THE CAMBODIAN CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

The Cambodian Center for Human Rights (“CCHR”) is a non-aligned, independent, non-governmental organization (“NGO”) that works to promote and protect human rights – in particular civil and political rights – democracy, and the rule of law in the Kingdom of Cambodia. CCHR’s vision is of a peaceful Cambodia in which all people can enjoy the fundamental human rights to which they are entitled, all are subject to the rule of law without impunity, all are treated equally without discrimination, all are empowered to participate fully in the democratic process, and all can share in the benefits of Cambodia’s sustainable economic development.

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ABOUT THE PROJECT

This booklet is an output of CCHR’s Voices for Gender Equality (“VGE”) Project. The VGE Project was jointly implemented by the Cambodian Center for Independent Media (“CCIM”), the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR), and the Cambodian NGO Committee on CEDAW (“NGO-CEDAW”), together with DanChurchAid (“DCA”). The VGE Project aims to contribute to improved gender equality within government structures and in public life in Cambodia by ensuring that women, girls and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and/or queer (“LGBTIQ”) individuals are empowered to claim their rights and have increased support from authorities and their communities.

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QUERIES AND FEEDBACK

Should you have any questions or require any further information about the booklet, or if you would like to give any feedback, please email CCHR at info@cchrcambodia.org.

This booklet, along with all other publications by CCHR, are available online on the award winning Cambodian Human Rights Portal, www.sithi.org, which is hosted by CCHR.

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ABOUT BOOKLET

This booklet aims to provide its readers with a better understanding of (“LGBTIQ”) community as well as their diverse characteristics, including sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression, and sex characteristics (“SOGIESC”).

The booklet features photos of WHRDs and LGBTIQ activists and outlines their background, their motivation for becoming an activist, the personal and professional challenges they have overcome, what they have done to advance gender equality and LGBTIQ rights, and their achievements.

LGBTIQ individuals in Cambodia are often misunderstood, mistreated, and threatened. Those from rural areas are often more victimized and isolated than those in urban areas. Few safe places or systems exist where members of the LGBTIQ community can get the information that they need on what their rights are, or on how they can advocate for them. No laws exist to protect them or ensure that they are treated the same as other human beings. It is hoped that this booklet will contribute to lessening the discrimination and violence that Cambodian LGBTIQ individuals often face, by raising the general public’s understanding of the difficulties that the LGBTIQ community experiences in Cambodia and encouraging the general public’s involvement on gender equality matters.
Society as a whole need to recognize LGBTIQ people and everyone must be a good citizen in order to have a peaceful society.
Mr. Pheng Sanh, 68, is an employee of the Future Cambodia-ASEAN Youth Group (Cam-ASEAN) and a rainbow scarf weaver. Sanh was born in Prek Bangkong village, Prek Takov commune, Khsach Kandal district, Kandal province. Sanh is the youngest of three children from a middle-class family. Sanh realized his sexual orientation at the age of six. As a child, Sanh only liked to play with boys and play the games the boys liked. Sanh was aware of his sexuality during the time of Democratic Kampuchea. After the genocidal regime ended in 1980, Sanh began cutting his hair short to express his gender identity. Then, in 1982, Sanh came forward to reveal his gender identity openly.

At first, Sanh felt lonely because he did not look like anyone else. But later, in 2002, after a friend introduced him to the Pride Week program, Sanh became a member of the Women's Network for Unity. There, Sanh learned a lot about his rights and realized that he was not alone because there were others like him. In 2007, Sanh became a representative of the Women's Network in his community. In 2011, Sanh became an activist for the Women's Network for Unity. Then, in 2014, Sanh moved from the Women's Network to work in the Rainbow Community of Cambodia. As an LGBTIQ rights activist, Sanh has participated in activities such as the establishment of LGBTIQ communities in some communes in Kandal, Takeo, Prey Veng, Svay Rieng and Kampot provinces. He has also advocated for LGBTIQ people to establish a family recognized by law, facilitated and encouraged 120 LGBTIQ people (60 couples) to live as families, and facilitated the safe house for LGBTIQ people who have been evicted from their homes.

The motivating factors for Sanh to continue as an LGBTIQ activist are his own experiences. He is a victim of rape and has been subjected to social pressure because he is a transgender man and an LGBTIQ person. He has been discriminated against by the public because of his gender identity expression and he knows what it is like to feel very lonely because of the stigma.

Sanh understands gender equality to be the equality of human rights, whether men, women, or LGBTIQ people. Gender equality is equality for all people. Sanh also believes gender equality must exist in society because when a society does not have equality, it will not have peace but be full of disputes, discrimination, and family divisions.
Society should value and respect LGBTIQ groups with a sense of humanity. Knowing yourself, striving toward your goal and building good deeds will make society realize our true value.
Chhoeurng Rachana is a 33-year-old, high school teacher and LGBTIQ activist. Rachana was born in Stoeng village, Svay Chek commune, Thmor Puok district, in Battambang province. Rachana is the second child among three children born into a middle-class family. Starting from a young age, Rachana preferred wearing pants instead of skirts and preferred playing with boys over girls. During grade three, at the age of 8, Rachana started wearing pants to school instead of skirts. At age 12, Rachana started to express his feelings and attractions to different genders. At age 22, Rachana began a romantic relationship with someone of the opposite sex, but they eventually broke up. After breaking up, Rachana began expressing his gender identity in mid-2012 by cutting his hair short and started a romantic heterosexual relationship.

Since the end of 2012, Rachana has been a LGBTIQ activist. At first, Rachana felt uncertain about himself and his gender identity after his heterosexual relationship ended and after engaging in some homosexual activities. But then, Rachana became a volunteer with Rainbow Community Kampuchea Organization (“RoCK”) where he started to understand more about LGBTIQ rights and finally realized his true gender identity. Rachana has continued to do volunteer work because he wants to support LGBTIQ rights within the community.

Rachana wants a systematic change regarding LGBTIQ rights for the next generation. He particularly wants to be a role model to others who have also struggled with homosexuality. Most importantly, Rachana wants to see a society full of diversity. Rachana currently works on many projects on LGBTIQ’s issues such as creating LGBTIQ networks, actively participating in promoting LGBTIQ rights through advocacy with the Ministry of Women’s Affair to recognize that homosexuality is a gender issue that the Ministry should recognize, joining radio talk-shows, and posting videos on social media and Facebook regarding LGBTIQ issues, etc.

Throughout his life, Rachana was discriminated against and verbally attacked for how he dressed in the workplace and for expressing his gender identity. Rachana also faced serious discrimination once he became an LGBTIQ activist. However, Rachana became a LGBTIQ activist because he has faced many obstacles including accepting himself as who he is, discriminatory verbal harassment and gestures in the workplace, and other forms of restrictions in society. Despite these obstacles, Rachana continues to work on promoting LGBTIQ rights throughout Cambodia.
Rachana understands that gender equality, refers to the equality between all human beings and must be respected. Rachana noted that gender equality must exist within a society because while inequality persists, society will remain unjust and other social issues will continue to occur, such as employment discrimination, and targeting for drug consumption. In particular, society has lost valuable human resources due to the reluctance of the LGBTIQ people to work traditional jobs for fear of social discrimination.
be a good and valued person in society who helps others and never does something illegal. If we do not strive for ourselves, who else will?
Reth Bora, 28, works at the Reproductive Health Association Cambodia (RHAC) as a Medical. He is also an actor, singer, and LGBTIQ activist. Bora was born in Thla village, Chroneang commune, Baray district, Kampong Thom province. Bora was the youngest of two siblings from a middle class family. When Bora was about 13 or 14, he started identifying his gender as different from other boys. Between 22 and 23, Bora revealed his gender identity to his community. He faced much criticism from those around him, including his family and friends who showed their feelings through verbal discrimination. His father also continued to encourage him to marry a woman rather than the gender he was attracted to.

