

# The Impact of Eviction: Report on Interviews of Women and Children Harmed by Land Evictions



Photo by LICADHO

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# I. Background of Land Concessions and their Effect on CEDAW Implementation

Cambodia has been a state party to the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) since 1992. The convention calls for parties to ensure gender equality in all access of people's lives, including basic human rights and land rights. CEDAW Article 14(h) requires states to ensure that women in rural areas “enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communications.”<sup>1</sup> In the UN CEDAW Committee's 2013 Concluding Observations on Cambodia's most recent official report, the Committee notes that land concessions have harmed women.<sup>2</sup> Paragraph 41 states that Cambodia's government should “[i]ntensify its efforts to facilitate access by rural women to basic services, latrines, safe drinking water, education, employment, health services, credit and loan facilities.” The report continues in Paragraph 42 to identify Cambodia's current policies on land concessions as discriminatory toward women and girls. The Committee states that “women continue to face limited access to land and tenure security.” It expresses concern that land concessions displace women and send them to relocation sites that “frequently lack basic infrastructure.” Finally, the Committee notes that women human rights defenders who protest these acts are subject to “harassment by law enforcement personnel.” NGO-CEDAW shares these concerns about the harm imposed on Cambodians, particularly on women and girls, by economic and social land concessions in Cambodia.

Over the past two decades, the government of Cambodia has forcibly removed hundreds of thousands of Cambodians from their land and handed the land over to mostly foreign commercial enterprises who paid off prominent government figures or their relatives. According to LICADHO (the Cambodian League for the Promotion and the Defense of Human Rights) over 400,000 people have been evicted since 2003 in just the 13 provinces where the NGO has offices.<sup>3</sup> The government justifies these economic land concessions (ELCs) as needed for the development of the country. However, rather than developing infrastructure for the benefit of

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<sup>1</sup> The full text of the CEDAW Convention can be found at the UN website:

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw.htm> (last visited on June 22, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Concluding observations on the fourth and fifth periodic report of Cambodia, October 18, 2013, CEDAW/C/KHM/CO/4-5

<sup>3</sup> All of LICADHO's statements and briefing papers on land concessions can be found at its website:

<http://www.licadho-cambodia.org/topic/land>. Most of the background data on Boeung Kak and Borei Keila in this report come from these statements and papers.

society or making use of previously unoccupied land, the government is seizing property that already supports vibrant communities, and destroys those communities with nominal or no compensation to the families who live there.

The vast majority of ELCs have been issued in violation of Cambodia's 2001 Land Law and its Sub-decree on ELCs.<sup>4</sup> Their requirements regarding size, prior environmental and social impact reports, prior consultations and consent of affected communities, transparency, and fair and adequate compensation have been routinely ignored. Efforts to enforce the requirements in civil lawsuits have been met with years of court inaction or retaliatory criminal charges. Although numerous local and international NGOs, foreign governments and international organizations such as the UN and World Bank have criticized the practice of land grants, and the government has claimed to issue a moratorium on ELCs, the evictions have continued. LICADHO recorded that 10,625 families (or an estimated 49,519 individuals) from the 13 provinces where LICADHO has field offices were affected by land conflicts in 2014. This statistic represents more than three times the 3,475 families evicted in 2013.

This report focuses on two specific geographic areas where land-grant evictions have occurred: Boeung Kak Lake and Borei Keila, both in Phnom Penh. Until recently, Boeung Kak Lake was the largest natural lake in Phnom Penh. An estimated 4,250 families lived on the lakeside,<sup>5</sup> and farmers earned a living through cultivating water vegetables on the lake. The water played a major role in the city's drainage system, as the vegetation naturally filtered water from the city's sewage. The lake supported a thriving tourist industry, as many guesthouses and businesses catering to budget travelers were built on the shore of the lake. In 2007, Phnom Penh's government approved the subleasing of Boeung Kak and all the surrounding land to Shukaku Inc., an exclusive residential and commercial development project co-owned by Senator Lau Meng Khin. Shukaku reportedly paid a mere \$.60 per square meter<sup>6</sup> at a time when a standard apartment rented for \$2,913 per square meter<sup>7</sup>. The rights were then sold to a foreign industry. Although laws prohibit a foreign entity from owning land or substantially altering it, the company permanently evicted all residents and other businesses, then proceeding to destroy the lake by filling it with sand. The land is currently uninhabited and undeveloped.

