

**Degraded Forest as a Discursive Tactic of Economic Land Concessions:  
A case Study of O Tanoeng Village, Kbal Dam Rey Commune, Kratie  
Province, Northeastern Cambodia**

A working paper for Regional Academic Seminar  
**“Changes and Challenges in Greater Mekong Sub-region”**  
17-19 January, 2008  
At the Royal University of Phnom Penh, Cambodia  
Organized by the Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable  
Development (RCSD), Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University  
in collaboration the Royal University of Phnom Penh

By Mr. TOUCH Siphat  
M.A. student, RCSD, Social Sciences Faculty,  
Chiang Mia University, Thailand  
[siphat\\_mrd@yahoo.com.sg](mailto:siphat_mrd@yahoo.com.sg)

**Abstract:** This paper does not intend to oppose the economic development commitment of Royal Government of Cambodia, but it tries to draw attention of the government on local people and natural environment. The paper discusses the discursive tactic of Economic Land Concession, which uses the justification that the land being granted to private companies was the 'degraded' forests that are no longer 'sustainable' to the livelihood of the local people. On the contrary, the paper tries to argue this idea, and tries to show instead that local people are being restricted in their access to the area which was once the 'geography of their livelihood'. It would be suitable to say that the economic liberalization of Cambodia has meant an increasing international trade and rapid economic growth resulting in an increasing demand in the utilization of natural resources. Among others, land and forest which are the center for the livelihood of the forest communities are now hot spaces of conflicts. O Tanoeng village, Kbal Dam Rey commune, Sambo district, Kratie province has been studied to illustrate the problems.

**Key words:** economic land concession, forestland, degraded forest, old forest, forest community and livelihood.

## **1-Introduction**

With a population of around 14 million and an area of 181,035 square kilometers, Cambodia is the smallest of the Indochinese countries and a poor country. Eighty five percent of the population lives in rural areas, existing at a subsistence level and the poorest sector of Cambodian society. Cambodia still exhibits a high degree of uncertainty in the political, economic and social security spheres. In terms of economic liberalization, Cambodia has been integrated into the regional and global economies. This opening up of international trade and rapid economic growth resulted in an increasing demand for resource utility such as forest, land, water, fishery and mining. With high demand of these resources and lack of effective regulations and managerial mechanisms, the multiple users (including military, local businessmen, farmers, seasonal migrants, and foreign investors) take an opportunity to exploit at a massive level.

Natural resources, on the ground and in social theory, are now highly contested spaces; the arenas of struggle and conflict where trees, water, land and those living on the land where those resources are found themselves on the losing side. Under the development label, Cambodia tried to actualize their highest stage of economic potential. In this sense, it has duplicated and implemented all development outlines made by the industrialized world in order to improve the economies through accumulating profit from all sectors, including from natural resources such as forest and land. In general, the expansion of the state's power controls over and exploitation of natural resources to fulfill the demands of the economic growth and global market can be seen in different forms such as national parks, conservations, protected areas, economic land concessions and so forth. Rapid increase in exploitation in the form of profit orientated industrial development is dynamically excluding and cornering the existing community rights. They are creating a lot conflict and competition over natural resources between the actors involved in the degradation of natural resources and the environment.

Land and forests have been considered an important resource in rural development and rural subsistence economies. Particularly, in Cambodia, there are historically direct use rights based on the needs of rural subsistence economies, such as the rights to clear and cultivate land, the rights to pasture animals, to extract timber and collect other forest products, the rights to obtain water, to hunt, and to fish and also the

rights to material and land for building a home. Different levels of access rights to land are a complex web of institutions, relationships, and human behaviors that determine inter-personal relationships and the natural environment through the ownership and utilization.

Cambodia is now employing the perception of land as commodity and commercial agriculture in the agenda of economic development, which is creating a lot of land disputes everywhere in the country. Visitors to Cambodia cannot avoid seeing numerous large plots of land surrounded by fence all of which belong to powerful and/or elite individuals. Such land can be sold and/or rented to somebody else as commodity. Land accumulation is not surprising: looking at forest and forestlands that have been claimed as state property, it is evident that thousands of hectares of forestland or forest areas have been allocated to private companies in the name of economic land concessions or forest concessions with the purpose of commercial exploitation. The economic Land concessions have been granted on forestlands which are claimed that they are degraded forest areas or non-used lands by powerful people, however most granted lands are not degraded. Those are dense and old forests, and they are still useful for the local communities' livelihoods.

Consequently, economic land concessions have been detrimental to the livelihoods, traditions and survival of rural Cambodian communities, both indigenous and non-indigenous. For indigenous communities, their cultural and spiritual connections to traditional lands add a further dimension to the impact of economic land concessions. The most commonly voiced concern of both indigenous and non-indigenous communities is the encroachment of economic land concessions upon land and forested areas that are the basis of their livelihoods and survival. These concessions have led to destruction of their agricultural and grazing land, and loss of access to non-timber forest products.

Specifically, in Kratie province, seven economic land concessions have been granted covering 64,373 hectares. Among others, the Global Agricultural Development, Asia World Agricultural Development and Green Island Agricultural Development companies have been granted over 29,383 hectares for teak plantation in Kbal Dam Rey Commune, Sambo district, Kratie province in March 2006 (MAFF website). After the Ministry of Agriculture signed a 70 year lease contract, the companies began to clear land

and forested areas, create roads and plant teak trees. For instance, to develop teak plantation, Global Agricultural Development (Cambodia) Co. Ltd (Chinese investment company) began bulldozing 9800<sup>1</sup> hectares of land and started to divide the area into plots set out for new plantations and the company's offices. Those activities have heavily negative impacts on the people of Kbal Dam Rey and O Kreang commune. The O'tanoeung village of Kbal Dam Rey commune has been studied to illustrate the impacts of above company on the villagers.