In 2013, Bora started working on LTBBIQ issues when a new friend and LGBTIQ activist introduced him to the mission of promoting and educating the LGBTIQ community. At this time, Bora continued to feel pressure from his parents to marry a woman. They believed it would create a better future for him and reduce his loneliness. After meeting the friend working on LGBTIQ issues, Bora became a volunteer at an NGO with his friend. At the beginning, he would just visit and educate the community on general health issues, particularly LGBTIQ individuals' health. Now, Bora participates in many activities as an LGBTIQ activist. He is the national representative of the Chaktomuk network, which produces videos on the experiences of LGBTIQ individuals who have been discriminated against. He advocates, mobilizes, and offers consultation to members on LGBTIQ health, helps others share their personal experiences in LGBTIQ groups, educates LGBTIQ individuals’ parents on how to increase the rights and freedoms of their children in choosing partners and more!

Bora is motivated to continue his work as an LGBTQ activist because he knows what it is like to face obstacles and be bullied because of his gender identity. He was discriminated against and devalued by others, including the police. Bora has overcome a lot to be able to provide support to other LGBTIQ individuals who are facing the same challenges, in an effort to eliminate social discrimination and help LGBTIQ people.

To Bora, gender equality is the equal access to human rights and to a life without discrimination. He adds that gender equality is a key issue to be promoted because everyone who has the same heart and life should not face any form of discrimination. Once there is gender discrimination, it impacts the entire society and the LGBTIQ groups, in particular, will be the victims of many crimes.
Women have to overcome hurdles to achieve their goals and dare to make their own decisions.
Ms. Oum Manith, 42 years old, works as vice president of the Cambodian Food and Service Worker Federation (“CFSWF”). Manith was born in Phan Village, Toul Ampil Commune, Bor Set District, Kampong Speu Province into a poor family with seven siblings, and she is the youngest daughter. Unfortunately, Manith lost her mother during the genocide. Manith's five brothers stayed at a pagoda to get food and shelter, while Manith and her sister went to work to get food and earn some money to continue their study. Manith graduated from high school, but did not pursue a college education due to financial stress.

In 2007, Manith worked at a gas station in Phnom Penh, and in the same year, Manith was elected as a representative of the local union. In 2015, Manith was elected as the national representative and worked at CFSWS. Manith actively contributes to the promotion of workers' rights through the establishment of local and national networks of women workers in various service sectors; providing training for service workers on legal rights and other capacity building; participating in advocacy with relevant institutions and employers; participating in dispute resolution processes between workers and employers, and more. Manith had observed that there have been some positive changes during this time, such as better working conditions for service workers and better compliance with labor laws. Example include maternity leave for service workers, annual health care allowances and leave conditions that comply with labor laws. In addition, Manith has noticed that some of the women workers in the entertainment industry are more confident and courageous this year, because they gathered more than 300 people to assemble and express their needs during the COVID-19 pandemic, when before that entertainment workers would never dare to show up or join in any advocacy activities.

While there have been some positive impacts for service workers resulting from Manith’s activism, Manith has faced many challenges as a woman labor rights activist. These include discrimination from relatives and some community members who think that Manith works against the government or is serving the opposition political party. In addition to discrimination, Manith’s personal security has been threatened, as she has received phone calls with threats that if Manith still continues working to protect labor rights. Although Manith has faced many challenges due to her work as a woman labor rights activist, Manith is still driven to continue this work, and she says her main motivation factors are: 1) a love and satisfaction with the work that she is doing because it helps women and other vulnerable people, 2) the violation of workers’ rights, especially the rights of women workers, continues and it still needs to be addressed or reduced, 3) human beings need to be valued and respected, no matter what kind of worker they are or what kind of work they do, and 4) Manith herself used to be told as a woman she could not do big things. Manith turned this contempt into a motivation to continue her efforts to today.
Manith understands that gender equality means equality between men and women in participating in job opportunities and employment, but Manith raised that in Cambodian society, in practice this does not occur. Manith added that gender equality must exist in order for women to have the opportunity to become leaders and for women's issues to be better understood.
women's opportunities are in their own hands.
Ms. Man Youvariyas, 32, is a member of the Trapeang Sangke Community Committee in Kampot province. Youvariyas was born in Trapeang Sangke village, Trapeang Sangke commune, Teuk Chhou district, Kampot province. Youvariyas is the fourth of seven children. Youvariyas only completed her education up to the third grade due to her family's economic situation. Youvariyas had to work wherever she could, including on fishing boats, to earn extra income to support her family. Despite her challenging upbringing, because of her honesty and willingness to help others, Youvariyas was elected to the Trapeang Sangke Community Committee in 2013 to become one of nine members.

Youvariyas has been working as a woman activist for fishermen's rights and as a natural resource conservationist in Kampot province since 2013. Youvariyas does this because she wants to help fishermen lift themselves out of poverty and protect the mangrove tree areas for future generations. Youvariyas has been involved in a number of activities related to issues in the fishing community and to natural resource conservation in mangrove areas such as: 1) building networks with other institutions and communities; 2) participating in the promotion of fishery rights; 3) raising awareness of the importance of natural resources, and of the laws and principles related to the conservation of natural resources and community fishery rights; 4) encouraging community members to unite to advocate for the protection of conservation areas and to exercise their rights; 5) participating in advocacy against private companies that have received development concession projects that negatively impact natural resource conservation areas and mangrove trees in the Trapeang Sangke fishing community; 6) immediately intervening to prevent activities that cause damage to mangrove trees and other natural resources; 7) submitting petitions to relevant institutions; 8) patrolling to crack down on illegal fishing and mangrove deforestation; and 9) volunteering in ecotourism projects developed by Trapeang Sangke community, to name a few! Youvariyas's personal security has been threatened while patrolling due to criminal activity in these areas and retaliatory attacks by perpetrators of environmental degradation.

Youvariyas's ability to help other fishermen, to protect natural resource conservation areas and to help poor communities motivates Youvariyas to continue working as a woman activist for the protection of fishermen's rights and natural resource conservation in Kampot province. Youvariyas understands that these natural resource areas are very important for the fishermen and for the next generations.

Youvariyas understands that gender equality is the possibility for men and women to access equal opportunities and benefits. For Youvariyas, gender equality should be promoted because when there is discrimination between men and women, the lack of women's participation will result in society losing opportunities for development.
women are pure gold, women can work in society like men, so please do not discriminate against women.
Mrs. Yong Ran, 33, is a farmer and woman land rights activist in her community. Ran was born in Kampong Thmey village, Thmor Da commune, Veal Veng district, Pursat province.

In the beginning, Ran was just an ordinary farmer whose family income depended entirely on growing crops. In 2010, however, Ran’s family, along with more than 100 other families in her community, suffered land grabbing by MDS Thmor Da SDZ. It was then that Ran’s community decided to protest against the company’s activities. Since Ran had been active in the protest, the community decided to choose Ran as a representative to facilitate and lead other land rights activities.

Ran has since been involved in advocacy activities to claim her and her entire community’s land rights, which had been abused. These activities include submitting petitions to relevant ministries and cabinets, peaceful protests, community meetings, and knowledge-sharing from her organizing efforts with her community.

