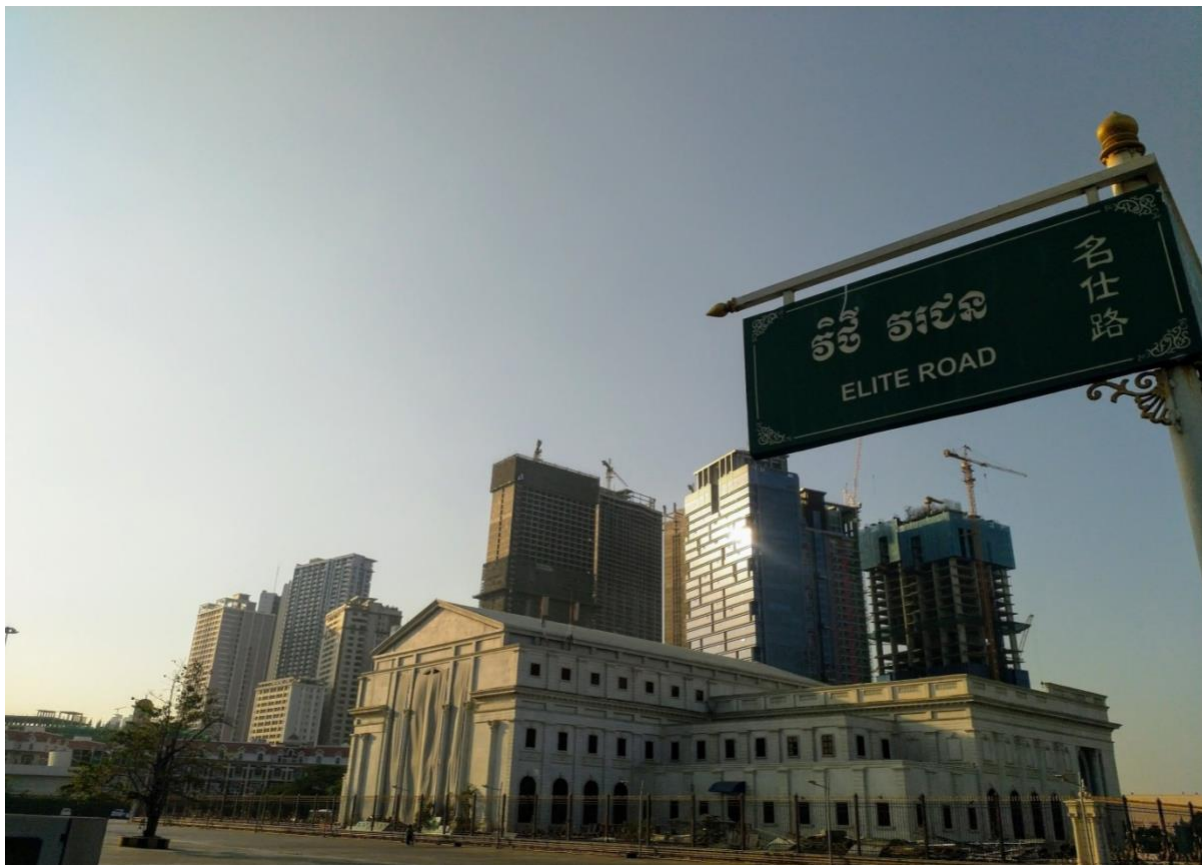


Land Privatization and Affordable Housing in Cambodia

Outlining alternative approaches for long-term sustainable urban development

Bruno Friedel



"Elite Road"—Diamond Island, Phnom Penh. Photo by author

Introduction

When living in Phnom Penh, you are never far from a construction site. The cranes dotting the sky are towering reflections of a city undergoing rapid growth. Cambodia, with Phnom Penh at the forefront, has one of the [fastest rates of urbanization](#) in the world. Sadly, this growth is dominated by speculative, unplanned development that favours wealthy elites to the exclusion of the urban poor. The frenzied pace of construction is leading to a landscape pockmarked by projects in various stages of completion, towers looming over traditional homes, religious sites and colonial-era buildings. The quick pursuit of profit is often too hasty for the developments themselves with many failing to secure funding for completion.

Bruno Friedel is an environmental and social policy researcher with a focus on housing and urban change. After working on urban sustainability at LSE Cities in London and as a housing adviser to the Victorian State Government, he is now based in Phnom Penh.

