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**Pou Sovachana and Alice Beban**

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JICA Research Institute  
10-5 Ichigaya Honmura-cho  
Shinjuku-ku  
Tokyo 162-8433 JAPAN  
TEL: +81-3-3269-3374  
FAX: +81-3-3269-2054

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# Human Security in Cambodia: Far From Over

Pou Sovachana and Alice Beban

## Abstract

The concept of human security is based on the fundamental principles of ‘freedom from fear’ and ‘freedom from want’ through the 1994 Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).<sup>1</sup> It argues for a shift from a state-centric view of security to one that focuses on the security of every individual. Human Security is about protection and empowerment of the individual. It tackles general threats to human existence and finds ways to overcome these threats, recognizing that the state itself can at times be a threat to its own people.

This report aims to understand how the internationally minted notions of human security and insecurity are perceived and interpreted by Cambodian people, and what suggestions people may offer for mitigating threats to human security. We conducted interviews and focus groups with people in diverse sectors including government, academics, civil society, rural and urban communities, media, students, and Buddhist monks. Our research suggests that when we replace the discourse of security in Cambodia with the concept of human security, it opens new conversations toward understanding and responsiveness to human rights and human development.<sup>2</sup> We argue that the connected, multi-dimensional insecurities in Cambodia can be revealed through taking a broad approach to human security that recognizes ‘freedom from fear’, ‘freedom from want’, and ‘freedom to live in dignity’ as inter-related in ways that may be contradictory. Currently much of the debate about the referent of security is too focused on either protection or empowerment; the voices of our research participants lead us to suggest that security comes from communication and dialogue between government and communities, and the importance of ‘cooperative leadership’.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 1994* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Peter Quinn, “Human Security and Development in Cambodia” (paper prepared for the conference “Mainstreaming Human Security: The Asian Contribution,” 2007).

## Introduction

“The suffering of Cambodia has been deep,” reflected Preah Moha Ghosananda, the ‘Ghandhi of Cambodia.’<sup>3</sup> Perhaps no other country on earth has suffered so much from as many forms of human insecurity as Cambodia has. The list from the 1970s is staggering: massive bombardments, civil wars, interstate wars, the ‘killing fields’, human rights violations, disease, starvation, displacement of people, the repatriation of 360,000 Cambodian refugees from the Thai border camps<sup>4</sup>, small arms conflicts, one of the world’s highest rates of deforestation<sup>5</sup>, grinding poverty, and land grabs have ravaged this once proud and influential country of Southeast Asia. Due to a complex interplay of domestic, regional, and international factors<sup>6</sup>, continual conflict plagued Cambodia from the 1970s to the late 1990s. Despite domestic and international efforts, peace and safety remained elusive for many Cambodians. If we use traditional security measures (focused on stability and freedom from violence and conflict), Cambodia seems like a secure country today. Nonetheless, hundreds of thousands of people are forcibly removed from their land and lack the means of subsistence, while still more die every year from preventable illnesses, lack of sanitation, and food insecurity. People suffer from a precarious existence and do not enjoy full security over their lives. A ‘human security’ approach can reveal the inter-connected threats that prevent people in Cambodia from realizing their full human potential.<sup>7</sup>

In this report, we aim to understand how Cambodian people perceive and interpret human security and insecurity, and we argue that the connected, multi-dimensional insecurities in Cambodia can be revealed through taking a broad approach to human security. A broad approach recognizes the ‘seven dimensions’ of human security (as laid out in the 1994 UN Human Development Report<sup>8</sup>), and focuses on both ‘freedom from want’ and ‘freedom from fear’. Indeed, it is by recognizing the interdependent relationships between ‘freedom from fear’ and ‘freedom from want’, and in the added dimension of ‘freedom to live in dignity’ that we

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<sup>3</sup> Moha Ghosananda, *Step by Step: Meditations of Wisdom and Compassion* (Berkeley, California: Parallax Press, 1992), 1.

<sup>4</sup> The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

<sup>5</sup> Accessed June 6, 2014, <http://news.mongabay.com/2005/1115-forests.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Quinn, “Human Security and Development in Cambodia” (paper prepared for the conference “Mainstreaming Human Security: The Asian Contribution,” 2007).

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 1994* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> The UN 1994 definition of human security encompasses seven dimensions. These include: Economic security (having an assured basic income from work or public safety net); food security (access to enough quality food); personal security (protection from physical violence); community security (values and relationships); olitical security (honoring basic human rights); environmental security (climate change, sanitation, disasters); and health security (minimum protection from illness and disease).

believe the concept of human security is most useful in Cambodia.<sup>9</sup> The most important contribution that the human security concept makes is to define every individual person as the main referent of security rather than simply focusing on perceived threats to the nation state. Therefore, in this ‘snapshot’ we have gathered the viewpoints of different people to understand how human security is understood in the Cambodian context. The bulk of this report is based on primary research. We do draw from several academic reports that have been produced using the human security framework. These include a study on the relationship between human security and climate change in Cambodia, focusing on Cambodia’s vulnerability to natural disasters<sup>10</sup>; and on health and human security, highlighting the high health costs and lack of access to quality health care for many poor Cambodians. The work of anthropologist Alexandra Kent on ‘reconfiguring security’ argues that cultural aspects of human security are often ignored in the western-focused definitions. However, in Cambodia we need to take a broad understanding of what constitutes both security threats and sources of security.<sup>11</sup>

Below we first explain the human security situation in Cambodia today by tracing human security issues from the Khmer Rouge regime until the present. The second section presents our findings from primary research. We conducted semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to understand how different groups perceive the human security concept and threats to human security, and how they feel human security threats can be mitigated (see ANNEX 1). We focus on vulnerable people in urban and rural areas as well as the views and policies of government representatives, academics, media, Buddhist monks, non-governmental organizations, and students. This study was limited by time and geographic constraints, and the results are not generalizable to Cambodia’s population as a whole. Rather, we analyze some of the main themes that arose from this exploratory research and suggest future policy and research priorities.

## **1. The Continual Unraveling of Human Security in Cambodia**

The Khmer Rouge isolated Cambodia from much of the world and destroyed key social-cultural institutions and economic activities in a reign of terror and violence – a return to “year zero”<sup>12</sup> that lasted three years, eight months, and twenty days (17 April 1975 – 7 January 1979).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Yukiko Nishikawa, “Human Security in Southeast Asia: Viable Solution or Empty Slogan?” *Security Dialogue* 40 (2009): 213.

<sup>10</sup> Lisa Borg, “Human Security and Climate Change in Cambodia,” CICP Working Paper, 46 (Phnom Penh: CICP, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> Alexandra Kent, “Reconfiguring Security: Buddhism and Moral Legitimacy in Cambodia,” *Security Dialogue* 37 (2006): 2.

<sup>12</sup> François Ponchaud, *Cambodia: Year Zero*, trans. Nancy Amphous (London: Allen Lane, 1978).

<sup>13</sup> The Cambodian victims remember this time as the darkest moment in their lives.

This regime deprived Cambodians of human security through systematic mass exodus, forced labor, torture, mass execution, disease, starvation, and ignorance. Around 1.7 million to 2.5 million people out of a 1975 population of roughly 8 million lost their lives.<sup>14</sup> This atrocious tragedy continues to live in the hearts and minds of many Cambodians and, when added to its aftermath, has had dire consequences in terms of human security.

In December 1978, over the course of just two short weeks, the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia, ousted the brutal regime, and installed a new government in Phnom Penh. The Khmer Rouge fled into the jungles in Western Cambodia. The new socialist regime offered Cambodian people more freedom and security but could not destroy the externally funded Khmer Rouge. Political instability and human insecurity persisted throughout this new period of socialist rule, denying the Cambodian people freedom from fear and freedom from want. Throughout the 1980s, the government forces engaged in frequent and fierce battles with the Khmer Rouge units, which continued to terrorize the Cambodian countryside, using civilians as a human shield. Both factions (the Khmer Rouge, and the Heng Samrin and Hun Sen regimes) planted millions of land mines across the country and continued to displace citizens.<sup>15</sup> People were forced to cross the densely forested and minefield areas and took refuge in camps across the border in Thailand.<sup>16</sup> Many of them were classified as illegal migrants and denied UNHCR (the United Nations High Commission for Refugees) protection. People inside the country were also subject to attack by opposition forces and to hardships caused by recruitment into the government's armed forces. They were forced to clear the forest, build roads, and provide defenses along the border. This was known as the K5 Plan, engineered by Vietnamese General Le Duc Anh, and focused on five key points for the defense of Cambodia against Khmer Rouge re-infiltration.<sup>17</sup> Working in the forest like this, innocent citizens regularly endured malaria, diseases, exhaustion, malnutrition and the never-ending danger of wars.<sup>18</sup> Political instability and human insecurity did not end with the Vietnamese ouster of the Khmer Rouge but persisted throughout socialist rule, denying the Cambodian people freedom from fear and freedom from want.

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<sup>14</sup> The Cambodian Genocide Project at Yale University.

<sup>15</sup> The Cambodian Mine Action Centre (CMAC) estimates that there may be as many as four to six million mines and other pieces of unexploded ordnance in Cambodia.

<sup>16</sup> Personal fieldwork at the Thai/Cambodian refugee camp Site B in 1987.

<sup>17</sup> For details, see Margaret Slocomb, "The K5 Gamble: National Defence and Nation-Building under the People's Republic of Kampuchea," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 32 (2001): 195-210.

<sup>18</sup> Brad Adams, *30 Years of Hun Sen: Violence, Repression, and Corruption in Cambodia*, (Human Rights Watch, 2015), 22-26.

With the help of the United Nations and after years of tense negotiations between the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) and three resistance factions<sup>19</sup>, an agreement to end the civil war was reached in Paris in October 1991. This treaty enabled the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) to undertake a massive peacekeeping operation, and to call and supervise a national election in May 1993. From a human security perspective, the Paris Peace Agreement promised to usher in a brighter chapter in Cambodian political history and bring a new dawn for people in terms of ending conflicts and in offering an assurance of economic development and human rights. However, the mission of UNTAC was not completely successful in terms of implementing the process of disarmament and stopping civil war in Cambodia.<sup>20</sup>

In the aftermath of the 1993 election, a coalition government headed by a system of two incompatible Prime Ministers was formed between the National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia FUNCINPEC and the Cambodian People's Party (CPP). On 5-6 July 1997, in the middle of the capital city Phnom Penh, Second Prime Minister Hun Sen used his loyal military force to oust First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh, which resulted in the death, torture, or arrest of more than 200 people loyal to Prince Ranariddh at the hands of those loyal to Hun Sen.<sup>21</sup> This turmoil led to the postponement of Cambodia's membership to ASEAN in July 1997, along with Laos and Myanmar. Cambodia was not admitted to the ASEAN Member States until April 1999, and the threat of violent conflict, with Hun Sen as the undisputed heavyweight political leader in Cambodia, continued to haunt the people of Cambodia.