Borei Keila, located opposite the Bak Tuok High School in central Phnom Penh covers 14.12 hectares of land. It used to be the site of a police training facility, but in 1992, villagers began

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<sup>4</sup> Sub-Decree #146 on Economic Land Concessions was signed on December 27, 2005. For a legal analysis of the specific provisions of laws violated through ELCs, see the June 2012 fact-finding report of Japan-based Human Rights Now, available at <http://hrn.or.jp/eng/activity/HRN%20Cambodia%20Report%20on%20Land%20Rights%202012.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> The number of families was cited in numerous articles in the Phnom Penh Post and the Cambodia Daily. See "Protest over Boeung Kak project met with confusion" by Chhay Channyda, Phnom Penh Post, October 28, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/boeung-kak-lake-latest-city-sell>, 9 Feb., 2007.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.globalpropertyguide.com/Asia/Cambodia/square-meter-prices>, last visited on 5/25/15.

settling on this land. In 2003, the Royal Government of Cambodia granted a land concession of over 4.6 hectares of Borei Keila to Phan Imex, a private company, for “social” purposes. The contract called for Phan Imex to build ten buildings on two hectares of land to house the existing residents of Borei Keila. In exchange, the company would receive development rights for the remaining 2.6 hectares of the concession area. The company demolished many existing buildings first, then left the families to camp on the dirt for years while new apartments were being constructed. Some families were forced to pay bribes to corrupt officials who promised them quicker placement in new apartments.

By 2010 only eight apartment buildings had been built, and Phan Imex Company asked to be released from the obligation to construct the two other buildings, claiming a lack of funds. Phan Imex asked that the remaining land to be given to them despite their breach of contract. Because the two final buildings were never constructed, about 400 families were left without permanent housing and without compensation that would enable them to obtain comparable alternative housing on their own.

On January 3, 2012, 384 families residing at Borei Keila were forcibly evicted from their houses or shelters by police, military officials and company employees. The remaining houses were destroyed and razed by bulldozers while the combined forces were violently chasing out the residents and imprisoning those who dared to protest. In all, 1776 families were affected by the land concession, including those who accepted settlements with the company.

Approximately 200 evicted families were relocated to Phnom Bath Mountain, 45 kilometers away from Phnom Penh. Each of these families was promised \$100 and a plot of land for compensation. However, once the families arrived on the site, only four wooden pillars, which outlined the plot of land for each family, had been put up. Families tied tents to the posts to create shelters under which to sleep. The site offered no water, no electricity and lacked all basic infrastructure, such as schools and medical clinics.

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## **II. Summary of Interview Process**

This study is a follow-up report on the economic, political, and social conditions of evictees both prior to and after their evictions. Such a study is important because land evictions often have profound repercussions on the lives of evictees, who often lose homes, land, livelihoods, and suffer negative political, social, and emotional impacts. Understanding such repercussions is

crucial to understanding the direct impact of land evictions on poverty and inequality, and also power imbalances within Cambodia.

The study includes interviews with adults and children whose homes were seized or threatened by land concessions. It includes interviews of children whose parent or grandparent served prison time for protesting the evictions and the government's failure to compensate them for the harm caused to their families.

This is a small study of fewer than 50 people. While due to its small size it is difficult to extrapolate from the findings and apply them to the much larger population which has been evicted throughout Cambodia, it does give some insight. We hope that, when combined with other studies, this small study provides further understanding of the effects of land evictions -- a trend of alarming magnitude not only in Cambodia, but also globally.

### **Study methods**

For this study, two sets of interviews were conducted. The first set focused on women involved in evictions from Boeung Kak Lake. The second set focused on 12 children and their families who were evicted from Boeung Kak Lake and Borei Keila. The two sets of interviews were conducted by different researchers, and their results have been combined into this report.

In the first set, twenty-three women (and one man, a husband who was present with his wife during the focus group interview) were interviewed. Six of the interviewees were not, in the end, evicted from their homes and land, though one of them did lose part of her land. Though these six interviewees were not evicted, their homes and land were initially included in the project development area, and under threat of eviction. All six were heavily involved in protests, and through the process of protesting, they claimed to have forestalled eviction. However, it is likely that this was possible as many of them claimed their land was not directly on the lake, but further in-land.

