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Losing the right to vote

Flawed registration and database management threaten to disenfranchise Cambodian voters

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An investigative report by **VOD**

Losing the right to vote

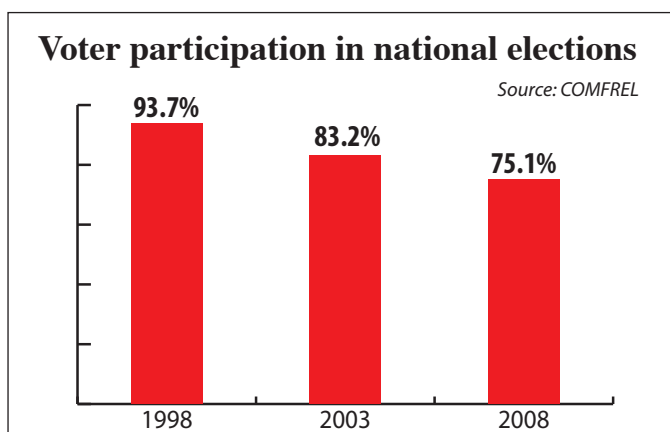
Flawed registration and database management threaten to disenfranchise Cambodian voters

The first national election in Cambodia was organized and administered by the United Nations Transitional Authority for Cambodia (UNTAC) in July 1993 following the ending of decade of civil war. Since the second National Assembly election in 1998, the Cambodian government has organized and administered the national elections by itself.

As of 2012, the total population of Cambodian people is approximately 14 million, of which around 9.5 million are eligible to vote.

In accordance with a report released by the Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL), 93.74 percent of eligible voters participated in the 1998 election, 83.22 percent in 2003, and 75.08 percent in 2008. This means that the number of eligible voters who went to cast ballots has decreased gradually and substantially.

In 2013, COMFREL found that 13percent of the country's eligible voters (9.5 million) had lost their right to vote, amounting to 1.24 million disenfranchised voters. This figure is relatively less than the number of eligible voters who were excluded from the voting list in Commune/Sangkat Council Election of 2012. A report by National Election Committee (NEC) illustrated that in the third Commune/Sangkat Council Election, 35 percent of eligible voters, equal to 3.5 million of 8 million eligible voters, did not show up on the Election Day.



The latest survey report by the International Republican Institute (IRI) in 2013 confirmed that there had been four main obstacles or factors that led Cambodian people to lose or neglect their right to vote. Of those interviewed, 27percent confirmed that they were busy or forgot the polling day. Another 22percent of respondents said they were unable to find their name on the voter list, and some confirmed that their names had been removed from the list. Fifteen percent of respondents said they were prevented from voting because they did not have proper documents or an eligible identification card on Election Day. And 12 percent of respondents said they had been sick during the polling day.

Not far different from the report released by IRI, media coverage showed that the majority of eligible voters who were interviewed by the press confirmed that they already had lost their right to vote in at least one or two previous elections before and feared they might lose it again in 2013. The eligible voters interviewed said that there had been a number of obstacles for them to exercise their rights, including a complicated voter registration process, lack of access to eligible documents and identification, inability to access the voter registration lists, mismanagement of the NEC's electronic voter records (which at times contained double entries and at others was missing registered voters), as well as poor weather on the polling day during the rainy season.

How did these potential obstacles come into existence?

Complicated Registration Process

Article 34 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia states that Khmer citizens of both sexes shall enjoy the right to vote and to stand as candidates for election.

Article 53 of Chapter VI of the Amendments of the Law of Election of Members of National Assembly states, "The National Election Committee shall delegate its power to the Commune or Sangkat Council to perform functions on its behalf in order to implement the voter list revision, the voter registration, and the register of voters for each commune or Sangkat."



Local election officials tally the results from voter ballots as election monitors watch. Observers are concerned that voter participation has steadily declined since Cambodia's first free elections in 1993. ©VOD

Following the amendment of the law, multiple problems have been identified in the voter registration process, particularly in regard to the irregularities of voter lists. Many election observers in Cambodia have regularly raised concerns over this issue. Mr Koul Panha, whose experience in observing elections dates back to 1993, delivered a speech to students in Phnom Penh on May 30, 2013, in which he maintained, “the key issue is that the NEC delegates its power to the Commune/Sangkat Council to perform the voter list revisions. Since then on, there have always been problems with the voter lists.”