The two political parties were in conflict and security threats from the Khmer Rouge remained high. The regime at first agreed to peace talks with the Cambodian government but then boycotted the 1993 election, defied the international community, rejected peace talks, and continued its armed rebellion against the coalition government in the western and northern regions. These battles waged until the final disintegration of the Khmer Rouge and complete integration of its army into the Royal Government armed forces in 1998. Total peace was only established throughout the country in early 1999, when Prime Minister Hun Sen persuaded the Khmer Rouge to defect, thus incorporating former enemies and those who had threatened the

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<sup>19</sup> The United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Co-operative (FUNCINPEC) founded and led by Norodom Sihanouk, the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) led by former Prime Minister Son Sann, and the Democratic Kampuchea (DK) led by Pol Pot.

<sup>20</sup> Shankari Sundaranaman, *Cambodia since UNTAC: Deep into the Quagmire*, accessed June 6, 2014, <http://www.idsa-india.org/an-sep-8.html>.

<sup>21</sup> "CNRP Promises Museum to Document 'Criminal' Acts by CPP," *The Cambodia Daily*, July 7, 2014.

population into the corridors of power.<sup>22</sup> The termination of internal conflict was achieved despite the fact that most of the non-communist states continued to support for the Khmer Rouge throughout the 1980s. It brought a real end to the decades-long armed politics, cemented peace, ensured political stability and provided Cambodia its best opportunities for development and growth in all sectors. This long desired peace has ushered in an era of unchecked economic development and monopolized political power, and the cost has been rapid environmental degradation, limited liberties, and profoundly unequal distribution of wealth.

Under the dominant party (the CPP), the government has worked hard to improve the living conditions and dignity of its people. The human security concept itself is not well known in Cambodia and the discourse is little used in policy, but human security-related concerns are considered by the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) to be the highest priority.<sup>23</sup> The politico-military organization of the Khmer Rouge was incorporated in 1998 through the successful “win-win” policy by Prime Minister Hun Sen. Following the July 1998 election, the RGC adopted and implemented the Triangular Strategy in the second mandate with the aim of establishing political stability in the spirit of national reconciliation. This focused on macro economic development, restoring peace, promoting sustainable development as well as maintaining security and stability for the country and its people. The strategy was, in general, successfully implemented and the process of economic recovery has started.<sup>24</sup>

To continue strengthening his “win-win” policy and ensuring people security, Prime Minister Hun Sen unveiled and implemented the “Rectangular Strategy for Growth, Fairness, and Effectiveness in Cambodia” on 16 July 2004, at the Council of Ministers. With good governance at the center, the strategy focuses on strengthening and developing four key areas: 1) peace, political stability, and social order; 2) partnership for development with private sector, donor community, and civil society; 3) economic and financial stability; and 4) integration of Cambodia in the region and in the world. (see figure 1). This Rectangular Strategy was reviewed, refined, and updated in the fourth mandate and is currently under implementation. After the election in 2013, Prime Minister Hun Sen reaffirmed the government’s commitment to peace, political security, stability, sustainable development, and poverty reduction. He proclaimed that “reforms are the top priority for Cambodia, and...deep reforms will be focused on legal and judicial reforms, anti-corruption, good governance and land and forest

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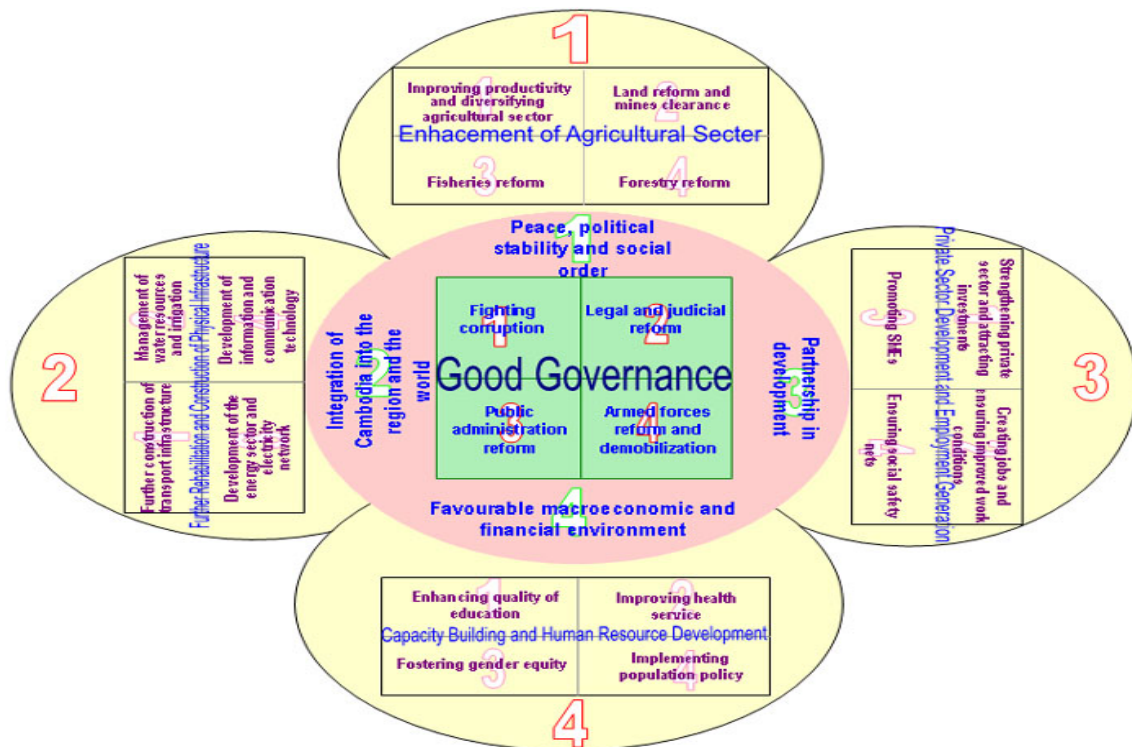
<sup>22</sup> Sowath Nem, *Civil War Termination and the Source of Total Peace in Cambodia* (Phnom Penh: Reaho, 2012).

<sup>23</sup> Sowath Nem, *Civil War Termination and the Source of Total Peace in Cambodia* (Phnom Penh: Reaho, 2012).

<sup>24</sup> Hang Chuon Naron, “The Cambodian Economy: Charting the Course of a Brighter Future,” in *Cambodia Progress and Challenges since 1991*, ed. Pou Sothirak et al. (Singapore: ISEAS, 2012).



management.”<sup>25</sup> According to the Guidelines for Formulating the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP 2014-2018), the government of Cambodia is committed to ensuring a better quality of life for its people, and to building a democratic, rule-based society, with equitable rights and opportunities for the population in terms of economic, political, cultural and other spheres.<sup>26</sup> It aims at maintaining an open market economy, and will formulate policies that provide an enabling and conducive environment for a better quality of life. In 2013, a workshop on Human Security in Phnom Penh brought together policymakers and academics for the first time to discuss the concept and its implementation in Cambodia. The ruling party Chairman of the Commission of Human Rights was positive about the concept being a “social revolution for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” with its focus on “problems of individual life and dignity rather than weapons.”<sup>27</sup>



**Figure 1. Rectangular Strategy of Cambodian Government**

<sup>25</sup> “Marathon PM speech focuses on reforms,” *The Phnom Penh Post*, September 26, 2014.

<sup>26</sup> Ministry of Planning, accessed June 6, 2014, <http://mop.gov.kh/Home/NSDP/NSDP20142018/tabid/216/Default.aspx>.

<sup>27</sup> “Cambodia starts focusing on human security,” *Southeast Asia Weekly* 8(1), December 29, 2013.

Cambodia has seen notable progress in the normalization of life, which has resulted in a steady improvement in economic growth and social development with steady poverty reduction. The country's economy is a success in terms of high and consistent economic growth, averaging 7.9 percent during 2000-2012.<sup>28</sup> Growth stood at 7.2 percent in 2013. The outlook for 2014 was forecast at 7 percent because of current political tensions and the risk of labor unrest following the national election in July 2013. The GDP per capita has increased from \$760 in 2008 to nearly \$1000 in 2012<sup>29</sup> and the poverty rate dropped drastically from 47.8 percent in 2007 to about 19 percent in 2012<sup>30</sup>. By reducing the poverty rate, Cambodia has achieved the Millennium Development Goal poverty target (CMDG1) and is one of the best performers in poverty reduction worldwide, according to a World Bank Poverty Assessment Report released in February 2014.<sup>31</sup> However, the authors of the Poverty Assessment report warned that

Despite impressive reduction in poverty, these hard won gains are fragile. Many people who have escaped poverty are still at high risk of falling back into poverty. For example, the loss of just 1,200 riel (about \$0.30) per day in income would throw an estimated three million Cambodians back into poverty, doubling the poverty rate to 40%.<sup>32</sup>

Human security issues remain and are becoming harder to disguise under the veil of economic advancement. Despite strong economic growth indicators and sensitive government policies, the overall development of human security in Cambodia remains far from ideal and thus requires an explanation.<sup>33</sup> Not everyone is experiencing the same benefits, as poverty persists mainly in the rural areas and the country is still considered a third world country by the World Bank and the UN. For many ordinary Cambodians, this high growth has brought hope and a sense of optimism but for the most part no real change in their personal security and safety. While the government promises inclusive growth, the benefits have not been evenly distributed and the widening inequalities of wealth distribution between rich and poor, and rural and urban areas, are profound. According to a 2010 report on local development from the UN Capital

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<sup>28</sup> Annual Development Review 2013-2014: Development Inclusiveness, Sustainability and Governance in Cambodia. A CRDI (Cambodia's leading independent development policy research institute) Publication, February 2014.

<sup>29</sup> Rectangular Strategy, Phase III.

<sup>30</sup> Ministry of Planning.

<sup>31</sup> World Bank. *Where Have All the Poor Gone? Cambodian Poverty Assessment 2013* (Washington D.C.: World Bank, 2014).

