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About us

Equitable Cambodia is a registered national non-governmental organisation in Cambodia working to promote equitable development and the progressive realization of human rights in Cambodia through research, evidence-based advocacy, community empowerment and support for grassroots-led social change. Equitable Cambodia was formed out of the localization of Bridges Across Borders Cambodia (BABC), an international solidarity organization active in Cambodia since 2003. Equitable Cambodia was registered by the Ministry of Interior as a Cambodian national non-governmental organization in March 2012.

Our Vision

We envision a Cambodia in which all people are able to enjoy their basic human rights and natural resources are managed sustainably for the common good.

Our Mission

Equitable Cambodia promotes inclusive and equitable development to further the progressive realization of human rights in Cambodia through research, evidence-based advocacy, community organizing and empowerment.

Our Core Values

We strive to “be the change”
We promote, defend and respect human rights
We cultivate empowerment
We practice active non-violence
We respect diversity and practice non-discrimination
We promote gender equality
We see challenges as opportunities
We have courage
We practice team-building
We are financially transparent
We are trustworthy and dependable
We are diligent and industrious
We respect others’ opinions
We are kind and compassionate

Overall Goals for 2013-2015

Our overall goal is to transform the national development model into one that respects, protects and fulfils the human rights of the Cambodian people. In order to achieve this long-term goal, Equitable Cambodia has established three program goals and one organizational goal for the period 2013-2015:

1. Threatened communities are motivated and organized to work together to secure their land and housing rights.
2. Cambodians are more informed and equipped to become active citizens, defend human rights and advocate for inclusive and equitable development.
3. Authorities, development partners and the private sector are held accountable for violations of land, housing and natural resource rights, and the overall land governance policy framework is improved.
4. Equitable Cambodia is a highly professional organization with competent staff, strong team spirit, and adherence to best practices in financial, administrative and human resources management.
between the Executive Director

2013 was a year in which the national elections were accompanied by prolonged political unrest and targeted violence and crackdowns by authorities on protesters, union activists, land activists (including members of the Boeung Kak Lake community) and journalists. In this environment, our training, organizing and advocacy work on contentious cases and issues became more challenging. Sometimes our team were threatened with arrest or authorities disrupted, disbanded or interfered with them as they tried to carry out activities with communities. Nonetheless, this year has been a defining one for political participation and mobilization for rights of Cambodians.

Equitable Cambodia, and BABC before, has been working tirelessly for the last ten years to bring awareness and empower Cambodians to demand their rights and we can safely say that 2013 was the year that this happened. Cambodian people in the cities and the countryside are more and more aware of their rights and the obligations of the government to protect them. They have overcome their fears and have been incredibly vocal in demanding accountability from their leaders.

In 2013, Equitable Cambodia’s Community Empowerment and Legal Awareness (CELA) program trained 30 new members of its growing network of community paralegals. This year, the CELA program supported the paralegals to deliver 60 workshops on citizen rights and laws to defend land, housing and natural resources throughout the country.

We began this year with the pilot of our new program, the Community Organizing for Housing Rights program, which for the first six months of the year saw our 18 community organizers receive intensive training from our own experienced community organizers as well as from highly skilled and experienced community organizers from Thailand. When the organizers were placed into communities, we had no idea how quickly they would bring residents together, working collectively to make remarkable improvements to their communities.
The Development Watch program has had many remarkable successes this year. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) Compliance Review Panel completed a year-long investigation of a complaint we filed regarding the disastrous resettlement of 4000 families to make way an ADB-funded railway project. The Panel’s findings validated all the claims we made in the complaint and called for a multi-million dollar corrective action plan, including the delivery of remedial compensation payments for all affected households. Also, as a result of our lobbying, the US Senate Appropriations Committee adopted a bill with language requiring the US government to vote against any new loans from the World Bank to Cambodia until the Boeung Kak Lake community has received appropriate redress. Additionally, we have had great success with our advocacy in the UK and Europe. 15 members of the EU Parliament followed up with a letter to the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Catherine Ashton, requesting an update on an urgent resolution adopted by the European Parliament calling on the European Commission to investigate human rights abuses committed by firms benefitting from the Everything-But-Arms trade preference scheme with Cambodia. We were also very relieved when Bonsucro, a responsible sugar initiative, eventually decided to temporarily suspend UK sugar buyer Tate & Lyle over complaints it profited from sugar bought from sugar concessions in Koh Kong where authorities and companies forcibly, and sometimes violently, took villagers land. We had been lobbying Bonsucro for over two years, including a complaint in 2011 and an advocacy trip in 2012 to Bonsucro’s Annual General Meeting.

I am proud to announce that in 2014 we continue to grow as an organisation through the introduction of new policies and procedures and our commitment to encouraging individual capacity building of our staff to ensure we maintain high standards in all areas of our work.

Lastly, I want to deeply thank our donors, supporters, partners, staff and volunteers. Their friendship, hard work and support have been enormously important for the work of our different programs and deeply appreciated.

We look forward to continuing our work with our donor, partners, Cambodian activists and threatened communities to advance the human rights situation in Cambodia and continuing to grow and develop as an organization in 2014 and beyond.

Eang Vuthy  
Executive Director
The Development Watch (DW) program of Equitable Cambodia aims to promote a human rights-based approach to development. It does this by conducting monitoring, research, analysis and evidence-based advocacy on aid, trade, and investment activities that have adverse impacts on human rights and the environment in an effort to hold business and development actors to account.

In 2013, the program worked on five major cases, including the Boeung Kak Lake development project; sugar-cane concessions in Koh Kong, Kampong Speu and Oddar Meanchey provinces; the Asian Development Bank (ADB)/AusAID-funded Railway Rehabilitation Project; the expansion of Phnom Penh International Airport; and rubber concessions in Ratanakiri province. Development Watch conducted research and assisted communities to develop and implement multi-pronged advocacy strategies, including filing complaints to local and international accountability mechanisms; negotiation; undertaking public advocacy, including protests and marches; and engaging with the media for advocacy and awareness raising.