Heang Noeun, a 40-year-old man from Kampot Province who is currently working in Phnom Penh, said he did not want to travel back to vote in his home province since it costs him a good deal of money and time. Because of these concerns, he decided to register on the voter roles in Sangkat Toul Sangke, but he still had to spend much of his own time to fill out all of the required forms. He added that the registration official had asked him for certified documents from multiple authorities on multiple occasions. Noeun's experience demonstrates that if eligible voters are not willing to try again and again in order to register or to obtain the correct documents for voting, they may not have a chance to vote.

“The first day they said their boss were busy, so that took

me one day. Later on, they asked me to bring certified residential documents with referees. However, when I brought those required documents, they said the referees had to give a copy of their voting card from the last five years. My referee spent two days looking for the voting card and found it. The following day, I had all of the documents, but the office had moved to another location — nearby the sewage canal at Touk Sangke market. I arrived there around 10 a.m., and they told me that I needed the signature of Sangkat chief, so I had to leave some documents with them for the Sangkat Chief to sign.

I had filled in the form without the signature of Sangkat Chief. The registration official should have given me the form with signature of Sangkat Chief. I proceeded to go get the signature of Sangkat Chief by myself, and I got his signature at 11 a.m. In total, I spent three and half days for this registration process.”

Others interviewed also faced difficulties to register their name for voting whenever they wanted to change their name from one polling station to another one.

Mr. Soem Naroeth, a university student in Phnom Penh who originates from Kampong Thom province and wanted to vote in Phnom Penh, said that in order to register at the nearest polling station, he had to spend around one week for proceedings.

“It’s really a big annoyance since it takes time — sometimes a week. We need to undertake many procedures, and some might be lazy to proceed with it. They are busy with studies, but for me, I have taken some of my time on it. Last but not least, I would like to suggest we adopt a better registration process so that all eligible Cambodian voters can vote.”

These scenarios demonstrate the NEC registration procedure is often not applicable for eligible voters who have moved their residence and want to vote in their new commune or Sangkat. The process would be more applicable if the registration procedures were revisited and facilitated for better and more effective work. Information sharing remains a core issue to take into consideration for migrants, since they are not fully aware of the proper procedures.

Mr. Uch Bunnarith of Kampot Province moved with his whole family to live and work in Phnom Penh, and he confirmed that information related to voter registration is not widely broadcast to migrants.

“I have not obtained many pieces of information, and some pieces are not clear or are not enough. I have just heard — and perhaps it closes the procedure — that migrants can vote in Phnom Penh. I do not know why the government or NEC does not widely broadcast information about registration procedure to its citizens. I am a citizen, and I wish to look for information. What about those who do not like to look for information? They might be far behind me,” he said. “The election-related information is not broadcast as widely as Alexan Whiskey [a popular alcohol in Cambodia]. And it would be good if they could do that.”

Mr. Uch Bunnarith wants the government and the NEC to make the registration procedure more accessible and easier — especially for those who have moved their residence.

“I want NEC or government make the procedure more accessible and easier for all eligible voters to register so they can cast their ballots wherever is closest to their (current) residence,” he said. “For example, I am from Kampot Province, and I am already registered in Kampot Province, but I could vote in Phnom Penh. It is very convenient and cost-effective since we are poor. I want the procedure to be like the first general election in 1993.”

People in other provinces also have concerns about migrants losing their right to vote. In a community forum, the participants said that the NEC and government should have a special procedure in order to ensure that people living in other countries can exercise their rights to vote. Forum participants felt that the NEC has not developed any mechanisms to make sure that migrants in Malaysia, Thailand or South Korea can vote.

Mr. Chhav Sokhom, a resident of Takeo’s Prey Kabas District spoke out during a community forum in his district on May 21, 2013, telling organizers, “I am really concerned about the wave of immigration across the nation. Has the government or NEC issued any announcements or circulars to encourage migrants to return to their home for voting?”

A report by the Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training has confirmed that almost 20,000 Cambodian workers have migrated to work in Thailand. Thousands and thousands of migrant workers have also been working in Malaysia and South Korea. Most of them lost their right to vote.

Some said that the more the NEC changes the voting procedures, the more difficult it is for eligible voters to participate. Lack of information sharing and the limited knowledge of Cambodian citizens may make it hard for voters to understand new procedures.

