



In Cambodia, the path to 'clean sugar' is still paved with delays

Published: 14 Aug 2015

Short URL: <http://farmlandgrab.org/25225>

Posted in: [Australia](#) | [Cambodia](#) | [EU](#)

[Comments \(0\)](#) [Print](#) [Email this](#)

Equal Times | 14 August 2015

In Cambodia, the path to 'clean sugar' is still paved with delays

by Lauren Crothers

For more than 30 years, mother-of-nine Chhim Phay and her family farmed a modest, eight-hectare plot of land in Cambodia's Kompong Speu province. That tranquility, however, was snatched from them in early 2011 when five of those hectares were lost to powerful Senator Ly Yong Phat, whose **Phnom Penh Sugar Company** - a wholly owned subsidiary of LYP Group - had been **driving farmers off their land**, sometimes violently.

The so-called 'Blood Sugar crisis' may be over, but Phay's family is one of thousands working for sugar plantations on land they once owned. It has become the only source of income. Their pleas for sufficient compensation continue to fall on deaf ears.

Representatives from the **Clean Sugar** campaign, which advocates for those whose land has been grabbed by concessionaires, argue that rather than improve since the crisis began, there is no end in sight to their plight.

"Most of the affected families remain in the same desperate economic situation that they have been in for years," says David Pred, managing director of Inclusive Development International (IDI), one of the NGOs running the campaign.

"Sugar companies that grabbed their land and destroyed their livelihoods have yet to take any action to properly compensate them for their losses," he says.

Under pressure from NGOs, some companies that purchase Cambodian sugar, including soft drink giants Coca-Cola and Pepsi, **have voiced concern**.

It's not hard to see how and why the sugar companies have profited at the expense of others: for 10 hours a day, Phay and four of her children between the ages of 16 and 22 toil on the plantation, taking home only 13,000 riel (US\$3.20) each.

"It's not only my family taking small kids to work at the plantation," says Phay. "Most of the other workers working there do the same because we are poor, and we need to make a living since our farmland has been lost to the company."

In neighbouring Koh Kong province, 37-year-old Chea Sok, along with her 13 and 17-year-old sons, works on a different plantation for the same powerful senator.

"[T]here are many small children working at the sugar plantation, because those kids - including my children - follow family to work at the sugar plantation in exchange for small wages to support the family," she tells *Equal Times*.

In short, life continues to be a constant struggle for the thousands of villagers around the country who have seen their land razed, homes bulldozed and have gone without proper compensation.

Big players

Behind it all, some of the world's biggest companies and banks have played a central role. Last year, it emerged that **ANZ Royal Bank** (a joint venture between Australian ANZ and the Cambodian Royal Group Company) had been providing financing to Yong Phat's sugar company.



Kompong Speu farmers protest outside ANZ Royal Bank on 16 December, 2014. They accuse the Australian-Cambodian joint venture of financing Phnom Penh Sugar Company, which they accuse of grabbing their land. (Lauren Crothers)

DR Congo: **Take action** to stop intimidation of community leaders accused of supporting protests against Canadian oil palm plantation company.

Sign the petition to denounce the arrest of Ethiopian food & land activists and **help support their families**.

Who's involved?

Select Category

Events

30 Nov 2015 - London
Global AgInvesting Europe



Posts

Comments

Recent posts

RDC: Enquêtes et actes d'intimidation contre le défenseur des droits humains Augustin Alphonse Bofaka et d'autres défenseurs des droits humains

23 Nov 2015 | No Comments

DRC: Investigation and intimidation against HRD Augustin Alphonse Bofaka and other human rights defenders

23 Nov 2015 | No Comments

Foreign ownership of water licences faces scrutiny as Coalition agrees to set up register

23 Nov 2015 | No Comments

Australia: ACE milks \$8m Vic dairy deal

23 Nov 2015 | No Comments

RIPL's Malawi case study emphasizes need to address land rights, women's rights in land investments

23 Nov 2015 | No Comments

In an email to *Equal Times*, Ly Yong Phat's son-in-law, Phnom Penh Sugar director Seng Nhak, denies owning plantations in Koh Kong province.

He also writes that: "The LYP Group has a zero tolerance policy on child labour. The company never has and never will condone those who bring children to the workplace. The company has put measures in place to prevent families bringing children to work including monitoring of the workplace, educational campaigns and annual meetings with suppliers to reinforce company policies."

Sugar giant Tate & Lyle is also being sued by 200 Cambodian farming families who worked on the Thai-owned KSL sugar plantation, which supplied the company and whose rights abuses and child labour practices were rife.

As part of the EU's '**Everything But Arms**' initiative, the majority of sugar produced in Cambodia is exported to the EU on a duty-free basis. However, this arrangement has proven problematic over the past few years.

During that time, **stories have emerged** about the use of child labour – which continues to be an issue, as per the testimonies of Phay and Sok – and the forced evictions of people living on land zoned off for the plantations.

In January, two consultants were retained by the EU for the purpose of carrying out an investigation into the forced evictions of people by sugar plantations and with a view to ensuring that they receive adequate compensation.

Eang Vuthy, executive director of **Equitable Cambodia**, an NGO that works with IDI on the Clean Sugar campaign, says that the final draft of those initial assessments has yet to be released and "progress has been really, really slow."

"That started early this year and they were supposed to release it already, but we heard that it's been very slow in terms of discussions between the EU, consultants and government, and we are waiting to see this," he says.

