

Case Study Cambodia:

Voluntary Weapons Collection from the Civilian Population

Thirty years of violent civil war left Cambodia with anywhere from 500,000 to more than a million SALW. Many of the weapons circulating in the country are in civilian hands and have resulted in a society plagued by a high number of shooting deaths, kidnapping, and other gun-related crimes. The Cambodian government began a weapons buy-back and confiscation program in August 1998 that evolved into a national weapons collection program that is presently on-going and has integrated with a broader EU supported effort. Previous weapons collection programs occurred in 1989 and 1993 with little success, and offered incentives including a chicken in exchange for information and 100 kilos of rice for a Kalashnikov.

The transition from a post conflict society to a culture of sustainable peace, security and development is hampered by the possession of illegal weapons and explosives by the civilian population. EU ASAC has supported the weapon collection efforts of the Royal Government of Cambodia through a strategy called „Weapons for Development“ (WfD) combined with a police capacity building project to provide security after people turned in their weapons and to improve police-community relations.

In 1998 the Working Group for Weapons Reduction (WGWR) in Cambodia, a then coalition of local and international NGOs including Star Kampuchea, Nonviolence International Southeast Asia and the Quakers, began advocating publicly for the government to take action on disarmament and small arms control.

By request of the Government of Cambodia, the European Union (EU) had decided to provide support to the Cambodian government for reforming the national weapons law, improving record keeping and stockpile management, raising public awareness on SALW issues and collecting and destroying weapons. The WGWR did not participate directly in the SALW collection and destruction component of the EU supported program, but its advocacy is very important for obtaining the attention of the international community as well as providing preliminary baseline data regarding the SALW problem in Cambodia.

Weapons for Development

Out of fear of creating a black market through a cash or voucher exchange scheme, and the recent achievements of WfD-style interventions in Mali and Albania under the United Nations Development Program, the EU-ASAC officials in Cambodia and the national authorities decided to implement a WfD pilot project in 2 provinces selected because of their history of armed conflict. The three overriding goals of the endeavor were to

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- 1) Improve physical security.
- 2) Raise public awareness about the risks posed by weapons.
- 3) Provide for greater visibility and mobility of police.

In 2001 -2002 in Snuol District, Kratie Province and Bakan District, Pursat Province, EU ASAC implemented these pilot projects using community-owned development incentives such as water wells and schools to encourage the voluntary hand-in of weapons. Seven smaller pilot projects were initiated in other provinces. The two major projects involved advocacy and awareness; community involvement in deciding the collective rewards for disarmament in the form of development projects; improving capacity of local authorities; and weapons collection and public destruction. The minor projects only dealt with public awareness raising and SALW collection.

Police Support

Increasing local confidence in the ability of the security forces is essential. EU ASAC has provided technical support and good governance and human rights training to local police forces and income-generation training to their families to help build this confidence.

By the end of 2002 EU ASAC had brought together representatives from the Training Department of the National Police, the Working Group for Weapons Reduction and national human rights NGOs to set up a training curriculum for the commune police officers to improve the relations between police and the community and to draft a police training manual.

In 2003, a nationwide police community relations training curriculum has been implemented. The cooperation between the Cambodian Ministry of Interior and Cambodian NGOs during the training made this programme unique in Cambodia. After the national elections the same year, police in the provinces where EU ASAC supported weapons collection projects were taking place participated in a two-week training based on this curriculum. These training manuals are now used by the Training Department of the National Police in the training of new policemen.

Local NGO Participation

NGOs bid to carry out different parts of the project. The Cambodian Institute for Human Rights carried out public awareness activities regarding the weapons collection effort as well as the dangers of domestic weapons ownership. The Partnership for Development helped organize Village Development Communities who then chose the development projects they planned to pursue in one province while in another a quasi-governmental provincial development committee fulfilled the same task. In all the participating communities received 60 wells, five school buildings, latrines and health centers for the weapons turned in. This process lasted three months in each of the two provinces.

In 2002, 7 local NGOs conducted workshops and provided water wells in return for weapons in the provinces of Pailin, Kampot, Takeo, Kompong Spue, Kompong Cham, Kompong Som and Battambang. Between May 2002 and May 2003, approximately

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1500 weapons were voluntarily handed in to the police by the civil population in the target areas.

In 2003, EU ASAC supported local NGOs to conduct public awareness workshops in nine provinces; Kompong Thom, Kampot, Preah Vihear, Pailin, Battambang, Kompong Cham, Kompong Spue and Kompong Chhnang. When sufficient numbers of weapons were voluntarily handed in to the police, water wells were provided in return.

Mine Awareness

In areas affected by mines and UXO, EU ASAC cooperates with the Cambodian Mine Action Center, which sends representatives to the public awareness workshops to expand the message being disseminated.

Capacity building of the Commune Councils in matters of security and specifically weapons security.

In 2004, in co-operation with the Department for Local Administration, EU ASAC set up a project to train commune councils and provide capacity to work on security and the problems illegal weapons in the community may cause. This complements the police training as both programmes are aimed at improving co-operation between the police, the community and the commune councils.

The Cambodian government claims that with the EU support they were able to increase the number of collected weapons, decrease the number of armed crimes, increase the sense of security and confidence in the police. Weapons handed in to the authorities were destroyed in local Flames of Peace as a symbolic demonstration of the shift to a culture of peace. When the pilot project was concluded in November 2002, 5661 weapons and 18,526 explosives had been voluntarily handed in to the authorities by the 10 target communes.

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For more information on Weapons for Development in Cambodia see:

- <http://www.eu-asac.org/>
- www.wgwr.org
- Johan P. Buwalda. 2002. Report of an evaluation mission in Cambodia: evaluation of the structure, implementation, management and perceived impact of the Weapons for Development projects currently operating in nine provinces under European Union Assistance on Curbing Small Arms in Cambodia. Brussels: European Union.