Ran has faced many challenges and sometimes felt no passion to continue her activism. She was discriminated against and isolated by relatives, her right to assembly and peaceful demonstrations has been restricted by local authorities, and she has even faced death threats from the company and legal harassment. She has also been highlighted as a political activist who aims to create unrest in the community. However, Ran always tries to overcome these challenges and continue her activities. As a result of her perseverance, Ran and others in her community have had some success. They have obtained compensation for some victim families, received resolution confirmation from the authorities, and Ran has become a prominent woman land activist in the community.

As a woman land rights activist, Ran understands that gender equality means that men can do the work they want and women can do the same. Gender equality is equality without gender discrimination. Ran adds that gender equality needs to be promoted because women are able to work as well as men. If a society does not promote gender equality, it will be full of injustices, conflict and discrimination.
we must love and value both ourselves and others.
Mr. Yem Sochea, 35, is an LGBTIQ activist working at the Cambodian Men’s Health organization. Sochea was born in Village 3, Sangkat 3, Mittapheap district, Preah Sihanouk province. Sochea is the seventh of nine children from a farming family. When he was a child, Sochea realized he was not like the other boys. He liked to play games the girls liked and enjoyed dressing in girls’ clothing. Although Sochea was aware of his true gender identity early on, he was reluctant to reveal it. It wasn’t until he was 19 that Sochea decided to reveal his identity to his family and friends. After doing so, Sochea faced discrimination from many of them. His family in particular had difficulties accepting his true gender identity.

In 2004, Sochea began volunteering for organizations working on LGBTIQ rights in his community. After many years of working with civil society organizations, Sochea had strengthened his knowledge to become the LGBTIQ activist and role model for the promotion of LGBTIQ rights that he is today. Now, Sochea works on the protection of LGBTIQ rights through initiatives such as: setting up a modeling arts program for LGBTIQ people in the community, setting up training sessions on LGBTIQ rights in the community, establishing a network of 700 members throughout the country which meets monthly or quarterly, and working on campaigns to promote LGBTIQ rights and health. Sochea’s efforts have positively contributed to changing the public perception of LGBTIQ people. Further, he has helped LGBTIQ people better understand their rights, and helped enhance cooperation from authorities on these issues.

Sochea is an LGBTIQ activist because he himself identifies as an LGBTIQ person who has been discriminated against. He continues his work because LGBTIQ people are still being excluded and seen as having less value in society.

To Sochea, gender equality refers to equality regardless of the gender of the individual. Sochea adds that gender equality needs to be promoted because everyone has equal rights in society and there should be no discrimination or exclusion. If a society discriminates against some of its members, that society will not develop and vulnerable groups will not dare express themselves and their desires.
women with disabilities are an indispensable resource for social development.
Mrs. Sor San, 26, is a public servant and activist for women with disabilities. San was born with a congenital physical disability in Kbal Koh village, Koh Dach commune, Muk Kampoul district, Kandal province. San is the second of six children from a poor family. Growing up, San was often depressed and stressed. Her disability, combined with the domestic violence she experienced at home, sometimes made her think about dropping out of school. However, San worked to overcome the problems she faced. In fact, San turned her struggles into the inner motivation she needed to successfully obtain a bachelor's degree.

Now, San is a civil servant on the General Secretariat of the Disability Action Council and a woman activist for the rights of people with disabilities. She works to support, raise awareness and promote their rights. San is a role model for other people with disabilities who struggle in life. San has been involved in social activities on the rights of people with disabilities since she was in school in 2014. San began by volunteering at the Cam-ASEAN Youth’s Future (Cam-ASEAN) and participating in many other social activities. Throughout the years, San continued to obtain new knowledge on the rights and freedoms of people with disabilities and on the legal framework that supports and protects people with disabilities. San has contributed to changing community perception for the respect and non-discrimination of people with disabilities by joining the Women with Disabilities Network, a network organization with a total of 50 members. This network hosts press conferences on the promotion of people with disabilities, creates campaigns to amplify the voices of people with disabilities and advocates with government institutions and civil society organizations on the rights of people with disabilities.

While San has been very successful, San still faces challenges, including: difficulty getting to where she wants to go, discrimination by the community where she lives, isolation from social relationships, lack of access to a wide range of opportunities and to various social activities. Because of these challenges, San continues to be motivated to support the rights of people with disabilities.

San understands that gender equality is equality between men and women, or equality regardless of gender. For San, gender equality needs to exist in society because without it, a society will not benefit from the full participation of everyone, such as LGBTIQ individuals, women and people with disabilities. Furthermore, gender inequality prevents development.
parents and community: please do not discriminate against LGBTIQ people because they are also human beings.
Mr. Boa Suy, 32, works at Men's Health Service Organization and has been an LGBTIQ activist since 2007. Suy was born in Phnom village, Banteayneang commune, Angkor Borey district, Banteay Mean Chey province. Suy is the youngest of five siblings from a middle-class family. At his young age, Suy enjoyed similar activities to the girls around him, such as playing with make-up and dancing. As a child, the majority of his friends were girls. When he reached high school, his family realized his gender identity. With the recognition of his family, Suy revealed his sexuality more clearly to his community.

In the beginning, Suy worked as a volunteer promoting LGBTIQ rights through awareness-raising campaigns in communities and supporting small group activities with NGO networks. After a while, Suy strengthened his personal capacity to participate in social activities more widely and increased his awareness-raising activities on LGBTIQ rights. He contributed to solving common problems that LGBTIQ individuals faced, like evictions from family homes. He also provided material assistance and psychological support to LGBTIQ groups who were facing depression. In addition, Suy networked with communities to disseminate knowledge on LGBTIQ rights, established monthly and quarterly community-based meetings which diverse groups attended - including LGBTIQ people, women and local authorities - to discuss the rights and legal framework related to LGBTIQ people. In his efforts to promote LGBTIQ rights, Suy has been criticized and verbally attacked for who he is and the work he does. In the workplace, he faced increased discrimination when his colleagues became aware of his LGBTIQ activism.

Suy’s motivating factors for being an LGBTIQ activist are his own identity within the LGBTIQ community and the discrimination he has faced because of it. Although Suy has faced many obstacles, Suy continues to work to protect LGBTIQ rights. He wants to be a model for other LGBTIQ people who are facing challenges and want to take part in society.

To Suy, gender equality is equality that people can enjoy without discrimination. Gender equality must exist in society because when a society is unequal, it will be full of discrimination on the basis of gender or status. There will be increased unemployment and insecurity within society leading to slow or stagnant development.
"please, we should all participate in social development to eliminate discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation."
Ms. Sang Seam is a 44-year-old farmer and the head of Anhchanh Rung Agricultural Community. Seam was born in Andoung Meas village, Anhchanh Rung commune, Baribour district, Kampong Chhnang province. Seam was born to a poor, farming family in Kampong Chhnang province. Although she was forced to drop out of school at grade 8 to work to ease the financial burden of her family, she has been a woman human rights defender since 2006. In 2014, Seam also became a female activist defending land rights.

Despite having to earn an income to help sustain her family, Seam took time to engage in several social activities. Seam worked as a volunteer for the Cambodian Center for Study and Development in Agriculture [CEDAC] where she conducted dissemination and education sessions for communities on agriculture and created a money saving system called ‘Money Saving for Yourself.’ Seam continued her work as a volunteer until CEDAC’s project ended. Subsequently, in 2006, with plenty of experience and knowledge in community work, Seam became involved in advocacy with other community members to claim the land rights being violated by powerful individuals.