According to Pred, Tate & Lyle as well as ANZ Royal Bank "have yet to take responsibility" for their roles in "massive human rights violations."

The head of IDI says he has concerns that the EU-Cambodian claims process "will not be procedurally fair and will not result in meaningful redress for the thousands of families whose lives have been devastated by this industry."

The EU embassy in Phnom Penh did not return our request for comment.

Pressure and action

In some respects, the tide has turned: earlier this year, the largest sugar producer in Asia, Thailand's Mittr Phol Group, **pulled out** of the northern Cambodian province of Oddar Meanchey, where it had been operating three sugar concessions totalling 20,000 hectares.

The decision came after Coca-Cola, which carried out an audit of sugar suppliers in 2014, vowed to sever ties with subsidiaries that were involved in land grabs.

Pred believes that the case against Tate & Lyle will likely go forward this year, unless there is some progress in securing proper reparations, and "we are likely to see the displaced communities take legal action against some of the other big players."

An Haya, a representative for roughly 200 families in Koh Kong province who filed the lawsuit against the sugar giant, says Tate&Lyle is in the process of trying to settle out of court.

"They have offered us some money for dropping the complaint, and we are considering whether to settle the case outside court – if the firm agrees to pay enough compensation for those whose land have been stolen by the sugar company in Koh Kong," he says.

Pred says the Clean Sugar campaign also plans to push further for the suspension of the 'Everything But Arms' deal, as well as mounting a boycott of brands that have done business with companies alleged to have grabbed land.

Agriculture Ministry spokesman Thun Sarath tells *Equal Times* that farmers who feel they have been adversely affected by land concessions can make a formal complaint.

"People can report to the local authorities to measure the area and the impact on farms, and then compensation depends on how much impact there is on the people. It depends on who reports to authorities, with witnesses, and companies would automatically compensate the people," he says. For Phay and Sok, however, the poorly paid work – and the wait – goes on.

Phay's husband, 50-year-old Chheng Sopheap, has travelled to Phnom Penh several times to protest outside ANZ Royal Bank, but with little to show by way of results.

Free City Radio interviews GRAIN on land rights and political prisoners in Ethiopia

23 Nov 2015 | No Comments

Land grabbing and just governance discussed in pan-African conference starting today ahead of Pope's visit to Africa.

23 Nov 2015 | No Comments

L'accaparement de terres et la bonne gouvernance sont débattus dans le cadre d'une conférence panafricaine exceptionnelle commençant aujourd'hui, à quelques jours de la visite du Pape en Afrique

23 Nov 2015 | No Comments

A apropriação de terras discutida numa conferência pan-Africana inédita a partir de hoje, antes da visita do Papa a África.

23 Nov 2015 | No Comments

Angola grants 7,000 hectares of land to Cabo Verde

21 Nov 2015 | No Comments

[more](#)

Languages

[Amharic](#) [Bahasa Indonesia](#) [Català](#) [Catala](#) [Dansk](#) [Deutsch](#) [English](#) [Español](#) [français](#) [Italiano](#) [Kurdish](#) [Malagasy](#) [Nederlands](#) [Português](#) [Suomi](#) [Svenska](#) [Türkçe](#) [العربي](#)

Special content

[audio](#) [contracts](#) [off-topic](#) [video](#) [water](#) [wikileaks](#) [women](#)

Archives

Select month

The irony of the situation he and 500 other families in his province find themselves in is not lost on him, and it stings. And the irony that, 40 years after the brutal takeover by Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge, injustices continue under a government which replaced it.

"We have relied on doing rice farming to support our families," he says. "If we don't work for the company that has occupied our land, we don't have enough money to support our children."

Source: [Equal Times](#)

Post a comment

Name

Email address (optional - if you want a reply)

Comment



Submit

Links (resistance and actions)

- [Access to land](#)
- [Act Now! for a better PNG](#)
- [Afrique-Europe-Interact](#)
- [Alliance paysanne « Stop aux accaparements des terres »](#)
- [Asian Peasant Coalition](#)
- [awasMIFEE!](#)
- [Cameroon Veritas](#)
- [Clean sugar campaign \(Cambodia\)](#)
- [CNOP](#)
- [Coalición contra el Acaparamiento - Colombia](#)
- [Collectif NOPALME](#)
- [Collectif pour la Défense des Terres du Ndiael](#)
- [Collectif pour la Défense des Terres Malgaches](#)
- [Dakar Appeal | Llamamiento de Dakar | Appel de Dakar](#)
- [Et maintenant, nos terres](#)
- [FIAN](#)
- [Friends of Yala Swamp](#)
- [Gardarem la terre et la mer](#)

- [Global Land Grabbing II](#)
- [Green Scenery](#)
- [Infos acquisitions terres Afrique](#)
- [La Via Campesina](#)
- [Land Inc.](#)
- [Land Justice for West Africa](#)
- [Le Hub Rural](#)
- [MILDA](#)
- [No land no food no life](#)
- [Oakland Institute](#)
- [openlandcontracts.org](#)
- [Our land our business](#)
- [PANAP](#)
- [Paren aquí vive gente](#)
- [PCSF](#)
- [Plateforme pour une agriculture socialement durable](#)
- [Projet ReAct](#)
- [Re:Common](#)
- [SiLNoRF](#)
- [Stop Africa Land Grab](#)
- [STOP Land Grabbing](#)
- [Synergie Paysanne](#)
- [Thorané: the land issue in Cambodia](#)
- [World Rainforest Movement](#)
- [Zamana](#)
- [□□□□□□□□](#)