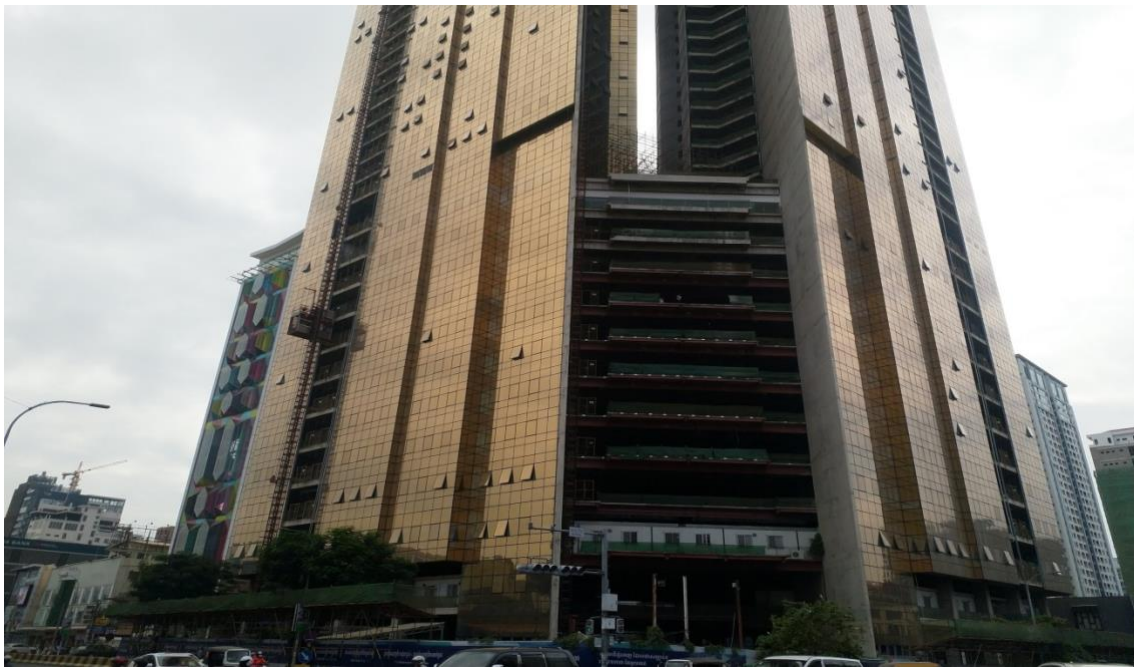
The construction of a gaudy 42-storey gold-plated skyscraper in central Phnom Penh, begun in 2008, lost investment halfway through only to recently be saved from being the city's latest white elephant.¹ Whether buildings are completed or paused during construction developers are winning big regardless. Investors are gaining huge windfalls from the acquisition of state land at bargain prices. This is supercharging the luxury property boom. The growing privatization of land for developer gain is one manifestation of an inequality of land ownership that has historically been shown to be the [highest in Asia](#). A UN study revealed that one percent of the Cambodian population owned 30 percent of the land.² The long-term effects of the land sell-off and land inequality could prove disastrous, regardless of the short-term benefits to some low-income Cambodians through new construction jobs. A property sector geared towards high-end development coupled with a lack of support for low-income housing tenures risks leaving generations of Cambodians in insecure, poor quality housing on the urban fringe.

The following section will unpack how land privatization benefits wealthy developers through exploration of case studies outlining the problem. The impacts of land privatization, including evictions, will then be discussed along with the failures of land management systems to safeguard those most disadvantaged. Attention is also given to how rapidly increasing land values derail efforts to create “affordable housing”.

¹ Jonathan Flexer, and Nam Voleap. “CBRE Market Update Quarter 2 2019: Phnom Penh Investment Opportunities.”

² United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF). Local Development Outlook Cambodia: Trends, Policies, Governance. Phnom Penh. 2010.

In the final part of this paper a different approach to land will be offered. It suggests a move away from the consideration of land as a commodity to be sold for private benefit. Land is a limited resource and its ever-increasing value on the property market is a large reason for the rising unaffordability of housing in Cambodia. Communities should instead be supported to remove land from the market through mechanisms that allow for communal ownership of land. While only one part of the solution to land inequality, communal land ownership would provide a way for communities to support each other in living affordably and securely. It would lead to less gold tower blocks and to more sustainable and inclusive cities for Cambodia.



“Gold Tower 42”—Phnom Penh. Begun in 2008, not yet finished. Photo by author

Elite Town? Land Privatization in Phnom Penh

The privatization of land in the Cambodian capital has gathered pace and is taking on a diversity of forms. For instance, the conversion of agricultural plots to residential uses in and around Phnom Penh is leading to enormous increases in land value. This conversion occurred on Koh Pich, also known as “Diamond Island”, where the Bassac River meets both the Mekong and the Tonle Sap. Small-scale farmers were offered minimal compensation payments and were evicted off the island to make way for Phnom Penh’s

newest and most exclusive development site.³ The former agricultural land became the city's latest urban development site.

