Clean Sugar Campaign

Land is life. Tell the sugar industry to stop bleeding Cambodian farmers by taking their land.

Oddar Meanchey

Oddar Meanchey Province, Samrong & Chongkal Districts

![Image of sugarcane field and workers burning crops]
In the districts of Samrong and Chongkal, Oddar Meancheay Province, three separate concessions were granted for 70 years for sugar production and a processing plant. The concessions were granted to three different companies in 2007: Angkor Sugar Co. Ltd., Tonle Sugar Cane Co. Ltd., and Cane and Sugar Valley Co. Ltd (all headed by Thai nationals). A search of these names reveals that they are senior figures in the Thai sugar company Mitr Pohl. According to community representatives, it is widely known that Senator Ly Yong Phat has interests in these concessions. Company staffs have told affected villagers that any complaints that they have should be addressed to Ly Yong Phat, and in discussions with local communities officials have frequently referred to the concessions as belonging to Ly Yong Phat.

The three Oddar Meancheay sugar concessions are all clearly linked. In its public listing, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) shows that all three companies applied for the concessions on the same day, received approval from the Council of Ministers on the same day and in the same letter, received approval from MAFF on the same day, and finally, signed the concession contract on the same day. The total area of the three concessions is approximately 20,000 hectares, which is in violation of the legal limitations on the size of economic land concessions in the Land Law.

**Human rights violations and impacts on affected communities**

These concessions have led to forced evictions, land seizures, forest clearance and increased militarization in the area, affecting more than 1600 families in two districts. Two representatives of affected communities have been sentenced to two years in jail for criminal offences, while others have gone into hiding out of fear of arrest. Two other community representatives were found not guilty at trial and released; however, they both served more than 6 months in jail in pre-trial detention. One representative was heavily pregnant at the time and gave birth in jail before she was found not guilty and released.

Following the end of civil conflict in Cambodia, people first began settling in Bos Village in 1998 after the area was de-mined. In 2003, officials formally acknowledged the community and distributed land receipts to the residents. The receipts granted 30x60m for residence and 5 hectares of land per family for farming. In spite of this acknowledgment of legal tenure, when the sugar
concessions were granted in 2007, a letter was distributed to community members stating that 31 villages occupying an area of 4,500 hectares were located within the boundaries of the three concessions.

Since 2006, there have also been efforts to establish Community Forestry in the area. Community Forestry is a program established by Cambodian law and supported by various development partners and organizations, including the European Union, which aims to formally hand over management rights of forested areas to the communities that have traditionally managed and depended upon them for their livelihoods. The Angkor Sugar Company plantation overlaps a large part of the Community Forest in this area.

In April 2008, Angkor Sugar Company staff wearing T-shirts with logos saying “Donated by H.E. Ly Yong Phat” demolished 154 houses in Bos Village, Kong Kriel commune under the guidance of local authorities. A “reconciliation agreement” concluded between a representative of Angkor Sugar Company and selected villagers confirms that the disputed land belongs to the company and that the affected families must apply for a “social land concession” with local authorities.

In September 2009, ten community representatives from Kon Kriel commune traveled to Phnom Penh to file petitions with the Council of Ministers, the National Assembly and the Cabinet of the Prime Minister. Several days later, a mixed group of more than 50 provincial and district military police and police surrounded and sealed off the village. Police arrested a former village chief and two other community members for alleged violations of the Forestry Law. Two days later, another villager was badly beaten with rifle butts by police officers. Eight other community members went into hiding.

On October 09, 2009, homes belonging to approximately 118 families from Bos village were burned and bulldozed by a contingent of approximately 150 police, military police, and hired demolition workers. Forestry Administration officials and RCAF troops from Battalion 42 – another battalion to which Ly Yong Phat provides “charitable support” – set up roadblocks at the entrances to the village, barring human rights workers and the media from entering the village to observe the evictions. Women and children fled to the local pagoda, while the men fled to the forest out of fear of arrest.

Several evicted villagers, including 5-months pregnant Hoy Mai and her husband, made an arduous journey by foot to Phnom Penh to complain to the Prime Minister about the eviction. Denied access to the Prime Minister’s cabinet or other government officials, they sought shelter in an pagoda in the center of town. They were discovered there later that night by police, who attempted to arrest them. Mai’s husband and three others managed to escape. Mai and three others were arrested. The three men were released, but Mai accused of being a ringleader and was sent to Siem Reap prison, where she gave birth to her son Samnang.

In June 2010, eight months after her detention, Mai was finally brought to trial. Although she was officially accused of “clearing state forest”, the court told her that
she would be released if she signed an agreement to withdraw all claims to her land in Bos village and accept replacement land. Mai signed the agreement and travelled back to Oddar Meanchey. Like most of the 270 plus families whose land was confiscated and homes destroyed in Bos village, Mai never received her promised plot of land.

The vast majority of these remain landless, homeless and destitute to this day as a result of Mitr Pohl’s land grab.

View the Amnesty International Video: Mai’s Story

Further reading:
Licadho briefing paper on Kong Kriel evictions (October 2009)

Amnesty International – Eviction and Resistance in Cambodia, Five women tell their stories (2011)