<sup>32</sup> World Bank. *Poverty Has Fallen, Yet Many Cambodians Are Still at Risk of Falling Back into Poverty, Report Finds* (Washington D.C.: World Bank, February 20, 2014).

<sup>33</sup> Sorpong Peou, "Human Security in Post-Cold War Cambodia," in *Post-Conflict Development in East Asia*, ed. Brendan M. Howe (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014).

Fund, 3.7 million people were estimated to live below the poverty threshold, with 92 percent of them living in rural areas and only 10 percent of this number owning a title to their land (although this number has increased in the last two years due to the government's push to expand land title around the country<sup>34</sup>). It is clear that the level of poverty remains a threat to personal security.

Social injustice also continues to be a common experience in the daily life of the people due to a lack of proper individual protection and ineffective governance. Corrupt governance is a major problem in Cambodia. For years, Transparency International has named the country as one of the most corrupt nations in the world.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, Cambodia's judicial system is generally recognized as lacking both legal know-how and political independence. In recent years, there has been a surge in forced displacement of rural and indigenous communities resulting from large-scale land concessions granted by the government for agro-business. Since 2000, Amnesty International estimates, some 420,000 people have been affected by forced evictions to make way for development projects that are said to be in the "national interest" but are invariably also very much in the business interests of senior members of the regime.<sup>36</sup> According to data from rights group Licadho, local and foreign firms now control 3.9 million hectares of concession land, or more than 22 percent of Cambodia's total surface.

The land grabbing issue is the latest example of the state struggling to meet the needs of its citizens and the growth expectations of the international community. Needs as basic as providing clean water, decent housing, health care, social justice, and education are undercut by the need to increase GDP and to de-regulate social services. The benefits of direct government support should go to the people as a whole rather than to the few elites. Any sustainable economic development needs to embrace inclusive growth as basic government strategy – through right, transparent, and effective social policies by putting people's interest first.

Political insecurity is also evident currently. After the last national election in July 2013, Cambodia remains trapped in a political row due to the opposition's refusal to accept the election outcome, which some claim was marred by fraud and election irregularities.<sup>37</sup> Peaceful mass demonstrations were commonplace during the months after the election. The government

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<sup>34</sup> United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), *Local Development Outlook Cambodia* (New York: UNCDF, 2010), 7.

<sup>35</sup> Transparency International - Cambodia came 160th out of 177 countries in terms of corruption and occupied the lowest spot among ASEAN Member States.

<sup>36</sup> Peter Gregory, "Cambodian Government Must Reform Land Rights Laws," *The Cambodia*, June 6, 2013, 1.

<sup>37</sup> Election Reform Alliance (ERA), *The Joint Report on the Conduct of the 2013 Cambodian Elections Compiled by a Coalition of Human Rights NGOs* (Phnom Penh: ERA, November 2013). .

showed restrictive restraint and the protesters used Freedom Park<sup>38</sup> to stage their resistance. However, the post-election violence led to the death of seven people and to dozens more being injured. A bystander was shot in the head by police during the clash between protesters and police on Monivong Bridge on 15 September, 2013 and a food vendor was killed by a police bullet after officers opened fire during a violent protest in Phnom Penh's Meanchey district on November 12, 2013. A few months later, on January 3, 2014, a strike by garment workers to demand a monthly living wage of \$160USD turned fatal as the military police used AK-47 rifles to fire bullets directly into a crowd of protesters, some of whom were throwing rocks and Molotov cocktails. At least five were killed and many more wounded.<sup>39</sup> The next day, a large group of military police accompanied by a group of men wielding sticks, batons, metal pipes, and axes, drove the protestors out of Phnom-Penh's Freedom Park. The impact of this deadly clash had grave consequences in terms of human security. The government needs to embrace a constructive and cooperative resolution by discarding the excessive use of violence and intimidation to address workers' demands and to deal with political dissents peacefully. Military intervention might stop the uprisings, but stability established by using bullets won't last. Ensuring social order through peaceful means is in the best interests of all people.

In the latest headlines regarding migrant workers, the Thai junta (after the military coup in May 2014) has launched a massive crackdown on all foreign illegal workers. More than 250,000 Cambodian migrant workers, mostly undocumented, were deported home in June 2014. This mass exodus has created severe disruption and insecurity, particularly to the most vulnerable including women, children, and migrants. It challenges the role of the government on the protection aspect of human security. "This is the largest-ever repatriation we have met. It is like a flood that strongly hits Cambodia," said Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen.<sup>40</sup> While the government struggles to deal with the displaced workers, in our opinion one of the best solutions is to provide better economic opportunities and decent paying jobs in the country to stop the flow of migrant workers before it begins.

In summary, according to the government and the international community, the indicators for human security in Cambodia are positive. The fear of direct physical violence associated with armed conflict and violent crimes has mostly disappeared with the disintegration of the Khmer Rouge Regime in 1998. But armed conflict is only one threat to human security.

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<sup>38</sup> "Freedom Park" was established in 2010 in response to the Law on Peaceful Assembly. This law requires each province and the capital to assign an area for public gatherings to ensure freedom of Khmer citizens for peaceful assembly (Article 2, 28 of Law on Peaceful Assembly).

<sup>39</sup> Aun Pheap, "Unions Tell Garment Workers to Suspend Strike," *The Cambodia Daily*, January 8, 2014.

<sup>40</sup> Fu Peng, "Over 250,000 Cambodian Migrants Workers Flee Thailand in Fear of Junta's Crackdown," Xinhuanet, June 26, 2014, accessed March 25, 2015, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2014-06/26/c\\_133439662.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2014-06/26/c_133439662.htm).

One might conclude that more Cambodians have enjoyed better security in the last two decades in terms of freedom from fear and freedom from want.<sup>41</sup> But the reality on the streets is different for many people. People's experiences of fear and need do not necessarily correspond with quantified measures of reduced warfare or poverty, and they vary widely according to people's position and access to social capital. Rapid and unchecked economic growth with no pro-poor policy continues to threaten the lives and livelihoods of Cambodian people in ways that do not correspond with the positive reports of rising GDP and per-capita income levels. In a public forum on land issues, one indigenous representative summarized the gravity of another type of human suffering in Cambodia by saying: "All this development is destroying our lives."<sup>42</sup>

## 2. Methodology

We undertook focus group discussions and in-depth interviews to understand how human security and its threats are perceived and interpreted by different stakeholders in Cambodia. We have not used the names of the participants in this report; instead, we identify them by their positions. Interviews focused on five main areas: 1) How people define and use the concept of human security; 2) Which different components - 'Freedom from Fear', 'Freedom from Want', and 'Freedom to live in Dignity' - are emphasized and why; 3) What kinds of urgent and long-term threats are important in the Cambodian context; 4) Who is responsible for human security and what is the role of international actors; and, 5) How can we mitigate human security threats in Cambodia. One methodological issue was how to translate the concept of "human security" into Khmer. Khmer language has several words that can be translated as security but each has different nuances. These include '*santesok*' (referring to peace, and freedom from violence and fear), '*sawatapeap*' (safety), and '*sekadae sok*' (a deeper, broader concept of security encompassing spiritual dimensions). We focused on '*santesok*' as participants were comfortable discussing this concept, but we used all three terms during interviews to elicit responses that covered a broad understanding of security.

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<sup>41</sup> Sorpong Peou, "*Human Security in Post Cold War Cambodia*."

<sup>42</sup> Meeting of the Prey Lang Network at Foreign Correspondence Club, Phnom Penh, June 19, 2014.

### *Interview participants included:*

- Three key policy-makers from central government (including both ruling party (CPP) and opposition party (CNRP) members of the National Assembly), and a rural Village Chief. We selected these participants to include both central government level and regional/local government, as the literature suggests that human security needs to work at multiple scales of governance to be effective;
- Three academics who teach and conduct research at the tertiary level in Phnom Penh;
- Three civil society organization representatives. We selected organizations working explicitly with a human security mandate, or those with programs directly relevant to human security concerns;
- Four media representatives who report on areas relevant to human security concerns. The media sector is important to include, given the central role media plays as a communication bridge between government and civil society, and an accountability mechanism for government;
- A focus group with six monks from a Phnom Penh temple, and an interview with a senior monk. This group is important to include in the Cambodian context given the historical and contemporary importance of the Buddhist Clergy for securing human security in Cambodia;
- A focus group with four university students in Phnom Penh, and two interviews with rural and urban university students;
- Three focus groups with lower socio-economic people; one in Phnom Penh and two in rural areas of Kampong Chhnang Province. We selected Kampong Chhnang because it faces multiple human security threats, including climate change-related threats (such as severe flooding and drought), poverty and land dispossession, and deforestation. We conducted one focus group in a rice-growing community, which has recently received secure title to their land, and another nearby community, which did not receive secure land title, in order to assess how formalized land title influences people's perceptions of security.

## **3. Knowledge and definition of the Human Security concept**

### **3.1 Knowledge**

Most research participants had not heard of the human security concept. A Member of the National Assembly suggested the concept is gaining traction in Cambodia in some areas of government, as he has now heard the term used in political debate several times after first hearing it two years ago: "It gives voice to concerns we already had but didn't have a name for."

He described Cambodia as on track to implement human security in the post-conflict shift from concerns over stability to concerns for people. “Now in Cambodia, we have security, peace and we should look at the security of people themselves.” He noted that Cambodia has “reached the first step” of putting the concept into the constitution: “Article 20 and chapter 3 talk about the security of the people in the form of human rights, right to live, right to survival, and right to have good health, and the right to speak.” He recognized however that the challenge (as also voiced by those in other sectors) is putting the policy into practice: “This just gives us a road map; now, how do we get there?” A rural NGO Program Officer similarly suggested that “the important part is not only using the term human security in policy; we have to have some measure to say what it means to people and if anything is happening in practice.”

The human security concept was most familiar to civil society organizations with ties to international human rights-based donors. One NGO director said that she was familiar with the concept and had used it in the past to frame a program that encompassed land rights and environmental activism. The director of an international NGO with a country office in Phnom Penh said the NGO has an established position of ‘Human Security Officer’ in Cambodia. This position was established as a directive from their international head office, and was originally conceived with a broad scope encompassing natural disasters, conflict and violence, and human rights advocacy. However, the NGO found it difficult to work with the broad concept and they gradually shifted the position to focus on natural disasters. The Director noted: “Like the word accountability, human security sounds good in theory but is difficult to work with in practice.” She suggested that the term needs to be well defined for specific contexts so that it doesn’t become mainstreamed “without real meaning.”