The DW program also conducted policy research and advocacy on key legislative and policy developments that impact upon land and housing rights in Cambodia. Policy work in 2013 focused primarily on advocacy using our human rights impact assessment (Bittersweet Harvest: A Human Rights Impact Assessment of the European Union's Everything But Arms Initiative in Cambodia) of the European Union's Everything But Arms (EBA) initiative, a report which Equitable Cambodia launched at the European Parliament in September. The program also contributed to a collaborative research project with Oxfam and Monash University examining community-driven accountability processes in three case studies of large-scale infrastructure projects.

**Railway Rehabilitation Project**

In October, the ADB Compliance Review Panel (CRP) visited Cambodia to conduct its long-delayed investigation of the Railway Rehabilitation Project. DW originally assisted families with a detailed complaint to the Panel, which was found to be eligible in October 2012. DW facilitated the CRP’s field visits and accompanied the Panel members on site visits in Phnom Penh, Sihanoukville, Battambang and Poipet.
1. The establishment of a USD$3 - $4 million ADB fund for remedial compensation payments.
2. A debt workout scheme to help highly indebted families repay their accumulated debts through a dedicated credit line and a debt workout facility.
3. Improvements to infrastructure and facilities at resettlement sites.
4. Increased funds to self-help groups under the Enhanced Income Restoration program, and an extension of the program for 5 years.
5. Adopting specific safeguards for the development of the freight facility at Samrong Estate, including a new detailed measurement survey carried out and full consultation and disclosure to affected households, categorizing affected households as "legalizable" and offering them compensation at the market value of the land at the time of relocation.

With support of DW, 121 families submitted 99 new complaints to various accountability mechanisms for the railway project, including the Asian Development Bank, Inter-Ministerial Resettlement Committee and/or the Office for the Special Project Facilitator (OSPF). As a result of complaints submitted with the assistance of DW in previous years, a primary school was built at the Poipet resettlement site and was nearing completion at the end of this year, the inadequate and under-resourced primary school at the Phnom Penh resettlement site was upgraded and expanded and AusAID built community centres at 5 resettlement sites and provided financial literacy education to heavily indebted families.

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**Impact Story: San Sokheng, Samrong Estate**

San Sokheng has lived in his house in a 100-hectare area known as Samrong Estate since 1979. He built the house himself, with help from family members. Sokheng supports his wife and 5 children by farming his nearby rice fields and selling the produce.

The ADB and Australian government-financed railway development project has put Sokheng’s home and farmland under threat due to a freight facility that is planned to be built on the Samrong Estate. Despite Sokheng’s legal possession rights to his land under Cambodian law, the government claims that the land belongs to the State. The project has offered compensation to Sokheng and other families living in Samrong, but it falls far short of the market value.

Since being approached by their village chief in 2009 and being told to give up their land, Sokheng and others in his community have had many sleepless nights. Sokheng’s biggest fear is losing his livelihood and, without adequate compensation, being unable to buy replacement land near the city.

DW began working with the Samrong Community in 2011, offering advice and training to residents whose legal rights were not being respected by the project. The residents learned about the background of their case and their rights under Cambodian law and the ADB’s safeguard policies. DW
also conducted high-level advocacy on behalf of community members by collecting evidence, preparing a two page legal memorandum on the case and submitting it to the senior management and legal department of the ADB.

After joining meetings with DW, Sokheng was inspired: “I began to think there could be a solution... I walked from house to house informing people about the project”. Using the knowledge acquired from DW, he has made his voice heard by writing to the Commune, Sangkat, City Hall and ADB explaining his case.

The ADB’s Compliance Review Panel visited Cambodia in October 2013. A draft report sent to Equitable Cambodia in December recommends that the ADB treat the Samrong residents as landowners and grant them full market value for their land and property at the time of relocation. It also finds that the ADB did not comply with its policies by failing to undertake a feasibility study of the proposed freight facility at Samrong, including an assessment of whether it was absolutely necessary to acquire such a large parcel of land and displace the residents. It recommends that ADB undertake this feasibility study and re-draft the resettlement action plan for Samrong Estate if it is determined that the freight facility is necessary. This positive result of DW’s hard work will hopefully lead to a solution for affected families in Samrong in the near future.
Phnom Penh Airport Project

In 2013, DW assisted families from the Thmor Kol community, who were threatened with forced eviction due to a concession for the proposed construction of a 10 meter ‘security buffer’ around the border of Phnom Penh International Airport. DW conducted research to identify which company holds the concession, and discovered that it was a client of the International Finance Corporation (IFC), and therefore bound by its performance standards. After extensive consultations and community education on the situation and advocacy options, the community agreed to allow DW to submit a complaint to the IFC’s Compliance Advisory Ombudsman (CAO) on their behalf.

A CAO investigator completed his field visit to Phnom Penh in July, when he met separately with NGOs, the community, government and involved companies. On July 2nd, the Ombudsman met with community representatives to explain CAO procedure, answer questions and hear their concerns. DW has been working closely with this community since 2012 helping them to organize and strategize. We have been very impressed with the results as members of the community seized this opportunity to passionately and articulately voice their claims and concerns. They demanded onsite upgrading and security of tenure, proposed that the airport wall be moved inward by 5 meters rather than outward into people’s homes and talked openly of their experiences with authorities and the threat of eviction. As a result of training by DW and EC’s Community Empow-
A YEAR IN REVIEW 2013

In 2013, clients of the EC and the Legal Awareness Program, they have a good understanding of their rights under Cambodian land law and under IFC safeguard policies. Further, they have devised a plan for upcoming negotiations in 2014.