Today, visitors to the wide streets of Koh Pich are given no illusions as to who the island is aimed at. Situated on Diamond Island, "Elite Town" is one of Phnom Penh's most recent gated neighbourhoods with a grid of streets named after American universities. Overlooking the ostentatious villas at the corner of Princeton and Harvard streets is the reigning vanity project of Phnom Penh, a re-creation of the Arche de Triomphe. The replica is part of another Diamond Island neighbourhood called "Elysee". Boulevards designed to look like Parisian streets lead up to the local city hall modelled on an elaborate Hotel de Ville. Golf driving ranges and expensive international private schools intersperse the housing developments. All that is missing are actual residents. While there has been a trickle of newcomers, the streets of both Elite Town and Elysee are largely empty. Such luxury developments are destined to predominately be foreign investments.



In "Elite Town" looking towards the "Arche de Triomphe", Phnom Penh. Photo by author.

Diamond Island is another example of the shadowy nature of land privatization in Phnom Penh. The island is owned by the [Overseas Cambodia Investment Corporation](#), an entity controlled by Cambodian financier

³ Sebastian Strangio. *Hun Sen's Cambodia*, Yale University Press, 2014.

Canada Bank. There are scant details available on the land acquisition like so many pieces of prime real estate being bought by private developers. Researchers claim that swathes of public state land have been converted behind closed doors into private land for sale.⁴ This has proved damaging not only to the majority of residents but also to Phnom Penh's urban heritage.

The fate of many traditional Khmer, modernist, and colonial-era buildings have been determined by murky deals between the state and business. It has been common for prime inner-city land and property including government offices, universities, and hospitals to be gifted to private interests in exchange for lesser-valued plots of land on the urban fringe.⁵ In one instance a government office building was transferred into the ownership of Cambodian conglomerate Pheapimex as part of an undisclosed deal. The company had recently acquired the colonial-era "Hotel Renakse" next door to the office building.⁶ The hotel had previously been under the leasehold of the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP). To complete this sorry tale, Pheapimex is owned by the wife of Lao Meng Khi, a Senator from the CPP.

Beyond the loss of heritage architecture, it is the city's disadvantaged who have borne the brunt of the high-end construction boom. Housing and land rights organization Sahnmakum Teang Tnaut has [catalogued the various deals](#) and developments leading to the eviction of 29,700 families between 1990 and 2016, including on Diamond Island. Thousands more have the threat of imminent displacement hanging over them today.

⁴ Vera Buttmann. "The clash of rural-urban migrants and real estate investors on Phnom Penh's housing market: Prospects for garment workers", Institute for International Political Economy, Berlin, 2017. Working Paper, No. 91/2017.

⁵Strangio, Hun Sen's Cambodia.

⁶ Adèle Esposito and Gabriel Fauveaud. "The atomization of heritage politics in post-colonial cities: The case of Phnom Penh, Cambodia." *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* 37, no. 4 (2019): 670-688.



“Champs Elysee”—Diamond Island, Phnom Penh. Photo by author.

Each case of eviction reveals how land privatization and speculative development can dramatically disrupt urban communities. One high-profile mass eviction was of residents who had built their lives around Boeung Kak Lake in central Phnom Penh. In order to build a “multi-purpose living and recreation” development, over [20,000 residents were forcefully evicted](#) and the 133-hectare lake was filled with sand. It sparked a series of protests and local and international outcry, which was vividly catalogued in the documentary film *Cambodian Spring*. The site was leased for 99 years by the government to Shukaku Incorporated, a front company of Pheapimex. The lake was reportedly leased for US\$79 million, a fraction of the estimated US\$1.3 billion price the land would fetch on the open market.⁷

Boeung Kak is indicative of an approach to land management that fails to protect the rights of the urban poor communities in most need of support. Successive governments and development partners like the World Bank (WB) have prioritized an individual land titling regime that fails to tackle many of the systemic land inequalities in Cambodia and which largely excludes alternatives to the market-first approach.

⁷Strangio, Hun Sen’s Cambodia.

Individual Land Titling: A Failed Approach?

The awarding of individual land titles has been a conventional approach to land management in the Global South. Proponents of individual titling claim that it supports people with informal tenures to gain economic prosperity. The argument follows that formal property titles not only provide long-term security during which people can renovate and improve their homes, but also an asset that households can use to access credit.⁸ Furthermore, advocates point to the need for titling in the efficient operation of land markets. This enables property transactions to be underpinned by legal surety.

In 2002, the WB funded the Land Management Administration Project (LMAP). It aimed to address land titling issues dating from the post-Khmer Rouge era. Under the Khmer Rouge, as part of the regime's descent into genocide the city had been cleared with vast sections of the population forced into harsh agricultural labour camps. There were only 60 residents in Phnom Penh when the Khmer Rouge regime fell in 1979. Thousands flocked back into the city and squatting in available properties supported many low-income families. However, the new provisional government annulled all pre-1975 land claims leaving many in precarious positions with no legal recognition of their tenure.⁹ This post-civil war settlement inevitably favoured those with bigger pockets and connections to authority. LMAP was designed to provide some certainty to those with claims to land. While thousands of titles were created through the program, LMAP largely failed to intervene in cases where land was disputed. This contributed to the residents of Boeung Kak being denied access to the LMAP process when fighting eviction from the land.