### **3.2 Definitions of human security**

Amongst government representatives, the notion of state protection was central in their definitions of human security: “Human security is everything we do to guarantee the well-being, the safety, the need, or the survival of the people” (Member of the National Assembly, CPP). A Member of the National Assembly from the opposition party (CNRP) reflected on human security as intimately tied to economic development - “the prosperity of the nation.” While other participants’ definitions also focused on economic security, freedom from fear was also emphasized. One journalist from the Phnom Penh Post described human security as “being free from danger and fear, both social and human”; and another journalist noted that “even if we have money, if we have fear we cannot have security.” These narratives suggest a tension between the state’s goals for economic development and poverty reduction, and the negative impacts of these same development processes for social and environmental justice. One

journalist described how “the government’s policies to promote living standards impact on many people, and also on animals, forests, indigenous people, mining, land activities,” and a civil society representative described economic development as “not for the majority of the population.”

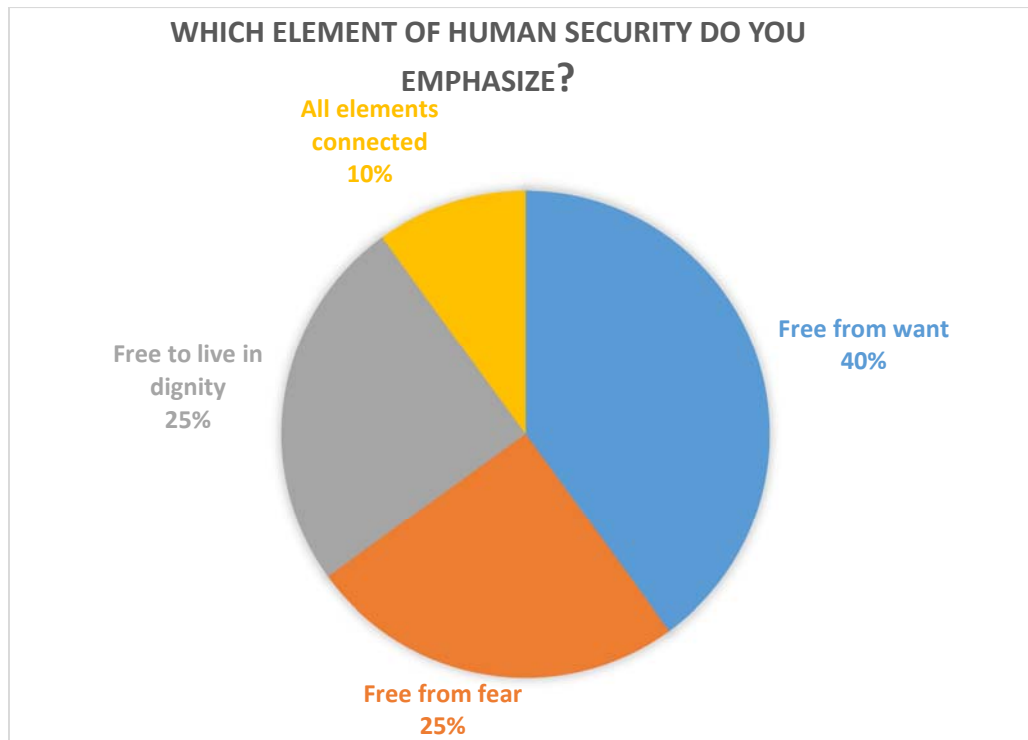
The notion of people’s participation in governance was a common theme in definitions of human security. A reporter from The Phnom Penh Post defined human security as “referring not to the armed forces but to the participation of the people”, and others talked of “being able to have a voice in our country”, and “feeling safe to speak out.” Safety in daily life was another central theme; rural focus groups talked of human security as the ability to “go anywhere without fear of harm of violence” and as having “no gangsters in our community.” Definitions of human security as security from threats by wealthy people and government officials was expressed in all three focus groups with lower socio-economic urban and rural people.

For many people in our study, cultural and moral dimensions of security were central. Participants described human security not only in terms of ‘freedom from...’ but also in positive terms; rural focus groups spoke of “helping, supporting and loving each other,” and the urban focus group described charity, tolerance, and honesty as central aspects. People’s strength and resilience came through strongly in the focus groups; for example, a participant from one rural focus group who was struggling with land eviction said that despite their fear of land loss, “they have fifty percent security because they love and support each other.” While ‘empowerment’ and ‘protection’ are often thought of in secular terms, several participants focused on spiritual and religious discourse, and the notion of culturally specific moral codes to define human security. When asked to define human security, one Economics Professor described the concept as an “outside power, physical power, spiritual power, and soul power;” another professor described it as “every institution that relates to life including food, spirit, emotional, and physical matters.” In a focus group, monks described a ‘happy life’ and ‘moral life’ as central concepts of being secure. This points to the importance of trust and solidarity for making people feel secure, notions which are often minimized by the human security concept’s focus on ‘freedom from...’. Indeed, the human security concept offers little guidance on how to move beyond ‘not fearing people’ to actually trusting them to act responsibly and in one’s interests.



### 3.3 The Three Dimensions of Human Security

We asked participants to discuss which aspect of human security they emphasized the most (freedom from fear, freedom from want, or freedom to live in dignity), and categorized responses into four categories as shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2. Interviewee responses to question: Which element of human security do you emphasize?**

Participants often described ‘freedom from want’ as the most pressing of the concerns. One Member of the National Assembly for CPP said, “Countries that are in conflict need to focus on freedom from fear, but now in Cambodia we need to focus on freedom from want first, and freedom to live in dignity. The government is pushing this through the economic growth strategy.” A member of the opposition party also suggested that freedom from want is most important in Cambodia, and a journalist from The Phnom Penh Post voiced a common opinion: “Freedom from want is the most important, because we are still recovering from war and the food supply is limited... As long as we can’t fill our stomach, we can’t live peacefully.”

Health concerns were also a common reason for people emphasizing freedom from want. Rural focus group participants suggested, “Freedom from want is most important for daily life, including having enough money to afford health care, good food, and being free from illness and disease; and “Freedom from want means we can have a proper income to support our

family and live healthy and happily.” Focus group participants also connected want to other aspects, such as “want causes lost dignity, lost opportunities, and problems such as thieving and corruption.”

Freedom from fear was also emphasized, and many participants in all sectors described the fear they feel in daily life. One academic voiced an opinion we heard often: “Freedom from fear is most important because fear could cause people to lose everything, including fear to speak, to stand up for our rights.” Another academic noted that it is only when we are free from the fear of being killed or threatened that we will have the stability to achieve the other components. A monk described his fear of being threatened by government officials and suggested that “while the people and monks are being threatened, the freedom to live in dignity cannot happen.” For him, as for some other participants, fear of large-scale conflict has reduced since the 1990s, but fear of speaking openly is felt strongly due to the threat of violence.

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*“I think that the freedom from fear comes first: Why? Because, when we are afraid someone threatens you then you have no freedom to live in dignity.”*

*(Monk)*

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Some monks in the focus group who emphasized freedom from fear suggested they don’t worry for their personal security as long as they do not express ideas openly, but this affects their mental health. One focus group participant said the government control and fear were reminiscent of the Pol Pot regime, and his reaction was a desire to fight against this control: “Threats from the authorities impede us expressing our ideas openly, sometimes it seems we are in the Pol Pot regime. We need to stand up and fight for our country.” A civil society representative suggested that freedom from fear is necessary for a life in dignity: “Freedom from fear is the most important because if we live with fear and no freedom to express our opinion, we would never be able to live in dignity.”

Several respondents felt that dignity is at the core of the concept of human security. One rural focus group participant suggested, “They are connected; if there is no fear, we can have dignity. Dignity is most important because it is about no discrimination, having rights to do what we want, not being looked down upon by wealthy people.” An academic suggested that “Freedom to live in dignity is most important because when we have ethics and norms, integrity, and try to find fairness to everyone, we can have creativity, and legal implementation of laws.” The link between poverty and lack of dignity was expressed eloquently by one student: “The most important thing now in Cambodia is poverty. This is about the freedom to live in dignity;

when people live in poverty, they think their life is not of value.” Participants in the lower socio-economic urban focus group recalled times when they lost their dignity, such as begging for loans or money, and noted that “when people are in need, they also lose their dignity.”

The core concept of ‘freedom to live in dignity’ was added to the human security concept later than the first two freedoms, and it is still not included in all definitions, so we asked people what they thought dignity adds to the human security concept. People’s notions of dignity encompassed ideas of morality and equity that they did not necessarily see brought out in ‘freedom from fear’ and ‘freedom from want’. “Dignity is creating a culture of fairness, a culture of respect, a culture of not being jealous or envious, and a culture of productivity, that can provide freedom and social agency for helping people” (Professor). Having dignity was associated by many participants with having a moral character; with notions of respect, pride, and having value and independence; and of helping others and having an honest character: “Dignity is about being a good, moral person and not exploiting others” (Rural focus group). One NGO Director argued that dignity is a central element of Khmer culture, but the state’s focus on freedom from want means that dignity is not always respected. Her view suggests that what people really ‘want’ is respect:

“A strong part of Cambodian culture is dignity. Families struggle but don’t want to live on handouts, this goes with the notion of face. But the government focus is on want. The government’s view is that if you ate today then you’re ok. Dignity is not respected ...when people are evicted for development, they just dump them with no proper sanitation, no jobs or proper housing, and there’s no sense that this is wrong.”

Given the continued prevalence of poverty in Cambodia, it is not surprising that many participants suggested freedom from want is most important. As Nishikawa (2009)<sup>43</sup> notes in her analysis of human security in Southeast Asia, the Cambodian government has explicitly focused on freedom from want rather than freedom from fear; this has the benefit of reducing poverty rates, and maintaining a high economic growth rate. However, this has been achieved in part through the creation of fear rather than through lessening fear in society. One civil society representative described this situation as the government focusing only on protection rather than on the bottom-up empowerment aspect of security: “Security in Cambodia is seen as the need to protect. Security equals military. This is the same for all ASEAN countries... Security is fear. Hun Sen uses infrastructure and security as his political manifesto when he says that at least things are better now than in Pol Pot. But people won’t accept this anymore, they want more

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<sup>43</sup> Yukiko Nishikawa, “Human Security in Southeast Asia: Viable Solution or Empty Slogan?” *Security Dialogue* 40 (2009): 213.

than this.” A large part of this shift is the huge cohort of young people who have no memories of the Khmer Rouge period or even of civil war. In this way, both socioeconomic class and generation play into perceptions of desirable security.