On June 20th, the Municipality of Phnom Penh announced that a committee had been established to begin a process of consultation, land valuation and negotiation with community representatives. On July 3rd, the community met with the government’s land committee. The community was told that they would receive market price for acquisitioned land and an independent committee would establish the market value. As this decision has not been officially announced, and no further information provided, we are unsure if NGOs will have a voice in the committee. Nonetheless, this is a huge step towards fair resolution for affected households. We are optimistic about the communities and airport stakeholders coming to a fair agreement.

Later in the year, under significant advocacy pressure from NGOs, including high impact advocacy by DW starting in 2012, the government announced that it will reduce the amount of land it plans to expropriate from the airport wall to 5 meters instead of 10. This means impacts on households and the community will be significantly reduced if the concession is granted.

In 2014, the airport communities will continue to negotiate for a fair solution and EC will continue to support them and facilitate and monitor their engagement with the CAO and other airport stakeholders.

**Boeung Kak Lake**

With support from the DW team in developing advocacy strategies, the Boeung Kak Lake (BKL) community pursued a robust advocacy campaign, and, in the period leading up to the July 28th election, protested almost every day. DW staff monitored and supported the majority of these protests, which were often successful in submitting community petitions or meeting with government representatives. Unfortunately, many have been marred by violent clashes with police and security forces, including a particularly brutal case of violence against BKL protestors in March when police attacked a peaceful demonstration, leaving five people seriously injured. BKL’s most high-profile campaign called for the release of imprisoned BKL activist Yorm Bopha. Upon appeal to the Supreme Court, Bopha was released on bail on 22nd November, with the judge ordering a re-investigation of the case. DW has also been working with community representatives to develop a guidebook on community organizing and advocacy (see Community Driven Accountability).

DW staff attended several meetings between NGOs and Municipal Governor, Mr. Pa Socheatevong. The Governor agreed that BKL families excluded from the 12.44 hectare deal would receive replacement land plots with titles in the 12.44 area, which would mark a significant breakthrough. Recently, the 12.44 hectares have been measured. At the next meeting the Governor stated that the 12.44 hectares granted to BKL are not in compliance with the city master plan, and therefore need to be further developed, including access roads, a drainage system and housing. It is unclear whether this will be used as pretext for future evictions, or if the MPP plans to provide onsite upgrading.

EC and Inclusive Development International (IDI) organized meetings with BKL activist, Tep Vanny, with the US State Department, Treasury Department and on Capitol Hill. After meeting with Vanny and the team, a senior staffer on US Senate Appropriations Committee told us to submit language for legislation that would put pressure on the World Bank. In a significant coup, the Senate Appropriations Committee adopted our language verbatim. If adopted by the full Congress, this will place significant pressure on the World Bank not to abandon the BKL community as it prepares to reengage with the Cambodian government.
Sugarcane Concessions / EBA Campaign

Our report, “Bittersweet Harvest: A Human Rights Impact Assessment of the European Union’s Everything But Arms (EBA) Initiative in Cambodia”, was finalized, published and launched at a special event at the European Parliament on September 16th. The report presents the findings of a human rights impact assessment of the EU’s EBA initiative in Cambodia, focusing on affected communities impacted by the sugar industry in Kampong Speu, Koh Kong and Oddar Meanchey. The report was published by EC, Inclusive Development International (IDI) and the Hands Off the Land Alliance. Professional photographs were commissioned for the report, providing documentary evidence of child labour on the plantations.

The launch was followed by an advocacy trip through Europe by EC Executive Director Eang Vuthy, Technical Advisor David Pred, and community representatives. A series of lobbying meetings were held to discuss the report findings and recommendations with the European Commission, members of the European Parliament, key EU Member States, Members of the UN Human Rights Council and its Special Rapporteurs. A launch event in Bangkok was also organized, providing an opportunity to lobby the Thai Human Rights Commission (THRC) and Thai sugar companies. Numerous journalists attended and a number of articles were published about the report and its findings.

ActionAID France and Peuples Solidaires organized a solidarity petition that was sent to the EU Trade Commissioner Karel de Gucht, which gathered over 59,000 signatures. The petition raises awareness of human rights abuses in Cambodia resulting from the EBA preferences. It is hoped that the success of the petition (itself a significant outcome) and associated media attention will help pressure the EU to launch an investigation into EBA-linked human rights abuses.
EU trade delegates visited in March to examine allegations of human rights abuses by sugar companies supplying Europe through the EBA scheme. DW worked with the Sugar Justice Network (SJN) to lobby the delegation to formally investigate the human rights abuses and return land or adequately compensate affected families. The delegation was also invited to meet community representatives from Koh Kong and Oddar Meanchey, but refused. They said they would release a report documenting their visit, but the EU has now declined to release this, claiming that it is an internal document. The EU delegates delayed a decision on whether to initiate an official investigation until after the UN Human Rights Council session in September, but we are yet to hear from them.

The sugar case has gained considerable attention from the media. Al Jazeera aired a report on human rights abuses and the sugar industry, featuring the ‘Blood Sugar’ campaign, which DW helped to organize. In the UK, the Guardian newspaper ran two pieces, including an article on the front page of its print edition, about Tate & Lyle’s links to the Koh Kong land grab, and an op-ed co-authored by EC’s Executive Director Eang Vuthy. Tate & Lyle received significant negative publicity and subsequently threatened to sue the Guardian for libel over its allegations that its suppliers used child labour on its plantations. In response, EC, LICADHO and CLEC released a joint press statement showing children working on the sugar plantations that supply Tate & Lyle.

