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Think Biotech reforestation concession, Kratie and Stung Treng province, Cambodia



(https://file.ejatlas.org/img/Conflict/3066/Cam_daily_petition.jpg)

Villagers submit a petition to halt the tree plantation - Source: <https://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/villagers-fighting-korean-tree-farm-hopeless-meeting-129366/> (<https://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/villagers-fighting-korean-tree-farm-hopeless-meeting-129366/>)

Reforesting forested land? The controversial Think Biotech project turns diverse natural forest into timber monocultures, grabbing the land of indigenous Kuy and local Khmers, who organize to resist further expansion.

▼ Description:

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This controversial forestry concession was granted to the private Korean company Think Biotech Co. Ltd in 2012 by the Cambodian Government with the aim to restore a 'degraded' forest at the edge of the biodiverse Prey Lang Forest. The concession was awarded within the context of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), signed in 2009, between Cambodia and South Korea. The objective of this MoU was to foster the cooperation in forest governance as well as investment into forestry projects in Cambodia to maintain and increase forest cover within the context of climate change concerns. The company, which is a subsidiary of the South Korean explosives and weapons producers Hanwha Corporation, started its operation in June, 2012 in Kampong Cham commune (Kratie province). Since then, vast tracks of lands have been cleared to establish a massive *Acacia* sp. monoculture tree plantation on their 34,000ha concession area [1,2,3,4]. The activities of the company have brought large impacts upon local land- and forest users and the environment. The company and the governmental forestry administration claim the land to be 'degraded' forest land. While this applies to some smaller areas of the 34,000ha concession, the larger parts of the 'reforestation' concession area are, surprisingly, covered by diverse natural forests, which the company is now clearcutting to set up an industrial monoculture. Therefore, the company is currently causing deforestation to set up the forestry plantation. The change from a diverse forest-agriculture landscape to an industrial tree plantation landscape comes with huge biodiversity costs, river pollution, loss of wildlife as well as with strong impacts on local communities of Kuy indigenous and Khmer. They have been living within the concession area for decades, practicing small-scale shifting and permanent agriculture [1,2,3,4]. The development of the plantation was characterized by a complete lack of consultation and many farmers only found out about the project when the

company arrived with machinery to clear the forests in the concessions area [1,3]. Many lost agricultural land and with the clearcutting of natural forests, local people have lost access to forest resources that their livelihoods, such as resin trees, herbs, rattan, mushrooms, wildlife and the like. Some of their burial grounds and forests have also been destroyed through the plantation development [1,2,3,4]. Organized protests first started in 2013 and involved several members of the Prey Lang Community Network (PLCN), a grassroots social movement that had emerged to protect the remaining Prey Lang forests. More than 100 people gathered and camped out in front of the provincial company office, however, at that time, the company refused to negotiate [5]. A few days later, more than 100 protesters seized two company trucks [6]. After some negotiations, the protesters achieved that some agricultural and housing plots as well as community forests were respected and carved out of the plantation development. Some compensation payments were made. However, the impacts upon livelihoods could be strong because the diverse forest landscape, on which the livelihood of most locals depended, is replaced by an acacia monoculture. If the project moves forward to affect 1,900 families, almost 6,000 ha of community forests, 4,400 ha of rice fields and 10 ha of sacred forests and burial grounds would be affected [2]. In May 2017, forest community representatives travelled to Phnom Penh to petition the South Korean embassy to halt the expansion of this controversial reforestation concession. The embassy refused to receive their petition [7]. Since then, the company has continued to expand their tree plantation. The work of the PLCN and some of the community members to stop the concession development goes on.

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Name of conflict:

Think Biotech reforestation concession, Kratie and Stung Treng province, Cambodia

Country:

Cambodia ([/country/cambodia](#))

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State or province:

Kratie province, Stung Treng province

Location of conflict:

Boeng Chas commune (Kratie); Kampong Cham commune (Kratie); Siem Bouk commune (Steung Traing)

Accuracy of location

HIGH (Local level)

▼ Source of Conflict

Type of conflict. 1st level:

Biomass and Land Conflicts (Forests, Agriculture, Fisheries and Livestock Management)

Type of conflict. 2nd level:

Land acquisition conflicts

Deforestation

Plantation conflicts (incl. Pulp

Logging and non timber extraction

REDD/CDM

Specific commodities:

Land (/commodity/land)

Timber (/commodity/timber)

Acacia

▼ Project Details and Actors

Project details

The related MoU between Cambodia's Forestry Administration (FA) and the Korean Forest Service (KFS) was signed in 2009 [2]. The company was introduced to the Forestry Administration of Cambodia in 2010 and the concession was subsequently granted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (MAFF) in 2012 [1].

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Level of Investment:

unknown

Type of population

Rural

Affected Population:

8500-9000

Start of the conflict:

06/2012

Company names or state enterprises:

Think Biotech (Cambodia) Co. Ltd (/company/think-biotech-cambodia-co-ltd) from Republic of Korea (/country-of-company/of-korea) - plantation development

Hanwha Corporation (/company/hanwha-corporation) from Republic of Korea (/country-of-company/republic-of-korea) - Pa company of Think Biotech Co. Ltd.

