Mini Report following Round Table Discussion on “Women’s Participation and Land Rights” held in Battambang on 21 February 2013

Executive Summary
This mini report summarizes the issues raised during the Round Table Discussion (the “RTD”) entitled “Women’s Participation and Land Rights,” held on 21 February 2013 in Battambang Province. The event was organized by the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (“CCHR”) under both the Project to Promote Women’s Political Representation in Cambodia and the Land Reform Project.

The objective of the RTD was to bring together various stakeholders, including civil society representatives, political party members, female politicians and representatives of other relevant institutions, in order to discuss the role of women in politics in Cambodia, particularly in relation to land disputes. The RTD further provided female politicians with the opportunity to share the challenges they have faced with regards to political participation and their recommendations for overcoming those challenges. Additionally, political parties were given a forum to discuss their ideas on promoting women’s political participation through the resolution of land conflicts. A total of 47 participants attended the event, including ten representatives from eight non-governmental organizations (“NGOs”) based in Battambang Province, one representative from the Battambang Provincial Department of Women’s Affairs, one representative from the Battambang City Hall, one representative from the Battambang Provincial Department of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction, two representatives from Commune Councils in Battambang and Banteay Meanchey provinces, six representatives from four political parties, nine participants from women’s networks in Battambang Province, 16 community members, and one independent consultant.

Introduction
According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (“FAO”), women constitute over 65% of the farming population in Cambodia and therefore play an essential role in Cambodia’s economy. Despite the importance of women’s empowerment with regards to family life, politics, communities and the country’s overall development, discrimination against women continues to be widespread. As the primary care-givers in the family unit, women are especially vulnerable with regards to land conflicts and the impact of forced evictions affects women particularly hard, especially in communities with high levels of illiteracy, low levels of employment and high numbers of single parent families. Violations of women’s land rights and of their human rights in general have significant effects on the stability of their lives and the lives of their families. However, the majority of individuals who make legal claims through the courts regarding land rights are women, which demonstrates their willingness to participate in the land conflict resolution process.

The RTD comprised of two panel discussions. The first addressed the challenges to women’s political participation and the threats to their land rights. Each panel member gave a short address in
response to a series of questions concerning the resolution of land conflicts and its connection to women’s political participation. The second panel discussion addressed the same topic, and a series of questions were presented to members of the FUNCINPEC party, the Cambodian National Rescue Party, the Nationalist Party, and the Human Rights Party.

Issues Raised and Discussed

Women’s Political Participation and Land – Challenges
The panelists agreed on the value of women’s participation for society, the economy and for development, and their right to political participation as citizens, as well as on the importance of promoting and encouraging women to pursue careers at all political levels and in institutions related to land rights. Land violations constitute a significant problem to women, which motivates them to become politically active and to participate in the resolution process. However, the panelists highlighted several challenges to overcome before women can become fully involved in the resolution of land conflicts:

1. There remains significant discrimination against women stemming from cultural perceptions of the appropriate role for women in society. Cultural and traditional values, which require women to handle a disproportionate amount of housework and be responsible for their family's well-being, as well as a lack of education for men regarding women’s rights, prevent women from actively participating in politics. Moreover, women often do not receive the necessary support from their families, in particular from their husbands.

2. Widespread low levels of education among women can limit their ability to participate in politics. The majority of Cambodian women have little or no knowledge about their country’s history, present political situation or future developments. They have very little access to information about their legal rights in general and land laws in particular, which means they are often not able to defend their rights in an effective way.

3. There is a significant lack of economic support. Women often do not possess the means to travel to various courts or information points and in most instances also have a family to support. In many cases, their primary concern is to provide economic security to their families and this can leave very little time for active political participation.

4. Finally, a general challenge to political participation is the widespread low level of understanding of land rights amongst all citizens. Citizen participation in community trainings that aim to educate people with regards to their land rights is also very limited, often as a result of economic migration.