DW has also seen success from its advocacy with other companies. In June, we collected 602 thumbprints from 5 affected communities in Oddar Meanchey as part of a complaint to the Thai Human Rights Commission (THRC) against the Mitr Pohl Corporation. The case has been proceeding slowly, but the THRC has engaged with Mitr Phol regarding the complaint. At a public forum on March 29th, the new General Manager of Koh Kong Sugar Industry Company stated that he had “a strong commitment to resolve the land conflicts between the people and the company” and they would return seized land if the government compensated the company appropriately. On November 8th, in response to an Oxfam campaign that DW supported, Coca-Cola announced a “zero tolerance” policy on land-grabbing in their supply chain and disclosed that Mitr Phol is one of their top three suppliers globally. DW followed up directly with Coke, providing information about the forced evictions and human rights abuses committed by Mitr Phol’s subsidiaries in Cambodia. Coke later informed us that they plan to conduct a social, environmental and human rights impact assessment of Mitr Phol’s operations.
Rubber Case

In May 2013, Global Witness published Rubber Barons, which revealed that two of Vietnam’s largest companies, Hoang Anh Gia Lai (HAGL) and the Vietnam Rubber Group (VRG), have leased vast tracts of land for plantations in Laos and Cambodia, with disastrous consequences for local communities and the environment.

In November, DW began working with Inclusive Development International (IDI) and Highlanders Association (HA) to raise awareness of affected communities in Ratanakiri about Global Witness’s findings, and support their efforts to seek accountability and redress from HAGL and the IFC, that is invested in HAGL via a Vietnamese Equity fund, Dragon Capital. DW and IDI also began conducting a human rights impact assessment of the HAGL concessions. DW conducted four fieldwork trips to Ratanakiri, holding interviews and focus group discussions with affected communities. Data collection from 18 affected villages is expected to be completed by January. DW also began raising awareness with the representatives of affected communities about the financial flows behind the companies that were impacting on them, as well as the IFC’s safeguard policies and accountability mechanism. In early 2014, DW will use this information to assist affected communities to submit a complaint to the compliance and accountability mechanism of the IFC, the CAO.

Community Driven Accountability Research Project

In 2013, the CDA project team worked with members of the BKL community to develop a guidebook on community organizing and advocacy, which present’s BKL’s experiences and lessons for other communities fighting evictions. The booklet was produced through workshops and consultations with BKL residents. The booklet is expected to be published in January and EC will help the BKL community to disseminate it through training organized by the CELA program. The project produced a draft paper and presentation on Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) in the Sesan case, which was delivered to other NGOs at Rivers Coalition of Cambodia (RCC). Another conference paper, “Mapping Accountability Processes in Cambodia”, was published in the Australian National University’s Development Bulletin. In June, the initial findings of this research were presented at an Oxfam Monash symposium in Melbourne. EC also presented at a panel event on “Innovations in Transnational Accountability” about our experience using transnational accountability mechanisms, including those of the World Bank and ADB.
COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT AND LEGAL AWARENESS PROGRAM

The Community Empowerment and Legal Awareness Program (CELA) of Equitable Cambodia (EC) aims to address significant barriers to just and inclusive development in Cambodia by empowering Cambodians to advocate for human rights change. The program is developing a series of interactive, popular education curricula covering rights, laws, paralegal skills, and legal strategies for challenging investment and development projects that do not respect human rights. It builds the capacity of grassroots activists to impart knowledge, skills, and values contained in these resources to their own communities and others that are vulnerable to land rights violations. The program is helping to rectify the imbalance of power in Cambodia by nurturing networks of community advocates and supporting their mobilization and collective advocacy actions.

There were several key outcomes of the CELA program during 2013. The first was the successful publication of CELA’s latest popular legal education resource, A Community Guide to Economic Land Concessions: Risks, Rights and Action (hereafter, Economic Land Concessions). CELA also designed a new format for its flagship resource, “A Cambodian Guide to Defending Land and Housing Rights” (Defending Land), and produced a new draft of A “Community Guide to Negotiation” (Negotiation) for field-testing. Further to developing new texts, CELA continued to build on its foundation of participatory education and empowerment by using its existing bank of resources to train more than 1900 people in 2013. This year, CELA trained a new group of facilitators on its Defending Land course consisting of university students who participated in last year’s Democracy Summer Camp. They then worked in collaboration with the grassroots paralegal network that CELA has trained in past years to deliver the curricula at community workshops throughout the country.

In 2013, CELA conducted five Training-of-Trainers workshops (ToTs) on its human rights defender curricula: three training sessions on the Defending Land course attended by 70 participants (including 22 women),
one ToT Workshop on Economic Land Concessions with 29 participants (17 women) and one workshop on Mining for 36 participants (8 women). CELA also organized the Democracy Summer Camp in Kep Province with 30 youth (16 women), which included training of trainers on CELA’s Civics course.

In turn, the grassroots facilitators and university students trained by the CELA team conducted 47 workshops, including 32 community trainings and 15 youth trainings, for a total of 1596 participants (942 women). These workshops were primarily held in land conflict hotspots in 16 provinces and Phnom Penh. The CELA team monitored and provided support for 22 of these community workshops, in which 83 percent of community participants and 92 percent of youth participants demonstrated proficient understanding of the lessons by passing post-tests.

In addition, CELA conducted 7 direct community trainings to participants from 9 communities threatened with eviction in Phnom Penh, with which EC’s Community Organizing for Housing Rights (COHR) program is working: Toul Kok, Khvar, Louek La Ark, Stueng Prak, Sammaki Meancheuy, Village 22, Village 23, Village 15, and Thmor Kol. Additionally, a special training was conducted by CELA for indigenous communities affected by Vietnamese rubber plantations in Ratanakiri province, which the Development Watch program is assisting in a major complaint to the World Bank’s International Finance Corporation. In total, 216 participants (107 women) attended these direct trainings.