## **2-Literature Review**

In the favor of economic growth, developing nations too often have set up development programs that undermine the inherent capacity of people to meet their needs through local initiatives, leaving them dependent on centrally subsidized bureaucracies, which absorb vast resources while paying less attention to the basic needs of the local people. Generally, developing governments have tried to accumulate profit from all sectors, including from natural resources to fulfill the demands of economic growth and global market application. Industrialization, monopolization and standardization have been considered (usually by nation states) as significant notions for such growth and are too often associated with conflicts and competition over natural resources between the actors involved. Ultimately, it has threatened the local people's livelihood, and natural resources and environments have also been degraded.

“Economic growth” is a powerful term, which is the most popular for many nation-states and other economists under the capitalist perspective. The term has subordinated the word ‘development’. This ‘development’ has too often been in the form of resource extraction, industrialization, consumption, or waste production. Coming to the end of the twentieth century, some poor countries started to experience economic development, particularly in South-East Asia. The economic growth of those countries has been fostered by integration, or globalization, of the world economic system which has been the impetus to increase investment and trade amongst developed and developing countries.

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<sup>1</sup> Agreement for Teak Tree and Processing Factory between The MAFF and Global Agriculture Development (Cambodia) Co.; LTD, signed on 15 March 2007

To understand the dynamics of economic growth in developing countries that those nation states have committed by trying to accumulate the profits from natural resources to fulfill such growth, that led to be prominent in their powers of natural resource management, control and exploitation; I will therefore review the concept of “politics of forestland management” and “monoculture in politics of ‘sustainable’ development” to illustrate the nation-state ability in exercising its exclusive power to control forestland and to examine how agricultural plantation contributes to sustainable development under the capitalist perspective, which is usually accepted by “modern” states, and how this perspective contradict with environmental activists who would argue that the application of ‘monoculture’ is not ‘sustainable’ development.

### **2.1 The Politics of Forestland Management**

Nation states usually try to expand their power to control and manage everything within their national boundary by establishing certain structures, laws, regulations, and characterizing those things in order to effectively control its populous. In this sense, Scott (1998) emphasizes the concept of simplification as a form of knowledge and control. He illustrates that the modern state likes to simplify everything in order to control and manage its people easier. Focusing on forest and forestland resources, ordinary people and nation-states have different interests. Historically, states use forest and land resources for commerce and/or other purposes of feeding the national economy, while most local/indigenous people use them for subsistence.

Claiming forestland and forest resources as “state property” has been a tactic made since colonial time until present time. Bromley and Cernea (1991) explain that in a state property regime, ownership and control over use rests in the hands of the state. Individuals and groups may be able to use the natural resources, but only with the forbearance of the state. Delineation of national parks, national forests, military based protected areas and so on is a way to legitimize the exercising of exclusive managerial power of modern states on natural resources. Those properties can be possibly shifted from state property to other types of property or vice versa. For instance, after the first general election in 1993, the Cambodian government created more than 30 forestry concession zones covering about 6.5 million hectares and privatized those zones for

exploitation; they were cancelled in 2002. This shows a shift from state property into private property; and then, reverting them back to state property again. Practically, we may see states that are able to both manage and control the use of that resource through government agencies, or to lease it to groups or individuals, giving usufruct rights for a specified period of time.

State property is generally seen as infrastructure, areas of land or water including all its natural resources such as forests, fish, mineral resources, and other things that are under state's territory. Governments historically intend to use these resources to accumulate the capital needed for maintaining the governments' expenditures and to gain benefits for other purposes of the nation. Neumann, (2005) reveals that modern states claim sovereignty over the land and natural resources within their territorial boundaries and thus sole authority to regulate their use. States come into 'being' by asserting control over the mosaics of the commons, dispossessing local and non-state entities of their pre-existing claims and rights in the process (the Ecologist, 1993 cited in Neumann, 2005). States assert control through scientific and technical acts of surveying, inventorying, zoning and mapping the living resources of its territory, most relevantly forested lands (Scott, 1998 and Bryant, 1997).

In Cambodia, the land law that was adopted in 2001 and the Sub-Decree on State Land Management that was placed in 2005 claims that "state public land is land with a public interest use, and includes property having a natural origin, such as forests". State private land is all land that is neither state public land nor legally privately or collectively owned or possessed under this law. The Sub-Decree on State Land Management sets out the framework for state land identification, mapping, registration and classification, and notes where additional administrative guidelines are required. Under the umbrella of this law 59 economic land concessions will remain, by December 2006, covering an area of 943,069 hectares in 15 provinces (MAFF, 2006).

Economic land concessions are intended to be part of the framework of poverty reduction and rural development set out in the National Strategic Development Plan 2006-2010. In particular, they are intended to develop land in an appropriate and perpetual manner, based on appropriate ecological systems; provide increased employment in rural areas; and generate state revenue. However, Human Rights, (2007)

reports that economic land concessions are not meeting these objectives. Concessionaires are not managing land in an appropriate or sustainable manner, with respect to existing ecological systems, and there does not appear to be any tangible benefits for local communities. In general, the concessions have not brought employment to affected rural communities.

