



I. Objectives of the Survey:

In our attempt to contribute to a genuine national reconciliation, KID conducted a survey on the experiences of ordinary Cambodians during the Khmer Rouge Regime and their expectations of the upcoming Khmer Rouge Tribunal with **two objectives**:

1. To familiarize six young Program Officers of KID with the experiences, feelings and needs of survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime. Similar to more than 50% of the Cambodian population, all six were born after 1979 and know little of their country's recent history. Facing members of the older generation in a face-to-face interview gave them the opportunity to develop a better understanding of what happened during the 1975 – 1979 period and enabled them to build relationships as one first step towards reconciliation. These six Program Officers – five of them are law graduates and one is a social science graduate – are trained to be monitors of the upcoming KR trial.
2. To familiarize with the survivors' hopes and expectations for the upcoming Khmer Rouge trial in order to prepare an outreach project on the tribunal aiming at building up peoples' awareness of the trial and strengthening the rule of law.

The survey was not conducted by interview experts and did not use professional scientific methods. Therefore the survey and its findings **should not be taken as representative of the Cambodian population as such**, but as limited to the opinions of the respondents.

II. Implementation of the Survey:

536 interviews were conducted in **Phnom Penh** and **ten provinces** between the **16th and 27th August 2004**. The provinces were:

- Kampong Cham
- Kampong Speu
- Kampong Thom
- Kampot
- Kandal
- Kratie
- Prey Veng
- Stung Treng
- Svay Rieng and
- Takeo





In face-to-face interviews we asked **22 questions** to Cambodians of all walk of life **over the age of 30**. These individuals were randomly selected which would reflect a fair representation of Cambodian society. They were illiterates and intellectuals and from all economic classes. We have asked them about their experiences during the Khmer Rouge regime and their expectations of the upcoming Khmer Rouge Tribunal.¹

45 % of the interviewees are women, 55 % men.

The ages range from 30 to 83 years. The average age is 49 years old.

98.9 % of the interviewees were Buddhists.

33.3 % of the respondents are farmers, 13.4 % are civil servants, 12.2 % are teachers and another 12.2% are housewives.

Two-third of the interviewees lived outside Phnom Penh. We did not go to those parts of Cambodia described as “former Khmer Rouge” areas such as Pailin or Anlong Veng but we presume that among the interviewees are some who have been associated with the Khmer Rouge.

1. Responsible Survey Team and Other Interviewers:

1.1. Our “**Core Team**” composed seven members, six Cambodians and one German lawyer. Five members are female and two male. All six Cambodian interviewers have interviewing skills but are not professional interviewers.



Before conducting the interviews, the Core Team was introduced to the phenomenon of “Post Traumatic Stress Disorder” (PTSD) by a Canadian psychologist and was trained in how to react should an interviewee become emotionally unstable or uncontrollable because of intense flashbacks.

Although the Cambodian members of the Core Team are all younger than 24 years old none had difficulties speaking or interacting with interviewees who are not related to them. Nevertheless, in order to make it easier for them to get into the difficult task, the first round of interviews was conducted with **family members**, the second with **acquainted persons** like neighbours or former teachers and the third with **unknown persons**. This was done in order to build up the self-confidence of the Core Team to face strangers on a step-by-step basis.

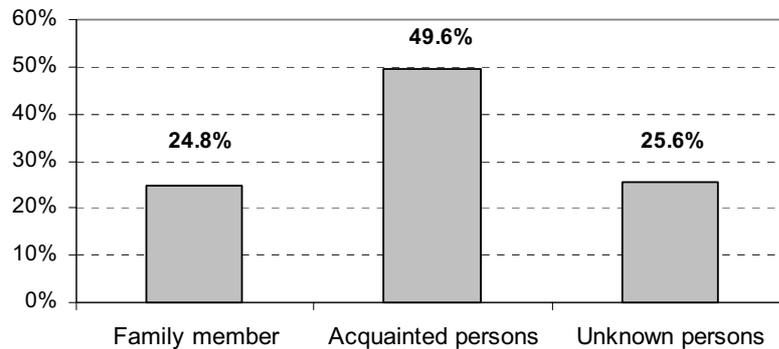
¹ So far only three surveys were conducted:

- Laura McGrew in **1999/2000**, see www.advocacy.net.org/news_view/news_37.html
- The “Center of Social Development” (CSD) in **2000**, see www.online.com.kh/users/csd/
- Suzannah Linton for the “Documentation Center of Cambodia” (DC-Cam) in **2002**, see www.dccam.org/Publication%20and%20research/reconciliation_in_cambodia.htm

In 1997 another survey was conducted by Jaya Ranja and Christine Baton for DC Cam but the results were not published.



Interviewees of the Core Team



The **Core Team** itself conducted **130 interviews** in Phnom Penh, Kampong Cham, Kampong Speu, Kandal and Svay Rieng. This pool of interviews² is most likely of best accuracy because the respondents were step-by-step led through the questionnaire. Difficult questions were carefully explained to them when required. The average time for one interview was approximately 1 ½ hour.