In 2009, LMAP was scrapped after a scathing report detailed the failures at Boeung Kak. Belated pressure from the WB and other international donors led to small concessions to the remaining 700 families battling against eviction from Boeung Kak. A 12.44-hectare resettlement site was carved out of the original 133 hectares.¹⁰ Today, evictions in Phnom Penh have slowed to a degree, as authorities are wary of another case like Boeung Kak gaining attention. However, smaller land disputes still occasionally hit the newspaper headlines and there is no sign of slowdown in expensive condominium developments across Phnom Penh. Development of luxury apartments is now underway on top of the former Boeung Kak Lake, including 1,600 units of the "One Park" complex. To compound the misery embodied in "One Park", it was

⁸ Hernando De Soto. *The mystery of capital: Why capitalism triumphs in the West and fails everywhere else*. Civitas Books, 2000.

⁹Strangio, Hun Sen's Cambodia

¹⁰Ananth Baliga, and Khouth Sophak Chakrya. "Boeung Kak: A Disastrous Decade." *Phnom Penh Post*, February 3, 2017

recently revealed that the construction had used “blood bricks”.¹¹ These are bricks sourced from kiln sites marked by child labour, practices of bonded indebtedness, poverty wages, and workers impaired by severe health issues. Blood bricks were also used in the construction of the Elysee neighbourhood on Diamond Island. The phenomenon shows how the unregulated boom of development, facilitated by land privatization, has damaged lives in other ways beyond eviction.

Affordable Housing Projects Struggle to Compete

Real-estate companies are making mega profits from luxury constructions, aided by the sale of public land. Beyond the high-end projects, could developers be incentivized by government policy to support affordable housing? Such reforms are destined to be frustrated by the land market. Without addressing land commodification, speculative developers will inevitably choose larger profits over the housing needs of low- to middle-income Cambodians. Currently, only a small number of companies are diversifying into what has been defined as mid-tier or “affordable” housing. They are partially responding to the [estimated countrywide demand](#) for 1.5 million new homes between 2015 and 2030. In [2019, 8,331 “affordable homes”](#) were built along with what the authorities term 38,488 “general houses”.

As well as receiving favourable terms for what was previously public land, developers are now able to benefit from Cambodian government incentives aimed at encouraging “affordable housing”. Tax breaks and fast-tracked approvals processes are in place for [projects of 100 housing units and above](#) which are marketed between 15,000 and 30,000 US dollars. The full impacts of such incentives are yet to be seen, but on current evidence, the “affordable” homes are too few, and in reality, are not truly affordable. Cambodian conglomerate Worldbridge group has been lauded by the government for its recent [“affordable housing” project](#). Prices for the 2,457 units in Koh Kor village, over 20 kilometres from the centre of Phnom Penh, vary between 25,000 and 30,000 dollars. One housing practitioner argued that house prices instead need to range from 10,000 to 20,000 to be truly affordable. This would meet the great demand from families earning 500 dollars per month, defined by the Cambodian government as [“middle-income families”](#). This begs the question: if current projects are not even meeting the needs of middle-income families, then what hope do low-income households have in benefitting from so-called “affordable housing”? Additionally, the financial burden of home loans is damaging to the tenure security of many low- to middle- income families. This will be discussed in the last section.

¹¹ Katherine Brickell, Laurie Parsons, Nithya Natarajan, and Sopheak Chann. "Blood Bricks: Untold Stories of Modern Slavery and Climate Change from Cambodia." Royal Holloway University of London (2018).

If the skyrocketing land market goes unaddressed, the majority of citizens will be left in insecure and poor-quality housing relegated to the urban fringe. Such marginalization leads to long commutes for work or study and inner and outer suburbs divided by wealth. While Worldbridge's affordable housing development is 20 kilometres from Phnom Penh's centre the same company is responsible for three luxury developments in the inner core. As Cambodian housing analyst [Ross Wheble](#) states: "Particularly for city centre projects, it is just not feasible for private developers to construct affordable housing unless there is some form of incentive".

With land values continuing to increase, it is hard to discern how government incentives could keep up. Developers will inevitably follow the biggest profit and escalating land values will always favour high-value developments. According to [one housing insider](#), the price of land in Cambodia is growing by between ten and 100 percent per year, varying by location. Increases in income cannot compete with such a steady rise. Significant change is needed to address the perverse effect of soaring land values. In rejecting the sugar hit of speculative development that destroyed communities like at Boeung Kak Lake, land should instead be treated like a vital, finite, and public resource. Steps can be taken to remove land from an overheated property market while also supporting the inclusive, sustainable development of the city. This includes providing existing residents with the ability to feel secure from land evictions. The final section of this paper will outline some principles and policies for change.