Introducing land reform is a tactic of land management for economic purposes. Modern states set up land reform programs to ensure exploitation occurs as much as possible. Land is the prime source of capital, wealth, and employment. For most of elite individuals, the nature of land tenure relations is very important to economic and political development. Thus property titles and ownership become essential for economic transformation, which then it paves the way to industrialization. Investors need security on land tenure to use those lands for the large-scale and long term agricultural production and/or to raise the capital by using land to mortgage for approaching loan. It is also easy for those governments to tax. With economic purposes, the transformation into indigenous tenures has been done to attract both domestic and foreign investment. With plantation farming, the provision of title, boundaries, and legal identity for plots of land become a paramount concern. The title, which had both a system of central registration and demarcation of precise boundaries, was essential to provide security for those investors, (Cleary and Eaton, 1996).

Peluso (1992) reveals that in Java regarding agrarian law 1870, all lands that could not be proven to be owned by villagers was state property. This law was the central policy of privatization on wastelands of 75 year leases with the purpose of estate development. It also became the basis for the forest Service's claims to all lands except those under small scale or plantation agriculture. Within the control of claimed land, foresters established managerial regulations and mechanisms, and also rearranged the existing administration in order to control land and forest.

Cleary and Eaton (1996) argue that the establishment of different systems of land tenure was critical both in revealing the underlying economic rationale behind changes in land tenure, and in creating some of the most serious land tenure problems in the region today. Increasingly, competition in land use, (the most significant feature of tenure) has been the method of registering titles. This provides a system of recording land

ownership that includes all rights, dealings, and encumbrances; holdings were surveyed and boundaries and locations precisely defined and illustrated by a plan that formed part of the register. In this sense, for the landowner, the certificate of title provides proof of ownership, which gives greater security and incentive to develop the land. It also provides a guarantee for the raising of loans for this purpose. Land transfers were facilitated, there was less possibility of mistake or fraud and disputes and litigation were reduced. For governments, the record of ownership provided by registration was of great value to land administration, the imposition of taxes, the planning, and the implementation of land reforms.

In the sense of Cleary and Eaton's argument, political ecologists analyze land and resource tenure as a '*political process*'. Neumann (2005) expresses that land tenure reform is often a highly charged politicized process that produces winners and losers. Rather than fixing universally agreed upon property rights in statutory law, titling and privatization often spark new controversies and political struggles over land access. Providing land ownership titles, the local people may feel happy because they have actual exclusive right over piece(s) of land within their life-world or their experiences of life. In fact, such land certificates are effective tool to peacefully exclude local people especially forest dwellers, from state land (like dividing things: this is yours and this is mine) by providing to others that everyone has been allocated ownership to some pieces of land, while other lands are state lands or belong to the nation state. Hence, the state can legitimately occupy or allocate its land to someone else or any group for the purpose of exploitation, usually granted to large scale commercial production. In doing so, the traditional rights of access to land or forest products of local people have been limited and the locals themselves may not take any serious actions against government exploitation of forest or forestland.

In general, state power can be observed and understood through its coercive or controlling organizations; other social forces and groups and the effectiveness of those organizations (Blaikie 1985 cite in Peluso, 1992). These structures and relationships can show the nature of state control of forests and other natural resources. It is important to know what drives the dynamic of state forest control and what gives rise to the state's use of coercion. For instance, in 1989, the Thai government returned to an increasingly

militarized approach in carrying out its forest conservation policies with disregard for local complexities (Anan, 1998).

According to Anan (1998), the policy of forest conservation became a very political sense in Thailand in 1989. The Royal Forest Department (RFD) continues to evict highland villagers from conservation forest, and the government allows lowlanders and investors to utilize upland areas for many intentions in the name of national development. However, the result rendered both contradictions in forest policy and the aggravation of conflicts with local villagers. In addition, the relocation programs establishing new national parks, have threatened the security of tenure of the local villagers who usually have only customary rights to access resources in the forest. The government believes that the presence of ethnic people was regarded as endangering forest conservation, despite commercialization being main factor. One must conclude that the government has more trust in market-managed conservation than people-managed conservation.

Sovathana (2004) reveals that Land and forest resources were subject to land and logging concessions, and the establishment of wildlife sanctuaries, tourism sites, and hydropower projects. In many instances, the Cambodian government has tended to exclude local people from access to natural resources through granting land and forest concessions for national and international entrepreneurs to extract natural resources in ethnic minority communities. After general elections in 1993, land and forest concessions were granted without the ethnic minority community's acknowledgement or participation. During this time, ethnic minority people, especially Kreung People in Yak Kaol community, faced difficulties in practicing traditional methods of agriculture, competition for resource utilization, and encroachments onto ethnic community land. It is easy to find examples of the government authorizing land and forest concessions to private companies and protected areas in Northeastern Cambodia, totally is more or less 1.500.000 hectares.

Sovathana also found that the development that has encountered in the Northeastern Cambodia has brought changes in local community systems and community rights to utilize land and forest resources. The Cambodian government has long considered upland communities a source of state revenue. Various government

development agencies have implemented highland development projects, with very good intent toward improving the living conditions of the local people. Actually, they have promoted commercialization with cash crop production, hence land and forest resources in the community have been lost through the granting of logging and land concessions. At the same time, the government has accumulated local resources and increased penetration of upland community structures. These interventions have threatened and suppressed local cultural practices, natural resource tenure systems, and the livelihoods of the local communities.

Nation states always force people to accept any development programs that exert to control over the land, waters and/or any other natural resources. They are powerful tools to strip indigenous peoples of their rights to natural resource utilization. In exercising state power, the central government often makes decisions that seriously violate indigenous peoples' human rights. Normally, indigenous peoples/local peoples suffer from violence, including intimidation, torture or murder; mainly when they have fought for their rights with government or private sector projects. There has been no recognition the autonomy of customary law of indigenous peoples and absolutely no representation in the decision-making bodies of the state, even if local government.