During her time working on land rights advocacy, Seam performed several activities such as dissemination, sharing and raising awareness about laws pertaining to human rights, environment, and natural resources, setting up small-group meetings in the community to reflect and follow-up on advocacy activities performed by her fellow community members, preventing illegal clearance of land occupied by citizens, and submitting land dispute-related petitions to seek intervention from NGOs and relevant ministries. In addition to these activities, Seam never forgot or gave up her work in the community focusing on women’s rights and farmers’ rights. She made efforts to lobby and create a network, which led to the creation of a community called ‘Anhchanh Rung Agricultural Community.’ This community was registered and legally recognized by the Ministry, comprising of 133 families as members and established to produce high-quality rice seeds for planting; seek markets for exporting the rice production; and collect and maintain the paddy seedlings in warehouses for delivery to other communities.

Meanwhile, Seam faced several issues in her work as an activist. Among other issues, her rights and freedoms were restricted by local authorities, she was highlighted as a political activist; local authorities were not happy with her; and she was scrutinized and regularly threatened with arrest by local authorities, and more. However, Seam continued her activities as usual because she will not stop demanding justice and defending the rights of those violated. She wants to become a role model activist for young generations to follow in her footsteps.
In her opinion, gender equality is the equality between men and women or, in other words, the equal participation of men and women. Gender equality must be absolutely promoted. If a society has prevalent equality, that society will have justice and respect for human rights. But in contrast, if inequality exists in a society, that society will face other issues such as a downturn of economy and anarchy.
whether you are an LGBTIQ person or not, you must respect the code of ethics and not abuse others. Good deeds will yield good results to reduce discrimination.
Mr. Van Sovann, 60, is a transgender man and teacher at the Department of Education in Kampong Chhnang City. He is also a community officer for the women’s football team in Kampong Chhnang province and an LGBTIQ rights activist. Sovann was born in Krous village, Rolea Bier commune, Rolea Bier district, Kampong Chhnang province. Sovann is the youngest of four siblings from a middle-class family. Sovann realized his gender identity by playing games and behaving like the boys as a young child. Sovann himself did not suffer as much criticism or discrimination as other LGBTIQ people.

Sovann has been an LGBTIQ rights activist since 1999. Sovann has continued to work to support LGBTIQ rights because of the hatred, discrimination (in all its forms), and social stigma against LGBTIQ people. Sovann wants to change society’s perception on LGBTIQ people, so that society will view them as human beings with the same rights and freedoms as everyone else. Sovann works to make positive change on LGBTIQ rights, notably by providing education in the school where he works on non-discrimination on the basis of gender identity, by facilitating job search for LGBTIQ people in his community, providing both football material and football training techniques to local girls and LGBTIQ members. Meanwhile, Sovann has been subjected to restrictions on his dress code in the workplace, where he’s been required to dress more according to his gender assigned at birth. Despite this, Sovann continues to work to protect LGBTIQ rights.

To Sovann, gender equality means that regardless of gender, anyone can make their own choices. Sovann adds that gender equality in society must be promoted because if there is a gender divide, there will be challenges to humanity, which will lead to disunity and a lack of social development.
Indigenous women have the right, opportunity and ability to become leaders and to make important decisions in their families, community and society. Indigenous women must be encouraged to participate in all relevant sectors.
Mrs. Fong Chompey, 25, is a Jarai indigenous woman and facilitator for the Cambodian Indigenous Ethnic Minorities Group. She is also a woman indigenous activist and environmental rights activist. Champey was born in Un village, Lum Choar commune, Ou Ya Dav district, Ratanakiri province. She is the youngest of seven siblings from an ethnically Jarai indigenous family. Although Chompey was born to an indigenous, farming family, she focused on her studies and completed high school in her hometown.

Chompey began community work in 2012 as a volunteer, conducting assessments on clean drinking water for a local non-governmental organization. In 2013, Chompey joined a volunteer youth program with the Community Legal Education Center (CLEC) to collect information in local communities. From 2012 to 2014, Chompey also volunteered for Highlanders Association and Cambodia Indigenous Youth Association where she participated in strengthening indigenous culture and educating others in her community on their rights and on indigenous-related laws. In late 2014, she worked for the Khmer Association in a project coordinator position, supporting ethnically indigenous students and empowering indigenous ethnic women in various projects.

As an activist, Chompey works on empowerment, educating others on rights and indigenous-related laws, conducting advocacy on women and gender-related issues, strengthening solidarity among communities, as well as joining protests to protect land and forests alongside the community. In 2017, due to her work overload and pressure from her family, Chompey took a break from work for nearly a year. Even still, she continued to engage in other activities with civil society organizations and the community. In mid-2018, Chompey returned to work, joining Equitable Cambodia as a community facilitator working on land-related issues. In mid-2019, Chompey decided to work as a facilitator in the Indigenous Ethnic Women Working Group in Cambodia as the deputy team leader. The Cambodian Indigenous Women Working Group was established in part thanks to her involvement. In this role, Chompey has worked on land rights cases, environmental issues, empowerment of indigenous people, especially women, and on building solidarity among the network.

Even though Chompey works a lot, she always makes time to strengthen youth groups in her community so they can advocate for land and forestry protection, for the eradication of discrimination against indigenous people, and for education on and preservation of her traditional culture. In her efforts to promote and protect indigenous community rights and the environment, Chompey has experienced discrimination, security threats and has had her freedoms restricted. Her activities have been monitored by local authorities and unknown persons. She has faced legal harassment in the form of a threatening phone call made to her father. She has been highlighted as a political activist, and was pressured by her father to stop her activism after he found out about it.
Chompey is motivated to continue her engagement in social activities as a woman indigenous activist and environmental rights activist because she is an indigenous woman and loves the indigenous community. She wants to preserve and promote her culture, traditions and language and preserve the community's natural resources for the next generations. Chompey adds that the volunteer teams also provide motivation, especially when she feels depressed or discouraged.

Chompey understands that gender equality is the right to equal development, equal opportunities and equal benefits between women, men and LGBTIQ people; in other words, it is equality between men, women and LGBTIQ people in society. Chompey adds that gender equality should be promoted in society to ensure a truly peaceful society. Furthermore, Chompey says that if discrimination based on gender still continues to occur, it will affect developmental progress and peace in society.
“Be brave and speak out about who you are, challenge society and claim your own recognition.”
Mr. Noy Sitha, 70 years old, lives in Sangkat Dangko, Khan Dangko, Phnom Penh. Because of his love and talent, he has spent many years for his life on training Khmer heritage art to the next generation since 1979. He started his career as a trainer in classical art in the Department of Arts and National Radio of Cambodia, School of Fine Arts, Ayay song, and Cambodia Living Art, Mahori performing. He has been an LGBTIQ activist since 2000. He became an LGBTIQ activist because he self-identifies as LGBTIQ, and also because he has seen abuses inflicted upon LGBTIQ people, including derogatory behavior by society and families.

As an LGBTIQ activist, he has been involved in promoting LGBTIQ rights in various activities such as raising awareness, writing stories or poetry about LGBTIQ people, addressing domestic violence, plus promoting LGBTIQ rights to the authorities. He emphasized that he enjoys the work although it is a volunteer job.

He has noted some positive progressions as a result of the efforts of the LGBTIQ community, including his own, wider public and authority awareness of LGBTIQ rights and related issues. He noted that attitudes continue to change towards LGBTIQ people and that there have been positive signs of change from society and families. LGBTIQ people are capable and brave enough to stand up, to come out and to advocate for LGBTIQ rights.