Principles and Policies for Change

Open for Public Discussion: Transparent and Open Land Management

One positive starting point would be an approach to land management that emphasizes public discussion. Analyses from Bugalski¹² and Brugman¹³ have argued for the informed participation of residents, a need for transparent decision-making from authorities, and recognition of current political and economic power dynamics. There is a need for public debate on citywide land-use plans with iterations of the Phnom Penh land-use master plan not open to the public.¹⁴ Engagement needs to go deeper to include

¹²Natalie Bugalski. A Human Rights Approach to Development of Cambodia's Land Sector: A Discussion Paper. Bridges Across Borders, 2012.

¹³Johanna Brugman. "Social, Political, and Economic Considerations for Securing the Land and Well-Being of the Urban Poor and Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Phnom Penh, Cambodia." (2019).

¹⁴Willem Paling. "Planning a future for Phnom Penh: Mega projects, aid dependence and disjointed governance." Urban Studies 49, no. 13 (2012): 2889-2912.

consultation on individual land parcels such as those surrounding and including the cities' lakes and wetlands. These areas of land not only support the livelihoods of existing urban communities but also are ecologically significant for cities like Phnom Penh. This includes their ability to help regulate waste and flood waters.¹⁵

This uncontroversial call for transparent, participatory planning and land management practices has been [echoed by key development partners](#) in Cambodia.¹⁶ These reports have also pointed to the need for integration between transport and land-use planning.¹⁷ A number of studies have shown the interrelationship between infrastructures like public transport, which is severely lacking in Phnom Penh, and the planning of affordable housing.¹⁸

Going beyond transparent land-use planning means recognizing that the continued commodification of land will create inequalities particularly in access to stable, affordable housing. Without this appreciation for how land commodification happens we can fail to notice the perverse outcomes of otherwise good land management policies. Take for instance the above-mentioned call for integrated land and transport planning. A number of studies have detailed how the development of new transport or utility connections in informal urban neighbourhoods can often lead to the displacement of long-standing residents¹⁹. Wealthier arrivals are able to pay higher amounts for housing in an area newly connected to a road, bus route or electricity network. Often this leads to the removal of communities who had long advocated for the new infrastructure with speculative developers instead gaining the unearned benefits of the increased land value. This outcome, common to Phnom Penh as well as other cities in the Global South, exposes how rising land values impact on housing affordability, particularly for urban poor communities.

¹⁵Laura Beckwith and Piseth Keo. "The Discourse and Practice of Resilience Policy in Phnom Penh." *Urbanisation at Risk in the Pacific and Asia: Disasters, Climate Change and Resilience in the Built Environment* (2020): 82; Sahmakum Teang Tnaut, "The Last Lakes", Facts and Figures No. 40, Phnom Penh, 2019.

¹⁶Global Green Growth Institute, "Phnom Penh Sustainable City Plan 2018 - 2030", 2019, Phnom Penh

¹⁷Laxman Perera. "Housing at the Center - Strategic Approach ." In *City for All Conference*. Phnom Penh: UN Habitat, 2018; Global Green Growth Institute, "Phnom Penh Sustainable City Plan 2018 - 2030".

¹⁸Shirish B Patel, Jasmine Saluja, and Oormi Kapadia. "Affordable housing needs affordable transit." *Environment and Urbanization* 30, no. 1 (2018): 123-140; Christina Culwick, and Zarina Patel. "Building just and sustainable cities through government housing developments." *Environment and Urbanization* 32, no. 1 (2020): 133-154.

¹⁹Shann Turnbull. "Democratizing the wealth of cities: self-financing urban development." *Environment and Urbanization* 29, no. 1 (2017): 237-250; Shirish B Patel, Jasmine Saluja, and Oormi Kapadia. "Affordable housing needs affordable transit."; Theresa Williamson, "Community Land Trusts in Rio's Favelas" , 2018 Lincoln Institute of Land Policy

Holding Land in Common

Changing this dynamic relates to another alternative principle of land management which enables communities to permanently take land out of the property market. One policy to facilitate this is the communal ownership of land. Communal rather than individual private ownership would mean that changes in land values, like those resulting from new infrastructure, would not lead to displacement by gentrification amid broader speculative activity. Instead, communities would be supported to maintain affordable land for the long-term. A method that has gained attention in recent years is that of communal titling. This allows a number of people to collectively own the land beneath a group of houses.