Seven of the interviewees were evicted from their homes and land and took the monetary compensation offered to them by the company. The upper limit on the monetary compensation was \$8000, 2 million riel, but not all of the seven interviewees received this full amount. This study also undertook a focus group of interviewees who had taken the relocation site option offered to them by the company. Apparently, aside from monetary compensation, evictees were also offered the option to have new homes provided for them at a relocation site some 23 kilometers from Phnom Penh. To interview the focus group, we traveled to the relocation site, known as "Seven N G" and held an interview with seven people in the home of one of the interviewees.

All interviews began with an open question asking the interviewees to explain their personal stories of how the evictions took place, or almost took place. The interviews then went into more specific questions, particularly concerning the overall economic impact of the evictions on

the interviewees. To gauge the overall economic impact, questions were asked concerning wealth lost, livelihoods and incomes lost, and changes in expenses. While the major focus of this study was on the economic impact of the evictions, questions on the political, social, and emotional impact were also asked.

The second set of interviews was less detailed, as the questioning focused on the children's ability to explain the effects that the evictions had on them. The interviews were done in three stages: the first focused on four children evicted from Boeung Kak and their changed lives; the second focused on four children evicted from Borei Keila; and the third focused on four children who were not only evicted from Boeung Kak Lake, but who had a parent or grandparent in prison for protesting the eviction.



*Interview of children who experienced forced evictions*

Eight girls and four boys were interviewed. The youngest are 11 years old and the oldest is 16. Their average age is 13. Names in case studies have been altered.

The interviewers met with the children in the presence of one parent at a neutral location. The children were quite shy, and were first encouraged to relax by engaging in play with toys or by eating snacks. Later, the children were asked to recall their lives before, during and after the evictions. Often, the parents would interject with their own perspectives, so their input was included in the results.

All of the interviewed children were actually evicted. Most were sent to relocation sites, but two had families that did not get a spot at a relocation site; instead they stay with relatives or friends. Two families were promised relocation money, but the company refused to pay the amount promised. Seven of the children are personally involved in protests, and at least one was beaten by an electric baton during a protest. Most of the children are still in school, but four were forced to drop out due to financial or emotional problems after the eviction. One child has two siblings who dropped out of school to work. Two of the children live separately from their parents. At least three suffer from mental illness and one from physical illness that can be traced to the eviction and relocation.

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### III. Interviewees' Story of Their Eviction

*“At first, the company pushed people to take the (\$8000, 2 million riel) offer, and respect state law. People didn’t want to take the offer, but security forces came in the night, carrying guns. One night I smelled gasoline, and I got scared. I saw other people’s houses being destroyed. I was forced to take the offer, and in the end, did not even get the 2 million riel, only the \$8000. The money was not enough to buy land. My grandmother got sick, so I had to use the money for her, and the children. I now have to work as a dancer at an entertainment club.” - Interviewee 12*

All of the evictees reported that their eviction had been forced, or at least forcibly attempted. The majority of evictees reported that the company gave them only a 7 day notice, and threatened that if they did not move their belongings and dismantle their houses within 7 days, their houses would be destroyed and neither the company nor the government would be held responsible. Most of the evictees were offered the choice of either accepting \$8,000 and 2 million riel as compensation for their lost houses and land- no matter the size of the land or the house- or to be relocated and given a new house, with 2 million riel as moving compensation.



*The bed of one of the child interviewees*

Two of the adult interviewees, and one the family of one child, however, were not offered the \$8000, 2 million riel compensation. One very poor interviewee owned a small piece of land (5m x 8m) and a cottage, with a roof and no walls. The interviewee claims not to have been given a notice, but was only told by neighbors. When she inquired, she found out that her name was not on the list to get compensation. When she confronted the company, the company refused to pay compensation, and in the end after many confrontations agreed to pay only \$100. The interviewee refused this small amount, and in the end, got nothing. The other interviewee who did not receive the full \$8000 compensation owned a house and land (5m x 6m) before being evicted. She was given a notice to leave within 7 days, but she did not leave. According to her, the company pumped sand and destroyed her house. When she confronted the company, the company argued that her house did not have a strong foundation, and used this as an excuse to only offer \$500 as compensation. She refused, and in the end, got nothing. One boy (interviewee 36, from Borei Keila) was separated from his parents after they were given no land at all. He moved in with his grandmother and was subjected to a second

eviction, in which they also received no land. The pair moved in with the boy's uncle. When asked about how difficult it is for him, the now 11-year-old answered, "Not difficult, but terrible."