Behind the successes, he has also faced a number of obstacles such as being forced to dress like a woman, based on the sex he was assigned at birth, despite it being opposite to his innate gender identity. Discrimination, disrespect, and lack of empathy from his family, has not prevented him from achieving his dream and being an LGBTIQ activist.

He defines gender equality as the equality between men, women, and LGBTIQ people, and each individual having equal opportunities and value. If gender equality exists, it will be the guidance for people to respect each other and live in harmony; in contrast, if there is no gender quality, there will be oppression, violence, and unhappiness.
To all women, you are not Prahok jars. Women and men are equal. Please women, consider yourself as Pure Gold.
Mrs. Lim Kimsor, 33 years old, lives in Phnom Penh, and has been an activist woman human rights defender, also a former environmental activist since 2013 and joined with Mother Nature organization since 2017. She became involved in social work in 2008 due to her family losing their land as a result of land rights abuses by tycoons and having seen first-hand inequalities in society, such as the gap between the rich and the poor, human rights violations, and gender-based violence. She has remained involved in social work because she wants to help society as much as she can and she had engaged with social works before her family lost their land in 2009.

As part of her work, she has traveled into forests and remote areas to raise awareness about human rights, environmental rights, forestry and natural resources. In particular, she has advocated for ending illegal sand and mineral dredging, protecting the natural environment, urging people in the community to claim their rights, and encouraging youth to participate more in social work. Moreover, she has collaborated and supported various advocacy activities for various groups such as youth, indigenous women, LGBT people, etc.

At the same time, it has been very challenging for her to be an activist because her rights have been restricted more than ordinary people. She has faced harassment and restrictions on her freedoms, such as the local authorities trying to stop her from doing her work by accusing her of being a political activist and discriminating against her because she is a woman. She has not been welcomed by local authorities and often has been monitored, so she has to be mindful of her safety. She also has to follow her family's rules as well as the expectations of her family because she is a daughter. However, she still demands for her rights.

Personally, she views gender equality as the equal rights each individual possesses to do the important tasks in their lives including community service, education, work, communications, networking, and so on. In addition, each gender has the ability to bring about development in society. She is determined to continue encouraging women to participate in activities aimed at ending gender-based violence because many men are not changing so it is necessary to promote gender equality for this issue as it has not yet been eliminated.
“the participation of women promotes transparency and is very important for the development of the nation.”
Ms. Ngoun Yemvadtey, 24, is a youth volunteer and environmental activist. Vadtey was born in Sre Chomrov village, Choam Chao commune, Por Senchey district, Phnom Penh. Vadtey is the only daughter of a middle-class family. Vatey’s parents divorced when she was 3 years old and Vadtey lived with her mother growing up. Vadtey did not show the challenges she faced about her family problems to outsiders. On the contrary, Vadtey maintained a positive disposition about her life and studies, and went on to graduate with a bachelor’s degree of ecology from the Royal University of Phnom Penh.

Vadtey has been active in social work since 2015. Vadtey began as a volunteer student at the Youth Resource Development Program (YRDP) and participated in community-based campaigns and awareness raising activities on environmental issues. After graduating with her bachelor’s degree, Vadtey expanded her social activities by working in an organization which focused on the environment and on forestry. Vadtey even participated in a cycling campaign to promote environmental and forestry issues! Vadtey also participated in the creation of an active forest patrol team to protect and gather evidence for forest protection advocacy, creating 12 forest road maps and participating in the crackdown on illegal logging. In addition, Vadtey mobilized members of local communities around the Preah Rokar Wildlife Sanctuary to submit a petition to the Ministry of Environment on the issue of increased illegal logging. Furthermore, Vadtey has produced three videos on social media to seek more support for environmental protection.

Due to her involvement in environmental activities, Vadtey has been subjected to restrictions on her rights and freedoms. Prior to any activities related to forest patrols or environmental work, Vadtey is required to apply for a permit and to report all her activities to the national park officials.

The desire to contribute her education and skills in social work for the public to more broadly understand environmental issues has motivated Vadtey to continue in social work and as a woman environmental activist.

Vadtey understands the words “gender equality” to mean equality in opportunities for work, whether male or female or, in other words, the importance of equal participation. Vadtey added that gender equality needs to exist in society. Without it, society will be full of gender-based issues, leading to the loss of unity and to the decline of social morality.
Be strong and do not despair. Keep advocating. One day your family and society will understand and accept us as LGBTIQ.
Mr. Som Sen, 57 years old, is a construction worker and a farmer who has been volunteering as an LGBTIQ activist since 2009. Before volunteering, he felt lonely and thought that he was the odd one out. Later, through his engagement with the Cambodian Rainbow Community organization, he learned his rights and realized that there were many people out there similar to him. Even though he does not get paid, he still continues to volunteer as an LGBTIQ activist because he wants to help LGBTIQ individuals and the next generation of LGBTIQ individuals to understand their rights and let them know that they are not alone.

So far, he has participated in many activities such as sharing his experiences on the radio, producing educational videos, and sharing knowledge about LGBTIQ in communities - all with the aim of eliminating discrimination against LGBTIQ individuals, increasing public awareness about LGBTIQ rights, encouraging LGBTIQ individuals to work hard and be brave, and building networks for LGBTIQ individuals. During his work, he has experienced verbal discrimination and restrictions on employment opportunities because of his gender identity.

To him, gender equality means equality and equal rights between men, women, and LGBTIQ individuals. Moreover, he believes whatever men can do, women and LGBTIQ individuals also can do. He added that gender equality must be promoted in order to encourage LGBTIQ people to not feel discouraged and to ensure that everyone receives the same opportunities regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.
Please, LGBTIQ partners join hands to overcome all forms of challenges.
Mr. Sun Phy, 49, is a classical singer and LGBTIQ activist. Phy was born in Kdum Pi village, Kork Krabei commune, Svay Chrum district, Svay Rieng province. Phy is the youngest of eight siblings from a farming family in Svay Rieng province. As a child, Phy had a different personality from other girls; he preferred to play only with boys and only played games the boys liked. When he was 15, Phy started singing classical wedding songs. At this time, Phy began to realize his attraction to the same sex, but Phy did not reveal his gender identity to family or friends. It wasn’t until he was 18 that Phy came out as trans. He faced much verbal and gestural discrimination because of it.

Phy has been an LGBTIQ rights activist since 2013 when he began attending the Rainbow Community Workshop in Cambodia. At first, Phy felt lonely because he was born with a different sexual orientation from other people, but after attending seminars and training sessions, Phy did not feel lonely. Instead, he felt more courageous with his broader knowledge of advocating for LGBTIQ rights.

Phy continues to work on LGBTIQ rights to this day. He wants to advocate for the legitimate rights of LGBTIQ people to make it easier on the next generation. He wants to normalize LGBTIQ people getting support from their parents and wants to change society’s perception of LGBTIQ people. Phy has done a lot of work related to LGBTIQ rights including: disseminating information on LGBTIQ rights to local communities in two communes, Kork Kork and Kork Pring, establishing a network of LGBTIQ consisting of 200 LGBTIQ people, assisted in organizing 20 couple of LGBTIQ people, producing an Ayai song that focuses on LGBTIQ issues, which was voice recorded to play during the community meeting, providing counseling for LGBTIQ families, and teaching traditional Ayai singing skills to others. While Phy has been working hard on LGBTIQ rights, Phy has been subjected to verbal discrimination by members of the community because of his gender identity.