Simultaneously, CELA has continued to play a central role in supporting solidarity-building activities between communities and grassroots activists to defend land, natural resources and housing rights in Cambodia. Specifically, the program continued to focus on supporting networking and community-led advocacy by communities affected by the Boeung Kak Lake development in Phnom Penh; the Railway Rehabilitation Project (from Sihanoukville to Poipet); the sugar industry in Koh Kong, Kampong Speu and Oddar Meanchey provinces; the Phnom Penh airport expansion; and mining operations in and around Prey Lang forest. CELA also provided technical support to the secretariat of the national Community Peace-building Network (CPN). In 2013, CELA supported 47 community actions.
A major highlight was the Free Bopha! Campaign, initiated after the Boueng Kak Lake activist was arbitrarily arrested, convicted and sentenced to three years in prison. After the arrest, EC worked together with NGO partners and BKL community representatives to advocate for Bopha’s release. The CELA team joined other BKL Working Group members to help the community develop an advocacy plan, and then provided financial and moral support as they implemented it. On the 22nd of November, responding to enormous pressure domestically and internationally, the Supreme Court released Bopha on bail.

In April, activist Tep Vanny won two international human rights awards for her activism: the Amnesty International-sponsored Golden Butterfly Award in March at the Hague, and the Vital Voices Award in April in Washington DC. The latter ceremony, which EC joined, included tributes from US Vice President Joe Biden and Secretary of State Hilary Clinton. This honour was partly an outcome of EC’s high-impact advocacy with the BKL community since 2008. In particular, the ‘Free the 13’ campaign drew international attention to jailed BKL protestors, including Vanny. The awards have further raised the profile of the community’s struggle.

Following the awards ceremony, EC and IDI organized meetings with Vanny with the US State Department, Treasury Department and on Capitol Hill. After meeting with Vanny and the team, a senior staffer on US Senate Appropriations Committee told us to submit language for legislation that would put pressure on the World Bank. EC and IDI provided language stating that the US Executive Director to the World Bank cannot approve any loans or grants to Cambodia until the Secretary of State certifies that the Boeung Kak Lake (BKL) community has received appropriate redress, which was defined, at minimum, as: a) land security for the 61 remaining families who were excluded from receiving land titles; b) clear demarcation of the community’s land and the company’s land; and c) livelihood programs for BKL families who were evicted between 2008-2012. In a significant coup, the Senate Appropriations Committee adopted our language verbatim. If adopted by the full Congress, this will place significant pressure on the World Bank not to abandon the BKL community as it prepares to re-engage with the Cambodian government.
COMMUNITY ORGANIZING FOR HOUSING RIGHTS

The Community Organizing for Housing Rights (COHR) program works in partnership with the Housing Rights Task Force (HRTF) and the Leaders and Organizers of Community Organizations in Asia (LOCOA) to motivate and organize threatened, urban poor communities in Phnom Penh to work together to secure their land and housing rights. Embedded community organizers work to mobilize and unite community residents to work together to identify and address problems in their communities. The organizers empower people to become more socially and politically aware and active. They are working to form and unify people's organizations, improve their capacity in advocacy and negotiation, and support people-led improvements to the environment, community infrastructure and living conditions in informal settlements as a strategy for strengthening security of tenure. Ultimately the project aims to transform the network of communities involved in the program into a community federation of the urban poor.

Equitable Cambodia commenced this new program in January 2013. The first six months of the project focused on training external community organizers who assumed direct responsibility for organizing work in the second half of the year and over the next two and a half years as part of the COHR 2013-2015 activity plan. The training, provided by seasoned Thai organizers from the LOCOA network, involved both theoretical and practical components. It also involved “testing” the organizers in the field to determine whether they have the necessary attitudes and characteristics to work successfully as community organizers.

Fourteen community organizers were then embedded in eighteen communities, comprised of 1697 families in three different areas of Phnom Penh city: Stung Meancheay (8 communities), Boeung Tumpun (2 communities) and communities affected by Cambodian railway rehabilitation (Railway) (8 communities). The organizers first facilitated community meetings, with full participation of residents, to discuss and prioritize community issues and propose potential solutions. The meetings identified collective solutions and designed participatory processes to resolve the problems with three main goals: 1) identifying solutions to community problems that involved collective actions, 2) improving community solidarity, and 3) enhancing community confidence and courage.

In 2013, many community meetings were organized to prioritize community issues and discuss solutions. Organizers worked tirelessly to encourage the participation of community residents. Approximately 95% of all families in COHR communities attended community meetings and shared their concerns. The meetings were successful, with the solutions found meeting all three of the aforementioned goals. The meetings also aimed to encourage strong negotiation skills before community residents took action and begun negotiations with authorities and company representatives.

The organizers identified 52 residents (31 female) as future potential leaders in seventeen communities. They were trained on the basic concepts of community organizing and the significance of people working together to address collective issues. Through various networking events, these leaders exchanged their success stories and experiences, building the foundations for strong links and solidarity between the communities, which we will continue to encourage in 2014-2015. A building was rented for the Community Solidarity Centre (CSC), which will be officially opened in early 2014. In the meantime, community trainings regularly took place at the offices of EC and our partner Sahmakum Teang Tnaut (SST). Twenty-eight residents from eight different communities were trained on Land Law, Housing Rights and Curricular 03. Sixty-nine residents from 17 communities were trained in advocacy skills in collaboration with the CELA program of Equitable Cambodia. Sixty-eight residents were coached on negotiation and deployed to negotiate directly with authorities and representatives of companies. From November 30th - December 1st, the COHR program organized an annual gathering with 142 residents from the 17 communities, in an effort to foster networks by integrating communities from three different geographical areas – Lake, Canal and Railway. A solidarity action was planned during the gathering and more than 200 residents from 15 different communities
joined the action the following day (see case study below). This was a critical first step toward the program’s ultimate goal of organizing a strong urban poor community federation.