## **2.2 Monoculture in Politics of “Sustainable” Development**

Monoculture is a kind of plantation system of commercial farming associating with large, specialized farm or plantation for such crops as bananas, cocoa, coconuts, coffee, oil-palm, products, rubber, teak, eucalyptus, sugar and tea. Such plantation systems refer to large-scale efforts combined with agricultural and industrial enterprises that are both labor intensive and capital intensive. It also raises, and usually processes industrially, agricultural commodities for the world market. Size and processing equipment are often important criteria, and large-scale enterprises may ultimately become agribusiness (Hodder, 2000).

The concept of ‘monoculture’ is perceived by modern states as a “sustainable” development technique in natural resource and environmental management. With respect to a capitalist perspective, “modern” states usually implement mono-tree plantations in large areas as natural resource and environmental improvement. In contrast,

environmental activists argue that the application of 'monoculture' is not "sustainable" development. Rationally, under large-scale plantations, nation states try to create a set of laws, regulations and mechanisms to manage natural resources such as forests, land, water and fish etc. Often, the state or powerful groups use force and violent means to evict, or deny access to, local communities from their land and forests. Moreover, promotion of mono-tree plantations is a politic of 'green' image that is destroying the complexity of natural ecological systems of nature. Rapid increases in exploitation orientated industrial development are dynamically exclusive the existing community rights. Those are creating a lot conflicts and competitions over natural resources between actors that have led to degeneration of natural resources and environment.

In South East Asia, the political issues and the problems associated with "politics" of sustainable development and environmental change can be seen through the exploitation of the region's forest resources. Uneven economic growth and pervasive environmental degradation in the region provide a platform to criticize the state's policies as mechanisms of economic incentives for large-scale logging, mining and other destructive activities, the most of benefit from those activities going to elite people. In response to environmental degradation, the concept of sustainable development has been promoted, particularly the South-East Asian states and non-state groups have generally accepted. However, this concept has been given different meaning by different groups. Developing states have too often sought to reform logging practices in the past by keeping with 'forestry action plan' with the assistance of Western aid agencies and consultants. However, such efforts have been criticized, saying it is a way to mask natural resource exploitation. Then, state-sponsored activities such as ecotourism and plantation forestry are hailed as being the epitome of 'sustainable development', as such activities are just part of the "green" image, causing more serious environmental problems and affecting on local livelihoods.

The Thai nation state's perception claims that tree Plantation is a form of forest management called "silviculture". Plus, Thai forestry academics mention that tree plantations would revive and improve forest conditions or replace the forest destroyed by cultivation and illegal logging as well as "the villagers' encroachment on the forest for farming and shifting cultivation by hill tribes". It would also contribute to economic

production and generate national income and employment. Moreover, silviculturists compare in terms of economic timber value of forest, natural forest can produce timber yields of only about five cubic meters per Rai while tree plantations can produce timber yields of more than seven times that much. But, Kuycharoen and Rajesh (2005) argue that during the period of colonialism, this “forestry science” spread alongside with commercial logging. They pointed out that the forest policy of the Thai government was based on such rational ideas, and forest reserve areas are always characterized by the hidden political agenda of taking over land used by village people.

In the monoculture practice, natural forest must to be cleared to allow no obstruction to the newly planted trees, and must be rid all unwanted vegetation. Such practice “replaces” natural forest with the commercial tree plantations. Kuycharoen and Rajesh note that such silvicultural practice will lead to destroy the diversified vegetation of natural forest. They claim that an area deemed as degraded forest will still have numerous small and young trees that could regenerate themselves if left to nature. Many of those areas also provide a variety of uses for local people such as grazing and collecting of non-timber forest products. They highlighted that allowing the private sector to rent “degraded” forest areas for tree plantations will result in natural forest destruction.

Similarly, Scott, (1998) argues that the logic of state-managed forest science was virtually identical with the logic of commercial exploitation. The next logical step is forest management that attempts to create,—through careful seeding, planting, and cutting—a system that is easier for state forestry to count, manipulate, measure and assess. Forest science, backed by state power, has the capacity to transform the real, diverse, and chaotic old-growth forest into a new, more uniform forest that closely resembles the administrative grid of its techniques. In the aftermath, biodiversity is destroyed through planting in straight rows on large tracts that have been observed as monoculture and later leading to soil degradation. He mentioned that forest is full of biodiversity, but the administrators’ forest cannot be the naturalists’ forest, because their abstractions and simplifications are disciplined by a small number of objectives, the most prominent of these typically being taxation and political control.

Reviewing forest management in Java, Peluso (1992) reveals that conservation ideologies were a cloak for the main impetus behind forest exploitation and the Forest

Service—the extraction of surplus for the state. The policy of planting actually can not sustain hydrological functions of mountainous forests. Teak was to replace non-teak forest species even on land that was very well-suited to agriculture, where other climatic and soil conditions were conducive to its vigorous growth. Such policy was meant, explicitly, to increase future state revenues. As a result, people lost access to the natural forest products when teak plantations replaced them. Moreover, the introduction of teak plantations sometimes resulted in reduced water supplies on adjacent village lands (Peluso, 1992).