Before further discussing the advantages of communal titling, it is worth acknowledging that access to an individual title is preferable to the insecurity of informal land tenure. However, the benefits of individual titling have been oversold and there are perverse impacts from its widespread application. Aside from the noted failings of specific schemes like LMAP, recent studies have suggested that the expected socio-economic benefits from individual titling have been overestimated. One particular overstatement is its role in supposedly enabling access to stable credit.²⁰

The dominance of individual land titling stokes the fires of the property market and speculative development. The marketization of land invariably benefits the wealthy particularly when the underlying inequalities of the Cambodian economy leave so many in an insecure position. One manifestation of this precarity is the enormous levels of micro-finance debt in Cambodia. Approximately fifteen percent of the Cambodian population holds some form of micro-finance debt, a total of at least 8 billion US dollars. The median debt is 3,370 dollars per borrower, the highest average for small loans in the world.²¹ This rising debt also underlies the flawed emphasis on individual titles. Many families may have put forward their land, gained through titling, as collateral to gain the loan. But when an economic shock or loss of employment comes this can create huge difficulties in paying for the high-interest loans associated with micro-finance. Selling land and property may be the only choice for many indebted families. Brugman links this process of “market-based dispossession” to the ease of sale of land and property under individual

²⁰ Geoffrey Payne and Alain Durand-Lasserve. "Holding on: Security of tenure-types, policies, practices and challenges." In an expert group meeting on security of tenure convened by the special rapporteur. 2012; Johanna Brugman. "Social, Political, and Economic Considerations for Securing the Land and Well-Being of the Urban Poor and Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Phnom Penh, Cambodia"; Andrea Rigon. "Collective or individual titles? Conflict over tenure regularisation in a Kenyan informal settlement." *Urban Studies* 53, no. 13 (2016): 2758-2778.

²¹Licadho and Sahmakum Teang Tnaut, "Collateral Damage: Land Loss and Abuses in Cambodia's Microfinance Sector". 2019 Phnom Penh

title. As she argues, the use of individual titles in Cambodia could “make residents' tenure security vulnerable, as it could incentivize the sale of land at a higher price to obtain an immediate and short-term financial benefit”.²²

²²Johanna Brugman. "Social, Political, and Economic Considerations for Securing the Land and Well-Being of the Urban Poor and Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.", p. 12.

The Community Land Trust Model

In contrast to this vulnerability, communal titling provides an extra level of security to householders while also addressing the underlying commodification of land. One model of communal titling is the Community Land Trust (CLT). While there are a number of variants, Williamson has defined four key aspects which comprise the CLT model.²³ The first is collective land ownership with residents coming together to jointly own a defined area of land. Second, the homes sitting on the land are usually owned individually. Third, the community as a whole maintains structures and rules through the Trust that control what happens to the land in question. This community control contributes to the crucial last feature: permanent affordability of housing. As the land is owned collectively a large part of the cost of individual houses is reduced. To ensure that affordability is maintained if the house is sold, the not-for-profit CLT structure owns the land for the long-term. This permanently removes it from the market. For Williamson: “the community-based aspect of CLTs offers the potential to reduce the speculation and displacement that can accompany titling programs that target individual plots”.²⁴

Beyond the affordability and security that come with the CLT model there are a number of other benefits. A CLT could build on existing urban community structures rather than duplicating them. In recent years, decentralization reforms have stalled in Cambodia with local authorities at the commune level (sangkat in Khmer) expressing frustration at a lack of decision-making power and resources.²⁵

CLT groupings can further support decisions made at the local level including any efforts at greater public participation in budgeting for small-scale infrastructure. This would help ensure that decisions that affect the status of land, such as infrastructure improvements, are brought closer to the landholders themselves. As Williamson states in relation to the favelas of Rio de Janeiro: “Decisions about the future of these communities are therefore best made by residents, who are the only people capable of evaluating the true value of their settlements, which is often noneconomic and thus hard to quantify”.²⁶ In many cases, communal ownership may lead to better stewardship of the land rather than the neglect often shown to habitable areas of state land. Lastly, by uniting through a CLT structure communities can collectively

²³Theresa Williamson, “Community Land Trusts in Rio's Favelas” , 2018 Lincoln Institute of Land Policy

²⁴ibid, p. 2

²⁵Chheat Sreang “ Impact of Decentralisation on Cambodia's Urban Governance” 2014, CDRI Working Paper Series No. 88, Cambodia Development Resource Institute

²⁶Theresa Williamson, “Community Land Trusts in Rio's Favelas” , 2018 Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, Pg 14

address economic changes in their neighbourhood. They could guard against speculative growth while managing the periods of economic decline that often destabilize property and land markets.