There were numerous successes this year, where organizers were effective in assisting community mobilization. The following are just three of the highlights from 2013:

1. Community organizers worked with eight communities along Stung Meanchey canal to mobilize the communities to successfully convince local authorities that they should receive on-site upgrading, not relocation as was being planned. This fantastic result came after EC’s community organizers worked with the residents to mobilize the community and develop a clear plan to take firm action on cleaning garbage from the canal that ran through their community. They managed to prove to the authorities and the public that they are enthusiastic and willing participants in solving the public problems facing Phnom Penh (garbage blocking the Stung Meanchey canal has been blamed for flooding in the city). As a result, the Khan Governor verbally promised not to evict them and committed to establish a working group, including Equitable Cambodia, to study the possibilities of on-site upgrading. This was a terrific outcome resulting from the communities’ and the organizers’ hard work and dedication.

2. Residents of Aphiwadh Thmey community, including about 60 families, came together to clear large amounts of garbage that were causing health, hygiene and amenity problems in the community. Families contributed their own money to purchase cleaning equipment and organized to gather residents to clear the garbage with facilitation by Equitable Cambodia’s community organizers. The community then contributed another package of money to pay for a solidarity event. COHR community organizers helped to organize meetings and facilitate planning. This has resulted in the residents of Aphiwadh Thmey coming together in unity to address their garbage problem and the emergence of a community organization and community leaders.
3. 114 families in the Roumchet Temouy community, also known as Samaki, discussed the high risk of fire in the community. They became deeply concerned that a fire could potentially cause deaths and widespread destruction. The residents organized a large meeting of community residents and agreed on a way they could work together to reduce this risk. They gathered money to purchase ten fire extinguishers and then gathered to demand support from the Sangkat authorities. After pressuring the Sangkat, they were provided with an additional two fire extinguishers. The residents held another meeting to distribute the extinguishers and provided training to everyone in the community on how to use them. The community now feels well prepared in the event a fire does break out. The community has become highly motivated, organized and capable of working collectively to address problems they collectively face.

4. In 2013 the CO team worked to organise residents in the village of Prek Takong where the local Sangkat planned to expand the road without consulting residents. The village consists of 360 families in two separate zones – one consisting of 156 families and another consisting of 204 families.

The plans, which involved widening the road and raising the height, affected 20 houses and did not benefit all many of the residents in the village. Residents came up with three demands in response - the new road should not be any wider than the existing road, it should not be raised in height by more than 1 meter and the remaining budget should be spent on elongating the road.

Initially the Khan governor agreed to some of the demands, and residents were extremely happy with the results so decided not to take any further action. However it later became clear that the contract award for the project would take place without a public hearing. After learning this, the residents felt let down by the authorities and lost trust in them.

The contract documents indicated that the construction would expand the width of the road against residents wishes and not extend it as much as they wanted. The residents wanted to take action by writing a petition to demand that the original road construction plan was kept to, but they were banned from taking action by the village chief.

Just one day before the opening ceremony of road construction was to be presided over by the Khan governor, residents heard that the road construction would still not be to their satisfaction. Before the ceremony started, a resident from the community approached the Khan governor and questioned him about the plans and what would happen to the affected families.

On the stage, the Khan governor announced to the public that the road construction would keep to the original road width where possible. A voice record of the Khan Governor’s promise was made, so there will be evidence available to hold him accountable.
**Impact Story: Solidarity Brings Results**

On November 1st, Shukaku Inc (the Boeung Kak Lake developer) began building a fence that blocked residents of Village 2, Village 23 and Village 21 of the Boeung Kak II commune from accessing the main road. On November 30 and December 1, the COHR program organized a gathering with 142 residents from its seventeen partner communities to promote networking and solidarity. During the event, the residents of Village 2, 23 and 21 asked for help from other communities to assist them in lobbying Shukaku Inc and the Khan authorities regarding the fence construction. A solidarity action was planned and agreed by all the participants in the gathering.

The following day, 200 residents from Village 2, 21 and 23 mobilized together with support from 15 other communities early in morning to stop the Shukaku construction workers from constructing the fence. This action aimed to pressure the company and local authorities to open negotiations on a solution that would ensure their continued road access. They wanted the company and authorities to agree to build a community access road before the company built its fence.

The residents prepared food and water to bring to the company construction workers, in an effort to make friends with the workers while they demanded Shukaku to construct the road for them. There was no violence or bad words exchanged during their blocking action. The residents were well-organized and divided themselves into different teams, including a team to surround the workers, a team to prepare food and water, a team to conduct negotiations with the company and in making sure that the demands were met. In the process, the negotiators shuttled back and forth to discuss with the residents before continuing the negotiation, in order to ensure that representatives were voicing the concerns of the people and not making decisions for them.

After one hour of blocking the construction, company representatives and local authorities including the village chief, Sangkat chief, deputy Khan governor and Municipality deputy governor came to the village and proposed to meet at the Khan office and Wat Neakvorn. They asked the residents to re-elect representatives to negotiate with the authorities and the company. However, the residents did not agree to re-elect representatives or to go outside the community to negotiate. They insisted on negotiating in their community at the construction site.

After 5 hours of negotiation, the residents, company and authorities signed an agreement to make an access road of 5 meters width, including a drainage system, for the residents of the three villages. They agreed to build the road within one week. The residents were extremely happy that through their solidarity action they were able to achieve their goals.

In each of these cases, the COHR community organizers facilitated community meetings, guided decision-making, assisted with planning processes, and organized technical assistance that played a crucial role in helping the communities to achieve these very positive outcomes.
Equitable Cambodia has a long history of facilitating volunteer placements where young people, students, interns and professionals have the opportunity to participate in meaningful cultural exchanges, short-term trips and work placements in Cambodia where they can learn about the people and culture of Cambodia, have meaningful and illuminating interactions with Cambodians and work to make tangible, positive impacts on the people and communities with whom they work.

