



Mondulkiri Association of Indigenous People for Development

Inaugural National Assembly (Annual General Meeting)

2nd January 2014

At Pichreada Hotel, Senmonorom, Mondulkiri Province.

REPORT AND MINUTES

The inaugural assembly took place as planned with a total 77 persons present, with 24 members from 4 of the 5 districts with self-help groups (SHGs); and 4 NGO staff, 6 public officials, and 43 other supporters including village and commune chiefs from all the SHG villages.

The opening and closing ceremony was presided over by his Excellency Mr Nharak Chan President of the provincial council of Mondulkiri, pictured right with the newly-elected Board of Directors of MIPAD. H.E Nharak Chan warmly welcomed MIPAD as a new partner in the province on behalf of all authorities to promote and protect indigenous people's interests.



The event started with an address on behalf of Bunong Elders by Ms Nan Samai, who is the leader of the Putaing Bunong Traditional Group that is one of the 5 founder-member SHGs of MIPAD, and whose 12 members performed their traditional dances. The group is now regularly in demand for traditional ceremonies and to entertain visitors, upholding Bunong ancient song and dance, while making new incomes for members.

Executive Director, Mr Chan Kosal and Nomad Consultant/Advisor Mr Sorn Sarun gave a brief summary of the formation of MIPAD leading to today's event. They acknowledged in particular the assistance of ILO and UNESCO through the Creative Industries Support Programme of the Millennium Development Goals Fund (CISP) and from the Kadoorie Charitable Foundation (KCF) enabling them to form and develop self-help groups and community activities. A steering committee oversaw MIPAD's formal registration by the Cambodian Government in November 2012 and the planning up to the General Assembly fully constituting the association under its statute.

The leader of Puham SHG, Mr Iev Sokhueun, gave accounts of what their group and MIPAD meant to them, their families and villages. Mr Moep Chamreun of the Cambodian Indigenous Youth Association (CIYA) welcomed MIPAD and the partnership with CIYA, a membership organization of young indigenous people throughout Cambodia but with strong Mondulkiri Bunong bonds. CIYA with the Mondulkiri Resources and Documentation Centre (MRDC) were actively promoting and protecting indigenous culture, using modern information/communications technology and social media to record and present ancient spoken-only knowledge that is in danger of being lost as modern development and newcomers move in. The MRDC manager, Ms Chey Bunthy, described MRDC's activities including the new accommodation in the centre of Senmonorom. This move is thanks to new funding from the Henrich Böll Foundation and support from [name who give rent-free]. It will be very convenient for visitors and will pave the way for a national indigenous people's cultural centre in Phnom Penh.



Members broke in four groups to contribute to the strategic thinking and planning of MIPAD. Participants considered and presented “what are the main problems in our communities?” and “what solutions and services would we like to see?”



The groups were asked to think about those issues in regard to the main strategic focus of MIPAD which are health, livelihood and culture. Mr Sorn Sarun facilitated their synthesis and assimilation into MIPAD’s plan.

Presentations and discussions were recorded but are only summarized here to give a global view of the main points raised by the participants:

What are the main problems in our communities?

Livelihoods

- Lack of food in most of the communities as for many villages rice production is not sufficient for the whole year.
- Lack of food variety.
- Difficulty to make an income and having enough money was also strongly emphasized.
- Difficulty to find a market for production, as villages are remote, and the inconsistent small market is considered as an important cause of the lack of income.
- Limited access to microfinance at their village.
- General lack of knowledge as many people did not attend school and even if younger generation does go they still drop out of school early.
- Limited technological skills available at the village, especially regarding agriculture like raising animals and growing vegetable. The fact that people live in remote areas is noted as a main cause of this lack of knowledge as information and ideas do not reach the most remote places.

Health

- General lack of hygiene and sanitation in most communities.
- Lack of access to clean water, not enough wells, so villagers use water from the river.
- Sickness especially from diarrhea and malaria.
- Mother and child health is very problematic as people mostly use TBA and traditional medicine and do not go to Health centers.
- Persistent lack of knowledge regarding health factors.

Culture and traditions

- All people present showed great concern regarding the loss of their culture and traditions.
- Traditional clothes not worn any more, traditional houses no longer built, weddings not follow traditions, music and dance not as popular.
- Decrease in ceremonial practices, younger generation do not respect spirits.
- Language lost is also a big concern for people.
- Traditional skills and knowledge not transmitted such as agriculture and construction techniques, handicraft, weaving and using medicinal plants.

What solutions and services would we like to see?

Livelihood

- Strong will to gain new knowledge and that new ideas and technology especially in agriculture.
- Develop water systems for better access to water and sanitation as well as being able to develop irrigation for agriculture to be able to cultivate rice twice a year increasing yields and then income.

- More training about weaving which has shown success in SHGs.

Health

- Raising awareness about health and providing good information regarding available services and their advantages.
- Encouraging the use of clean water and good hygiene to avoid many diseases.
- Providing more education to people about the importance of the use of impregnated mosquito nets

Culture

- Raising awareness about Indigenous People’s culture and traditions, such as dancing music, wearing traditional clothes and organizing ceremonies. To do so people proposed to do more documenting and collecting knowledge related to culture and traditions.
- Find people who have real and good knowledge about traditional medicine and then document this knowledge and find ways to pass it to new generations.
- Documenting, encouraging use of traditional crop species and rice varieties as a solution to keep local culture.
- Language should be consciously promoted by documenting all stories, songs and music.

Informal time in-between sessions is very important for people to get to know each other, especially as some had to travel a very long way, on foot as well as by motorized transport, and from very early in the day.



After lunch, the most important session took place – to elect and appoint the inaugural Board of Directors, who would set policy and exercise overall control of MIPAD over the next year and beyond. Participants unanimously passed the formal resolution formally adopting the Statute. This provided for 6 representatives from community self-help groups, with two from Nomad RSI and one a Commune Councillor. It was decided that as members were drawn from all 5 districts of the province, that one member should represent each. Therefore the assembly reconvened the same district groups from the morning sessions to serve as formal caucuses to see if each could reach consensus on the best member to represent them. The groups were then tasked with also nominating a second choice representative, with the proviso that their team should consist of one woman and one man.

The caucuses nominated three men and one woman as their first choices. However, as MIPAD is committed to gender parity, the plenary was invited to supplement this arrangement. One constituent district, Pichreada, could not attend the Assembly, with Busra Weavers Handicraft Group’s, Ms Ms Roern Heng, a leading active member of the MIPAD steering committee. Accordingly, subject to her agreement, Heng was elected unanimously to the Board. The caucuses nominated three women as their second choice, so one of these could join the board as sixth member and achieve parity. The three women gave short personal presentations of their credentials and after very close voting, Ms Liv Thida was elected. The other two candidates, plus a male member from Putaing were invited to act as reserve Board members, and Pichreada will be asked to nominate its reserve member to work with Heng.



Participants voted to delegate powers to the new Board to consider and invite a Commune Councillor to serve alongside them. They also formally delegated to the Board to make all staff appointments, as well as to invite consultants/advisors. The planned business of the day being completed, the closing ceremony then took place.

Members attended the Nomad RSI office for an evening reception to mark the successful conclusion of the General Assembly and to celebrate the New International Year.

Chan Kosal
Executive Director



Participants to the first MIPAD General Assembly