An important question that arose in these narratives is the interconnections between the three dimensions of human security, and whether there are trade-offs to be made by focusing on one or the other dimension. The CPP Member of the National Assembly suggested that there is a necessary trade-off between the three dimensions:

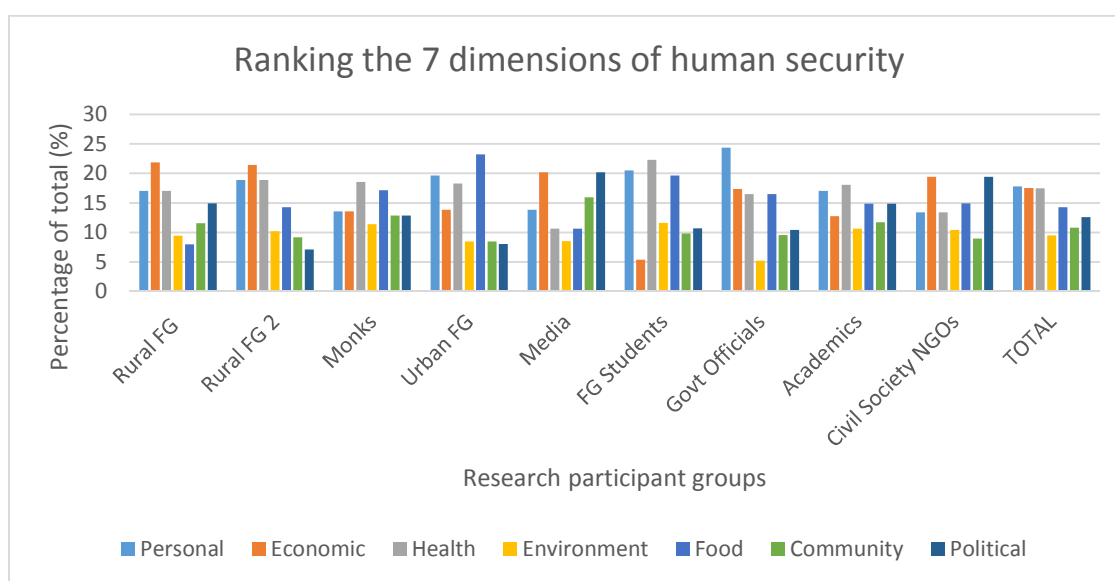
“It’s three dimensional; after the freedom from fear is realized, the freedom from want can be realized. But there must be some other way to build the freedom of dignity; we need freedom to speak, freedom of expression within the context of the law. And you must balance. If you push too hard, then the freedom from fear relaxes and what happens then? And if you focus on the right of expression, then you lose the freedom from want.”

We interpret this perspective as suggesting that freedom of expression may hinder development goals. This view could be seen, for example, in concerns from some government participants that ongoing public demonstrations by garment workers demanding higher wages may scare investors away. However, other participants felt that the different dimensions can be mutually strengthening. One NGO Director explained the necessity of focusing on all dimensions: “The Cambodian government works by threatening people, using fear as a control mechanism. And the idea of ‘life in dignity’ is not adopted. They adopt policies that show they have forgotten they have a population, but they can work on reducing want while still respecting people’s rights.” Many participants concluded that the three elements are closely related because when they can avoid poverty and fear, they will have freedom to live in dignity. Students spoke about the connections of these elements in the difficulties facing young people in Cambodia today: “They are all connected...After we graduated from school, we don’t know where we should go and what we should do, the public service is not transparent; we face discrimination getting public sector jobs. The problems of daily living and security will affect the next generation.”

### **3.4 The Seven Dimensions of Human Security**

Although most definitions of human security focus on ‘freedom from fear’ and ‘freedom from want’, the influential 1994 UN publication on human security suggested an alternative, broader definition of human security as encompassing seven dimensions. These include personal security, economic security, health security, environment security, food security, community

security, and political security. During interviews, we asked participants to rank the importance of the different dimensions for their understandings of the human security situation in Cambodia. The responses, presented in percentage form in figure 3, revealed interesting differences between the stakeholders we interviewed. Overall, personal security, economic security, and health security were all seen as most important. However, rural focus groups emphasized economic security, and spoke of the lack of decent jobs in their communities and the daily grind of poverty, while urban respondents, including the urban community focus group, students, media, government officials, and academics, all focused heavily on personal security.



**Figure 3. Interviewee Responses to Question: How would you rank the importance of the 7 dimensions of human security?**

Many participants described the ways these dimensions are interconnected, such as personal and political security. For example, one monk described how “personal security is most important, to allow us to do and speak about the problems that relate to politics in Cambodian society, and this leads to political security; the ability to speak about politics in public places. Economic security is also important, but right now even if families work hard they cannot be secure. Why? Because the government does not take care of the people.” Others suggested that political and community securities are connected, as “the government has to secure transparency, and the community has to help each other” (CNRP Member of Assembly).

#### 4. Human Security Threats in Cambodia

We asked participants whether they felt secure and what were the most important urgent and long-term human security threats facing Cambodia. No participant said they felt completely

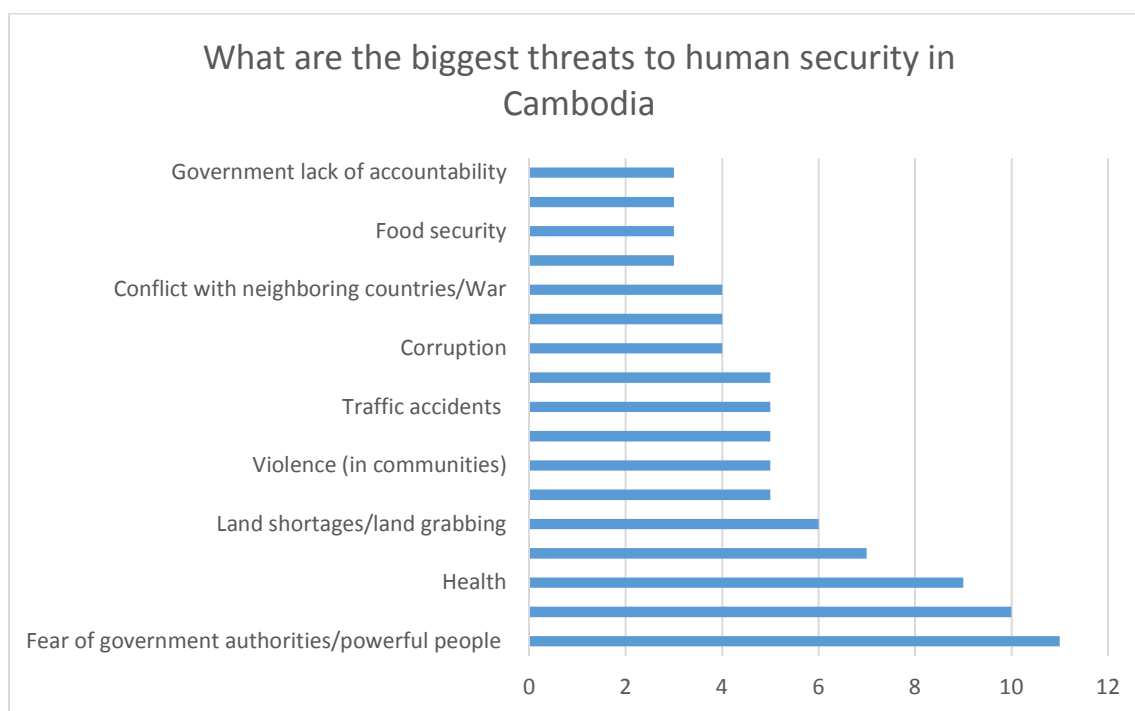
secure; participants spoke ambivalently of their relief that the country is no longer in conflict and has achieved stability, and also of their continued insecurity in daily life. When asked if they felt that human security was better now than five years ago, participants offered conflicting responses with around half of participants feeling that the situation now was better and half feeling that it was unchanged or worse. Amongst university professors, one participant felt the country was more secure, while one said it was less secure than before, and one said they did not have security because they lived with “fear of violence, selfishness and jealousy.” Amongst focus groups, the student focus group debated and reported that security is not better than five years ago “because there are more demonstrations; before, people didn’t dare but now they are braver.” The urban focus group also felt that security had not improved, citing the government deadlock, threats by authorities, and lack of political participation. One rural focus group with secure land rights felt that the country was more secure due to more jobs being available and there being better roads. The second rural focus group, who do not have ‘hard title’<sup>44</sup> to their land, said their security was worse than five years ago due to the land conflict and their inability to solve the problem in the face of powerful actors.

Amongst government officials, a ruling party Member of the National Assembly said that the country was more secure than before, but they needed more time to get over the war. Two opposition government officials felt that the security was worse than five years ago due to threats and fear of violence, and a local village chief felt people are more secure now, but the political deadlock is a barrier to security. Civil society representatives felt that security was better than before, but as one interviewee described, this perception of increased security is population specific. There may be less violence overall than before but heightened insecurity amongst young people due to the difficult economic situation.

We analyzed the key themes in people’s descriptions of human security threats; these are grouped below according to the number of participants that mentioned them (Figure 4). Major threats identified include fear of government authorities/powerful people, natural disaster threat, health, political instability, and land shortages. It is interesting that more people raised fear-related threats as the biggest threat to human security (such as fear of authorities and powerful figures), despite the fact that more participants prioritized ‘freedom from want’ rather than ‘freedom from fear’. However, we see this not so much as a contradiction but as a response to the way the state uses a fear-based government approach in the pursuit of development objectives.

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<sup>44</sup> A ‘hard title’ is an ownership certificate, issued by the Cadastral Office. This office is part of the Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction, and also coordinates with City Hall for land within Phnom Penh. A ‘hard title’ is the most secure form of ownership, as registration should be the only evidence required to prove ownership (“Understanding land ownership in Cambodia,” *The Phnom Penh Post*, August 9, 2012).



