**Loss of land and livelihoods caused by sand dredging in Dak Por village, Takeo province**

In Dak Por village, Boeng Tranh Khang Tboung Commune, Samraong District, Takeo Province, the community, comprised of approximately 470 families, has occupied the land, situated near to the Slakuo River, for several decades. Even during the Khmer Rouge regime, the villagers remained in Dak Por, although at that time their lands were used by the regime as part of its land policy. After 1979, the villagers once again began farming cucumber, cassava, potatoes and other vegetables on the land along the Slakuo River. Although the land along the river where they farm is state-owned, being in such close proximity to the river, up until 2013 the community had never faced any problems regarding their farmland before.

Across from Dak Por village, the company pumps sand from the river in late 2013

In April 2013, the villagers observed that across the river in Rumpeak Pen village, Otdam Soriya commune, Tram Kak district, two bulldozers, three excavators and several trucks, had begun constructing a road from the south of Slakuo bridge to what would later become the Hav Un Sand Pumping Work Site, and then the Slakuo Pumping Work Site. Following the construction of the work site, sand began to be dredged from the river, using excavators and barges. The company operating the work site is Slakuo Sand & Quarry Crushing Ltd., owned by Cambodian Ms. Hav Un. The company claims to have had a license from the government for the duration of its operations, however the villagers have never seen it. The villagers were never consulted with regards to the project, and have never seen nor heard of an environmental impact assessment being conducted.

Once the sand dredging had begun, company representatives, in cooperation with the chief of Dak Por village, began to coerce the villagers into selling their farmland to the company for a low price, by threatening them that if they did not accept, they would get nothing. Approximately 14 of the affected families reluctantly sold their land to the company, fearful of the threats made to them and the visible deterioration that had occurred on the riverbank since the company began dredging the
sand. The rest of the families refused to sell the land, however when they decided to protest against the sand dredging, the village chief threatened the community that the company was well-connected and would bring in military police from Preah Sihanouk province to suppress any such protest activities if they went ahead.

The villagers claim that loss of land along the riverbank was noticeable almost immediately after the sand dredging began. Indeed, when CCHR visited Dak Por village in November 2013 just months after operations had began, riverbank erosion was already evident and was affecting approximately 30 hectares of land. At that time, the community told CCHR they were worried that if the company continued to pump sand in the river, more of the land would be affected, further impacting on their ability to farm that land, which they relied on as a source of income. In June 2016, CCHR visited the village once again - this time the damage to the riverbank was startling with even more land lost.

Prior to the sand dredging in Dak Por village, the community’s livestock relied on the river as a water source, however after the dredging began the impaired water quality as a result of the disruption of the riverbed led to the animals being unable to drink the river water. Subsequently the community has had to water their livestock by using water from the well that the community uses for drinking water. This has decreased the amount of water available to the community, who in turn have had to purchase water from outside to sustain themselves – especially during the dry season when water is more likely to be in short supply – further exacerbating their financial difficulties. In addition, the community reported that the increased turbidity has had a further impact on their livelihoods as their catch of fish had decreased since the sand dredging had begun, which they relied on for a source of food and income. Thus, the sand dredging has impacted upon the community’s rights to water and food.

In early June 2016, a company representative informed the villagers that the company’s license had expired, and it now appears the company is clearing its work site. The villagers want to ensure the company leaves the site, and that the government will not grant further licenses to dredge sand in the Slakuo River, which would create further loss of land and negatively impact on the community.