Women’s Political Participation and Land – Political Party Strategies
Political party representatives agreed on the challenges discussed in the first panel and highlighted the importance of land to women, as it constitutes the basis of their economic survival, as well as the increasing role of women in land issues. A number of representatives mentioned corruption and injustice as the roots of discrimination against women and land violations, and proposed economic improvement as an approach to solving land conflicts and to increase women’s participation in this process. Other representatives proposed mandatory voting as a short term solution and education and higher salaries for public servants as a long term solution preventing land violations.
The panelists further discussed the revision of all land concessions, and an altered use for commune budgets, which would prioritize land conflict resolution, promoting women’s rights and the education of citizens. All panelists agreed on the promotion of women as active participants in politics and their involvement in the resolution of land conflicts.

Recommendations

The following recommendations emerged during the RTD:

- With regard to discrimination against women, the panelists suggested that men should be educated on the subject of women’s rights. Additionally, NGOs and political parties, as well as the Ministry of Women’s affairs, should support women in their efforts to participate in politics and in participating in the resolution of land conflicts, and should aim to increase their representation in the upcoming elections and to advance women in higher positions.
- With regard to women’s low levels of education, the panelists proposed that increased investment in this area is required. Women need to be educated regarding their country’s political situation and regarding land laws, in order to empower them and to enable them to be aware of and to protect their rights. They should also be informed about legal procedures so that they can share their knowledge with other women. Education will help women to protect their rights and land.
- With regard to women’s economic difficulties, economic family support should be provided by the government.
- With regard to citizens’ low levels of knowledge, the panelists highlighted the need to invest in the training of civil servants regarding human and land rights, seeing that they are the ones who design and implement the laws. Citizens then must be informed about their rights in order to understand, advocate and peacefully protect them. Dissemination of information on land laws and land titling needs to be more efficient. Methods of spreading information using television and public information offices in every district were discussed.
- Generally, the environmental, social and economic effects of land concessions should be assessed by holding discussions with citizens and local authorities, to prevent further negative consequences of violations of land rights.
Annex 1

The following organizations attended the Round Table Discussion:

- Amara Organization
- Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of human Rights ("LICADHO")
- Banteay Srey Organization based in Battambang
- Committee for Free and Fair Election in Cambodia ("COMFREL")
- Khmer Youth Association ("KYA")
- Legal Aid of Cambodia ("LAC")
- Development Association Resource Economic ("DARE")
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights ("UN OHCHR")
- Independent Consultant

The following government departments attended the Round Table Discussion:

- Battambang Provincial Department of Women’s Affairs
- Battambang Provincial Department of Land Management Urban Planning and Construction
- Battambang Municipality
- Commune Council in Prek Luong Commune, Ek Phnom district, Battambang
- Commune Council in Banteay Chmar Commune, Thmar Pouk district, Banteay Meancheuy

The following communities attended the Round Table Discussion:

- Land Community in Banteay Meancheuy
  - Chan Kiri Village, Sangkat Poay pet, Poay Pet City,
  - Santepheap Village, Toul Pongro commune, Malai district,
  - Thlok Village, Banteay Chhmar commune, Thma Puok district
- Land Community in Battambang
  - Krapeu Saeseb Village, Boeung Pram Commune, Bavel district.
  - Andong Kanthout, Doun Ba commune, Koas Krala district.
  - Toul Mtes Village, Thipakdei commune, Koas Krala district.
  - Prey Thum Village, Kampong Lpov commune, Samlout district.
  - Samraong Snao Village, Samraong Knong commune, Aek Phnum district.
  - Chhouy Sna Village, Khnach Romeas commune, Bavel district.
- Women’s Network in Wat Kar Commune, Battambang
  - Chrap Krasaing Village, Sangkat Wat Kor, Battambang City
  - Kampong Seima Village, Sangkat Wat Kor, Battambang City
  - Damnak Luong Village, Sangkat Wat Kor, Battambang City
  - Prey Koun Sek Village, Sangkat Ou Char, Battambang City

The following political parties attended the Round Table Discussion:

- FUNCINPEC party
- Human Rights party
- Nationalist party
- National Rescue party