



សមាគមដើមមេឃដ្ឋិនៃជនពិការ New Horizons Society

Annual Conference - 14-15 February 2009

Report

1 Introduction

NHS was created in 2005 as the federated organisation of self-help groups formed by the development projects of INGO Landmine Disability Support (LMDS). It was formally registered as a local NGO in May 2008; and took over most responsibility for ongoing activities when LMDS funds ended in July 2008. Its interim Governing Council, consisting of 15 senior beneficiaries took over the implementation of an AUSAID Landmine Survivor Fund US\$ 58,397 project for 399 poor disabled people to be completed by \$31,000 March 2009. Once they succeeded in putting that project on track, efforts were devoted to securing new funding to ensure NHS's survival and to completing its own internal legal formalities which required its permanent governance structure and operations to be established. The NHS website, brochure, and other essential arrangements were developed towards the end of 2008. Policies and activities were reviewed in order that full operations could resume as soon as possible, and various papers and proposals to donors were compiled and issued.



Child Advocacy Group Members form a Guard-of-Honour to welcome distinguished guests and delegates to the Annual Conference held at the NHS HQ.

The funding challenge, though formidable for any newly localised NGO, has been met by a first grant from "Stepsafe", which enabled NHS to retain its HQ and Multi-Purpose Centre in Kampong Chhnang for 6 months from 1 January. It had faced closure in December. That would have ended computer and other training classes, clinics, sports, etc. plus moving out all assets.

The various legalities required NHS to hold an annual conference, attended by delegates from all participating self-help groups, with proceedings to be conducted to transact business for its full transition from its interim structure to a permanent one with new or re-appointed officers.

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On the eve of the conference, “Maagdenhuis”, a Dutch NGO, notified NHS that it too would allocate \$12,000, to go with the funds from Stepsafe to help safeguard NHS’s immediate future with the prospect of more funds later.

Conference Preparations

The interim Governing Council at its meeting in December appointed four district planning sub-committees. They organized their own district’s participation in the event. They had to work in a way that would minimize disruption to the AUSAID-LSAF project which has a strict non-extendable completion date of 31 March. As the two remaining “LMDS” part-time employees had decided not to work beyond the completion of the AUSAID-LSAF project, it meant that the organizing committee consisted only of senior beneficiaries, with the assistance of the MoSVY seconded officer. They therefore produced the plan for the two days and made all the arrangements. A final planning meeting/rehearsal was held on 13 February.

As NHS had taken over responsibility for the KC Centre from 1 January, efforts had been made to rejuvenate activities and restore standards, which had run down since the funding crisis of 2008. Stalwarts who had stayed loyal to their post, the housekeeper and guard, were rewarded with promotion and new NHS uniforms. “Hun” pictured below left is now the Centre Supervisor, as she is responsible for cleaning, catering, and supporting sports and social activities. She has also featured in publicity releases of partner local organisation CNVLD and its website, extracts of which are reproduced on the NHS website. www.newhorizonsunlimited.org

The “CNVLD” wheelchair racer passing on their congratulations to NHS before distinguished guests. This was one of eight good-will messages read out from close partners and



Day One Morning

Delegates began to arrive at first light to register. Although many had to travel over 70 km’s along dusty dirt roads on open motor-cycle taxis, all 200 arrived ready to start the Opening Ceremony at 9.00 am. The start was delayed for the NHS Chairman but when he failed to arrive or send a message, his deputy took his place giving the welcome and overview on NHS’s activities. The Director of the Province’s Social Affairs Department presided. He gave a very warm encouraging address in which he said that praise and congratulations did not come just from his ministry but from other government departments. The work done since 2003 was regarded as a model of good cost-effective practice in community development, proving that disabled people are successful leaders.

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The Child Advocacy Group presented a drama on the theme of the conference of “Community in our Community” and after the declaration of opening a break and snack was taken.

Next, at a plenary session, each of the four districts gave reports, on the last year, summarising membership of beneficiaries (male/female); self-help groups and villages; progress in improving livelihoods and local advocacy initiatives; training conducted, and relationships with other NGOs and local authorities. Successes and under-achievements were reported. (A separate detailed report will be produced later.) All districts reported on the problems caused by inflation which was over 40% in the last year.



Delegates relaxing after lunch. In the foreground right is the NHS Security Officer who was the Conference Registrar

Day One Afternoon and Evening

After lunch separate break-out sessions were conducted district-by-district to update their “Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats” analysis done every year. The results were then synthesised at a plenary session in to a composite document, which will be written up in a separate report to be reflected in the NHS strategic plan. In general the same situation applies as in previous years that while poverty and vulnerabilities can be overcome, it takes time and continuing levels of external support over many years to consolidate and sustain progress. The NHS structure and method of operation which relies on voluntary senior beneficiaries as peer-to-peer facilitators and mentors (not salaried staff) was proving its ability but nevertheless some “core” running cost as well technical support was still needed. Indeed the delegates unanimously passed the following motion:

“We hereby convey our warmest thanks to Stepsafe, as the principal sponsor of our Annual Conference; to it and to Maagdenhuis for their core-cost support which is enabling us to keep going well in to this year; and to AUSAID and LMDS-UK for their vital past support.”