In the eyes of the locals and environmentalists, the state reforestation campaign is a way to replace the natural forestry by mono-tree plantation that is both ecologically destructive and detrimental to local villagers' interests. In contrast, nation states defend that tree plantations would revive and improve forest conditions or replace the forests that have been destroyed, as well as contribute to economic production and generate national income and employment. However, the state's actions are often in conjunction with private businesses that have played a prominent part in generating environmental problems.

### **3. Economic Land Concessions in Cambodia: An Overview**

Early 1990s, the situation of national economy of Cambodia was transferred from the Planning to Free Market basis. The Royal Government of Cambodia has opened for both local and foreign private investment in agricultural sector. In this sector, the Royal Government of Cambodia focuses on the investment in Economic Land Concession for agro-industrial plantation. The major goal of this opening is to provide **free (non-use) land** for agricultural and agro-industrial plantation, and processing for export, which is expected by the government to create the jobs and generate income for the people living in the rural area.

At present, land concessions are booming in Cambodia resulting from the economic development policy reform, which has opened up new economic orientated—market-based economies. Within the economic reforms, state development plans started to promote agro-industry to entice the national and international investors to invest in agricultural plantation. According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery

(MAFF) of the Royal Government of Cambodia, by December 2006, 59 economic land concessions will remain covering an area of 943,069 hectares in 15 provinces (Figure 1).

No.	Province	No. of Companies	No. of Concessions	Area (ha)
1	Stung Treng	10	10	179,899
2	Kompong Speu	8	9	90,256
3	Kratie	7	7	64,373
4	Ratanakiri	5	5	53,747
5	Kompong Cham	5	5	12,070
6	Kompong Thom	4	4	35,561
7	Koh Kong	3	3	79,300
8	Kampot	3	3	36,200
9	Siem Reap	3	3	19,235
10	Mondulkiri	2	2	17,600
11	Oddar Meanchey	2	2	16,000
12	Sihanoukville	2	2	12,800
13	Pursat	2	2	141,963
14	Kompong Chhnang	1	1	176,065
15	Battambang	1	1	8,000
<b>Total</b>		<b>58</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>943,069</b>

Figure1. Economic Land Concession Companies, Operating In Cambodia

*Source: Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery (posed on website in February 2007)*

There also appears to be an increasing demand for such concessions not exceeding 1,000 hectares, which may be granted at the provincial level. For instance, in Kratie, information from provincial authorities indicates that 34 proposals for economic land concessions are under consideration, including 22 proposals for concessions of 1,000 hectares or less. In Mondulkiri, 23 proposals for economic land concessions were reported to be under consideration, covering over 100,000 hectares and including 11 proposals for 1,000 hectare concessions. Those areas have been claimed as “state property”, and asserted that “degraded” forests and “free” land (non-used land) by powerful actors, but; in reality, they may be different.

Kratie province is located below Ratanakiri Province of the Northeastern Cambodia, which is far from Phnom Penh about 340 Km by road or 220 Km by water way of the Mekong River (Figure 2). It shares a border with Stung Treng province to the North, Mondulakiri province to the East, Kampong Cham province and the neighboring country of Vietnam to the South and Kampong Thom province to the West. The area of the province is 11,094 square kilometers or 1,109,400 hectares. The total population is 276,693 people consisting of 142,304 (51.43%) females (MAFF, www.maff.gov.kh). The province is divided North-South by the Mekong River and its narrow floodplains. Most of the province consists of undulating uplands, including lowland/ upland mosaic and upland forested areas. Kratie is classified as a rural province. There are seven economic land concessions have been granted in the province (Figure 3).