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## IV. The Economic Impact of Eviction

*"Before the eviction, we weren't rich, but we had enough to live off of. We had small jobs, like selling vegetables on the streets as vendors, but we had enough to send our children to school. Now, at the relocation site, we can't bring in enough money. There are too many sellers here, and not enough buyers. Everything is much more expensive than it is in Phnom Penh. And our families are forced to live separate from each other and it is expensive traveling to and from Phnom Penh. It is very difficult. We earn less, but face higher expenses. It is really hand-to-mouth living. Before, some of us used to grow food on our land by the lake, some of us used to raise pigs, fish, or raise lilies to sell. Without enough income, we had to borrow money from the banks. But without enough income, we were not able to pay back the banks, so the banks confiscated the new homes given to us at the relocation site. They bought out new homes for lower prices than they sold them for. Now we are renters, and must continue to borrow money, and pay interest. Many of us had to pull our children from their education, and they have to work in factories nearby. One of us has a smart, pretty daughter who is sixteen. She used to go to school, but now she works in a dance club, and we worry about her future." - Focus Group*

*"Before the eviction I had my own land and house. My land was 6m x 100m and my house had ten rooms. I was able to get some income from renting rooms, and I owned a laundry shop. From rental and laundry I could earn between 20,000-40,000 riel a day. I was notified that I had seven days to take the \$8000, 2 million riel compensation, or the house would be destroyed. When I saw many security guards from the government and company, I was shocked, and fainted. I took the money, and gave it to my husband to take care of our children. He left me for another woman. I have no home now, and sleep on the street. When it rains, I sleep under the roofs of buildings. I now collect rubbish on the streets, and sometimes do laundry. The income is not regular, and if I can get hired, I can maybe get \$2.50 in a day." - Interviewee 9.*

With the exception of one or two of the interviewees, all of the women interviewed had worked on or near the Boeung Kak Lake area, earning their livelihoods through a variety of mostly small, informal businesses such as street vendors, sewing, or renting rooms from their houses. As such, almost all of the interviewees were dependent on the flow of customers and business in the Boeung Kak Lake area to support their livelihoods. almost all of the interviewees, who came could be described as low to low-middle income, felt that before facing eviction, they had made enough money to at least survive and pay for basic daily necessities.

#### Case Study 1: Trading School for Child Labor

Makara, now eleven, was only seven when his family was forcibly evicted from Boeung Kak. The boy was too young to remember the circumstances, so his father Sok provided the background. *"In January 2007, we were given two unwanted options of compensation, either \$800 or housing in a reallocation area"* he mentioned. Papers signed, Sok's family was promised housing, but was instead dumped at a relocation site with thousands of others. There, a complex of metal garden shelters divided into several rooms had been set up. The site offered no kitchen, no bathroom, no water and no electricity.

Sok, shocked by the situation, demanded his promised compensation. His voice was hard-edged as he spoke. *"Nothing was given back to me; I lost everything, my house, my valuables and all my money."* The family lived in the shelter for a year. Nowadays Sok's family rents a 29m<sup>2</sup> room.

Initially, a charity provided Makara with food and paid for expenses such as book so that he could attend school from Monday through Saturday. His grades were poor and he didn't much like it; shame showed on his face as he revealed that he was constantly bullied. The charity stopped helping children once they turned 10 years old, and his father cannot afford to support his education, so he had to drop out of school.

Now Makara has to work collecting garbage with his father. Sometimes the boss won't pay, so they have to work a second job harvesting coconuts in the jungle. Makara finds his daily jobs exhausting; he would love to go back to school or one day become a monk like his brother and get free food, education and housing.