Relevant government actors:

Korean Forest Service (KFS), Republic of Korea

Forestry Administration (FA), Cambodia

Ministry of Environment, Cambodia

Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Cambodia

Environmental justice organizations (and other supporters) and their websites, if available:

Prey Lang Community Network (PLCN), www.preylang.net/ (<http://www.preylang.net/>)

▼ Conflict & Mobilization

Intensity

MEDIUM (street protests, visible mobilization)

Reaction stage
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Groups mobilizing:

Farmers
 Indigenous groups or traditional communities
 Local ejos
 Social movements
 Local scientists/professionals

Forms of mobilization:

Community-based participative research (popular epidemiology studies, etc..)
 Creation of alternative reports/knowledge
 Development of alternative proposals
 Involvement of national and international NGOs
 Official complaint letters and petitions
 Public campaigns
 Street protest/marches

▼ Impacts

Environmental Impacts

Visible: Air pollution, Biodiversity loss (wildlife, agro-diversity), Fires, Loss of landscape/aesthetic degradation, Defores loss of vegetation cover, Surface water pollution / Decreasing water (physico-chemical, biological) quality
Potential: Food insecurity (crop damage), Global warming, Noise pollution, Soil contamination, Soil erosion, Waste over Groundwater pollution or depletion, Reduced ecological / hydrological connectivity

Health Impacts

Visible: Mental problems including stress, depression and suicide
Potential: Malnutrition

Socio-economical Impacts

Visible: Loss of livelihood, Loss of traditional knowledge/practices/cultures, Land dispossession, Loss of landscape/sen:
Potential: Displacement, Lack of work security, labour absenteeism, firings, unemployment

▼ Outcome

Project Status
 Under construction

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Conflict outcome / response:

Compensation
Land demarcation
Migration/displacement
Strengthening of participation
Application of existing regulations

Development of alternatives:

The petition submitted by the PLCN to the Korean Embassy (who rejected to accept it), as well as to Cambodia's Ministry of Environment and the Forestry Administration proposed to change the forestry activity developed under this concessional tree plantation to a REDD+ area (REDD = Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation) [7]. That way, communities could be involved in forest management and the characteristics of the natural forest would be maintained

Do you consider this an environmental justice success? Was environmental justice served?:

No

Briefly explain:

As of November 2017, the expansion of the tree plantation continues, encroaching natural forests and villagers' land.

▼ Sources & Materials

Related laws and legislations - Juridical texts related to the conflict

Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC). 2008. Sub-decree for granting user rights to plant trees within state forest lands [click to view] (<https://www.ecolex.org/details/legislation/sub-decree-no-26-on-rules-for-granting-user-rights-to-plant-trees-within-state-forest-lands-lex-faoc1>)

References to published books, academic articles, movies or published documentaries

[2] Work, C. 2017. Forest islands and castaway communities: REDD+ and forest restoration in Prey Lang Forest. *Forests*, 21.

[click to view] (<http://www.mdpi.com/1999-4907/8/2/47/htm>)

[1] Scheidel, A. and C. Work. 2016. Large-scale forest plantations for climate change mitigation? New frontiers of deforestation and land grabbing in Cambodia. In: ICAS Colloquium on "Global governance/politics, climate justice & agrarian/social justice linkages and challenges". Colloquium Paper No. 11. The Hague.

[click to view] (<https://www.tnri.org/files/publication-downloads/11-icas-co-scheidel-and-work.pdf>)

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Links to general newspaper articles, blogs or other websites

[4] Board J., Channel News Asia, "Cambodian villagers fear for future amid forest burning dispute: Special report" August 2016

[click to view] (<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/cambodian-villagers-fear-for-future-amid-forest-burning-dispute--7846450>)

[3] Turton, S. and P. Seangly. 2016. Seeds of destruction? The Phnom Penh Post, 23 Feb, p. February 23.

[click to view] (<http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/seeds-destruction>)

[6] The Phnom Penh Post (May, 28, 2013) "Villagers seize trucks in protest"

[click to view] (<http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/villagers-seize-trucks-protest>)

[7] The Phnom Penh Post (May, 10, 2017) "Calls to halt 'reforestation' plan".

[click to view] (<http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/calls-halt-reforestation-plan>)

[8] Hanwha Corporation (December 31, 2013 and 2012), Separate Financial Statements.

[5] The Phnom Penh Post (May, 27, 2013) "Villagers camp out to protest 'land grab'"

[click to view] (<http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/villagers-camp-out-protest-%E2%80%98land-grab%E2%80%99>)

Related media links to videos, campaigns, social network

Channel News Asia - Meet Som No, the man fighting Cambodia's reforestation

[click to view] (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6yMuYFHdWGE&feature=youtu.be>)

▼ Meta information

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