

# Volunteering at grass roots level in Cambodia

## Proposal for UNV by Centre for Advanced Study

### Introduction

The year 2001 has been proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations as the International Year of Volunteers, with the United Nations Volunteer Programme (UNV) designated as the international focal point for preparation for year. The aim of the initiative is to enhance recognition, facilitation, networking and promotion of volunteer service.

UNV -Cambodia has developed the idea of preparing a journalistic publication on Volunteerism at the grass roots level in Cambodia. The aim of the publication is to highlight the process of recuperation of social capital and the (re) appearance of volunteer activities, which is taking place in Cambodia's rural communities. The *wat* (pagoda) and the social structures around it, in many communities, play an important role in the reconstruction of infrastructure (schools, roads) and social services, often drawing on pre-war traditions of mutual help. This process of recovery of social capital, which might be one of the important assets and driving forces for Cambodia's development is not always enough recognised and/or taken into account in the design and implementation of development activities. Therefore, UNV would like in the context of IYV2001 contribute to a major recognition of this important process and the work of volunteers at the grassroots in Cambodia.

UNV has requested the Centre for Advanced Study to conduct a small-scale qualitative study on volunteerism at the grassroots level in Cambodia, and prepare a small publication that is accessible and interesting for a larger public. The study is to consist of several case studies of volunteers in Cambodia and some interviews with a few selected international volunteer organisations and international volunteers.

One of the aims of the publication is to bring this largely unknown aspect of Cambodian society into the open, and gain recognition for the importance of such volunteerism in rural communities.

### Methods

The study will consist of a review of available literature on volunteerism in Cambodia, five case studies of volunteerism at the grass roots level, and several interviews with volunteers (international/Cambodian) working in a more organised setting.

For the five case studies, the following volunteers could be interviewed:

1. Nun in Battambang providing health education to the communities in general and mental support to people with HIV/AIDS and their communities in particular;
2. Elder person (*cah turn* or *acaar*) in Kampong Thorn or Battambang who has revived traditional associations of mutual co-operation that used to exist in pre-war Cambodia; -.;>
3. village chief in Kampong Thorn who is very active in his community;
4. Volunteerism among Cham (near Phnom Penh), or among ethnic minorities (Rattanakiri);
5. One other case (not yet identified).

Interviews with volunteers at the grass roots will focus on the following aspects:

- *Personal history* (youth, experiences, mutual co-operation in pre-war Cambodia, Pol-Pot period, Heng Samrin period, present life, role in community)
- *Volunteering activities* (when and how came the idea, why, what are the activities, for whom, how, when, where, how often, etc.)
- *The effects* (how does it affect the life of the volunteers, what do they get out from it, how does it affect the life of the beneficiaries, how does it affect the "community" at large)

Interviews with members of the communities will focus on the following aspects:

- *History of the community* (where do people come from, what is the history of the village, when did people settle here, what people, etc.)
- *Volunteering activities* (when started, what activities, for whom, how, when, where, how often)
- *Meaning for the beneficiaries* (how does it help them, why, what do they think about it) –*Meaning for the community at large* (do the activities have a larger impact on the
- Community as a whole, does it strengthen a sense of community)

Interviewing national/international volunteers will focus on the following aspects:

- *History of the organisation -Present day activities*
- *The organisation's view on volunteerism -the volunteer's activities and experiences*

### **The product**

The interviews on the five case studies will be taped, transcribed and translated.

The report will be written in a journalistic style, with quotes and pictures of the volunteers interviewed. It will be based on available literature on volunteerism in Cambodia (both at grass roots level and more organised forms of volunteering), the interviews with volunteers and beneficiaries at grassroots level, interviews with international volunteers and background information on a few selected international volunteer organisations, such as the Red Cross.

The publication will have the following outline:

#### I. Introduction

- *Brief overview of available literature on the history of, and present-day volunteering in Cambodia: the importance of religion (the pagoda as centre of the community) will be highlighted.*

#### 2. The history

- *Description of pre-war Cambodian society, Pol Pot period, Vietnamese period; and after UNCTAD, through the eyes and experiences of the volunteers and community members interviewed. Volunteerism will be the red thread (no lengthy historical expositions)*

#### 3. Volunteering at the grass roots level

- *Description of the five case studies: activities and effects as explained by the volunteers and community members including quotes and pictures. The case studies will not be presented separately, but interwoven and organised along common themes.*

#### 4. Organised forms of volunteering in Cambodia

- *Cambodian volunteerism: description of history, activities and effects, including experiences of one or two Cambodian volunteers.*
- *International volunteerism: description of history, activities and effects, including experiences of one or two international volunteers.*

The text for the publication will be reviewed/co-edited by a small committee, in which one or two persons of the UNV office in Cambodia take part.

### **Timeline**

- Preparation case studies: second week of August -Case studies: third and fourth week of August - Transcription/translation tapes: September. -Interviews with "organised" volunteers: September.
- Write up: September/October.
- First draft: First week of October.