Although Makara and Sok's family has to endure these conditions for now, they stand up and protest for their rights on every possible occasion with other land activists. Makara chuckled: *"It's like playing a game of tag with the policeman who tries to arrest you."*

## Wealth Lost

Land eviction often results in the considerable loss of wealth for evictees. Being low to lower-middle income, loss in wealth can have devastating repercussions throughout their whole lives. Obviously, the land itself is appropriated, but with the land housing, gardens, and other material goods are lost. While evictees sometimes receive some form of compensation, either in monetary form, or through the allocation of new land and houses, a common grievance is that such compensation does not actually equal the amount of wealth lost. For this study, wealth is understood as “stocks” or assets, such as houses, land, materials goods such as household goods, a fixed amount of money held within a bank, and so on. Wealth is different from income, which is understood as a “flow” or amount of money continuously received, on a regular or irregular basis. For this section of the interview, interviewees were questioned both on wealth lost, as well as compensation received.

Five of the 24 interviewees were not evicted. According to these women, the reason they were not evicted was that, though their land was originally slotted for inclusion in the “development” project, their land was sufficiently in-land that they were able, through protesting, to pressure the government and company to keep their land. While these women suffered considerable stress, and some of them imprisonment and beatings as will be discussed, they did not, in the end, lose their land or homes. However, one of these five interviewees complains that her house now suffers from flooding.

The other 19 interviewees all suffered from eviction from their land and loss of houses. All held serious grievances concerning the extent of the wealth they lost. The wealth owned before eviction varied considerably among interviewees, with some owning just small plots of land, to others owning over an acre. Houses owned varied considerably as well, with the poorest of the interviewees having owned only a simple shack without walls, to one of the wealthier interviewees that owned a house with ten rooms that brought in considerable rent as her income. Nonetheless, according to the interviews, the upper limit offered as compensation was \$USD8000 and 2 million riel, or the possibility to live in a new home at a relocation site.

While \$USD8000 and 2 million riel may seem like a fair amount of money in Cambodia where wages are very low, in reality, according to the interviewees such compensation was insufficient to buy new land and houses. Three of interviewees did not even receive the standard \$8000, 2 million riel offer. One of the poorer interviewees, who lived in a simple shack by the lake, was only offered \$100 as total compensation. Insulted, she refused, and in the end did not receive any compensation at all.

As for the relocation site focus group, all lost land and homes and were only compensated \$500 dollars as remuneration for moving expenses. While the focus group interviewees did receive new houses at the relocation site, the interviewees complained of their houses being badly constructed, made of cheap material and prone to leaky roofs. More disturbingly, many of the

focus group interviewees eventually lost their new homes to banks. As will be discussed, the focus group interviewees all complained of insufficient incomes at the relocation site. Unable to sustain their livelihoods, many of the interviewees borrowed money from banks. In time, unable to repay the banks with their insufficient income, the banks then confiscated their new homes (at prices lower than market value) and now the interviewees have once again lost their homes. As a result, the interviewees have found themselves without house ownership, having to pay rent while living on insufficient income, and continuously in-debt. Overall, all interviewees- with the exception of the five who were not evicted- suffered considerable losses in land and housing with arguably inadequate compensation.

### **Livelihoods and Income Lost**

With the exception of one of the interviewees, all reported either complete loss of livelihoods or such degradation of incomes that they felt desperate and constantly worried about finances. As discussed many of the interviewees worked in small businesses dependent on the BK Lake area. Ten of the interviewees, plus those in the focus group, said that the development of the lake area had resulted in fewer customers. Their businesses were no longer sustainable. The focus group in particular complained that business at the relocation site was unsustainable; being so far from Phnom Penh, in an area with a limited population, has resulted in too many sellers and too few buyers. The loss of income continues to be devastating for the interviewees. A number of the interviewees from the focus group reported having to withdraw their children from schooling so that they could work in factories.

The loss of wealth, in land and housing, of the interviewees was also directly linked to the deterioration of income for some of the interviewees. Three of the interviewees, plus members of the focus group, reported losing income as they used to rent out rooms in the houses they lost, or used to farm or fish and sell their products as small vendors. Other interviewees reported a loss of livelihood and income as a repercussion of their political protests. One interviewee, who frequented a number of protests and did not, in the end, lose her land, nonetheless lost her means of income. She reported that she could no longer sell as a vendor on the streets as she used to, as since the protests she is harassed by the authorities. Another interviewee reported that she was repeatedly shocked with an electric baton during the protests. She felt her health had suffered greatly from these electric shocks, and said she was no longer able to work.