To Phy, the words “gender equality” mean being equal before the law. Phy believes gender equality must exist because when there is discrimination and/or a lack of gender equality in society, especially toward LGBTIQ people, it will negatively affect LGBTIQ people who might become discouraged from participating in social work and struggle to find themselves. Gender inequality can lead to social unrest, leading to a loss of human resources and insecurity throughout society.
Please be aware of your rights, so that you understand what we are entitled to. We must not do anything that can affect society, so that society does not discriminate against all LGBTIQ.
Ms. Chhun Monyvechra, 34 years old, is a makeup artist and a high school teacher at Hun Sen high school Veal Rang at Preah Sihanouk province. Alongside these roles she is a member of Steering Committee of Chaktomuk Network. Vechra has been an LGBTIQ activist since 2006.

She has participated in many activities to demand the protection of the rights of her own communities and the wider LGBTIQ community. These activities include engaging with relevant organizations, attending workshops, training programs, networking events, and live concerts to promote and raise public awareness about LGBTIQ rights and seek support in eliminating discrimination.

Although she hasn’t experienced the hardships many LGBTIQ people face, she has seen that most Cambodian LGBTIQs suffer from discrimination from their families and society and have difficulty accessing job opportunities. Importantly, she wants families with LGBTIQ to acknowledge their children and to stop interfering with their choice of partners.

She believes that the work she is doing is very crucial because public participation is still limited. LGBTIQ people do not know clearly what laws are in place to support them, therefore, the more activities we do, the better results we will get. LBGTIQ networking is vital for LGBTIQ people in Cambodia to show the world that Cambodia also has LGBTIQ people and having same-sex relationships is natural. Even though, there is no law to protect LGBTIQs, she is still happy to continue campaigning as they continue to make progress and she is hopeful there will continue to be positive change. While there have been no big successes, it is important for the next LGBTIQ generation to not experience such difficulties.

As an LGBTIQ activist, she defines gender equality as the equality of men, women, and LGBTIQs. We must promote gender equality in order to be equal, to reduce the gender gap, to end gender-based restrictions, and to implement the rule of law and transparency in order to eliminate gender-based discrimination.
Indigenous women should participate in activism, speak in public forums and on social media and arm themselves with knowledge of the law.
Mrs. Phloek Phyrom, 39 years old, is a Pu Nong woman (indigenous community), living in Laoka village, Sangkat Sokh Dom, Krong Sen Monorom, Mondulkiri province. Currently, she is farmer and a facilitator of indigenous groups in Mondulkiri province covering 5 districts and 39 villages in total.

She has been an indigenous rights activist since 2010 when she experienced the clearing of community land by an investment company. She is also passionate about protecting natural resources and indigenous culture and takes part in protecting the culture and natural resources of her community.

After discussing with other communities about the impact of land and natural resource depletion, as well as deforestation, she became an indigenous rights activist. Community representatives and members from other areas, such as Busra, Kaoh Nheaek, Monourom, Kaev Seima, and Ou Reang, jointly submitted a petition to the Mondulkiri Provincial and Municipal Court to seek resolutions for affected indigenous peoples, to stop deforestation and to end clearance of community forests.

Her achievements include securing the return of 27 hectares of land from the Villa Development Company back in May 2017 and facilitating indigenous communities to gain knowledge through various trainings on the Law of Self-determination and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

During her activism she has received death threat when she was celebrating Indigenous People in 2017. In 2018, she received another death threat while she was carrying out advocacy related to the Dos Kromom mountain issue. A third death threat was received when she tried to defend 70 hectares of indigenous land. In 2016, Phyrom and her community were sued for physical abuse, in 2018, the police told her that the lawsuit had been dropped. These factors affected her emotionally, however, did not stop her from her work. She reiterated that if she stopped that would mean she had been defeated. In response to these challenges, she has carried out many advocacy activities by raising relevant laws, guiding authorities to the incident sites and disseminating information to the public.

As a woman indigenous rights and forestry activist, her freedom has been restricted more than ordinary people and she has been monitored and tracked while attending meetings with her community and meetings about indigenous song, despite the fact these activities do not require prior notification being given to the authorities.

As a woman indigenous rights defender, she defines gender equality as complementarity. Even though we know that women and men are equal, sometimes men misunderstand the term “equality” by saying that women have to work as hard as men. In contrast, gender equality is the complementary roles of men and women.
She wants the government to broaden opportunities for women in practice not just on paper, in order to increase their participation (especially indigenous women). She notes that some local authorities still discriminate against indigenous women by using inappropriate words.
Women must learn to be self-sufficient, do not be afraid of those who do not respect you. Stand up for yourself and for society. You must be hopeful, get involved in social work and gather as much information as possible in order to make informed decisions in the future.
Mrs. Chray Nim, 41 years old, is a vegetable seller and launderette owner; simultaneously she has been a land and women’s rights activist since 2012. She used to be a housewife, she was married to a civil servant and was entirely economically dependent on her husband. In 2012 she and her community suffered from land rights abuses. The other community members were less likely to fight for their land back so she came forward to advocate for herself and on behalf of the whole community. She was chosen to be the community representative by her community members, tasked with coordinating and leading advocacy activities.

Since then she has engaged in many activities in order to demand for the respect of the entire community’s land rights, including the protection of her own rights. Such activities include peaceful protests, community empowerment, social media advocacy, and psychological support for other women with similar problems. She is currently playing an active role in promoting peaceful freedom of expression. She joined Cambodia in 2021 and became an independent citizen journalist to monitor and report on peaceful advocacy activities to independent media and civil society organizations.

She went through a series of challenges that impacted her mental health, even resulting in suicidal thoughts. She suffered discrimination from her family-in-law as well as physical, economical and psychological abuse from her husband to force her to stop protesting and advocating. Because of her refusal to stop her advocacy activities, she was divorced by her husband and her own family, as well as her family-in-law, cut off communication with her. This resulted in a downward spiral for her. Her child got sick and she could not afford to take care of them, she was detained by police for her advocacy and she began to suffer from depression. Despite these challenges, she has not stopped her advocacy and other social work, instead it has become a great motivation for her. As a result, Nim and her community have had many accomplishments, including receiving a notice of cessation of their forced eviction. Her community is now much stronger. She became a land and women’s rights activist who is very active in supporting not only her own community, but also other communities through outreach, empowerment, and participation in many protesting activities.

As a land and women’s rights activist, and a victim of domestic violence, she describes gender equality as giving value and equal right, as women can do whatever men can do. She says that equal rights must be granted in practice, not only promised on paper or in speeches. She says that gender inequality causes emotional distress, mental health illnesses, and many other issues; for herself she was divorced by her husband for participating in advocacy and faced many problems because she is a woman.
As women, do not be afraid to try what you want to do
Ms. Mrs. Ley Srey Aun, 36, works as a garment worker and is a woman labor rights activist. Srey Aun was born in Preychas village, Toek Vil commune, Puk district, Siem Reap province. Srey Aun is the eighth of twelve siblings from a farming family in Siem Reap province.

Srey Aun has done many jobs before working as a garment worker. In mid-2019, Srey Aun became a woman labor rights activist. Srey Aun was motivated to join the protests to promote workers’ rights because of the oppression of women workers by employers, the discrimination against women in the workplace, the use of inappropriate language towards workers and the non-compliance with employment contracts. Even though Srey Aun has only recently become a woman activist for the protection of labor rights, Srey Aun has made many positive changes for workers’ rights where she works.

As a result of Srey Aun and her team’s efforts, the employment contracts in her company have improved. The contracts now provide seniority payment to employees and no longer discriminate against some employees. In addition, it is no longer acceptable to suspend workers for no reason and regular payment is ensured to workers.