Election monitors also criticized the changes in procedure from one general election to another as creating more dif-

iculties for eligible voters. Monitors referred to the second National Assembly election in 1998, during which election officials issued blue cards with photo ID and polling station number for voters. The observers confirmed that the blue card served as a guide for the voters to clearly know their polling station before the polling day.

In addition, the blue card process could stop unethical registration officials from removing the name of voters or changing the polling station. However, the blue card procedure was altered in the subsequent general elections.

NEC Secretary-General Tep Nytha defended the change in procedure.

He said the blue card was replaced by the Cambodian National ID card. This change was stipulated not by the decision of NEC but by the amendments to the Law on Election of Members of National Assembly in 2002. He believed that the amended procedure made the voting process more convenient for voters.

“The Cambodian National ID card is a clear and legal document to prove identification. It is more secure and much better than the blue card.”

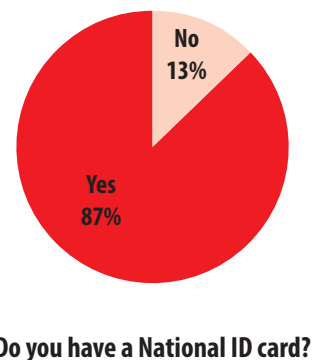
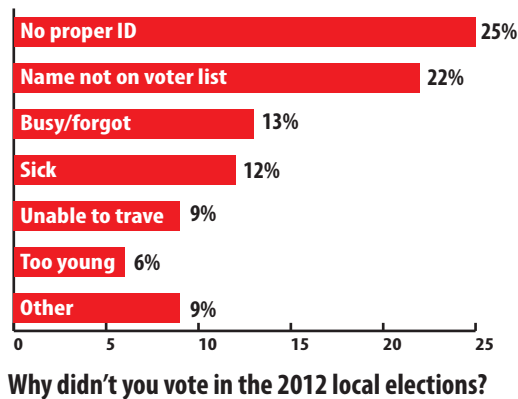
Attorney Sok Sam Oeu, executive director of the Cambodian Defense Project, explained that the meaning of the amended election law’s Article 50 does not prevent the NEC from issuing blue cards but rather states that to be eligible to vote, every citizen must have his or her name in the voter lists and must have documents to certify his or her identity during polling.

The NEC has developed several procedures with the purpose to ensure that eligible voters can vote in a more conve-

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MR. CHHAV SOKHOM, VOTER

IRI public opinion survey reveals voter concerns over registration process



Source: IRI. "Survey of Cambodian Public Opinion." Jan.-Feb. 2013.

nient manner, but not being able to implement those procedures will bring about challenges for the eligible voters who would otherwise benefit from them.

However, some communes and Sangkats do not follow the directives of NEC at the local level. Most of registration officials work in a village office or at the house of the village chief, making it difficult for eligible voters to find their location. Eventually, some citizens give up their right to vote.

Toul Sangke Deputy Village Chief Seng Bunthai was responsible for issuing election-related documents in his village and told VOD about the procedure.

"We already disseminated and shared information associated with registration procedure to all eligible citizens in Toul Sangke village through village team leaders," he said, adding that he also "went to inform those who lost their identification cards or certificate of identification to bring two passport photos and two referees and to register their names at the Sangkat Office."

Second Deputy Chief of Sangkat Toul Sangke, Mr. Kruey Sok Khemarith, said officials responsible for voter registration were unlikely to widely promote and share the information to eligible voters. Recently, he said, there were not many people coming to ask for certificates of identity.

"Those who lost their National ID card or certificate of identity for voting have not come to the Sangkat yet," Mr. Kruey Sok Khemarith said. "We are not sure whether or not village chief or village team leaders have widely shared that information to citizens and that is why we have not seen many people come to Sangkat office. In addition, the villagers did not know about reissuing the certificate of identity for those who lost it because they are unable to access the media. That is why eligible voters who lost their ID card are likely to be quiet on this issue."

People in other provinces still know very little about using other documents instead of their National ID card for voting.

Mrs. Cheng Yan of Lvea Krom village, Lvea Krom commune, Kong Meas district, Kampong Cham Province, said she had already applied for her National ID card but has not

yet obtained it, adding that she is worried she will not be able to cast her ballot in the upcoming elections.