### **Higher Expenses**

Many of the (evicted) interviewees reported higher expenses. Five of the interviewees, plus the interviewees of the focus group, reported struggling to pay rent. Before, they used to own their houses and land, but with insufficient compensation to pay for new homes, they are forced to rent rooms. The other (evicted) interviewees reported having to live with family, or, in the sad case of one elderly woman having to live on the streets. Two of the (evicted) interviewees, plus

interviewees from the focus group, reported being in-debt as a result of financial hardships related to the evictions.

### **Lost potential income due to dropping out of school**

At least four of the children interviewed have already dropped out of school because of the eviction and relocation. Their families can no longer afford to let them attend school; one received financial assistance from a NGO for food and education, but lost the aid when he turned 10. At least one child has siblings, aged 8 and 10 who work in a factory to help the family make ends meet. One child fears that she will not be able to continue on to secondary school because it is too far from her current home. Cost of education is also a hindrance; one boy (interviewee 32) explained that he won't be able to afford his dream of being a doctor. He now hopes to "be a nurse because being a doctor is too expensive." One child and her sibling fell behind in school after leaving classes for four months due to depression. A sixteen-year-old boy (interviewee 27) had tears running down his face as he explained that his mother made him drop out of school to earn \$60 per month at a dish-washing job which he hates. He was proud of knowing how to read and write and had had higher hopes for his future.

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## **V. The Political Impact of Eviction**

*"The company gave use notice to leave within 7 days. They told us if we don't leave, then our belongings are in danger and they will not be responsible. I went with others to the Phnom Penh Municipal Hall to protest, and tried to talk with the officers there. I've been arrested and in jail for one month and three days, and beaten, on the legs. The company security guards beat those who protested on company land."- Interviewee 1.*

The majority of the interviewees- evicted, non-evicted, and the focus group- protested multiple times since the beginning of the evictions. Five of the adult interviewees and one child reported being beaten, and some of them reported being beaten severely. A couple of the interviewees reported being arrested, or of knowing close friends or activist representatives who were arrested. Seven of the interviewees reported harassment and intimidation by company security, government security, and local officials. Harassment included feeling discriminated against by local authorities, and feelings of being followed and harassed when trying to sell their goods as vendors. Many of the interviewees stated that government authorities framed their protests as being instigated by the opposition party. As stated above, all interviewees report that the company forced, or attempted to force, eviction through intimidation by company security.

Most of the children evicted had been active in protests, and even some of those not engaged in protests expressed anger at the government and the will to persevere in spite of their experiences.

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## VI. The Social and Emotional Impact of Eviction

*“Living at the relocation site, we are so far from our families now. Our families are dispersed. We are separated from them, and it is very hard on us. Some of our husbands have been really hurt by the eviction. They get angry, and have become drunkards. There is violence in our homes. We feel hopeless and depressed.” - Focus Group*

*“My children are always afraid for me (since I protest). My neighbors are on the side of the village chief- they accuse me of trying to get money. I feel very sad for those (activists) in jail. I feel hopeless, and have lost trust in the government. The government treats us as enemies, as part of the opposition party.” -Interviewee 5*

The social impact of the eviction, and more specifically, of protesting, varied among the interviewees. As stated above, most of the interviewees were involved in protests. While a few of the interviewees reported having felt supported by their families and neighbors, a number felt discriminated against by their local communities. Seven of the interviewees reported being mocked by their neighbors, or accused of being part of the opposition party. Five of the interviewees reiterated feeling discriminated against by the local authorities. Three of the interviewees reported having no support for their families. And five of the interviewees reported a worsening of family relations resulting from separation from their families or increased arguments in the household. The focus group also reported issues of familial separation and feeling discriminated against by local authorities.

One 13-year-old boy (interviewee 29) revealed feeling terribly lonely and stressed. He didn't have any friends because he had to drop out of school and there were no other children his age in the community at his relocation site.

The eviction had a harsh toll on the emotional well-being of the interviewees. The interviewees who did not, in the end, become evicted, still reported living in fear of losing their houses and feelings of distrust toward the government. Though some of the non-evicted interviewees reported feelings of defiance and empowerment through their protests, they said they felt great concern and sorrow over their fellow activists who were still in prison.