Because of her activism, Srey Aun has been targeted by some of her supervisors. She has been assigned workloads even when sick. She has been scrutinized and her actions have been monitored, in an attempt to find reasons to dismiss her. Srey Aun has also received verbal threats from workers who were not satisfied with Srey Aun's activism.

To Srey Aun, gender equality means non-discrimination against women, men, or other sexes. It means respecting human rights, especially those of women and children. Gender equality should be promoted because when inequality occurs, women will be more oppressed, thus discouraging them from participating in social work. This will lead to the loss of many job opportunities and lead society to stagnant development progress.
LGBTIQ individuals play significant roles in contributing to the development of society, and are therefore part of this society.
Ms. Nith Vanyu, 31 years old, is a makeup artist. She has been an LGBTIQ activist in Siem Reap province since 2006. She has been realizing her sexual orientation since she was 12 years old, which became a challenge for her as she was discriminated against and excluded from her family and by society.

She has witnessed the LGBTIQ community be subjected to many challenges such as discrimination from their own families and society and limits placed on their ability to freely advocate. As such, she has always raised the challenges faced by LGBTIQ individuals in relevant events or trainings organized by NGOs. Furthermore, she has built an LGBTIQ network within her community, which currently includes 33 members. She has also been working with her community to raise awareness about health and advocate for the other related rights in addition to LGBTIQ rights such as the rights of people living with HIV, older people, children, men, and women.

Interestingly, she organized an “LGBTIQ Advocacy Forum” in 2016 in Banteay Srey District with the purpose of eliminating discrimination against LGBTIQ individuals in Siem Reap province, which the honorable Banteay Srey District Chief attended. The District Chief wanted to encourage and show support for eliminating discrimination and violence against LGBTIQ individuals in the community, and to bring positive changes to the community.

Being an LGBTIQ activist is difficult because her rights and freedom have been restricted by her family and society. Moreover, she has been stigmatized by her community because of her sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression. Importantly, she has not been welcomed by local authorities to advocate for LGBTIQ rights in her community.

She defines gender equality as the equality of all genders, regardless of their sex, gender, skin color, religious belief, social status, or wealth. She has noticed that the law does not yet include rights for LGBTIQ people. Additionally, she believes that gender-based violence may have negative consequences for society such as an increase in migration, an increase in the rate of suicide, and a decline in the human resources of the country. She is positive about the future and will persist in working to eliminate discrimination against LGBTIQ individuals, to help to promote the rights of LGBTIQ individuals, and to transfer knowledge to others through effective advocacy.
LGBTIQ people must stand up, don’t be discouraged, fight for your rights and for respect.
Mr. Sorn Nern has been an LGBTIQ activist since 2009. He is 49 years old and works as a farmer in Pea Reang district, Prey Veng province.

Prior to becoming involved with the LGBTIQ network in 2004, he had little understanding of his rights as an LGBTIQ individual. He has since come to understand his rights and become an activist. Through his activism he hopes to promote the rights of LGBTIQ individuals and reduce discrimination. He understands that LGBTIQ people face many challenges and therefore provides support and guidance for those that need it.

He is actively engaged with the LGBTIQ community. He attends networking events, meets with LGBTIQ people to build their capacity and advocates on behalf of the LGBTIQ community. He believes that the hard work he has put into activism has been worth it as the LGBTIQ community have a greater understanding of their rights than they previously did. Furthermore, the public are more tolerant of LGBTIQ people and parents are more accepting than they once were of their children if they are LGBTIQ.

He has experienced discrimination as a result of his gender identity, for example, not being employed to work in a factory. As an LGBTIQ activist, the term "gender equality" to him means equality and non-discrimination, regardless of your gender identity. Gender equality is vital for society, as without it, everyone will be impacted negatively, not only LGBTIQ people.
LGBTIQ people must be brave enough to speak out to others, especially their own families, we must not do robbery or drugs, we must do good deeds and do what society recognizes.
Ms. Chhom Vy has been an LGBTIQ activist since 2014. She is 31 years old and lives in Sdov village, Theay commune, Barphnom district, Prey Veng Province.

She has actively participated in meetings, workshops, presentations, counselling and educational performances in order to promote LGBTIQ rights, such as marital and parental rights. She believes that LGBTIQ activism has been successful at making people aware of LGBTIQ rights, reducing LGBTIQ discrimination and helping LGBTIQ people gain skills and jobs.

As a transgender woman she has suffered discrimination such as members of the public and authorities have said inappropriate things to her and even threatened her and been violent towards her because of her gender identity and activism. However, she is happy to continues to campaign because she believes activism is vital as it encourages LGBTIQ people to be brave.

She understands gender equality as people being treated equally regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation. She believes gender equality must be promoted because LGBTIQ people are still discriminated in which can affect LGBTIQ peoples' mental health. Furthermore, LGBTIQ people do not aware of their own rights clearly.
Women are pure gold, lesbians are pure gold as well. Parents of LGBTIQ individuals and society, please do not discriminate against them and treat them with contempt. All citizens and parents, please do not mistreat and confine your children if they are LGBTIQ because it will be too late when you lose your dearly loved children.
Mr. Suong Pheakdey, 35 years old, is an LGBTIQ activist living in Thammcheat Samdech Techo Hun Sen village, Sro Aem commune, Choam Ksan district, Preah Vihear province. As a result of moving to another region and his family’s circumstances, he had to leave school in Grade 1. In 2011, he was a volunteer activist for the Cambodian Rainbow Community. He then worked as an LGBTIQ networking officer in various provinces for three years, from 2012 to 2014. He ultimately resigned from this job due to personal circumstances, but he still continues to work as an LGBTIQ activist.

He was motivated to become an LGBTIQ activist as it enabled him to reach out to other activists at the grassroots level to educate them about LGBTIQ rights and to ensure that all people, particularly the families of LGBTIQ individuals, understand more about LGBTIQ rights. LGBTIQ individuals have the right to live and work without oppression. He especially does not want LGBTIQ individuals to feel left behind, to be discriminated against, and to be treated with contempt.

He has shared his knowledge through LGBTIQ activist networking at the ground level to help such activists become aware of their rights, and to be mentally strong, including by improving their morale. This has helped to reduce discrimination against LGBTIQ people.

Yet, along with such success, he had also experienced problems, such as physical violence at the hands of his brother when he found out the truth about him. He believes that family denial and family pressure are the root causes of the displacement of LGBTIQ people.

While working at the grassroots level, he faced many challenges, such as the chief of a village who said “his community does not need it” and asked him to network somewhere else. He was sometimes called gay whilst doing his work.

At age 19, he was forced to marry a man, even though his family knew that he loved women. In addition, he was confined to his house by his family until the day of the wedding. On the wedding day, he decided to run away from home because he did not love men. He has faced other challenges, such as being rejected when applying for jobs, even though he cut his hair short, as some jobs are discriminatory in their hiring processes, particularly jobs in factories, construction sites, and security.

He says that the rights of LGBTIQ individuals and gender rights should be promoted so that they can get equal employment, are not discriminated against, and are not judged solely by appearance whether they are male or female or LGBTIQ. Moreover, an individual’s gender identity is innate to that person; just the same as if they are lesbian, they love women.
LGBTIQ individuals are human beings, so please DO NOT discriminate and exclude them.

“”
Ms. Hour Pov has been an LGBTIQ activist since 2014. She is a Dance Specialist at the Department of Culture and Fine Arts in Battambang Province. She is 45 years old.

She said being an LGBTIQ activist had granted a great chance for her in advocating for the promotion and protection of LGBTIQ rights because she had been invited and engaged with many NGOs. She has established an LGBTIQ network and community of around 60 individuals in Battambang province in which aims to support and promote LGBTIQ rights. Furthermore, they are volunteer to share their life stories and the challenges they have faced publicly in order to advocate for LGBTIQ rights.