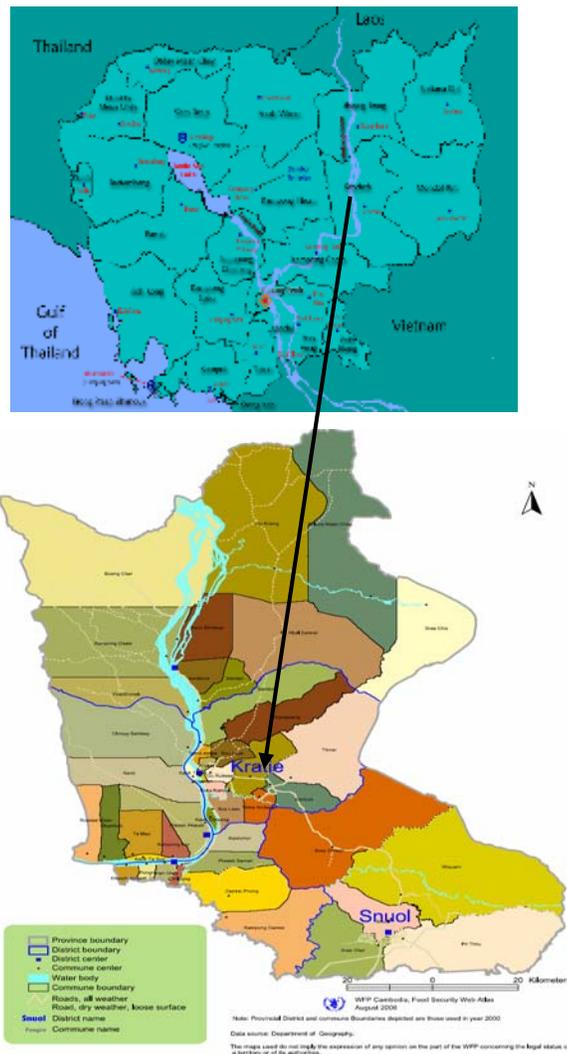


Figure2. Map of Kratie Province

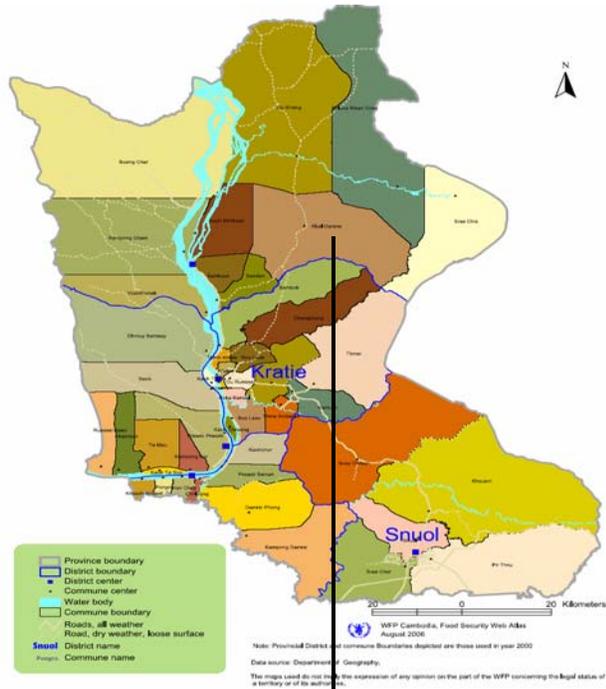
No.	Concession Companies and Addresses	Director and Nationality	Area (ha)	Date of Contract
1	<b>Green Island Agricultural Development (Cambodia) Co., Ltd</b> #10, Street 271, Sangkat Teklaok III, Khan Tuol Kork, PP,	Kwok Stanley Kar Kuen, American	9,583	15/03/06
2	<b>Global Agricultural Development (Cambodia) Co., Ltd</b> #1533, National Rd. No. 2, Sangkat Chak Angre Krom, Khan MeanChey,PP	Kwok Lai Ngan Wan, American	9,800	15/03/06
3	<b>Asia World Agricultural Development (Cambodia) Co., Ltd</b> #1159, National Rd. No.2, Sangkat Chak Angre Loe, Khan Meanchey,PP	Wan Ylu Ming, Chinese	10,000	15/03/06
4	<b>Plantation Agricultural Development (Cambodia) Co., Ltd</b> #326, Kampuchea Krom Blvd, Sangkat Vealvong, Khan Tuol Kork, PP.	Kwok Stanley Kar Kuen, American	9,214	11/08/06
5	<b>Great Asset Agricultural Development (Cambodia)Co., Ltd</b> #326, Kampuchea Krom Blvd, Sangkat Vealvong, Khan Tuol Kork, PP.	Yao Yong Zhong, Chinese	8,985	11/08/06
6	<b>Great Wonder Agricultural Development (Cambodia) Limited</b> #326, Kampuchea Krom Blvd, Sangkat Vealvong, Khan Tuol Kork,PP	Kwong Wing , Chinese	9,231	11/08/06
7	<b>Tay Nam (K) Co., Ltd:</b> Trapeang Sre Village, Pi Thnou Commune, Snuol District, Kratie Province	Ha Thieu, Vietnamese	7,560	18/09/06

Figure3. Economic Land Concession in Kratie Province

Source: Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery

The Kbal Dam Rey (elephant's head) commune is one of 46 communes of the province, located 55km in northeast of the provincial town (Figure 4). It has an area 407 Square kilometers, and has been settled since 1940s. Recently, the commune has 911 families — 4166 persons. 2079 persons are male and 2086 persons are female. The commune has five villages, namely O Tanoeung, Sre Sbov, Cham Horb, O' Po and Sre Treng village. This commune is rich with the forest resources. However, the main income for the villagers' livelihood is farming, within the 824 hectares of rice fields and the 64 hectares of upland (growing corn or some other crops). Complementarily, they enter the forest to gather non-timber products. Kbal Dam Rey Commune interested me due to it is located in the area that is now held by three companies separately. Those three companies; Green Island Agricultural Development (Cambodia) Co., Ltd, Global Agricultural Development (Cambodia) Co., Ltd, Asia World Agricultural Development (Cambodia) Co., Ltd; have been granted a total amount of approximately 30,000 hectares of land on the same date, 15 March 2006.

The people in Kbal Dam Rey Commune have been negative to the project because they have not been consulted regarding such land concessions. These companies have encroached on their farm land, grassland for the local cattle, and forestland where the local people used to rely on for their subsistence. Furthermore, the local people have been prohibited to gather non timber products and not allowed to travel via the Ox-cart road where they rode a long time ago. Today, those villagers are excluded from accessibility to the resource tenure that they once had been accustomed to. O Tanoeung (name of a natural stream connect to the Mekong River) Village will be chosen for an intensive study the problems of inaccessibility to resources, because Global Agricultural Development (Cambodia) Co., Ltd has been granted on the area of the village.