Working with Communities

While recognizing the points of similarity between the communities studied by Williamson and neighbourhoods in Phnom Penh, practitioners must be wary of simply replicating a communal titling model from one country to another and expecting success. As Gillespie discussed in her analysis of the exportation of Western property law to Cambodia: “Legal concepts of property need to be more place sensitive so as not to potentially undermine or destabilize existing and evolving social norms and conditions”.²⁷

In the case of the CLT model, it is important that it should be voluntary and community members can opt-in to joining the trust. Rigon’s analysis of the introduction of collective titling in Nairobi attests to this.²⁸ In this Kenyan example, community members perceived that a collective titling scheme had been imposed upon them without their proper deliberation. Consideration also needs to be given to the existing power dynamics at play in Cambodia. In particular, the relationship between powerful landholders and those in authority.²⁹ With an intensely speculative real estate sector so dominant in the Cambodian economy, any model that removed land from the conventional property market would require significant advocacy. As Peredo and McLean state: “the commodification and marketing of land have established a cycle that can be difficult to break”.³⁰

Communal titles are used in Cambodia but currently only exist for agricultural land and some small forested areas used by local Indigenous populations. A number of studies have been undertaken of the application of communal titling in these rural areas.³¹ These analyses and the experiences of Indigenous populations with communal titling are instructive to any wider application in Cambodian cities. However, there are obvious differences between titling programs in rural as opposed to urban areas. While beyond the scope of this paper, further research is required to understand the legal or practical obstacles to

²⁷Josephine Gillespie. "A legal geography of property, tenure, exclusion, and rights in Cambodia: exposing an incongruous property narrative for non-Western settings." *Geographical Research* 54, no. 3 (2016), 264

²⁸Andrea Rigon. "Collective or individual titles? Conflict over tenure regularisation in a Kenyan informal settlement."

²⁹Ibid; Johanna Brugman. "Social, Political, and Economic Considerations for Securing the Land and Well-Being of the Urban Poor and Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Phnom Penh, Cambodia."

³⁰Ana Maria Peredo and Murdith McLean. "Decommodification in action: Common property as countermovement." *Organization* (2019): 1350508419867202. 17

³¹Ian G Baird. "'Indigenous Peoples' and land: Comparing communal land titling and its implications in Cambodia and Laos." *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 54, no. 3 (2013): 269-281; Sarah Milne. "Under the leopard's skin: Land commodification and the dilemmas of Indigenous communal title in upland Cambodia." *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 54, no. 3 (2013): 323-339; Josephine Gillespie. "A legal geography of property, tenure, exclusion, and rights in Cambodia: exposing an incongruous property narrative for non-Western settings." *Geographical Research* 54, no. 3 (2016).

communal titling in cities. Key questions include: what would the minimum size of a land trust be, how could land trusts be organized along existing community structures, how could land trusts be formed through an opt-in process, and, importantly, what mechanisms could be created to enable land to be affordably acquired?

Conclusion

The Cambodian government has [recently committed](#) to review the 2001 Land Law. Amidst a number of other potential changes, mechanisms should be created to facilitate communal land ownership for urban communities who want to join together in safeguarding their tenure and housing affordability. While not the only solution to some of the housing problems in Cambodian cities, the option of communal ownership of land would provide one method to address an increasingly unequal land and housing market. It would provide ordinary citizens a greater degree of control and say over the economic forces impacting on their homes and neighbourhoods. It could contribute to a different model of urban transformation resistant from the worst aspects of the market system.

Cambodian cities like Phnom Penh could forge a healthy and vibrant built environment that is distinctly Khmer. There is no lack of alternative ideas that could both guide development and deliver sustainable and safe housing for all.

Bibliography

- Baird, Ian G. "'Indigenous Peoples' and land: Comparing communal land titling and its implications in Cambodia and Laos." *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 54, no. 3 (2013): 269-281
- Baliga, Ananth, and Khouth Sophak Chakrya. "Boeung Kak: A Disastrous Decade." *Phnom Penh Post*, February 3, 2017. <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national-post-depth-politics/boeung-kak-disastrous-decade>
- Beckwith, Laura, and Piseth Keo. "The Discourse and Practice of Resilience Policy in Phnom Penh." *Urbanisation at Risk in the Pacific and Asia: Disasters, Climate Change and Resilience in the Built Environment* (2020): 82.
- Brickell, Katherine, Laurie Parsons, Nithya Natarajan, and Sopheak Chann. "Blood Bricks: Untold Stories of Modern Slavery and Climate Change from Cambodia." Royal Holloway University of London (2018).
- Brugman, Johanna. "Social, Political, and Economic Considerations for Securing the Land and Well-Being of the Urban Poor and Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Phnom Penh, Cambodia." (2019).
- Bugalski, Natalie. *A Human Rights Approach to Development of Cambodia's Land Sector: A Discussion Paper*. Bridges Across Borders, 2012.
- Buttmann, Vera. *The clash of rural-urban migrants and real estate investors on Phnom Penh's housing market: Prospects for garment workers*. No. 91/2017. Working Paper, Institute for International Political Economy Berlin, 2017.
- Chheat Sreang "Impact of Decentralisation on Cambodia's Urban Governance" 2014, CDRI Working Paper Series No. 88, Cambodia Development Resource Institute
- Chhut Buntheon, "Residential properties remain in high demand, developers say". *Khmer Times*, March 6, 2020, <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/698612/residential-properties-remain-in-high-demand-developers-say/>
- Cliff, Valerie, Moeko Saito Jensen, and Richard Marshall. "Sustaining Natural Resources for All." *Phnom Penh Post*, November 24, 2019. <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/opinion/sustaining-natural-resources-all>.
- De Soto, Hernando. *The mystery of capital: Why capitalism triumphs in the West and fails everywhere else*. Civitas Books, 2000.
- Esposito, Adèle, and Gabriel Fauveaud. "The atomization of heritage politics in post-colonial cities: The case of Phnom Penh, Cambodia." *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* 37, no. 4 (2019): 670-688.

