INTRODUCTION
As explained in the first edition of the Sithi Project bi-monthly newsletter, the Sithi Project incorporates a multifaceted approach to promoting and protecting human rights, made up of: (1) developing and implementing decentralized approaches to monitoring, documentation and information sharing; (2) utilizing this monitoring, documentation and information sharing for more detailed research and analysis; and (3) applying this to sophisticated evidenced based dialogue and advocacy to bring about improvement in human rights in Cambodia.

This edition of the Sithi Project bi-monthly newsletter illustrates this multi-faceted approach by examining work that the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR) through the Sithi Project and activists trained by the Sithi Project have undertaken to resolve issues and push for greater respect in relation to land rights.

DECENTRALIZED APPROACHES TO MONITORING, DOCUMENTATION AND INFORMATION SHARING
A decentralized approach to monitoring, documentation and information sharing is the crux of the Sithi Project’s holistic approach to the promotion and protection of human rights in Cambodia. In the past, smaller sector-based and local civil society organizations (CSOs) that are in a position to bring a more localized and specialized approach to human rights protection and promotion have not had the capacity or resources to do so. Without this information, research and analysis on the bigger picture human rights situation has been difficult.

The Sithi Project empowers local CSOs and community activists through capacity building and facilitating the transfer of skills, knowledge and tools, most notably through training on documentation and human rights monitoring. Since 2010 the Sithi Project – in partnership with the CCHR Human Rights Network Project – has trained 23 community activists/representatives in Battambang, 26 in Banteay Meanchey and 24 in Siem Reap in documenting and monitoring human rights violations. From the community activists/representatives trained, the Sithi team has received documentation in relation to a total of 36 cases involving human rights violations, of which 13 cases related to human rights violations stemming from land conflicts. The data and information supplied by local activists has fed into detailed research and analysis that CCHR has been conducting on land conflicts on both a national and a local level.

DETAILED RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS
The decentralized approach to documentation, monitoring and information sharing allows for more detailed research and analysis into human rights abuses in Cambodia. In relation to land for example, information that is shared by local activists is further investigated by CCHR and then used to supplement research and analysis that CCHR has conducted on a national level, whilst also allowing for research and analysis in relation to individual cases.

In 2011, the Sithi Project conducted a study on land conflicts based on public information gathered from news media in Khmer and/or English, publications of non-governmental organizations and CCHR’s own investigations, largely based on cases identified by grassroots activists trained by the Sithi Project. The study was entitled, “Reported Land Conflict cases 2007 to 2011 in Cambodia” (the “Study”). The Study found 223 land disputes that have been reported on in the public domain in the last four years, affecting some 47,342 families.
Of the 223 land cases examined for the Study, 79 were in relation to conflicts of land that were part of economic land concessions (ELCs), affecting some 30,160 families.

In relation to ELCs – a mechanism that grants private state land for agricultural and industrial-agricultural exploitation – information received from grassroots activists helped with CCHR’s research and analysis of whether the granting of ELCs adhered to the process proscribed by law. The Sub-Decree on Economic Land Concessions states that ELCs can only be granted when: (1) land has been registered and classified as state private land; (2) land use plans have been adopted; (3) environmental and social impact assessments have been completed; (4) there are solutions to resettlement issues bearing in mind that there shall be no involuntary resettlement by lawful land holders and access to private land be respected; and (5) public consultation with territorial authorities and local residents has been conducted. Information shared for example by two activists from Srea Nuoy Commune in Siem Reap, Mr. Phoeun Pha and Mr. Bi Norgm, in relation to an ELC of 7,000 hectares granted to Banya Group in 2007 - 4,000 hectares to be used to develop a city and 3,000 hectares to replant forests - provided a useful case-study for the Sithi Project to use when analyzing the affects of ELCs. Based on the information provided by community reporting, CCHR was able to build a case-study in relation to aspects of the law that were not compiled with, such as adequate and appropriate compensation to be awarded to the community and the general adverse affect of the ELC on the livelihood of the community in general.

EVIDENCE-BASED DIALOGUE AND ADVOCACY

The capacity building work of the Sithi Project feeds information into CCHR’s research and analysis work, ultimately for better evidenced-based advocacy and dialogue to bring about improvements in the situation of human rights on both a micro (local) and macro (national) level.

At a local level, communities initiate advocacy and dialogue with support from the Sithi Project, which in turn is supported by other CCHR projects, such as facilitating public forums through which communities can address their concerns to officials directly, with the help of the Public Forums Project, or support activists in trouble with help from the Human Rights Defenders Project. In February 2011 CCHR’s Human Rights Network Project supported villagers from Srea Nuoy Commune to gather outside Siem Reap Provincial Court in support of four representatives, including Mr. Phoeun Pah and Mr. Bi Norgm, who were summoned to answer questions on kidnapping and illegal confinement in relation to protests against demarcation of land that took place in May 2009.

At a national level, CCHR has used the data compiled through its own desk-based research and information received from community activists to lobby on the issue of land reform. The Study for example was publicized by way of a press conference bringing together stakeholders and victims of land conflicts and our findings were sent to relevant Ministries with the aim of starting a much needed dialogue on how to address land conflicts, including the granting of ELCs.

CONCLUSION

The multi-faceted approach to human rights protection and promotion promoted by the Sithi Project exemplifies a new collaborative way to undertake human rights protection and promotion work. Collaborative and participatory approaches have encouraged information CSOs and community activists to share information with CCHR, while strengthening local communities through capacity building to claim their rights for themselves. Based on information collected by CCHR on its own and collaboratively with others, the Sithi Project feeds CCHR’s fact based dialogue with the RGC and others, and fact based advocacy to inform the development of recommendations for policy, structural and legislative reforms, and raise awareness and promote understanding of human rights. The human rights web portal connected to the Sithi Project, www.sithi.org, has further amplified the voices of local communities by providing an online platform through which their observations on human rights violations can be presented to national and international audiences. Through utilizing new media like Sithi.org, CCHR is able to disseminate information and increase awareness and understanding of human rights issues in Cambodia amongst Cambodian people and across the world, as it continues its work to promote and protect human rights.

CONTACT

Any suggestions, feedbacks, or more information, please contact:

Ms. Chor Chanthyda, Project Coordinator
Email: info@sithi.org
Phone: +855 (0) 23 72 69 01

The Cambodian Center for Human Rights