Mrs. Peng Korng of Prek Sdey commune, Koh Thom district, Kandal Province, thought the National ID card was the only legal document she could use on polling day. She said, "I am really worried since one guy did not have his ID card [and could not vote], and the registration procedure is very complicated."

This concern is regularly raised. It is not new for citizens to be concerned about other problems associated with electoral procedure, including being without National ID card, though, as already clarified in this report, the ID card is not the only documentation that can be used to vote.

Voters without National ID Cards

Some villagers from Sangkat Kilometre 6 did not have a National ID card for voting. In some cases, their lack of an ID does not mean they have not been issued National ID cards but they used those ID cards as collateral for a loan. Many individuals in this situation who were interviewed by our reporters expressed that they are willing to vote but that they do not understand the NEC's procedure for voting without an ID card.

Mr. Taing Kihok, a sand collector at Kilometre 6 Market, is one such case. He showed willingness to vote, but he did not have a National ID card and did not know how, where or who to contact in order to obtain a certificate of identity for use in the election.

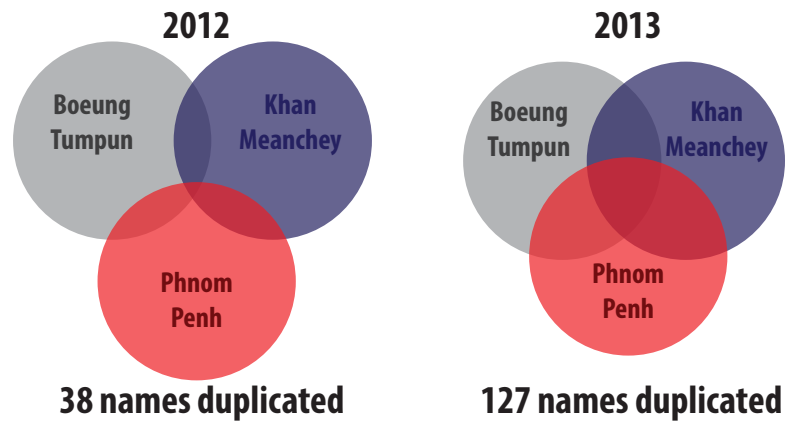
"Due to poverty, I decided to pawn my National ID card so that I can have some money for my family," he said. "I already pawned my National ID card, so I cannot cast my ballot. I need assistance from others so that I can go to the polling station."

According to a report issued by International Republican Institute (IRI) in 2013, 13 percent of Cambodia's eligible voters do not have National ID cards. This, of course, hindered eligible voters from registering for the election and casting their ballots. The report also illustrated that 15 percent of

COMFREL surveys of voter lists shows duplicate names increased in 2013

COMFREL surveys of official voter lists and registration records in three urban Sangkats (Boeung Tumpun, Khan Meanchey and Phnom Penh), found the number of duplicated names increased by more than 200% from the 2012 commune elections to the 2013 national elections.

Source: COMFREL. "Final Report and Survey of Voter List, Voter Registration and Audit of Voter List Plus Verification of Deletion Forms for the 2013 National Election." March 2013.



the total eligible voters failed to cast their ballot because they did not obtain a certificate of identity for elections. Another 22 percent of eligible voters did not show up during the polling because they said their names had been removed from the voter lists.

Mr. Kem Ley, an independent social development researcher, also confirmed that 1.3 million Cambodians are currently in debt with micro-finance institutions, and even more are indebted to other, private creditors. Citizens' National ID cards are often used as collateral when pawning or borrowing money, stripping many some of these eligible voters of their right to vote and negatively affecting the results of the election.

"To be able to borrow money from others, most Cambodian people have to use their land titles, National ID cards, family book or other legal documents," Ley said. "This will seriously affect these eligible voters who now do not have a National ID card to cast their ballots. Though micro-finance institutions do not accept the National ID card (as collateral), many other private creditors do."

The NEC confirmed to VOD that those who had already registered and lost their National ID card would still be able to cast a ballot in the upcoming National Assembly Election. However, the NEC requires those who have lost their ID card to apply for a certificate of identity at their Commune or Sangkat and to include two passport-size photos and two referees.