**Figure 4. Interviewee Responses to Question: What are the biggest threats to human security in Cambodia?**

*Note: Food security threats include food shortages and food safety fears such as chemical contamination of food. Fear of government authorities/powerful people includes also lack of freedom of speech, as interviewees suggested that suppression by authorities and powerful people prevents freedom of speech. The horizontal axis represents the number of respondents to this question.*

#### **4.1 Fear of authorities**

The most common threat was fear of government authorities and powerful people, and fear to speak out. Several participants described this fear as in part stemming from the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge regime. “People are fearful; this is left from the period of conflict...At the same time, Khmer help each other” (Reporter, Phnom Penh Post). One academic described the fear of government authorities as the most urgent threat in the country and added that people felt acutely because there is a sense that they have no one to turn to. Another academic described this threat as stemming from a lack of moral values: “I don’t have any individual security because I live with fear; I’m afraid of authorities not respecting human rights. Cambodians do not give value to Cambodia itself.” In the student focus group, all four participants said that they do not have personal security because they have no freedom of speech related to political issues.

Closely connected to this threat, many participants talked about the threat of political instability. A student described the situation as “getting more violent; the police and army are using more and more violent means to stop the protesters, but the protesters are desperate, they demand change... This relates to the security of the country, and to the security of the people. And it relates to the freedoms; because the people are protesting in order to have freedom from want – proper wages, land – but when the government cracks down on the protest, people can’t have freedom.”

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*“The long-term threat is living with fear, not having the right to express ourselves, living with no clear future.” (University Professor)*

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Several participants connected their discussion of fear of authorities with the threat of corruption. A journalist suggested that “the main threat comes from the society that teaches us that power comes through corrupt practices and nepotism”, and one student echoed many participant’s connections between corruption and inequality; “Here there is too much freedom in the sense that some people have freedom... the wealthy have freedom in the law... Even if we have the courage to complain, they know that probably nothing will happen... So Cambodia is a great place to live for the wealthy. And a difficult place to live for the poor.” While most participants focused on the role of the state in corruption and nepotism and instability, one civil society representative spoke reflectively of the role of the international community in promoting development policies “aligned with the neoliberal belief that GDP trickles down when the country wasn’t ready.”

#### **4.2 Natural Disasters**

Both rural focus groups discussed the threat of natural disasters, including climate change, and specifically floods and drought, as one of the greatest threats they faced. Indeed, the importance expressed by respondents to disasters is perhaps not surprising given that most Cambodians depend on the agricultural sector. Farmers already face challenges due to extreme weather events, and the country was recently rated as the most vulnerable country in the world to the effects of climate change (Morton, 2014). One rural focus group described how patterns of rainfall had changed in recent years, and they connected severe flooding with rampant deforestation. The ruling party Member of the National Assembly also suggested that the threat of ‘natural’ disaster is also human created through natural resource extraction; he argued that



“people are responsible. When they want something too fast it destroys the balance of nature.” This Member of the Assembly said that people can adapt when natural disasters happen slowly, such as a drought, but in a sudden disaster the government and international community need to step in. One NGO director argued that in fact it is the slow disasters that are most threatening in the long term: “People are usually more resilient to flooding because they are used to it, but not drought. That’s what drives internal migration the most. There is no government support for this long-term problem of drought. And it impacts women the most.”

### **4.3 Health threats**

All three of the lower socio-economic focus groups focused heavily on health concerns as a threat. This was not only the threat of becoming sick but also connected with the fear of abuse by powerful people, as several people mentioned a lack of trust in the medical system, and the high costs of health care. The rural focus groups discussed fear of doctors refusing to treat them if they couldn’t pay, of distrust for the medical system, of overworked medical personnel, and most importantly, of lacking the money to be treated. Participants in the urban focus group voiced this fear of illness: “We just want to live in safety, but we don’t have security currently; when we have health problems, we can’t trust doctors and don’t have money to pay health fees.” A specific health concern mentioned by several participants was the threat of traffic accidents. This can be understood given the context of Cambodia’s high rate of road accidents and death. The number of accidents have increased by more than 200% in recent years and on average almost 5 people die in traffic accidents each day, with increasing numbers of automobiles and lax enforcement of traffic laws taking their toll.<sup>45</sup>

### **4.4 Land shortages/land grabbing**

Amongst rural focus groups and state and civil society stakeholders, many people spoke of the threats of land shortages and land conflicts, and discussed the long-term consequences of land grabbing and land shortages for their children’s futures, particularly as these issues intensified migration out of the country. As one Village Chief described, “These people are farmers; I am concerned about the land. Now many of them do not have land, what will their children do in the future?” In one rural commune where land had been confiscated for a state development project, the participants said they lack security due to their land being confiscated so they are concerned about having no land to give to their children. One civil society representative

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<sup>45</sup> Cambodia Ministry of Public Works, *Annual Report on Traffic Accidents* (Phnom Penh: Ministry of Public Works, 2012).

described how the notion of a rural safety net promoted by some donor agencies is becoming less viable as many people lose access to land. She suggested that the country needs to invest first in agriculture for smallholder farmers, then some people can “stay in agriculture and make a decent living, and others can have a platform to move out.”

#### **4.5 Political Instability**

Several participants in media, government, and student sectors focused primarily on the threat of political instability, due both to the political deadlock between the two main parties and also the increased demonstrations and dissatisfaction amongst some groups. For some participants, it seems that political rivalry (arguably born of democratization) is perceived as a threat rather than as a part of the democratization process. Participants from government to rural focus groups spoke of the need for reconciliation between the two main parties, with the focus largely on compromise as the way forward rather than ongoing oppositional politics or debate.

Some argued that the increasing number of young people and rising unemployment/low-wage employment creates frustration and the potential for increased violence and instability. People also discussed the threat of instability in relation to ASEAN integration. Participants described ASEAN integration as an opportunity to create partnerships and strengthen human security, and also as a potential long-term threat to human security. Some argued that Cambodia needs to build up the country’s domestic capacity before engaging with others, for “if we are weaker than others in the region, we will be their dogs. In ASEAN, we want to strengthen ourselves first; this doesn’t mean we want to isolate ourselves” (The Phnom Penh Post Reporter). A student voiced a common concern that ASEAN integration “is a high risk when Cambodia has such a low education level for most people...The investment that comes will favor those with education, and I think that people from other countries like Thailand will come in and get the better job opportunities, or the companies will go to places with a better educated workforce.” A ruling party Member of the National Assembly suggested that good laws are needed regionally to handle the human security situations in ASEAN and to ensure people are not living in fear. He also felt that regional fair trade agreements are important to make sure Cambodia benefits.

Some people tied the issue of youth unemployment and instability to problems within the education system. Various participants discussed education as both a threat and as a potential solution to human security problems. Opposition party Members of the National Assembly described education as the most important sector long term and said that education, along with spreading information and cooperation, is essential to eradicate human security threats. The urban and rural focus groups all spoke of the insecurity they feel because they

cannot afford to support their children's education fees and of the fear of unemployment even for those who manage to get an education. The lack of educational opportunity was also tied to poverty, being cheated (due to illiteracy), violence, and to the threat of Cambodians losing out from regional cooperation with better-educated country partners.

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*"The biggest long-term security issue is the young population; the population is growing, but there are no jobs." (NGO Director)*

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### **5. Achieving Protection and Empowerment: Whose responsibility is Human Security?**

Those attempting to operationalize human security at the national and international level disagree on what the concept encompasses and how it should be achieved, and also about who should be responsible for it. The Commission on Human Security (2003) suggests 'protection' (shielding people from danger) and 'empowerment' (ensuring people develop human potential and participate in decision making) strategies to achieve human security. We asked participants whom they felt was most responsible for ensuring human security, and what the role of different stakeholders should be.

The vast majority of participants felt that the state is most responsible for ensuring human security, although some saw the state's role as a protector and others emphasized the need for the state to promote empowerment for people to actively participate in mitigating threats. Several people likened the state to a parental figure whose duty it is to protect the population: "Whenever the children have an argument, the parents have to reconcile and that is the responsibility of the government" (Journalist). This recalls the paternalism that the former incredibly popular Cambodian King Sihanouk played to and suggests a cultural value of a benign paternalistic monarch that does not necessarily mesh with Western ideas of empowerment.

Others portrayed a very different way of understanding government responsibility, speaking of the need to participate in elections and protests to increase respect for rights, and to encourage the government to respect the law. Young people, and educated urban people, were particularly strong in their notions of holding the government to task for its actions. Media representatives spoke of the need to spread information and knowledge about potential threats to human security through non-censored writing, and also through broadcasting on popular television shows. Monks described the need for solidarity between people: "If all Cambodian people join hands together, we can find an effective and practical solution"; "Citizens must have

the right to make change, and be willing to participate” (Monk Focus Group). Others argued that “we can’t always rely on the state so we have to learn how to act on our own” (Journalist) and that the government needs to “create an enabling environment for people to act” (NGO). Many of the participants suggested ways that they themselves and people in their communities could mitigate threats to human security, including participating in civic affairs. Both rural focus groups suggested that they could help mitigate threats by reducing chemical use in agriculture, sharing ideas and advice to solve common problems, communicating with local authorities, and generally being tolerant and supportive of others. The lower socio-economic focus group in Phnom Penh spoke of their capacity to reduce violence and of the need for people to join together to strengthen their voices, but they also felt their power is limited and good leadership within central government is most important

Many participants suggested that both government and people themselves are responsible for human security, and it is the cooperation and interdependence of people and the state that is most important.

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*“I don’t think it can come just from the bottom or just from the top. The important thing in Cambodia is that the bottom and the top have to start cooperating together.” (Student)*

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This theme of cooperative, inter-dependent relationships for human security came through in many interviews, with participants in civil society and government describing the need for linkages between local, national, regional, and global partnerships, and the need for truly global relationships to tackle global challenges such as climate change. One NGO director suggested that many of Cambodia’s human security issues cannot be solved domestically for they are linked to global flows of trade and aid such as land grabbing linked to international investment and commodity consumption. Therefore, more cooperation and pressure on global players to adopt socially and environmentally just practices need to be part of a broad strategy to ensure human security. The rural focus groups expressed similar concern that their own actions were not enough due to global commodity flows. As one farmer said, even if they reduce chemical use, the country still imports chemical heavy fruit and vegetables from other countries, so the agricultural policy needs to change if the farmers are going to be able to change themselves.

People discussed the need for transparency, accountability, and inclusive relations for human security “that give space for everyone and are not secretive or corrupt” (Professor).

‘Cooperation’, ‘doing it together’, and ‘tolerance’ at all levels were seen to be important relationship attributes. These included cooperation between people and the state, between people and other people, and between Cambodia and regional and international partners.