**ផែនទីប្រើប្រាស់ដី និង ធនធានធម្មជាតិ ឃុំ ក្បាលដំរី**  
 Commune Land Use & Natural Resources Map of Kbal Damrey (100403)

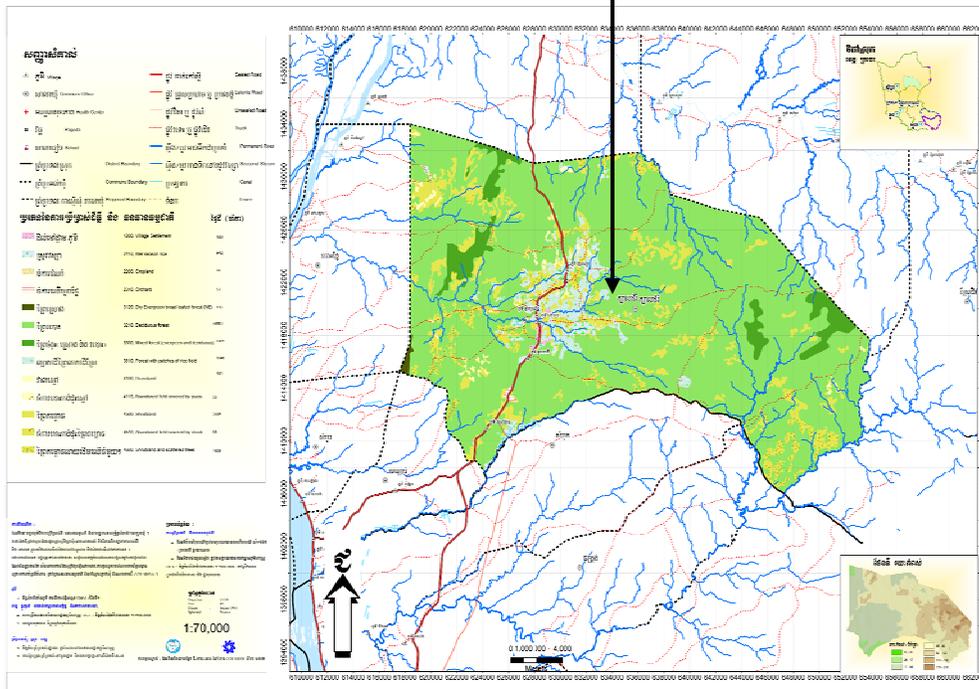


Figure4. Map of Kbal Damrey Commune

Source: Department of Provincial Land Mgt, Urban Planning and Construction, Kratie

#### **4. People, Culture and livelihood of the O Tanoeung Village**

##### **4.1. People, Rice Plantation and Livestock**

O Tanoeung village is one among five villages of the commune of Kbal Dam Rey. It does not have clear-cut boundary which can precisely separated it from rice fields from other villagers' rice fields. This village had been, in 1940s, moved from the old village, called Char Park village which is far from the current location about five kilometers in the west. The village is located along the national road number 7, the centre of the commune (Figure 5). According to an 82 years old man, the national road number 7 was built when he was 15 years old, and the government of that period encouraged the people to live along the road. Thus, this village has been settled in current location more than 60 years ago. When it first established in the present location it only had around 30 households in 1940s. Recently, the village has 105 households, consisting of 138 families. The total population of the village is 620 persons, 311 persons are male and 309 persons (49.8%) are female.

The villagers' livelihood relies very much on farming, within the 96.5 hectares of rice fields and the 7 hectares of upland (Chan Kar), forest and non-timber products, scattering about the area; but not in one large single piece. Since, people only clear small land for household consumption. Approximately, 97 percent of the populations are farmers. Others are petty traders and officials. Traditionally, the villagers clear forest to create farmland for first two or three years; then, they convert those lands to be rice fields. Generally, they have an area of rice field about one or two hectare(s). The villagers do not clearly know their rice fields in metric measurement (scientific measurement) because they cleared land as much as they can grow rice enough for their family consumption. The land clearance has been done by their physical labors, some are about five or ten years, but some are more than 50 years old. In case Ms. Poeun's rice field is 53 years old; it is heritage of her parents.

The people do not have any formal land certificates. However, they can estimate their rice field area through using rice seed. They know that three Tangs (1 Tang equal 24 Kilogram) of rice seed can be used for about one hectare of rice field. Generally, they use rice seed in between three to six Tangs (72 Kg. to 144 Kg.) a season of rice plantation. Within three Tang of rice seeds, the farmers can get rice product 60 sacks (1sack equal 55

Kg.) which are enough for household consumption, an average of household is five people, and some households even had surplus for sale.

The Villagers, rice fields and livestock are inseparable elements of the village ecology. Rice is classified into three types by its growing period as heavy rice, with a length of growing period of approximately six months, medium rice, with a moderate growing period of approximately five months, and light rice with a short growing period of approximately four months. This arrangement takes place because of labor shortage, so that harvest can be done at different time to spread the labors out. And this strategy can overcome environmental risk that may happen as farmers use more than one variety. Exchange labor is very common for the villagers in rice cultivation. Traditionally, the people start to grow rice early raining season (usually early June each year), and they start to harvest from November until early December, end of raining season.

In the O Tanoeung Village, there are 81 families among 138 families stay at their rice fields for rice cultivation. Generally, their rice fields are far from the village about two to five kilometers, so the villagers prepare seed and farming tools and food for rice cultivation for a season. Because of their rice fields are far from home and in the forest; the villagers build a cottage nearby their rice field. Usually, they stay at the rice field for a whole rice cultivation period in order to save time for working on the rice fields and protect rice plants from wild animals. Although rice production is primarily for subsistence, it is also the principal sources of cash income for the farmers. Rice traders come from the Kratie town to purchase rice at prices comparable to those found elsewhere in the province. Besides rice plantation, many villagers raise cattle. In this village, there are 437 buffaloes and 387 cows and oxen within 60 households. Traditionally, those cattle have been released into the grassland in the forest. Oxen and buffaloes are primarily for rice cultivation and also for the principal sources of income.



