to travel either by radio or by word-of-mouth.

This backdrop of apprehensiveness contrasts with the opinion, expressed by many, that it would be possible to reduce (not to eliminate altogether) corruption in Cambodia. However, it would take “much time” – by that the majority of respondents seems to mean at least a decade or 15 years.

Unanimously, the *condition sine qua non* for corruption reduction is that official salaries be raised. Probing the average amount of the raise doesn't draw any precise response, but usually a 50 to 100% increase is mentioned. Respondents also concede that some officials will stay corrupt, simply because they are greedy. However, the consensus is that, if lower officials are paid a decent level, they will feel ashamed to ask the public for more money. This somewhat contradicts the widespread assertion that corruption is traditional and endemic.

Much will depend on whether officials will be punished if found guilty of corruption. Rigorous law enforcement must go together with salary improvement: the former is considered a necessary factor to reduce corruption. This is a challenge given that the judiciary is unanimously considered the peak of corruption.

Most respondents also believe that corruption will be reduced when older civil servants will be replaced by the young generation, which is credited as having a more morally responsible outlook.

The government is singled out by all as the one agency having the power to reduce corruption. It should give the example: if the government (meaning by that the highest officials – ministers, generals etc) respects the law, the people will respect it too. In this ideal perspective – which many interviewees share – the government promulgates the anti-corruption law, doubles the officials' salaries, then its highest level officials show they obey the law, becoming a model to others – all backed by incorruptible law enforcers.

The above may sound like wishful thinking, but it is always tempered by a large dose of realism. Not many respondents show great hopes in the government: after all, the people who commit and condone all sorts of illegalities (let's not forget all interviewees assert that corruption is illegal) are the very persons who should/would enact the law.

This very frequent consideration brings about a more likely scenario. Corruption could be reduced more effectively if there was more cooperation from NGOs and/or foreign donors: since most government officials are corrupt, Cambodia will need some help from the outside - from foreign organizations.

This fits with the commonly held view that Cambodia and the so-called Western countries are very different. All believe that in Western countries people generally respect the law, and corruption is minimal and carried out in secret, because it entails not only punishment but public shame. This contrasts with Cambodia, where corruption is publicly flaunted and pervasive.

Since Western people are perceived as seeing corruption differently than Khmers, and being much more aware of the public good, most respondents hope this Western outlook will spread to Cambodia. The reasoning is simple: there are so many NGOs and IOs in the country, and they are bound to react to such blatant corruption – at least because it hampers their efforts and makes them waste money.

However, even if the West provides assistance regarding the fight against corruption, it will take years and will require a commitment by the government on the anti-corruption law. Interviewees are aware of the internal contradiction between thinking the government is the prime mover of corruption and hoping it will become the prime mover of anti-corruption: hence the recourse to an external agency, the “honest West”.

This *deus ex machina* outlook prevails. It is tempered by the widespread opinion that ordinary people too can help reduce corruption in Cambodia, by denouncing the episodes of corruption they witness. Phnom Penh – perceived as more civilized and more under Western eyes – would be the best place to begin such campaign (the border provinces, in contrast, are deemed the most difficult, because cross-border trade breeds corruption).

But this kind of action, respondents add, can happen only if the anti-corruption law will be promulgated, will be tough and, above all, will be well-enforced. Again, it should be remarked that this widespread opinion about the feasibility of popular participation ignores the equally widespread conviction that most Khmers look only after themselves and don't want to come to the help of others. Analogously, the majority conviction that one should do something against corruption (Table 8) contrasts with the sample's attitude towards social/ political engagement described by Table 10:

Table 10 - In the past year, did you...

| | |
|--|------------|
| Discuss Cambodian social/ political issues with others | 30% |
| Participate in a social or political meeting | 10% |
| Contribute time or work to a NGO | 6% |
| Give money to a NGO/ party | 3% |
| Contribute time or work to a political party | 2% |
| <i>I don't want to get involved with politics</i> | 62% |

The most educated are, predictably, the ones who discuss the most. However, keeping in mind that the study sample was mostly urban, and younger than the national average, the results are not encouraging. Especially, two thirds of this sample doesn't want to get involved – out of fear, disgust, and despair. There lies the big challenge for any anti-corruption initiative.

4 Conclusions and Recommendations

Corruption is perceived, above all, as abuse of power. Respondents saw it as pervasive, a permanent part of Cambodian life; it implies giver/taker co-operation; it has some social utility. Teachers are perceived as the most corrupt (with the effects one can imagine), closely followed by local officials and police.

The main two perceived causes are officials' low salaries and high officials' greed for power and its trappings: they work as a dual mechanism, top-to-bottom and back. But people's ignorance of corruption's damages and their readiness to give officials "a little gift" are important too.

There is no civil service culture for fighting against corruption: very few check the costs of Government services. Even less ask for written receipts from officials. Perception of human rights is rather vague. Most Cambodians just think about their own lives, and do not care or want to help people around them.

All recognize the damage corruption does to Cambodian society; but the great majority thinks corruption will always exist. However, interviewees also seem to have some hope for the future, resting mostly on a rather unlikely combination of vast raises of officials' salaries, a strongly enforced anticorruption law, and foreign pressures.

Nearly half the sample feels they should do something against corruption. And about a quarter feel the same, but say it is a difficult activity. And, somehow contradictorily, two thirds of the sample don't want to have anything to do with politics. Moreover, most are palpably afraid.

Any viable anti-corruption initiative must address those conflicting feelings and motivations. Obviously, it will take a long time, it will have to proceed very gradually, and it cannot ignore the two main socio-cultural obstacles: lack of solidarity, and fear.

The only activity a limited majority feels they could do is phone to a radio show. Even exhorting friends and family is considered dangerous by a majority. But these are both activities that should be encouraged – if possible, focusing on specific cases which show some promise of results. The other focus should be citizens' rights.

A positive note is that awareness of corruption-related matters is growing. It could be developed – through appropriate campaigns - into an awareness of what are the right costs of the most common Govt services, and into a more widespread habit of asking for receipt when asked for money.

Appendix

The quantitative sample characteristics:

Gender

| | |
|--------|-----|
| Male | 49% |
| Female | 51% |

Age group

| | |
|----------|-----|
| 16 to 20 | 25% |
| 21 to 24 | 25% |
| 25 to 49 | 50% |

Location

| | |
|--------------|-----|
| Battambang | 17% |
| Kampong Cham | 31% |
| Phnom Penh | 23% |
| Siem Reap | 15% |
| Takeo | 15% |

Education

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-----|
| None - some primary | 14% |
| Completed primary - some secondary | 64% |
| Completed secondary - some tertiary | 15% |
| Completed tertiary | 7% |

Occupation

| | |
|-------------------------------|-----|
| Student | 27% |
| Employee | 23% |
| Business Owner/ Self-employed | 19% |
| Unemployed | 16% |
| Other private sector jobs | 11% |
| Government/ Army/Military | 5% |

Household monthly income

| | |
|-------------------|-----|
| Less than 50 US\$ | 4% |
| 50-100 US\$ | 17% |
| 101-200 US\$ | 49% |
| ore than 200 US\$ | 31% |