However, interviews with eligible voters appear to confirm the trend identified by IRI, that lack of a National ID card is a potential obstacle for eligible voters, leading some of them to lose their right to vote. The IRI survey found that 15 percent of eligible voters who failed to cast their ballots did not have sufficient documents or a certificate of identity.

Even though the NEC has already developed new procedures for producing certificates of identity for eligible voters, the process is still complicated, and the responsible officials have been accused of operating in a politically partisan manner.

Mismanagement of Voter Registration Data

Mismanagement of voter registration data is another part of this report. Eligible voters believe it will likely become the second biggest obstacle, following voter registration, in which eligible voters were discouraged from showing up during polling. The mismanagement of voter registration data hindered eligible voters from casting their ballots either because their names had been removed from the voter list or sometimes because they were listed as the incorrect gender.

A 2013 research report by the Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL) explained that, in accordance with a research study on voter lists in Sangkat Boeung Tumpun, Khan Meanchey and Phnom Penh, there were 127 duplicated names of 4,178 eligible voters registered in an official Sangkat voter lists from 2011 (which is equal to 254 names). Another study was conducted in 2012 on the same voter lists and found that they contained only 38 duplicated names (which is equal 76 names).

In addition, the Second Deputy of the Commune Council of Sangkat Russey Keo Chan Samnang provided similar evidence. She confirmed that the factors that could cause eligible voters to lose their rights included misspelling of their names and incorrect listing of gender or date of birth.

"Incorrect gender is another obstacle," she said. "For example, it is male but we recorded it as female and we always modify it every year. And we always adjust his name and gender, but when the list was sent back, it was still incorrect. Misspelling the name is also a problem. Even though NEC clearly guided that those who have that problem would be allowed to vote, some polling stations would not allow that."

Another voter raised similar reasons, telling VOD he could not cast a ballot in 2012. A 32-year-old vendor Mr. Meng Vuthy of Trapaing Anchanh village, Sangkat Trapaing Krasaing, Khan Porsenchey confirmed that in 2012 he registered his name for the Commune/Sangkat Council Election, but he could not find his name on the voter list on the polling day.

"I could not cast my ballot since I was not able to find my name on the voters' lists. I looked for my name in several

polling stations but I still could not find it,” he said.

In 2013, Vuthy again did not have a chance to cast his ballot. He said that he had not been clearly aware of the registration and verification of voters in the new place where he had just resided.

“This year I did not register or verify my name in the voter list since I have just moved to live in a new place, and village chief did not inform me about that issue,” he said.

Ms. Pich Sreypeuv, 30, is a garment worker from Trapaing Anchanh village, Sangkat Trapaing Krasaing, Khan Porsenchey, a community where people evicted from their homes were sent. Sreypeuv did not register her name in this new village, and because of this she would have to return to vote in Sangkat Phnom Penh Thmey, where she was registered previously. She mentioned the difficulty in reviewing her name on the voter lists because her name was moved to a new polling station.

“It is really difficult since my name was sent to another district. I have to vote at Samrong Andet polling station, but I found my name at Kouk Khleang, which is located in Phnom Penh Themy and different district,” she said.

In collaboration with the National Democratic Institution (NDI), the Neutral and Impartial Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (NICFEC) issued a report on the verification of voter lists. The study looked into the initial voter lists obtained from the Commune or Sangkat Councils and the NEC and it found 16 cases in eight polling stations different from each other. The verification of voter lists was covered in 134 polling stations in 111 communes or Sangkats of 18 provinces and the capital. Two main causes of irregularities were identified.

The first one was that initial voter lists obtained from the NEC were different from the lists obtained from the communes and Sangkats. The difference could also be due to the fact that people belonging to the duplicated names had moved their residency or polling station.

The second irregularity was associated with technical issue committed by the NEC. Names in the initial voter lists provided by the communes and Sangkats were removed for several reasons, while NEC did not do so.

NICFEC Election Monitor Mr. Keo Darith claimed that in accordance with his investigation, some irregularities have existed at local level since the start of voter registration. If the NEC does not take high consideration on this issue, he warned, the upcoming election process is unlikely to be independent, neutral and impartial as stated in the law.

“NEC officials should participate in the process of registra-

tion and verification of voter lists,” he said. “If we just allow the commune clerks or Commune or Sangkat Councils to take that responsibility, and the NEC, who is a neutral body, does not monitor or audit the lists, irregularities will still exist that make more troubles for eligible voters.”