Flexer, Jonathan, and Voleap Nam. "CBRE Market Update Quarter 2: Phnom Penh Investment Opportunities." 2019.

Gillespie, Josephine. "A legal geography of property, tenure, exclusion, and rights in Cambodia: exposing an incongruous property narrative for non-Western settings." *Geographical Research* 54, no. 3 (2016): 256-266.

Global Green Growth Institute, "Phnom Penh Sustainable City Plan 2018—2030", 2019, Phnom Penh

Hawkins, Hannah "A Cambodian housing revolution built on 'Lego Bricks', *SEA Globe*, March 29, 2018 <https://southeastasiaglobe.com/a-cambodian-housing-revolution-built-on-lego-bricks/>

Hin Pisei "Affordable housing on the up", *Phnom Penh Post*, 9 April 2020, <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/post-property/affordable-housing>

Horton, Chris. "Giant Development in Cambodia Hinges on Chinese Buyers." *New York Times* May 6, 2014. https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/07/realestate/commercial/giant-development-in-cambodia-hinges-on-chinese-buyers.html?_r=0.

Knox, Claire "Cambodia's Affordable Housing Crisis", *SEA Globe*, March 31 2017 <https://southeastasiaglobe.com/cambodias-affordable-housing-crisis/>

Licadho and Sahmakum Teang Tnaut, "Collateral Damage: Land Loss and Abuses in Cambodia's Microfinance Sector". 2019 Phnom Penh

Milne, Sarah. "Under the leopard's skin: Land commodification and the dilemmas of Indigenous communal title in upland Cambodia." *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 54, no. 3 (2013): 323-339.

Paling, Willem. "Planning a future for Phnom Penh: Mega projects, aid dependence and disjointed governance." *Urban Studies* 49, no. 13 (2012): 2889-2912.

Patel, Shirish B., Jasmine Saluja, and Oormi Kapadia. "Affordable housing needs affordable transit." *Environment and Urbanization* 30, no. 1 (2018): 123-140.

Payne, Geoffrey, and Alain Durand-Lasserve. "Holding on: Security of tenure-types, policies, practices and challenges." In an expert group meeting on security of tenure convened by the special rapporteur. 2012.

Perera, Laxman. "Housing at the Center—Strategic Approach." In *City for All Conference*. Phnom Penh: UN Habitat, 2018.

Peredo, Ana Maria, and Murdith McLean. "Decommodification in action: Common property as countermovement." *Organization* (2019): 1350508419867202.

Real Estate.com.kh reporters "Half a Million Landed Homes by 2030: VTrust, *Khmer Times*, September 4, 2019 <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/50639840/half-a-million-landed-homes-by-2030-vtrust/>

Rigon, Andrea. "Collective or individual titles? Conflict over tenure regularisation in a Kenyan informal settlement." *Urban Studies* 53, no. 13 (2016): 2758-2778.

Sotheary, Pech. "NGO: Development Hurting Residents." *Khmer Times*, December 14, 2016. <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/63005/ngo-development-hurting-residents/>.

Sok Chan, "First phase of affordable housing to be completed within the year", *Khmer Times*, February 19, 2020, <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/692367/first-phase-of-affordable-housing-to-be-completed-within-the-year/>

Strangio, Sebastian. *Hun Sen's Cambodia*. Yale University Press, 2014.

Turnbull, Shann. "Democratizing the wealth of cities: self-financing urban development." *Environment and Urbanization* 29, no. 1 (2017): 237-250.

Woetzel, Jonathan, Diaan-Yi Lin, and Mukund Sridhar. McKinsey Global Institute, July 2018. https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/industries/capital_projects_and_infrastructure/our_insights/smart_cities_in_southeast_asia/mgi-smart-cities-in-southeast-asia.ashx.

Williamson, Theresa "Community Land Trusts in Rio's Favelas", 2018 Lincoln Institute of Land Policy

The World Bank Group. "Sharing Growth: Equity and Development in Cambodia. Equity Report No. 39809-KH". 2007. <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/809851468213260073/pdf/398090KH.pdf>

The World Bank Group "Urban Development in Phnom Penh". 2017. World Bank, Phnom Penh. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28958> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.