Our Volunteer Program provides participants with the opportunity to be involved with a range of EC and partner organizations operating in Phnom Penh and Kep province.

Volunteers have the opportunity to gain an insight into Cambodian life and culture, an introduction into the world of development and human rights work, and important life skills and valuable experiences as well as the opportunity to develop meaningful long-lasting connections with people, communities and organisations in Cambodia.

In 2013 Equitable Cambodia’s Volunteer Program hosted 107 volunteers in Phnom Penh and 37 in Kep.

Developing World Connections (DWC)

EC partners with a non-profit organization Developing World Connections to offer meaningful experiences to volunteers ranging from students to business executives. Based in Canada, DWC works closely with grassroots organizations like EC to support sustainable development initiatives for people who want to spend their vacation time making a positive difference for impoverished people.

DWC facilitated discussion between the Rotary Club of Kamloops Daybreak and the Rotary Club Phnom Penh Metro to support a Rotary International project with EC to improve water security in Kep Province. This included implementing clean drinking water systems, improving irrigation systems, building latrines and creating public awareness about health, hygiene and water borne diseases.

A group of DWC volunteers, many of whom were members of the Rotary Club of Kamloops Daybreak, worked on a portion of this water project in Kep. The team of seven volunteers got their hands dirty working with our local staff and the beneficiaries. They laid bricks, dug holes, inserted a cement cistern holding tank and plastered the wall of two latrines. The group then moved onto the next project of creating two new water gates. These gates help to increase crop production for local farmers by allowing more water to flow to their fields. The final project was to extend an existing ditch, and the team managed to finish 30 meters before the trip came to an end.
Individual and Career Break Volunteers

EC welcomes long-term volunteers who want to get involved in our projects, working alongside local staff in a variety of roles. There are many skilled professionals taking a mid-career break who wish to support development efforts in Cambodia. In 2013 EC hosted two career break volunteers who assisted with advocacy and raising awareness. As part of their work they shot professional standard photos of our community organizing work that were also published on our website, Facebook page, Twitter account and used for some of our reports. The volunteers also provided valuable advice to local staff on improving their own photography skills, which has greatly increased the quality of photos taken by our staff and utilized by the organization. They helped to update the CELA section on the EC website, travelled to the provinces to assist with monitoring community trainings on human rights and monitored protests in Phnom Penh. One of the most helpful things done by these volunteers was to create, maintain and transfer responsibility of a EC volunteers only Facebook group that will help to keep volunteers connected to each other, to EC, and updated about EC’s activities and advocacy.

“During my stay I learned a lot about the politics of the country and saw first-hand the struggles the people were still going through in an effort to retain their human rights.

EC has been at the forefront of helping those people become more educated in their dealings with the government in issues such as land rights, deforestation and the overall greed of foreign companies who care more about profit than the lives of the Khmer people.

I attended protest rallies and saw how passionate the people were about their country and living a decent lifestyle without threats of violence and eviction. I attended workshops with young law students who were keen to get the message out to the communities. I also saw how the people stick up for their own in cases such as the protests surrounding the jailing of Boeng Kak Lake activist Ms Yorm Bopha, who many believe was unfairly imprisoned for her alleged role in the bashing of two motodup drivers.

And I went on field trips to remote areas and actually lived as the indigenous people do, sleeping and eating with them. The community in the village north of Battambang welcomed me into their lives and treated as an equal despite the language barrier. Smiles speak all languages.

My time in Cambodia with EC has been life-changing. As a “barang” I can now look at life through the eyes of the Khmer people and know that no matter how tough life is there is always a light at the end of the tunnel.

I cannot thank EC enough for one of the most satisfying times of my life and hope that I will be able to return to my Khmer “family” in the not-too-distant future.”

Duncan Horscroft, Australian

Student Volunteers

In 2013 EC welcomed eleven student volunteers from Belgium, England, Switzerland, Italy and America to teach English in our partner community schools and help to fund the set-up of another classroom at Impact School in Phnom Penh. They donated fans, whiteboards, tables and chairs. Volunteers also helped EC staff with editing of program reports and updates of training curriculums written in English, monitored training in the provinces and one volunteer joined with the villagers in Kep by lending a hand in the construction of a latrine.
We have enjoyed a long and healthy partnership with United World College Singapore for many years, and throughout the year we hosted volunteers, mini-gap year and gap year placements.

Two gap year students taught English students in three of our partner schools in Phnom Penh - Aziza, Wat Thann and Rudi Boa. They also spent a few days a week teaching English at Equitable Cambodia, as well as helping to edit and produce case studies and annual reports, taking quality photos for our publications, and helping to organise these photos on our server.

We also hosted some smaller groups. Three groups came for a project week, with one group assisting local teachers at Tiny Toones and at Wat Thann primary school, while another group assisted with English and art classes at Rudi Boa. Eight Grade 8 students visited Tiny Toones, Rudi Boa, and Wat Thann to decorate paper plastic bags with the local students. This was a great learning experience for our visiting students.

In addition to this, year one UWC teacher, Emily, joined our volunteer program and brought her friend, Julie. They assisted the local teacher at Tiny Toones by teaching English classes, assisting the teacher during other classes, organizing fun and educational games and activities, as well as helping with some school administration responsibilities.

We hosted two mini gap students who taught English at Impact school while the other helped maintain the volunteer program Facebook group and collected volunteer quotes and volunteer activities for our annual newsletter.