AUSAID, with the Australian Red Cross, were thanked because of their funding over many years and special support in 2008 in allowing the AUSAID-LSAF project to go in despite the loss of LMDS funding and staff, including allowing senior beneficiaries to take their place. LMDS-UK was also warmly thanked; their good will message appreciated, and through them donors UK-DfiD, Ireland, Princess Diana Fund, and CBMI whose past contributions of resources have been committed to staying at the disposal of NHS and beneficiaries. Although a handover had been agreed to take effect on 1 January, now it was understood the date would be 1 April 2009.

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The annual conference is as much about renewing acquaintances, as well as meeting new friends including those in the new Kampong Tralach target area, as it is about the formal business to be transacted. Given that NHS is very much a grass-roots upward voluntary operation, social activities are also crucial for mutual encouragement and motivation. Therefore good food and hotel accommodation, with entertainment were provided - a treat for these people who seldom if ever enjoy such "luxuries"!



A karaoke competition took place judged by Kosal pictured below, our once former market street-beggar now national singing celebrity on a scholarship to attend music school in Kampot with partner organisation Epic Arts.

Day Two Morning

The NHS Charter and Byelaws were debated, with the most important point whether the original plan to have a tripartite structure should apply, or the normal two-tier one. The members unanimously approved an arrangement where the top managing body, normally referred to as the "Board of Directors" in NGOs in Cambodia, should include both a Governing Council made up mainly of 15-18 senior beneficiaries, and a Board of Trustees as an additional check and balance which is to include foreign and local dignitaries. Full details appear in the NHS Charter and Byelaws.

The district-by-district reports showed that the membership breakdown would suggest 5 places for Tuok Phos, 4 for each of Samakimeanchey and Rolei' bier, with 2 for Kampong Tralach in a 15 person Governing Council. It was decided to proceed on this basis with the three additional places reserved if the male/female composition did not meet the goal of equity. The NHS Charter allows members to choose the method of selection, which may be by caucus where there is genuine consensus, or by election in a secret vote. Both methods were used.

Kampong Tralach selected one man and one woman. Rolei' bier also achieved parity with two men and two women. Touk Phos selected four men and one woman, and Samakimeanchey who should have just four members had a close tie between one man and one woman, both highly regarded throughout the network. Accordingly the conference voted in the plenary session unanimously for one of the three reserve places to be used so as not to disappoint either. This gave an overall male/female breakdown of 11:5; compared to 11:4 on the interim council. However female representation in the membership stood at 40%, therefore the other two places were allocated to additional women members. The 2009 Governing Council consists of 18 Members, 11 men and 7 women. The honorary treasurer and lawyer, ex-officio members, will be re-invited serve.

The New NHS Governing Council held their inaugural meeting and selected Mr Norn Chamrong (Touk Phos) as Chairman, and Ms Ke Tha (Rolei' bier) re-appointed as Secretary. Their appointments were confirmed by the annual conference.

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The conference moved a motion of thanks to Mr Veng Soy (Samakimeanchey) the past Chairman, and other outgoing members of the interim council for their hard work and service.



The conference decided not to consider and issue invitations to Board of Trustee members due to the lack of availability of good Khmer translation. However they approved delegation of powers to the Governing Council subject to reports back through their district representatives.

New Horizons Society Governing Council 2009-10 with Chairman seated centre and Secretary on his left

Community in our Community Awards

The Conference Planning Committee aimed for the conference to be a celebration of the formation of NHS and wished to convey positive images of living with disability, especially on the part of “good neighbours”, who could be ordinary citizens or officials. It was felt that promoting social inclusion would be one of four key messages for 2008-9 in the plan funded mainly by AUSAID-LSAF. This idea was unfamiliar to many as the first time such consideration had been given but to everyone’s surprise, when nominations were made, there were many good people who rendered assistance during hardships and crises. In the end, four men and four women, two from each district were selected as most outstanding, but with messages of thanks to go to all nominees.

Stepsafe Informal Representative, Ms Jen Broadbent, arrived from Australia and Phnom Penh mid-morning to witness proceedings, join the lunch and attend the closing ceremony. Jen also found time to visit one beneficiary’s successful pig enterprise nearby, one of many serving as proof of the impact of Australian Business Volunteer Mr Jon Digges. Jen even taught the children a song and dance which was performed at the closing ceremony.



The Deputy Provincial Governor presided over the closing ceremony, very kindly taking time out from his normal Sunday relaxation, and conveyed the good will of the Provincial Governor and colleagues in all provincial departments. The Child Advocacy group then acted out another drama on the social inclusion theme. This was followed by Deputy Governor leading the awarding of prizes.

Song’n Dance “Bananas of the World Unite” added joy and laughter, and another English song in the repertoire of NHS Students.

“For better lasting lives and livelihoods of poor mainly disabled people.”

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The event closed on time to allow all participants to go home safely before dark, after Kosal gave his final virtuoso performance, followed by the national anthem.

Kosal singing his special song about how life used to be as a disabled boy before he met LMDS, and Ms Fran Digges and EpicArts, who are sponsoring him to achieve his ambition of a singing career.

Conclusion and Thanks

The conference delegates were extremely happy to have been given this chance to gather again and to renew hopes and plans. As well as donors, Stepsafe, Maagdenhuis, and AUSAID, they are grateful to government authorities, supporters, and sectoral partners.

The conference cost \$2,500*, for two days with 200 delegates, various expenses, one arrival snack, three main meals, a breakfast, evening entertainment, travel and overnight hotel accommodation.

Ms Ke Tha
Secretary

* final figure to be entered when accounts closed.

"For better lasting lives and livelihoods of poor mainly disabled people."