In April 2013, NDI released its survey report on the amendment of the 2012 voter lists. Eleven percent of the eligible voters who already registered for voting could not find their name in the voters’ lists, according to the report.

An independent body and election monitor, COMFREL, also identified many irregularities and technical issues committed by the NEC from one election to another associated with compilation of voter registration data.

The report explained that during the Commune and Sangkat Council election in 2012, 1.5 million eligible voters could not find their names on the voter lists. In the fifth National Assembly election in 2013, COMFREL found that 13.5 percent of eligible voters — or 1.25 million voters — could not find their name on the polling day.

Nevertheless, some election monitors said that there will be some mechanisms to help voters in the fifth National Assembly election.

Chairman of COMFREL’s Board of Directors Mr. Thun Saray told VOD: “It would be great if the registration procedure could be made at the village level. It is our suggestion for the NEC. We already confirmed that it would have an impact on the neutrality of the NEC. We want changes. Invalid names or missing names is still a chronic issue. On the polling day, the names of eligible voters were misspelled or removed. That is a problem, and NEC must accept it.”

Civil society organizations (CSOs) emphasized the importance of NEC

reforming the voter lists. However, the NEC’s stance is that it is not necessary to reform the voter lists but to amend the Law on Election of Members of National Assembly.

Chairman of the NEC Mr. Im Sousdey said in the press conference in May 2013 that NEC is implementing the procedures stated in the election law. He confirmed that if CSOs or political parties wanted more than this, they should submit their concerns and suggests to the National Assembly for amendment.

“The NEC does not have the authority to ask the Constitutional Council of Cambodia to explain it,” he said. “Only President of the National Assembly, Senate or Parliamentary Members can appeal for explanation. That is why we want those who are eligible to appeal for explanation. We also want to be clear about that. We have worked on the electoral system since 1993 and everything has stayed the same.”

Just one day after the reaction from the NEC on the recom-

“If ... the NEC, who is a neutral body, does not monitor or audit the [voter] lists, irregularities will still exist that make more troubles for eligible voters.”

**MR. KEO DARITH,
ELECTION MONITOR**

mentation of CSOs for voter list reforms, Prime Minister Hun Sen also reacted to the report.

In an inauguration of National Road 44 in Kampong Speu Province on May 6, 2013, Prime Minister Hun Sen criticized the group of CSOs for providing too many recommendations to the NEC, stating that it violated the authority of the National Assembly, which passed the law for the NEC to enforce.

“Have you read the law before providing recommendation of displaying the voter lists at an early stage? The NEC has its own procedures, and it abides by all those procedures: What, when and how to implement it,” the prime minister said. “Does the recommendation from CSOs have more authority than the National Assembly?”

As it is implemented, the response is not far different from NEC Chairperson Im Soudy. Citing the Law on Election of Members of National Assembly and its amendments has become a standard response from the NEC. NEC’s work and procedures are completely based on the election law.

The Law on Elections

The National Assembly passed the Law on Election of Members of National Assembly on Dec. 19, 1997. Article 13 of Chapter III states that the National Election Committee shall have a mixed composition including Khmer dignitaries, Khmer citizens who are eligible to vote, a representative from the political parties who have seats in the National Assembly, an official from Ministry of Interior, and representatives from national and international organizations. However, in the amendments to the law passed on May 11, 2011 by the National Assembly, the composition of NEC is narrowed, with the representatives from political parties and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are excluded by the new composition.

The Law on Election of Members of National Assembly, originally passed on Dec. 19, 1997, has already been amended four times. The first time was on Aug. 21, 2002; the second one was on May 25, 2006; the third one was on Dec. 15, 2006; and the fourth one was on May 11, 2011.

Article 1 of this law states that the purpose of the law is to establish the electoral organs, procedures and conduct of the election of members of the National Assembly of the Kingdom of Cambodia. The law was amended on Article 109, Article 131 and Article 133.

Article 109 states that the Commune and Sangkat Election Commissions shall collect the minutes and other documents from all Polling Station Commissions and make a report of consolidated election results in their commune or Sangkat. If there are complaints against the election re-

sults or irregularities at any polling station, the Commune or Sangkat Election Commission shall immediately hold a decision-making meeting open to the public to solve those complaints. In case a complainant is not satisfied with the Commune or Sangkat Commission’s decision, he or she or his or her representative has the right to immediately appeal to the Provincial or Municipal Election Commission. In a separate case, Article 131 and Article 133 regulate broadcasting and propaganda.