She has experienced discrimination and been stigmatized by her family, colleagues, and wider society because of her gender identity. Having faced many challenges, she volunteers for NGOs that seek to eliminate discrimination and promote LGBTIQ rights. She encourages the LGBTIQ community not to be discouraged by discouraging words. She believes that it is crucial to respect all genders and LGBTIQ individuals because they are human beings. She is passionate about promoting and protecting LGBTIQ peoples’ rights.

Gender Equality, to her, means the equality of all genders and LGBTIQ individuals to participate in the public sphere without discrimination and be equal before the law. Moreover, LGBTIQ individuals are human beings and it is equal to everyone.
To all women, we do not have to conform to cultural norms. We should support, promote and empower other women and ourselves.
Mrs. Ny Sandos, 47 years old, has been a Land Activist for eight years in Phnom Penh. Currently, she is the representative of Village 23 in Sangkat Beoung Kak II, Khan Toul Kork, Phnom Penh, located along the railway line. She is married to a military officer and has three children. Two of her children now have a bachelor’s degree and have become a secondary school teacher and IT staff in a private company. Her life seems to be improving, but she still continues to represent the community of Village 23, Sangkat Boeung Kak II, Khan Toul Kork, Phnom Penh. Her community has lived in the area since the fall of the Khmer Rouge, her family moved to the area in 1995. In 2012, her community was given due notice of forced eviction by the government without sufficient compensation or adequate resettlement.

To help her community, she has carried out many advocacy activities seeking for justice in relation to forced evictions, land grabbing, and human rights violations. She believes that if her community move to another location they will face many difficulties, especially financial difficulties. Hence, she decided to consolidate the voices of her community through petitioning and non-violent approaches in order to seek justice from the government. Notably, some members of her community have accepted the re-settlement offer from the government and relocated, while some have agreed to cut a plot of their land in accordance with the government’s regulation in return for onsite upgrading in the form of developments to their remaining land.

While some progress has been made it has come at a price as resultanty she has faced pressure from family, discrimination and harassment from the local authority. Additionally, she has been interfered with and monitored by the local authorities who aim to stop her from executing her advocacy activities. Despite this, she still pursues her goals of promoting gender equality, developing her community, transferring skills and knowledge to youths to enable them to claim their own rights and eliminating injustice in society because what she wants is justice.

To her, gender equality means women and men have equal rights. Moreover, their jobs, roles, and responsibilities must be equally valued.
Please do not consider yourself to be incapable of achieving great things because you are a woman. Whatever men can do, women can also do. Women are so powerful.
Mrs. Lay Sreymeth has been a land rights and women's rights activist since 2017. She is 36 years old. She was selected by her community, along with two other women, to advocate on their behalf as they were concerned about losing their land. She is dedicated to serving the needs of her community and defending land rights, human rights and women's rights. She attends meetings with her community to discuss issues affecting them, meets with authorities on behalf of her community, attends public events, supports victimized activists, campaigns to defend human rights, land rights and women's rights, cleans up the environment, and celebrates World Housing Rights Day. She has achieved great things on behalf of her community, such as the implementation of a waste collection service and increased electricity, encouraging the community to grow trees and plants around their houses, teaching the community about human rights, and empowering the community to be united and work together.

She has experienced many challenges as a result of her activism, such as, being monitored by the local authority, being excluded from communications and notifications from the authorities, threatened for carrying out advocacy work, forced to agree to stop undertaking activities and give her fingerprints to the authorities. Thun, despite the fact that members of her community have been living on the land for more than 20 years, the authority have claimed that it is state property. Her husband worries about her safety, however, she feels compelled to continue fighting for and empowering her community and protecting them against forced eviction.

As a land and women's rights activist, she defines gender equality as equal rights for women and men. She champions gender equality and believes that women can do jobs that men have traditionally done, as well as housework and social work. The old saying that “the cook cannot also think” is not true because women are as powerful as men and can do just as well or even better.

From her experience women are still subordinate to men. For example, the authority told her that her community already has a representative, who is a man, so she does not need to lead the community anymore. She advocates that we must continue to promote gender equality.
As women, we must not choose weaknesses, we need to be joyful. If we find ourselves being weak, we must fix it and commit to fixing it.
Ms. Keth Leng, 35 years old, is currently working as an administrative assistant at a factory in Phnom Penh. She finished her schooling at grade 8 in Krang Yov commune, Saang district, Kandal province. She initially joined the factory as a regular worker who did not know about labor rights. In 2002, she joined the union and then became a labor rights activist.

She has since been actively involved in various activities to promote labor rights. She was motivated to continue with her activism because she wanted to solve social problems as well as to help the poor. She has participated in advocacy, raising awareness at factories and relevant ministries, speaking on radio talk shows, negotiating with factories or companies, and coordinating labor cases. There have been many positive outcomes resulting from her efforts, such as improved working conditions, more respect for labor laws, better benefits for female workers and other workers, greater union participation and greater understanding by workers of their rights.

Despite such success, she has also suffered discrimination and feels her efforts have not been valued because she is a woman. Nonetheless, these issues or obstacles have not discouraged or stopped her work as a labor rights activist.

In relation to gender equality, she highlights that, whilst there has been much talking and writing, there remains, in practice, much inequality between men and women in terms of social development and leadership in this country. She emphasizes that it is more important to promote and give women more opportunities. If men and women work together, then conflicts can be reduced.
We need to value women as the back bone of our nation because the growth of the industrial sector is impossible without the contributions of women. To all women, you are not incapable.
Ms. Chheng Danou, 46 years old, has been a Labor Activist for almost 9 years. She is currently the Vice President of the National Independent Federation Textile Union of Cambodia (NIFTUC). After, she graduated with a bachelor's degree in law in 2020 and has become a trainer in her current union, as well as collaborating with other unions to share her knowledge of labor law. She used to be a garment worker for 13 years (1998-2011). She never thought she would become an activist since she was not knowledgeable in advocacy. However, in 2013, she established a union at Yong Sin factory and later became the President of the union. Having seen factory workers face many hardships, she decided to participate in activities to promote and protect labor rights through advocating for support from the government, civil society and other relevant stakeholders. As a result of her hard work, the factory working conditions were improved and included securing seniority payment, final salary, indemnity payment, and priority note payment amongst others.

Despite her successes, she has been restricted and harassed by local authorities, powerful people, and her community during her work. Her ability to exercise her rights and achieve her goals as a woman and an activist were constrained by the local authorities and her local community. Moreover, she was prohibited from implementing her activities as a result of individuals telling her that her mission is impossible, bribes, and receiving threats to her personal security.

Garment workers fear losing their jobs, are continuously subjected to restrictions on their freedoms to freely communicate with their colleagues and unionize, prevented from attending meetings without legitimate invitations, and have limited knowledge of their human rights, labor rights, and the law in these areas. These vulnerabilities and fears have steered garment workers to remain silent and endure the hardships. Therefore, she wants to promote and protect the rights of garment workers to obtain the benefits and freedoms they are entitled to as human beings and employees.

She is decisive and committed to protecting and promoting gender equality, especially empowering vulnerable female workers to obtain equal benefits and treatment from their employers.

To her, gender equality means the equality between men and women in labor sectors. Meaning, men and women are entitled to the same job opportunities, the same payment, the same benefits, and the same treatment from the employers.
“Together for Equality-
Reducing inequalities,
Advancing human rights!”