The emotional impact on the evicted interviewees, both those at the relocation site and those who took the compensation, was much worse. Almost all reported feelings of great pain and hurt, fear of losing their lives after conflict with authorities, hopelessness, stress over finances, mental problems, and some even thoughts of suicide.

## Case Study 2: Domestic violence and health issues

Neary, now thirteen, was at school when her home was destroyed. Her mother, Sophy was carrying her baby brother and cooking when bulldozers rammed into their house. Sophy went into shock and fainted; her baby fell from her arms and hit his head. Sophy had barely regained her senses when fragments of the roof began falling. She grabbed the baby and ran as quickly as she could.

Neary came back from school to find her house destroyed and mother missing. She was overcome by anxiety and panic until her older brother came looking for her. She joined a group being taken to the relocation site.

Sophy and Neary's baby brother are both HIV positive. Since the eviction, Sophy's health has worsened, and she is constantly tired. She sometimes doesn't have the strength to cook and look after the children.

The family has also experienced domestic violence. Sophy's husband had to drive 80km daily to commute to work, so he was constantly exhausted and became physically abusive toward her and the children. During this period, the children had become depressed and dropped out of school for about four months. Sophy confessed, "We were always arguing about all the children we had while we didn't have money. Once he smashed my head with a wooden stick. I fell unconscious and was brought to hospital. I had many stitches on my head. I wanted to divorce but I couldn't because he brings money home and has to help me with the children. He was violent after the accident, so the neighbors interfered and brought peace between him and me. He never hurt me again. I know that poverty and depression has led to violence."

Today, the family situation is better, and they work together to confront their problems, building strength they can use to fight. Neary, understanding the need for better education, decided to keep up with school. Now in grade 6, she can read and write and dreams of becoming a teacher.

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## VII. Physical Effects of Relocation

The evictions caused many of the interviewees to endure a decreased standard of living, including much more pollution and much poorer sanitation. The relocation sites often have no



running water, no sanitation, no electricity, and no medical facilities. There is little vegetation to keep the dust at bay. This has fostered an environment that contributes to respiratory illnesses and other transmittable diseases. At least one child interviewed (interviewee 30) suffers from a chronic lung infection. She receives medicine from LICADHO, but cannot heal because the environment at the relocation site contributes to her condition.

*The water pump used for children's daily needs is contaminated and the water is unsafe to drink.*

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## VIII. Conclusion and Recommendations

The interviews conducted in this study reveal that the eviction and relocation process for all of the families involved was a difficult and painful process. Most of the interviewees reported worse conditions in all areas of their lives, in particular, their social, economic, emotional, intellectual, and physical well-being. The social and economic land concession programs, rather than promoting the development of society, have weakened society and made for a worse life for each person forced to leave their home. While the programs are often touted as promoting business and development of land, the families only suffer from these programs.

## **Recommendations:**

As noted earlier, it is difficult to extrapolate from one small study to apply the experiences of these 36 interviewees to all of the hundreds of thousands of evictees in Cambodia. However, the interviewees all reported similar experiences, and it is reasonable to deduce that their experiences are not dissimilar to others' in the country.

It is particularly noteworthy that these interviewees were harmed by the experiences, yet received little or no compensation. Many were moved from locations where they had stable lives and could earn a living to a place that was in no way comparable to their previous homes.

The government which authorized the displacement of so many families should take responsibility for undoing the harm which its actions have caused. Moreover, as a party to CEDAW, Cambodia should comply with the UN CEDAW Committee's recommendations from its Concluding Observations of 2013.

Recommendations for government action that would address some of these issues include:

- Ending the current framework for social and economic land concessions
- Providing financial compensation for evicted families equivalent to the value of the land, buildings, and services to which they previously had access, regardless of the terms of past contracts or whether paper land titles existed.
- Ensure that primary and secondary level education is actually provided to all evicted children, including paying for transportation, books, fees, and meals.
- Providing free psychological counseling and medical care for relocated families.
- Building infrastructure at all relocation sites, including free health centers, public schools, plumbing with clean water, electricity, and roads.
- Implement all of the recommendations of the UN CEDAW Committee.