

Joanna Kyriazis
Final Summer Internship Report

I spent this summer working as a legal intern for the USAID Cambodia Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise Project whose mandate is “to promote market development, resource management and better governance”(<http://www.cambodiamsme.org/>). My supervising lawyer was named Paul Dodds, a U.S. lawyer who has been working as a legal advisor for development projects abroad for many years.

My first project was to create a legal rights and obligations handbook for value chain clients transporting farmed fish, swine, resin and honey, and a brief report on lessons learned with recommendations. Much of the project’s work is with small farmers. The Cambodian agricultural sector cannot compete with its Thai and Vietnamese neighbours because corrupt government officials continually impose illegal unofficial transport fees, making animal trade a highly unprofitable business. For this project, I compiled all applicable legal acts, navigating Cambodian’s foreign, inaccessible and highly incomplete legal system with some help from my Khmer colleagues.

My Cambodian project partner and I then traveled throughout Phnom Penh and to some of the provinces (rural areas), interviewing government officials, animal traders, slaughterhouse operators, international professionals, etc. This exercise was intended to help us map the process of animal transport, patterns of compliance, illegal activity in the public and private sectors, and the general understanding of the law as we traveled further away from the capital city.

After collecting our first round of information, my colleague and I discovered that a complete handbook of clear rules and regulations was next to impossible; the law had simply not been written and the accepted customary practices were not something we wanted to promote. Therefore, we redefined our scope of work, in hopes of being able to use the valuable research we had done to serve more realistic purposes.

Eventually, we decided that my colleague and I were in a very unique position and could gather some extremely useful information. He had a national legal education and could speak the national language, I had an international legal education and could speak one of the most widely used international languages, and we had ample time and funding. We decided to continue with the research we had started, but instead of merely looking into current practices, we wanted to learn about private and public opinions of the system and use these perspectives to compile a report of legal recommendations. Aside from individual field interviews, I also organized two large conferences where representatives from different provinces assembled to share their knowledge, experience, and ideas about animal transport law. These went very smoothly and were incredibly effective, helping us to gather a lot of information efficiently and to conduct some comparative analysis across the provinces.

Currently, the FAO is working closely with the Cambodian Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries in the drafting of an overarching animal health and production law, so it provided a timely opportunity to send in our recommendations. Furthermore, USAID legal advisors often collaborate with other donor organizations like the FAO, so there was much communication between my organization and the individuals most active in the drafting and decision-making process.

My final report explored the legal rights and obligations of value chain clients transporting animals within and across provinces, with a particular focus on swine trade. It outlined legal, administrative and economic deficiencies in the current system and presents a set of legal and systemic recommendations

to further develop animal transport regulations and ensure compliance with existing regulations. The recommendations were based on academic research, field interviews, and comparative analysis of animal transport regulations in more developed nations as well as Cambodia's more immediate neighbours (where possible). They were to work to improve the competitiveness of Cambodia's agricultural sector, and public health and environmental impact effectiveness.

Finally, alongside my main project, I was also able to assist with Cambodia MSME's initiative to promote legal transparency. They are currently working to pass a Sub-Decree (lower level law) on a "Rule on Rules". While I was there we hosted a conference with the public and private sectors to test ideas such as public participation in law-making and requiring the government to make laws available online.

All in all, working in a developing nation was extremely challenging—especially as a legal intern in a country that has not enjoyed a history of transparent and democratic governance. The differences in culture, language and approach were very interesting; when we wanted to use bold criticism as an instrument for change, they wanted subtle, suggestive nudges. However, in a country like Cambodia there is a lot of work to be done, so you are granted a substantial amount of respect and responsibility and you can make some very significant contributions. I was also fortunate enough to work with some of the most educated, intelligent, well-trained locals, as well as a collection of outstanding international experts. I learned and laughed a lot both in the office and in the field, and the people I met through my internship were the most compassionate and inspiring individuals I encountered over the entire trip.

