WHAT IS THE SITHI PROJECT?
The Sithi Project is a Cambodian Center for Human Rights (“CCHR”) facilitated project - generously supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), East West Management Institute (EWMI), the Asia Foundation (TAF) and The Open Society Initiative (OSI) - aimed at further developing and implementing collaborative and decentralized approaches to monitoring, documentation and information sharing as a basis for more detailed research and analysis and more sophisticated evidence-based dialogue and advocacy to bring about an improvement in the situation of human rights – particularly civil and political rights – in Cambodia.

Cambodia suffers from a widespread disregard for human rights. Whilst the period 2008-2010 was arguably marked by some improvements in the situation of social and economic rights (with a strong caveat *vis a vis* land rights), we have seen worrying trends in relation to the situation of civil and political rights. In the past, non-governmental organizations (“NGOs”) and other civil society organizations (“CSOs”) working in the area of human rights in Cambodia have had limited success in addressing these violations and encouraging greater respect for human rights. This is partly due to issues relating to documentation and access to, and dissemination of, information, which could be used for the purposes of dialogue and advocacy. Monitoring and documentation of the human rights situation has been non-collaborative. In particular, those smaller sector-based and local CSOs that are in a position to bring a more localized and specialized approach to monitoring and documentation have not had the capacity and the resources to do so. The Sithi Project has been established to provide information and increase awareness and understanding of human rights in Cambodia through the development of a sophisticated and innovative online human rights portal and to train those at a local level, particularly grassroots community activists, in monitoring and documentation so they can participate in the contribution of information to help drive change to improve respect for human rights in their communities and across Cambodia.

THE SITHI PROJECT APPROACH TO PROMOTING AND PROTECTING HUMAN RIGHTS
The Sithi Project approach to promoting and protecting human rights is essentially three-fold.

The core of the Sithi Project is the development of an online human rights portal – Sithi.org. Sithi.org is a one-stop shop for information on human rights in Cambodia, and was the first initiative of its kind in South-East Asia. It has been online since 2009 and was officially launched on 22 July 2010. The Portal is designed to facilitate the sharing and dissemination of information pertaining to human rights by those interested in and/or working on promoting and protecting human rights in Cambodia. Sithi.org is made up of a number of different sections housing human rights violations maps, publications and media reports on human rights issues, relevant laws, as well as practical information including directories of civil society actors, funding agencies and state institutions. This information is shared so individuals and organizations can put it to use in the promotion and protection of human rights.
The capacity building component of the Sithi Project feeds directly into the portal. Since 2010, Sithi staff have been training community activists in Siem Reap and Battambang, and more recently in Banteay Meanchey, on monitoring human rights violations in their communities and the correct way to record what has occurred. Training on monitoring and documentation of community activists in Siem Reap and Battambang concluded in August 2011. Since then, activists have been sending their reports on human rights violations occurring in their communities to CCHR, where the information is analyzed and placed on the Portal as appropriate. Through the training of activists, the Sithi Project is not only increasing the capacity of smaller local CSOs and individual human rights activists in documenting the human rights violations occurring in their area, but also providing a forum, Sithi.org, through which that information can be promoted and used as part of evidence-based dialogue and advocacy.

SUCCESSES OF THE SITHI PROJECT SO FAR...

In February 2011, Sithi.org surpassed 100,000 visitors to the site. Since going on-line, Sithi.org has made a range of information available, which has been utilized by the media when reporting on development and by NGOs in submission to United Nations human rights bodies, amongst others. Most recently, Sithi.org launched its findings of a study into land conflicts in Cambodia which showed that 5% of Cambodia’s land is disputed with hundreds of thousands of people affected.

On 31 August 2011, the Asia Pacific Network Information Centre (APNIC) announced that Sithi.org had won the Information Society Innovation Fund (ISIF) 2011 award under the category of “Rights and Freedoms”. The ISIF 2011 Award has been granted in recognition of the role that the Portal has played in advocating for social change and in promoting the civil and political rights of Cambodian citizens, using information communication technologies in innovative ways.

ABOUT THE NEWSLETTER

The Sithi newsletter is a new initiative aimed at disseminating information related to the Sithi Project and increasing awareness and understanding of human rights in Cambodia more generally. Starting November 2011, the newsletter will be produced bi-monthly. The theme for each newsletter will be determined based on project findings, with a particular focus on political and civil rights.

CONTACT

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