The Cambodian Human Rights Network Project:
Empowering grass roots organisations
A Quarterly Newsletter on Human Rights Activism
www.cchrcambodia.org

Main objectives and activities of the Project
The Network Project seeks to empower and link Community Based Organizations (CBOs) to promote and protect human rights through the following four steps:

Creation: The creation of a network that will naturally link CBOs and communities through various initiatives in the project.

Identification: Identifying and meeting with potential network participants to outline the benefits of the network.

Empowerment: Empowering the target beneficiaries through capacity building and the transfer of skills and knowledge.

Participation: CBOs will be provided access to a small grant scheme to support training, public forums, marches and gatherings.

INTRODUCTION TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK PROJECT
The Human Rights Network (HRN) Project is a new CCHR project, generously funded by Diakonia, which has been established with the intention of promoting and protecting human rights in Cambodia by decentralizing human rights activism throughout the country. The Project, which began in June 2010, is aimed at training people to promote and protect the human rights of people living in their communities.

In recent years it has been observed that individuals, around the country, independently or together with other members of their communities, have initiated and carried out activities in protest at violations of their human rights within their communities. These people have established their own mechanisms and have worked together with communities, associations, unions and networks to protect each other’s interests. These people clearly have the will to affect change within their communities. However to work effectively these groups need to be empowered through skills and knowledge sharing, and practical assistance. The CCHR’s Human Rights Network Project has been established to provide support to and strengthen Community Based Organisations (CBOs) who are independently committed to the promotion and protection of human rights. Through the creation of the informal human rights Network these groups can link together to discuss situations in their respective communities and explore how they can work together to drive change to improve respect for human rights in their communities and throughout Cambodia.

THE NETWORK PROJECT APPROACH
The HRN Project is divided into four stages, which are displayed in the box opposite. The first stage of the project – much of which was achieved in 2010 – was spent putting mechanisms in place for the creation and identification of a human rights network. The next stage of the project will primarily focus on empowerment and participation. Target Beneficiaries will be empowered through capacity-building and the transfer of skills and knowledge. Target Beneficiaries will receive training in human rights, monitoring and documentation and advocacy, material and equipment support, guidance and assistance from CCHR and other NGOs with relevant expertise and will be encouraged to apply for funding through the Project’s small financial support scheme to conduct activities in the furtherance of their objectives. At the end of the conclusion of the pilot period, CCHR will have transferred skills and knowledge to 30 CBOs throughout the country. After completion of the pilot project CCHR will continue to extend the Network. In the medium term, it is expected that the Network will cover the entire geographical area of the Kingdom.
WHAT TRAINING IS PROVIDED BY THE PROJECT?
The target beneficiaries of the project - “Network Participants” receive training in three areas namely:

1) **Human Rights** - Network Participants are trained on the basic concepts of human rights.

2) **Monitoring and Documentation** - Network Participants are shown how to monitor human rights violations and the correct way to record what has occurred following the Events Based Approach. This is a unique approach which takes the ‘incident’ as the starting point of documenting violations and regards it as a big entity which might be comprised of more than one ‘act’ or ‘violation’. The CCHR has adopted this approach and plans to share the technique with others in Cambodia.

3) **Advocacy** - this is part of the human rights training and its ultimate aim is to empower community representatives to be able to advocate by themselves when they face human rights violations.

THE FIRST STAGE OF THE PROJECT
In the first six months of the Project (June-December 2010), activities were directed at identifying potential Target Beneficiaries and explaining the nature of, reasons for and advantages of participation in the Network. During the early months of the Project, staff met with individuals and CBOs based in a number of provinces but mostly the Phnom Penh Municipality and Kampot Province as activities were to be focused in these areas during the pilot stage of the Project. As the capital city, Phnom Penh is naturally home to most large NGOs and as such there is a tendency for communities to raise their concerns with them, rather than advocate for their resolution. Moreover, grassroots activists and CBOs that do operate in the city generally have strong existing support networks and as such do not require the same degree of empowerment and capacity building as do other CBOs in other areas of the country. As a result the decision was taken to focus primarily on Battambang and Siem Reap provinces which have large rural and urban populations and are home to a large number of CBOs who are in need of capacity building and support. The fact that the two provinces border each other was a further incentive, with the prospect of joint advocacy – especially between CBOs working in the same focus areas – an inviting one.

INITIAL OBJECTIVES MET BY THE PROJECT
With regard to the main project objectives the following have been met.

- Creation of the Network hotline, helpdesk and referral system which allows Network participants to contact Project staff directly in order to report violations, seek guidance on responding to violations and information on organizations which can provide relevant assistance.
- The creation of “Sithi” pages – a directory that provides information on organizations throughout Cambodia who are participating in the Network.
- Potential Network Participants have been identified and meetings have been held with these participants to outline the benefits of participation.
- Two communities, Prek Sleng Commune in Kandal Province and Chi Kreng Commune in Siem Reap, have received two and five radio/CD players which allows for the creation of ‘radio groups’. These ‘radio groups’ will listen to broadcasts and audio materials and will discuss the issues raised between themselves. It is expected that this will increase awareness amongst these communities of important issues as well as their capacity to discuss them.

NEXT STAGE OF THE HRN PROJECT
During the next implementation phase, January – December 2011, CCHR will partner with twenty Target Beneficiaries in Siem Reap and Battambang provinces linking them together, providing essential resources and materials, and increasing their capacity through training in human rights, monitoring and documentation, and advocacy. In the final implementation stage, January – May 2012, CCHR will partner with an additional ten Target Beneficiaries. By the conclusion of the pilot period, CCHR will have linked and empowered 30 CBOs thereby promoting grassroots activism and empowering communities, CBOs and others to set the human rights agenda in their respective areas and throughout the Kingdom of Cambodia.

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