Symposium

THE RIGHT TO FOOD AND CONFLICTS OVER LAND USE

Cambodia Rubber Plantations: Rubber in a Rice Bowl?

Christophe Gironde - Graduate Institute | Geneva - November 7, 2014
Starting point

Contrast between:

- Predominantly pessimistic literature (political economy of agrarian change and land grabbing literature) and denunciation by NGOs (*Rubber Barons* – A Global Witness Report, 2013)

- Many Ratanakiri’s farmers optimistic about the current change despite land loss and new challenges
Optimistic farmers (1)

- Rubber is profitable for sure, as everybody go for it!
- Big investors would not take big risks

- Agricultural price trends – rubber vs. cashew nut
- Less interest for cashew nuts from Vietnamese buyers
- Growing interest for rubber as well as cassava

- ‘Long life’ of rubber trees, can be left to children...
- Work load – ‘just to tap the trees’
Optimistic farmers (2)

• We will learn how to tap the trees
• We will find buyers, and buyers will find us
• Innovation is like that - No innovation without uncertainty!

• Food (in)security? No fear.
• No problem to rely more on the market for food (expect higher income thanks to rubber)
• Food diversity has increased ... shops ... junk food!
Questions

1. **What is happening on the ground?**
   - Who is getting land in Ratanakiri? ELCs only? Which land? Where?
   - To what extent do land acquisitions overlap with land previously used by local populations?

2. **What are the mid-term consequences on local livelihoods?**
   - How populations are ‘impacted’ (immediate) by the land rush? What do farmers do / can they do in response to the land rush?
   - What about their food security? Period of time to assess...

3. **Can anything be done? Any intervention?**
1. Land acquisitions and rubber boom in Ratanakiri

Context – Stakeholders – Process
Northeastern Cambodia (remote...)

Sources:
- Protected Areas: Ministry of Environment (2001)
- Proposed Protected Areas: Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries (2000)
- Cities: UNEP (1999)
- Biodiversity regions: ICEM (2002)

Projection: UTM Zone 48B
Spheroid: Everest 54
Among the poorest areas in Cambodia
Research area

Loum Choar
NR 78

Malik

Vietnam
Economic Land Concessions
Chea Chenrith, Heng Brothers, Vesna, ...
Khmer private company

Loum Choar

Mekong Express

300-400 ha
In-migrants medium-range landholdings (+/- 10 ha)
Local élite rubber plantations

Chief of the commune
Family rubber plantations inside the ELCs
Stakeholders in Ratanakiri

Economic Land Concessions
1’000 – 15’000 ha

Individual owners
‘companies’
Hundreds – 000’ ha

State land

In-migrants
3-15 ha

‘Indigenous’ families
3 ha (0-15)
2. Changing livelihoods
Opportunities

• Land transactions – Faustian dilemma: cash or land
• Job creation (clearing large-size landholdings)
• Farming-related opportunities
  • Cash-crop boom (casava, soja)
  • Technology: private nurseries, availability of inputs
• Local economic development: diversification of supply and services, better connection ... for who?
Constraints

• Less land
  • Large-size landholdings have expanded, on communal lands
  • Even well-off migrants cannot find more land ... only from families that are de-capitalizing → not anymore areas characterized by ‘available land’; rather saturation

• Loss of land
  • Land sales = land loss (when considering low price when compared to current value and potential income)
  • Loss of access (no more communal land)
  • Uneven loss of access due to ELCs
    • Areas granted but still farmed by some groups
    • Others do not dare
    • Land areas not granted but at risk and not farmed anymore
Constraints

- **Compensations**: non-existent, not materialized, low (partial, poor-quality land), or diverted

- Initial investment for rubber (labour force and inputs)

- In-migrants are competing with local native populations, for land, for jobs, for non-farming activities

- Family farming is put in competition with larger-size capital-intensive units (capital and technology gap)
Responses / Strategies