## **6. How to solve Human Security problems in Cambodia?**

### **6.1 The Role of External Actors**

When asked specifically about mitigating the threat of natural disasters, many participants said that the scale of large disasters meant the state alone couldn’t be expected to act, and almost all participants supported receiving assistance from outside. As one NGO Director said; “people here are resilient and they can solve problems. But the scale of natural disasters is beyond the means of any one community to fix.” A university student echoed many other participants’ concerns about cross-border threats when he suggested that “a concept like human security in the region can help the countries to think about working together to help each other...for the issues that are not just a problem in one country like climate change, migration and others.” However, several people spoke of the need to strengthen the national capacity to prepare for disasters first and worried that the influx of assistance from outside may weaken the domestic capacity to cope. The ruling party Member of the National Assembly suggested that Cambodia needs to have the national institutions in place first (which he said is a priority for the current administration) and then also accept international assistance in the case of a large disaster. One student described this concern: “The important thing is that we have a way to help ourselves. We have to increase the capacity of our own country. Because what if they have problems of their own and don’t come, what do we do then?”

Even in the face of large-scale natural disaster, several participants pointed to the community as the driver of responsible change and the recipient of external assistance. A common theme in several interviews was how to avoid outside support that would have negative impacts for Cambodian society, while increasing assistance that would increase government accountability and sustainability. Some argued that support should be given to complement and strengthen government so that “within the key players of local people, NGOs, and the government, the NGOs can provide assistance, and the international community can help through the government” (CPP Member of National Assembly). Others argued that support should be given straight to affected communities or ‘competent organizations’ in order to bypass corrupt government processes because “society here is broken and people do not help each other” (Urban focus group). Others described a half-way path of “giving directly to the

victim, but we also need to follow rules and regulations with competent authorities” (Journalist, Phnom Penh Post).

## **6.2 The need for cooperative leadership**

Many participants spoke of the need for political dialogue to mitigate threats of political instability. This theme is interesting because it signals a frustration with the status quo of a one-party system, and because the ways that participants understood political dialogue as the avoidance of instability have a long intellectual history in Cambodia and do not necessarily mesh with Western notions of participatory democracy. Cambodia’s democracy is rather a ‘managed democracy’, where the ruling party has strengthened its power since the first elections in 1993 through strong networks of political patronage<sup>46</sup> Many participants, such as the urban focus group, described the need for cooperation and tolerance between the political parties, and between civil society and government in order to find solutions to problems. Participants described themes of ‘cooperative leadership’, ‘compromise’, ‘engagements’, and ‘recognizing the constraints of others’ as essential for moving toward a system where different interests can work together. This non-confrontational, conciliatory attitude has a long history in Cambodia, and was used famously by King Sihanouk to attempt to avoid becoming drawn into conflict by cultivating relationships with both sides, and by Hun Sen to bring former Khmer Rouge into the folds of government after the civil war. More generally in Cambodian society, conciliation and harmony are valued highly, and outright debate and hostility is discouraged<sup>47</sup>. The rural focus group participants described the ongoing political stalemate between the two major parties as a major threat to human security and suggested that “We need the two major political parties to work together here to solve the problems; having a peaceful country leads to development. We need tolerance, then people will be happy.”

We feel that there is an important lesson here for human security discourse, for in stressing the need for tolerance and compromise, along with the paternalistic notion of government, some participants were essentially describing political rivalry itself as a human security threat rather than as a sign of a participatory democracy. This is perhaps not surprising given Cambodia’s long history of hierarchical, authoritarian monarchs and leaders, and its desire to avoid further conflict; it suggests that Western notions of democratic leadership may not be understood in the same way in this very different cultural and historical context. This strategy can successfully reduce conflict, but it can also breed frustration since anger may be

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<sup>46</sup> Sebastian Strangio, “More Managed Democracy for Cambodia,” *Asia Times Online*, February 9, 2012, 1.

<sup>47</sup> Maneesha Gellman, “Powerful Cultures: Indigenous and Western Conflict Resolution Processes in Cambodian Peacebuilding,” *Journal of Peace, Conflict and Development* 11 (2007): 25-6.

buried and resurface later. A Member of the National Assembly said: “We have to eliminate all the misunderstanding between the two parties, then the two parties have to listen to the people, then you come up with something that could serve the benefit of the people.” The Member was unclear however, about how ‘misunderstandings’ would be resolved in a way that promotes multi-party democracy and debate rather than continued one-party dominance. Interviewees discussed the need for communication at different levels of the state apparatus. One rural focus group talked of the need for better communication between local authorities and central government, and a rural village chief also described his frustration at the lack of information he received from central government and his limited power to make change in his community. This frustration is well documented in Cambodia where ‘communication’ is tied up with entrenched hierarchies and is often one-way from center to local, and local level administration receives few concrete resources to achieve change in their communities<sup>48</sup>.

Many stakeholders spoke of the need for continued strengthening of competent leadership in Cambodia. Leadership in this case was described not only as Western values of engagement, transparency, and responsibility, but also as Buddhist values of morality and notions of patrimonial protection. Several interviewees argued that developing more rules and laws was not enough, because without good morals to underpin them, people would twist the laws to their benefit. These moral values were described by Monks in the focus group as “starting from yourself, with a good education, morality and mind.” One older monk described the basis of good morality from Buddhist discourse as central to effective leadership, which includes 1) avoid taking the life of beings, 2) avoid stealing, 3) avoid sexual misconduct, 4) avoid telling lies, and 5) avoid taking intoxicated substances.

Some participants linked the need for the government to listen to the voices and concerns of people with long-term threats to the broader Cambodian economy. One student suggested: “The government has to hear what the people want. People have things they lack and they want. If we don’t have secure communities, the investment won’t come, the factories will go elsewhere, people will be poorer. So having a more responsive government is the main thing, and the freedom of speech to tell the government what we think.”

To achieve human security through cooperative leadership, several people talked about the importance of education, including both a quality, inclusive formal schooling system and informal, community-based knowledge sharing in order to be aware of rights and responsibilities and to better communicate with other stakeholders. Several participants described the need to up-skill the population before ASEAN integration in order to reduce the

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<sup>48</sup> Thon Vimealea et al., *Leadership in Local Politics of Cambodia: A Study of Three Communes of Three Provinces* (Phnom Penh: CDRI, 2009).

risk of further out-migration of low-skilled Cambodian workers. Students in a focus group suggested that improving education and wages were essential for reducing the urban/rural achievement gap: “I strongly believe that if people are paid a fair wage, they wouldn’t have to engage in so much corruption. And we have to improve the wages at the same time as we put more effort into improving the quality of education, especially for rural children so they can achieve the same as the urban children.” One NGO director suggested that up-skilling should not just be left to the state but could also be instituted more formally in the private sector by encouraging large businesses that invest in Cambodia to offer vocational training. University professors argued that both government officials and citizens need to be educated about their rights and roles: “Cambodian people need to understand their roles... to avoid the oppression and exploitation of others” (Paññāsāstra University of Cambodia).

## **Conclusion**

Our research suggests that replacing older realist discourses of state security with the concept of human security provides a promising way to open new kinds of conversations with local people about the insecurities they experience and the hopes they hold for the future. Certainly, the concept helps put a spotlight on the problems faced by people in their everyday lives and invites us to consider how these are interrelated. However, as the breadth and diversity of the responses we received show, the concept is perhaps too all-encompassing to be of immediate practical applicability.

In general, all of those whom we asked about the relevance and usefulness of the concept of human security for Cambodia found it helpful for identifying their security concerns and reflecting upon their aspirations for a better future. Our respondents saw the notion as encompassing ideas such as ‘peace’, ‘freedom’, ‘poverty alleviation’, and ‘dignity’. Many referred to issues such as freedom of speech, human rights, and lives of dignity as important for a peaceful future in Cambodia. Clearly shifting the focus of security from the referent object of the state to that of the individual human being has strong resonance for people from all walks of life.

Despite its rhetorical appeal though, there are problems with the concept of Human Security. Firstly, several of our respondents pointed out that the real difficulty lies in putting the concept into practice, not only by designing policies and regulations, but by translating these into human behavior. This was eloquently captured, for instance, by a student who noted that “if we look at Cambodia, we have laws but they are not followed...it is about making sure that [human security] has meaning to it, so that we can pressure to change actual behavior.” As some of our informants indicated, the problem is not a lack of laws and regulations but the lack of



shared values. As consumerist values seep into every area of Cambodian life, many Cambodians continue to refer to the Buddha's teachings as a moral compass for the control of greed and for the creation of an inclusive "imagined community" for Cambodia's future. This sort of attitude should alert us to the risks of Eurocentricity in the concept of Human Security and to the importance of listening to indigenous experience and ways of formulating hopes of a more secure future.

This brings us to the second question that our findings pose. It is clear from our interview material that the concept of human security means different things for differently positioned people in Cambodia today. Factors such as age, background, and access to social capital shape the "wants" that people express. It is hardly surprising that a middle-aged rural farmer, who has memories of war, views political rivalry in the distant capital with dread and simply wishes for stability in order that (s)he can get on with the business of making a living. In our rural focus group, for instance, a conciliatory attitude was preferred to a confrontational one: "We need the two major political parties to work together here to solve the problems; having a peaceful country leads to development. We need tolerance, then people will be happy." However, for today's swelling group of young students in the capital, who are internet savvy and cognizant of the structural hindrances to their own advancement, securing the future may mean challenging the status quo through protests and demands for a regime change. If both of these positions are to be respected then Cambodia's leaders are going to need to find a way to respond to challenges and enact change without resorting to violence, threat, and coercion.

This brings us to the third problem that our material brings to light – the fact that the concept of human security embraces several intertwined and sometimes contradictory aspirations. The "freedom from want" element has clearly been adopted by some stakeholders as justifying neoliberal reforms and trajectories of development that satisfy the demands of a global marketplace and elites. However, addressing "want" in this globally endorsed way, without simultaneously implementing inclusive, pro-poor policies for wealth redistribution and protection of rights, clearly increases "fear" as well as "want" for large groups of people. As one participant in a public forum on land issues so incisively declared, "All this development is destroying our lives." In other words, in a fractured society, efforts to reduce the wants and fears of one group may be made at the direct expense of the security of other groups. The current struggle over land in Cambodia is perhaps the most alarming example of this. There are now strong global incentives that encourage elites to enforce the stability that encourages investors while ignoring democratization and respect for the needs and rights of those who get in the way of the elite's development agendas. Indeed, it could perhaps be argued that the very notion of freedom from want is something of an oxymoron since the engine of global consumer culture is

the continual generation of new wants for new consumer items. The contradictory aspirations resulting from economic growth-oriented development are captured by Umegaki<sup>49</sup>, who asks the question: For whom are the perceived benefits of economic growth policies focused on long-term development conceived? And what will life be like for the majority of the population in the interim? A perspective that focuses on people's lived experience as "active participants in the making of their own lives in the effort to survive the interim" (ibid:8) is needed to alert us to policy that ignores or imperils certain sections of the population now in the pursuit of long-term freedom from want.