1.2. Beside the Core Team **other interviewers** participated in the survey. Among them were the following:

- KID staff at the headquarter in Phnom Penh
- Heads of KID’s “Community Information Centers” (CIC) in Kampong Cham, Kratie, Stung Treng and Svay Rieng
- KID’s “Partners” of its Grassroots Democracy Project. They are school directors, deputy school directors or directors of local NGOs who are respected members of the community.
- KID’s “Citizen Advisors” of the Ombudsmen Project. They are local, well respected persons who know how to read and write and provide a bridge between the illiterate people and the local authorities. They are trained on human rights, democracy and rule of law by KID and give advice on these topics to the people.
- Former students of KID’s “Critical Legal Thinking” workshops and
- Friends of the Core Team

These helpful supporters interviewed a total of **406 persons**. It cannot be verified if during each of these interviews the respondents were asked face-to-face or if in some cases the questionnaires were just distributed to them to be filled in by them alone. It is also likely that in some cases, villagers sat together with the Partner, the Citizen Advisor, even with Village Chiefs or other higher-ranking persons and answered the questions together, particularly in the case of illiterate respondents.

² See results in detail in the Annex on page 20



2. Design of Questionnaire and Conduct of Interviews:

2.1. Being aware of the risk of a face-to-face interview that interviewees give “acceptable” rather than “true” opinions, the Core Team nevertheless chose the form of personal interviews in order to provide the greatest flexibility in terms of clarifying misunderstandings, meeting emotional needs of stressed interviewees and including illiterate respondents.

The Core Team **rather arbitrarily chose 20 closed and 2 open-ended questions** they personally found interesting to pose to the interviewees. Question 6 (“What did you like most during the Khmer Rouge regime?”) and Question 7 (“What pushed /encouraged you to survive the Khmer Rouge regime?”) were drafted in order to get an idea of any positive aspects of the life under the Khmer Rouge. We believe that even in such hard time, there must have been some reasons to encourage a person to survive or hope for better times – because even the hell is not completely dark, there is always some light. Besides that, we thought it is important for a genuine reconciliation process to examine all aspects of life during these years, not only the bad ones.

2.2. Before each interview the interviewer made sure that the interviewee was older than 30 years. So, all interviewees experienced the Khmer Rouge regime either as children, adolescents or adults.

The interviewer also tried to carefully balance the gender in choosing interviewees.

Before asking the questions the interviewers tried to create an **atmosphere of trust** by firstly introducing themselves and handing over their name cards of KID. Secondly, the interviewees were told that the interview is voluntary. They were asked for about two hours of their time for conducting the interview. Then they were explained the two objectives of the survey and assured that his/her identity will be kept strictly confidential. We did not ask for their names.

In some cases it was helpful to additionally explain **KID’s vision of the project** in more detail:

- Genocide, crimes against humanity and any other gross human rights violations shall never happen again in Cambodia.
- Therefore KID strives for a Cambodia where the rule of law is respected and an independent and impartial judiciary observes the principles of fair trial for all Cambodians.
- KID wishes to contribute to an atmosphere of trust among Cambodians so the trauma of the Pol Pot times can heal and mutual understanding can grow.
- In our future Cambodia all citizen shall enjoy real peace after a national reconciliation process and shall enjoy their human rights for a democratic and better development of the country.

During the interviews the presence of third persons was discouraged. Any condemning reaction on what the interviewees said was avoided. Instead, the interviewers showed empathy and understanding. At all times during the interviews the telephone numbers of two doctors, one of the “Transcultural Psychosocial Organization” (TPO) and one of the “National Centre for Disabled Persons” (NCDP) were kept handy in case of serious signs of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Both doctors were informed about the survey in advance and agreed to be of assistance in case of emergency. Luckily, none of the expected unpleasant situations occurred during the interviews.



3. Experiences of the Core Team:

It was a success for the project that of a total of **636 distributed questionnaires, more than 84% (= 536) were completed and sent back to KID.**

The extensive participation of interviewees and their general attitude in explaining at great length what happened to them shows that the majority of respondents do not want or cannot forget the past. Most of them did not want to be interrupted while answering the questions. Sometimes the interviewers had difficulties moving them to the next questions as they wanted to add more and more to each question and often came back to the previous question. For some the interview could have taken several hours. So, it was helpful to have calculated two hours or more for each interview.

The interviewees rarely showed signs of tiredness or impatience although they were asked as many as 22 questions out of which some were rather hard to answer.

Most of the interviewees seemed to be honest in answering the questions and did not have difficulties to show their real feelings and needs. Only a few interviewees were suspicious about the topic and asked if the interviewer came from a political party. And only a few did not feel safe to talk in the beginning, but quickly gained confidence in the course of the interview as they felt acknowledged by the interviewer.

The Core Team were happy and appreciated the interviewees sharing their darkest experiences. We became curious and wanted to know more. We also became thoughtful about the experiences of our family members we did not know of before.

On the other hand we were sad and touched by the troubling stories we heard directly from survivors for the first time in our lives. Sometimes interviewees cried and required the full attention of the interviewer. This was a personal challenge for all interviewers. Yet, the remaining feeling is the Core Team's self-confidence in talking frankly to people about the Khmer Rouge regime and feeling safely to ask intimate questions.

We learned to connect and adapt to very different types of personalities.

III. Most Important Results of the Survey:

In KID's view, **the most important findings** to come out of this research are as follows:

- 1. The vast majority of the Cambodians who participated still think about the Khmer Rouge years (89.1 %).**