As noted, the amendment of the election law was made in accordance with suggestions from the NEC so that NEC could work easier. However, some believe that the amendment of this law is not useful and does not protect the best interests of Cambodian citizens.

In addition to what is mentioned above, the date of polling is another potential obstacle for eligible voters.

Mr. Savuth, 35, originally a farmer from Kampong Cham Province, is currently working in Phnom Penh as a *motodop* driver, bringing in additional income to supplement his agricultural work. Savuth said the polling day has sometimes fallen during the rainy season, which could disturb agricultural activities and increase the risk of voters encountering bad weather.

“I think that the rainy season is the busiest season for farmers since we need to farm,” he said. “In addition, it could be raining during the rainy season and it is difficult for us to travel to the polling station.”

He suggested that the polling should be held during the dry season, lessening its impact on agricultural activities and the chances of encountering bad weather.

“I think we should opt for a good time that will be convenient and when farmers are not busy. I think it is good. The dry season is a good choice since there is no rain or storms.”

The first National Election in Cambodia was organized and administered by UNTAC on May 23, 1993 following the Paris Peace Accords on Oct. 23, 1991. The assigned polling day was very convenient for farmers because they already finished their harvesting activities and they had enough time to go vote, and because there was not any disturbance from weather. As a result, 89.56 percent of eligible voters in the voter lists showed up during the polling.

However, the election law does not clearly state the exact date of polling. Article 3 states that the date of polling shall be determined and announced by the Prime Minister upon the request of Minister of Interior.

For the fifth national assembly election in 2013, the NEC in 2012 issued 15 measures to implement before and during registration and verification of voter lists in order to ensure

“The NEC has its own procedures, and it abides by all those procedures: What, when and how to implement it. Does the recommendation from CSOs have more authority than the National Assembly?”

PRIME MINISTER HUN SEN

that the election could proceed in an effective, better, accurate, just and transparent manner.

In collaboration with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the NEC produced a video spot on the procedures and practices of registering and verifying voter lists. The video spot was broadcast and distributed to commune and Sangkat councils.

The NEC invited national and international NGOs to participate in educating eligible voters and the public to register and verify the voter lists in 2012 and the subsequent year.

NEC uploaded the latest voter lists to its website (www.voterlist.gov.kh) so that it would be convenient for eligible voters to find and verify their name. Five telephone hot lines were installed in the secretariats of Provincial Election Committees and other provincial departments so that eligible voters could make call to ask about their name. In addition, NEC officials and the NEC secretary-general conducted field visits to some communes and Sangkats in order to monitor and verify the work of commune clerks.

Distributing the election information card is a crucial step that NEC has implemented so far. The NEC always claimed that the information card would guide eligible voters to find their polling station or their waiting number.

As a result, in the lead-up to the fifth National Assembly election, from June 1–6, 2013, the NEC produced almost 10 million cards (9,675,453 cards) and distributed more than 2 million cards (2,214,943 cards) which is equal to just above

23 percent of the eligible voters. The NEC would be responsible for distributing the rest of the cards to eligible voters.

However, some community forum participants expressed confusion about the card. They thought that the information card was an important document that they would be able to use for casting their ballot. It is still questioned whether other procedures implemented by NEC are more effective while some procedures and the way of distributing information confused eligible voters.

Mr. Ley, the social researcher, explained that, as of today, Cambodia has not had a standard monitoring and evaluation system to assess whether the election procedures could be held in a good, free, fair, just and neutral environment. He said that it is still hard to say whether Cambodia should pass a law punishing election officials who work in partisan manner. He suggested that a monitoring and evaluation system should be established and implemented by NGOs and political parties. A reform must take place in the NEC or otherwise NEC itself will be pressured by politicians, he said, and Cambodian citizens who wish to elect their representatives will still face difficulties and lose their rights to vote.

Additional recommendations uncovered by this investigative report are that the NEC should collect concerns and obstacles identified by citizens and produce a report to submit to the National Assembly for consideration. Likewise, the NEC should encourage politicians and the public to discuss electoral system reform and to amend some articles of Law on Election of Members of the National Assembly. ■

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