While much of today's "etic"<sup>50</sup> debate about Human Security is focused upon either protection or empowerment of individuals, our data suggest that people themselves present a far more complex and sometimes conflicting range of ideas about how their future wellbeing may be secured. For example, while some argue for a change from relationship-based to rule-based governance, others point out that introducing more rules is useless if people are not motivated to follow them. Similarly, impressive figures for the Gross National Product and evidence of material "development" are accompanied by the disenfranchisement of large numbers of people. Above all, we propose, ordinary people wish to have their needs – as they themselves experience them – listened to and responded to by leaders they regard as responsible and morally dependable. In this way they are requesting the right to be treated with respect and live in dignity.

In sum, we contend that by inviting reflection upon the precariousness of individual lives, the concept of Human Security is helpful for enabling people to communicate the kinds of problems they are experiencing in countries like Cambodia, where poverty, corruption, and human rights abuses continue to create insecurity. The challenge remains, however, for the proponents of Human Security to draw up concrete strategies for ensuring that government, and national and international elite actors behave responsibly towards ordinary citizens, particularly the most vulnerable. Given the growing tensions in Cambodia today, the Royal Government of Cambodia now bears a particularly heavy burden of responsibility to its people for ending corruption and including all Cambodians into a more just and equal society. While they may have been expedient in the past, the ruling party's methods of addressing want and fear in Cambodia over the past three decades are going to have to adapt to the changing ethos among Cambodian people. As a new generation of the Cambodian electorate comes of age, the leaders may find that they can no longer enforce stability using time-tested practices of rewarding

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<sup>49</sup> Michio Umegaki, "East Asia in a Human Security Perspective," in *Human Insecurity in East Asia*, ed. Umegaki et al. (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2009), 7.

<sup>50</sup> This is an anthropological term referring to an 'outside observer's' view of a situation, in contrast to an 'emic', insider's view. Our research reveals that using an 'emic' perspective on human security research uncovers cultural, religious and political nuances that must be incorporated into future research.

supporters and intimidating opponents. More politically mature methods of open dialogue about visions of the future, willingness to share and to compromise, and the establishment of a strong and independent judiciary are all key to the building of lasting peace and security in Cambodia. The alternative is untenable. Good governance cannot come from force. The search for lasting peace and security has not been easy and it is not yet completed, as UN Right Envoy Surya Subedy reflected during his recent visit to Cambodia in June 2014.

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*“Having studied Cambodian society and history carefully, and interacting with people from all forms of life, it is my duty to state that if real reforms are not effected soon, the country runs the risk of a return of violence.” (UN Right Envoy Surya Subedy)<sup>51</sup>*

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<sup>51</sup> Says Subedi, “Violence Threatens Still,” *The Phnom Penh Post*, June 25, 2014.

## **ANNEX 1: Questionnaire**

### **I. Conceptual Basis of Human Security**

- 1) Are you familiar with the term ‘human security’? When and how did you come to know this concept?
- 2) What does human security mean to you? Please describe the *core* of this concept as you understand it. [Note: If participant is not familiar with the term, refer to the reference note on the research project to explain the concept, and ask what it means to them.]
- 3) We understand human security as consisting of three elements: “freedom from fear”, “freedom from want”, and “freedom to live in dignity”. Do you (or your organization) attach weight to a particular element? If so, why? How are these three elements interrelated?
- 4) “Freedom to live in dignity” has been gradually recognized, later than the other two freedoms. What do you think “dignity” adds to the concept?
- 5) What other elements are missing from the concept of human security?

### **II. Human Security in Cambodia**

- 6) What are the major issues of human security in Cambodia (both urgent threats and long-term risks) and why are these human security concerns?
- 7) How should these issues be tackled?
- 8) How are you (or your organization) involved in resolving these issues?

### **III. Human Security in Practice**

- 9) The practice of human security consists of two approaches: the top down “protection” of those who suffer, and the bottom-up “empowerment” of people to cope with threats by themselves. Do you (or your organization) think these are equally important, or do you prioritize one over the other? Why?
- 10) How do you (or your organization) promote “protection”? How do you promote “empowerment”?
- 11) It is important to promote social and institutional preparation for natural and human-made disasters before they strike. How and why do you think the concept of human security can contribute to this preparedness? Please give some relevant examples if you have them.

**IV. Receiving Assistance in Case of Natural Disasters**

- 12) Suppose Cambodia is affected by a massive disaster (such as storms or flooding). A vast number of casualties are expected, and its magnitude is supposed to be far beyond the control of a single government. Do you think Cambodia should accept the assistance from outside?
- 13) If your answer is positive, what kind of organizations and what methods do you think are acceptable to such an operation? Why?

**V. Receiving Assistance in Case of Escalation of Violence**

- 14) Suppose Cambodia is affected by an escalation of violent conflict. Here again, a vast number of casualties are expected, and its magnitude is supposed to be far beyond the control of a single government. Do you think Cambodia should accept assistance from outside?
- 15) If your answer is positive, what kind of organizations and what methods do you think are acceptable to such an operation? Why?

**VI. Country and regional partnerships for Human Security?**

- 16) Beyond receiving international assistance for natural disaster and violence, what kind of regional and international partnerships (such as ASEAN) are important for human security, and why? What are the barriers to making these partnerships effective for human security, and how can these barriers be overcome?
- 17) What kind of relationships within Cambodia are important for human security and why? What are the barriers to making these relationships effective for human security, and how can these barriers be overcome?

**VII. The Added Value of Human Security**

- 18) Do you think the concept of human security has induced any change in the ways of thinking, policy-making and practices in Cambodia? Would there be any difference if the concept had not been introduced?
- 19) Is human security fully capable of tackling the crucial issues of today's world? If not, what do you think are the major impediments to the dissemination and/or operationalization of human security? How can we overcome such difficulties?
- 20) Finally, feel free to give any additional comments.

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## **About The Authors**

**Pou Sovachana** is a Senior Research Fellow and a Deputy Director in Charge of Research and Publication at The Cambodian Institute for Peace and Cooperation (CICP). Prior to his current position, he taught Ethics and Political Science at Paññāsāstra University of Cambodia for five years. He holds a Master of Arts degree in Education majoring in Curriculum and Instruction and an Advanced TESOL degree (Teacher of English to Speakers of Other Languages) from Portland State University, Portland, Oregon, USA. He has worked with Buddhism Education For Peace Center and various NGOs in Cambodia in the fields of education and Theravada Buddhism. He has organized and coordinated many activities to promote volunteerism such as “Let’s Pick Up Trash and Clean the Environment Together”, “I Help You, You Help Others”, and “Drop Everything And Read (D.E.A.R)” with students, monks, parents and teachers. In 2012, he contributed a book chapter on “Progress and Challenge of Education in Cambodia Today” for the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS). He is the author of several articles on the Cambodian educational system and how to best work for Cambodia’s future. His areas of



interest include applied Buddhism, higher education improvement, human security, regional integration, social cultural community and political security of Southeast Asia.

**Alice Beban** is a Senior Research Fellow at The Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace and a PhD Candidate at Cornell University in New York, in the Department of Development Sociology. She has spent several years working in other countries in Asia, and as a researcher and project officer for a development NGO in New Zealand, conducting research on social and environmental justice issues in the Pacific and Asia. She has published work on organic agriculture and contemporary rural livelihoods, on land issues in Cambodia, and on cultural notions of wellbeing. Her most recent publication is, “The Spirits are Crying: Possessing Land and Dispossessing Bodies in Rural Cambodia (co-authored with Courtney Work, *Antipode*, 46(3), 2014). As a Fullbright Scholar for the academic year 2014-2015, she presently examines the implications of land reform for men and women in rural Cambodia. Her research interests include the political economy of development, global food politics, sustainable agriculture, agrarian studies, land reform, feminist political ecology, social movements and resistance, and Cambodian social and political life. She lives in Kampong Chhnang with her wonderful two young daughters and her very supportive husband.

## Abstract (in Japanese)

### 要約

人間の安全保障の概念は、国連開発計画（UNDP）による 1994 年人間開発報告書で提示された「恐怖からの自由」と「欠乏からの自由」という基本原則に基づいている。同概念が論じるのは、国家中心の安全保障から個々の人間に焦点を当てる安全保障への視点の転換である。人間の安全保障とは、個人の保護とエンパワメントである。それは、国家自体が時としてその市民にとっての脅威となることを認識しつつ、人間存在に対する脅威に立ち向かいそれらの脅威を克服する方策を見つけようとするものである。

本稿の目的は、人間の安全保障という国際的に新たに形成された概念について、カンボジアの人々がどのように認識・解釈し、人間の安全保障への脅威を軽減するために何が必要と考えているのかを理解することにある。本研究では、政府、研究者、市民社会、都市および地方のコミュニティ、メディア、学生、仏教僧を含む多様なセクターの人々に対し、インタビューおよびフォーカスグループ・ディスカッションを行った。そこから明らかとなったのは、カンボジアにおける安全保障についての言説を人間の安全保障の概念によって置き換えることにより、人権および人間開発について理解し対応していくための新たな議論の道が開けるということである。人間の安全保障を広くとらえ、「恐怖からの自由」「欠乏からの自由」「尊厳をもって生きる自由」という 3 つの自由を相互矛盾も含め互いに関連し合うものと認識することによって、カンボジアに存在する安全の問題が相互に結び付き多次的であることが明らかとなる。現在、安全保障の対象をめぐる議論の多くは、保護かエンパワメントか、という二者択一的な論争に集中しすぎる傾向にある。しかし、本研究で得られた人々の声から提起されるのは、安全は政府とコミュニティの間におけるコミュニケーションと対話から生まれるものであり、「協調的リーダーシップ」が重要だということである。



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Eun Mee Kim, Seon Young Bae, and Ji Hyun Shin

# Human security in Cambodia: Far from over

Beban, AB

2015