“...I could have gone to Philippines or Thailand however I was so amazed to volunteer in Cambodia since Cambodia and Rwanda, in more than many ways, both share a history of tragedy. Needless to say that on my second day of arrival, I visited the Choeung Ek Genocidal Centre. And there, I realized a very shocking truth: why Cambodia once, in 1960s was considered as the “Pearl of Asia” and today is regarded as one of the poorest nations in South East Asia.

I thoroughly enjoyed staying here and frankly, volunteering to work with EC has been so far the most rewarding and eye-opening decision I’ve made. EC taught me a lot, more than I envisioned. EC was doing the annual report so I was given a work to do in an administrative role. Sitting in the office, reading about past volunteers’ reflections, allowed me to gather some good knowledge about human rights and social justice violated by some of the development projects taking place in Cambodia. It seems to me that these kinds of social injustice and human rights aren’t only happening for Cambodians, but also it’s the common problem we shared most developing countries. I never thought about it before and I now feel motivated to explore the potential development-taking place back home; it would be certainly something of great interest.

Being at UWCSEA, is like being outside the real world. We live in a very comfort zone, where everything we need is provided for us anytime we wanted it. In a conversation with a friend of mine who graduated from UWCSEA, when I asked him how the university life differs from UWCSEA, he told me: “wait and welcome to real world”. I had no clue about what he meant but now I think I have some sort of sense. Through this volunteering program, I was exposed to new world, new culture and new ways of living, which truly opened my mind and eyes. I also learnt how to live independently which is what I think would be the same in University”

Bonheur Tumurere, Rwandan
Global Explorers

Global Explorers is a non-profit organization with a mission of inspiring responsible global citizenship and provides transformative journeys for students and educators, primarily in middle and high school. Global Explorers is a new partner for our volunteer program and this year they brought a group of 12 students to help construct two latrines in Odong village, Kep.

Cambodian Legal Interns

This year we had three Cambodian legal interns from the Royal University of Law and Economics undertake internships with our CELA and DW program. We encourage outstanding students to develop and nurture an interest in human rights work and human rights in Cambodia. All of our interns made invaluable contributions, and brought an infectious enthusiasm to their work.

“EC’s intern program is really useful for students without previous experience. Their program allows me to gain knowledge and skills through work and training and I have learnt a lot about how to perform well in the workplace, how to write reports, take minutes and monitor advocacy and community training. Moreover, I have learnt how to work as part of a team and build good communications with others, and in particular I have learnt a lot about the social issues affecting Cambodia. I have changed many attitudes after my internship here such as my communication, thinking skills and responsibility.” Pat Navy, Law Student

To learn more about our volunteer program and the wide range of volunteering options facilitated by Equitable Cambodia, please see our website:  http://www.equitablecambodia.org/volunteer
Or, send an email to: volunteer@equitablecambodia.org
At Equitable Cambodia we strongly believe in cooperation and co-ordination with other like-minded groups and we would like to recognize the following partners:

**Partners**

Amnesty International  
Aziza Schools  
Bank Information Centre  
Bridges Across Borders Southeast Asia Community Legal Education Initiative  
Building Community Voices  
Cambodia Indigenous Youth Association  
Cambodian Kids Foundation  
Center for International Environmental Law  
Community Capacities for Development  
Community Legal Education Centre  
Community Peace Building Network  
Developing World Connections  
Epic Arts  
ESCR Net  
Focus on the Global South  
Global Witness  
Highlander Association  
Housing Rights Task Force  
Human Rights Watch  
Indigenous Community Support Organization  
IRAM (Indigenous Rights Active Members)  
International Accountability Project  
International School of Phnom Penh  
Leaders and Organizers of Community Organizing in Asia  
LICADHO  
LICADHO Canada  
Meakea Aphiwadh  
Mekong Watch  
NGO Forum on ADB  
NGO Forum on Cambodia  
One World Foundation  
Room to Read  
Sahmakum Teang Tnaut  
Sustainable Cambodia  
The Bretton Woods Project  
The Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)  
Tiny Toones  
Towards Ecological Recovery and Regional Alliances (TERRA)  
United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights  
United World College of South East Asia  
Youth for Peace

We would also like to thank the following donors that made significant contributions to Equitable Cambodia (EC) in 2013:

**Donors**

DanChurchAid/Christian Aid  
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Open Society Institute  
Open Society Justice Initiative  
Oxfam Australia  
Oxfam Great Britan  
Planet Wheeler Foundation  
Rotary Club  
The McKnight Foundation  
TNI (Transitional Institute)  
United World Colleges  
Volunteer contributions
## 2013 Financial Summary

### Opening Balance

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Receipts</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Grant Receipts</td>
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<tr>
<td>General Donations &amp; Volunteer Program</td>
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### Disbursements

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<th>Disbursement Program</th>
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<td>Development Watch Program</td>
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*Note: The percentages and dollar amounts represent the allocation of funds for each program segment.*
GET INVOLVED!

Donate

The work of Equitable Cambodia is made possible by the support of our network of friends around the world whose compassion and yearning for justice knows no borders.

If you are moved by our work, please consider making a financial contribution to support a specific Equitable Cambodia program or a general donation to help us further all of our programs.

Secure credit card donations can be made on our website at www.equitablecambodia.org. US residents can also make tax-deductible donations through Bridges Across Borders Southeast Asia (BABSEA). Just send a check made out to BABSEA to PO Box 358887, Gainesville, FL 32635-8800, USA. Be sure to note that the donation is for Bridges Across Borders Cambodia.

Volunteer

Equitable Cambodia is always looking for dynamic and enthusiastic people to join our team. If you are interested in volunteering with us, please visit our website or contact volunteer@equitablecambodia.org

Follow us

Get up-to-date information on our work to support Cambodia’s most vulnerable communities and the political situation in Cambodia. You can also give us a louder voice by subscribing to our page, signing our petitions and sharing our page and posts with your friends and family.

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