• Regarding land
  • Land sales
  • Local populations cleared more land to secure their access (those who had enough workforce)
  • Re-investment into paddy rice in low-wet areas (limited)

• With respect to labor force – intensification in labour
  • Looking for salaried work rather than growing own land in case of low-income crop systems
  • Hiring workers rather than harvesting oneself
Responses / Strategies

• Regarding farming systems

Agricultural intensification

- More crops over the year on the same plot (land use ratio)
- Shorter fallows (short-term needs/strategy ... sustainability?)
- Repetitive rice or cassava (until yields decrease substantially)

Increasing share of cash crops over rice (casava, soja, rubber)

De-agriculturization of livelihoods

- Cases of families in Ratanakiri who have little land but do not farm all of it (as they prioritize salaried labor)
3. Food security situation

The drama has not come (yet)
Results from August 2013 survey

Food diversity (over the last 7 days – seasonal factor...)

- 17% of households had eaten meat at least 4 days
- 83% of households had eaten meat maximum 3 days

- 23% of households had eaten fish at least 4 days
- 77% of households had eaten fish maximum 3 days

- 89% of households had eaten vegetables at least 4 days
- 11% of households had eaten vegetables maximum 3 days

- 5% of households had eaten fruits at least 4 days
- 95% of households had eaten fruits maximum 3 days
Results from August 2013 survey

Food security in general
- 15% of households responded that they do not have enough resources to feed their members
- 2% experienced days without eating at all (over the last 12 months)
- 9.5% experienced a lack of rice to feed the family (over the last 7 days)

Source of main food item (rice)
- 60% responded that the rice they eat comes mostly from purchase
- 70% responded that they could easily borrow rice from other villagers in case of need
Explanations

– Land acquisitions have not all been turned into rubber plantation → space left for sometimes to local populations
– Still some/enough land for indigenous populations
– Intensification of cropping systems
– Loss in access to natural resources and food in the wild has been partly compensated by food purchase
– Most important:
  • Native populations sell their land
  • Native populations sell their workforce
Limitations

– Rubber planted areas are increasing ⇒ less space left for sometimes to local populations
– Medium-range companies continue to expand
– In-migration continues ⇒ less land for indigenous populations
– Intensification of cropping systems ⇒ soil exhaustion
– Loss in access to natural resources and food in the wild has been partly compensated by food purchase ⇒ families are increasingly indebted
– Most important:
  • No more ‘extra’ land to sell ⇒ ‘Desperate land sales’ (deficits)
  • Native populations sell their workforce ⇒ less job opportunities than at the beginning and increasing number of in-migrants
3. Prospects
Uncertainty

- Family farming-based livelihoods?
- Little/no alternative to farming so far for native populations?
- The growing presence of Khmer-ethnic immigrants
- The tight control of commercialization
What is left for family farming?

• 2/3 of households have less than 5 ha (minimum to meet basic needs)
• 63% have no fallow acreage
• Many cannot, many do not want family farming
What alternatives to farming?

• Opportunities in the non-farming sector?
  – Already so many shops and services
  – No relation outside to organize the supply of goods for trade

• Employement in ELCs or companies? Employers prefer Khmer workers
  – They come to work and stay!
  – Some are bound to their employers
  – They know better the job to come (tapping)
The growing presence of Khmer-ethnic immigrants

• Some come in search for work (poor/excluded from their native province)

• But even ‘poor’ migrants have resources on arrival in Ratanakiri
  – Financial capital from renting-out their land
  – Bank loan
  – Acquaintances (place to stay, information for job)

• They rapidly (3-5 years) get access to land: land-work exchange, rent, buy

• They control services and trade, connecting local economy to broader markets, networks and territories
What can be done?

• Usual recommendation for democratic-participatory process is outdated: the land has been transferred; no reversibility can be expected

• Voluntary Guidelines? Never heard of!

• Reluctance from cooperation partners to address the issue