

Tyrone W. Siren
Report for Scott Kloeck-Jenson Global Studies International Internship Grant
9-17-03

Report

I was originally given the Scott Kloeck-Jenson Global Studies International Internship Grant to intern and conduct research with the Center for Social Development (CSD) in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. CSD invited me to spend three months conducting a national public opinion survey on the rapid development of the gambling industry in Cambodia. However, Cambodian national politics got in the way of a productive summer of working with this organization.

Although Cambodia's political situation has stabilized in recent years, the national elections on July 27, 2003, which would lead to the formation of a new coalition government, created anxiety not only among citizens but among government institutions and international organizations. Due to the possibility of political instability, Cambodia's government institutions and international organizations ground put most of their work on hold. Therefore, my original proposal became impossible. In fact, CSD had little work for me to do because they were not actively developing or working on any projects until after the elections. Although frustrating at first, I found another avenue to pursue.

After a couple of weeks of doing very little for CSD, I went to visit an archeology professor, Dougal O'Reilly, at the Royal University of Fine Arts. I had been told by colleagues that Dr. O'Reilly was starting an NGO that would attempt to combat the destructive looting and trading in ancient Cambodian artifacts. Because much of the looting and trading take place in the region where I do PhD research—Cambodia's Northwest—I am familiar with the social and economic implications of the trade.

Tyrone W. Siren

Looting in Cambodia's Northwest (a region famous for its Angkor Wat temples and other ancient civilizations), in my opinion, is second in economic importance only to the casinos in the region, the main focus of my dissertation research. Since I am very familiar and concerned with the situation, Dr. O'Reilly asked if I would like to contribute to his nascent NGO by writing a short description of my past findings in the region as well as some possible recommendations for ways to educate the local population about the cultural and economic importance of preserving its cultural heritage.

At this time (end of June), I made a decision to leave my internship at CSD to work with Action Against the Antiquities Trade (AAAT). I chose to do this because I felt I could better contribute to Cambodian society and the protection of its cultural heritage—a human and cultural right—while also gaining the invaluable experience of learning how NGOs are built from the ground up. Therefore, I began working fulltime with AAAT in late June, and I have decided to continue working with them until late October.

I am contributing to AAAT on two levels: 1) writing a summary of the social conditions which lead to antiquities looting and trading, and 2) on a business and organizational level.

The following is a summary of the recommendations I am making to AAAT:

- To facilitate cultural and intellectual exchange between AAAD and the communities located in culturally rich areas where looting is common. AAAD will recognize the knowledge that local residents have about the archeological site, and AAAD will share archeological research findings with the community.
- To learn how communities interact with the archeology sites, including the meanings they attach to them, and how they economically benefit from it through non-legal trade in its artifacts.
- To work with local community leaders to create awareness among residents about the archeological richness of their region and to help create locally based

programs that allow residents to economically and culturally benefit from the region's heritage without harming it.

I am also learning about the "business" and organizational structures of NGOs, which include obtaining tax exemptions from the IRS which will allow US donors to make tax free donations; being officially recognized as an official NGO by the Cambodian government; setting up a board of directors; and creating national and international media image.

Although my summer took an unexpected turn, it turned out to be a highly productive and enriching experience for me, which has contributed not only to my dissertation project (the changing political economy of Cambodia) but to my general understanding of how the global political economy of Non-Governmental Organizations function.