Figure5. Location of O Tanoeung Village in Kbal Dam Rey Commune

#### **4.2. Importance of Forests to the Villagers' Livelihood**

The village is rich common property resource that plays a crucial role in the villagers' livelihoods. Forest resources support subsistence and income-generating activities such as fuel-wood, wild fruits, vegetables, and medicines collection. These activities typically complement rice production, thereby providing households a means for diversifying their livelihood activities. Even though the people with no land, cattle, and few alternative livelihood opportunities, they can collect forest resources for subsistence. In this manner, the forest resource base serves as an essential "safety net" for the villagers. Many households view agriculture as their primary employment and the collection of forest resources as a vital secondary or tertiary occupation.

The village was found to be highly dependent on forest resources, including timber and poles for construction, fuel-wood, vines, rattan, bamboo, thatch, wild fruit and tree leaves, wildlife, medicinal plants, and mushrooms and wild potatoes. Typically, the villagers treat forest with the utmost respect. Although they enjoy with forest resources, but they do not regard those as a commodity and exploit them without consideration their future preservation. In case of 46 years old man can be drawn as an example, his household members are seven people; he knows the geography of the village's area very

well. His family relies on very much natural resources in that area. Beside, rice productivity, he goes into forest with his three smart dogs to hunt wild animal such as Trokourt (*Varanus nebulosus*), Chhma Ba (*Lepus cochinsinensis*), Chhlus (*Felis bengalensis*), Sva Kdam (*Macaca cynomolgus*), Chruk Prey (*Canis aureus*) and so on, by using wooden gun with bamboo arrows and also fish a long natural streams.

Another example, a 30 years old lady, Ms. Chan, her household's members are three people. With her one year son, she quite often goes into forest to collect wild potatoes for her household consumption. While, her husband goes to work for wood sawing individual, that he can earn money 10,000 Riel a day. According to Ms. Chan, there are six kinds of wild potatoes that can be found in the forest; including Dam Long Chheur, Dam Long Teuk, Dam Long Tean, Dam Long Chruk, Dam Long Srom, and Dam Long Kborng.

### **5. Economic Land Concessions in the village**

*“Chin (Chinese) company is clearing forests. Forests no longer exist; our lives will face difficulties in the near future. Our children will not see and know all of trees and wild animals in this area. If the government sold land to Chinese, what we can do. We are excluded” (villagers said).*

‘Dey Chin’ word is very common for the O Tanoeng villagers. Since the Global Agricultural Development (Cambodia) Co., Ltd came to take over forestland in the village area, no villager has known what the company plan to do with a huge area of forestland, even though the name of the company. During the time, I was staying in the village, I asked many villagers a question “what is the name of the company”? Their answer was “I don’t know”, but they knew it is Chinese company because those people speak Chinese. Actually, according to agreement paper between company and MAFF, dated on 15 March 2006, this company is directed by Ms. Kwok Aingan Wan, American nationality. From my point of view; she may be a Chinese American, because there is no white man there and her name is very Chinese. Ms. Kwok Aigan Wan is not only a director of Global Agricultural Development (Cambodia) Co., Ltd Company; but also a director of Plantation Agricultural Development (Cambodia) Co., Ltd Company, covered on an area of 9214 hectares, located in neighboring commune of Kbal Dam Rey

commune (see in figure 3). However, the land law 2001; article 59 prohibits the grant of concession in several locations, to jointly exceed the total of 10,000 hectares in order to prevent a single person/company to hold excessive land.

According to the discussion with some people in the village, the villagers do not know that the central government of Cambodia granted the forestland area to private company. Until the company started clearing land and forest area to create roads and digging trenches to prevent villagers and their cattle from accessing areas within the concession that the people began to aware that the company encroaching their livelihood source. At the beginning, the company bulldozed forest and encroached upon the villagers' rice fields. Meanwhile, people from O Kreang commune and two villages of Kbal Dam Rey commune gathered together to protest and stop bulldozer, and to complain to the local authority. But, there was not any solution and the company kept clearing land with claiming that that area of land and forest belonged to the company under 70 year agreement with the government.

The local authority (village head, commune council and district governors) knew about the company's activities affecting on local livelihood. However, they could not take any actions to solve the problems because the company has a permission letter from the government. Politically, local authorities need to respect to their boss at provincial and national levels, otherwise they might lose their position. Anyhow, the local communities with supports from some local NGOs went to complain about their difficulties at the provincial office. In June 2006, a provincial governor accompanied by representative of the companies, relevant officials, and several arm forces came to the community to settle the disputes.

The local people were told about the number of economic land concession companies and amount of forestland areas in Kbal Dam Rey, O Kreang and Ro Lous Mean Chay commune that have been granted to three companies by central government for teak tree plantations. That governor explained the people that the government granted only state private land to the companies. He mentioned that those lands are 'degraded' forest areas, thus those companies come to reforest in those areas and to establish factories for wood production for exports. He also claimed that those companies will help to develop local infrastructures and to provide job to the local people. He emphasized that

in the future Cambodia will export wood products out and import ‘US Dollars’ in (sic). The villagers as powerless people could only murmur among themselves, that they will lose their rice fields, farmlands, grass land for their cattle and other natural resources that are used for their livelihoods. Anyhow, the villagers strongly concerned about their fields and tried to negotiate with companies in order to reclaim their paddy fields back, and they requested those companies to move away from their paddy field at least 500 meters. The O Tanoeng villagers came into confrontation with Global Agricultural Development Company. As a result, the company agreed with the villagers’ requests. Practically, the company released the rice fields, but it moved a way from their rice field approximately 100 meters only.

Nowadays, the villagers unhappily recognize ‘Dey Chin’ (Chinese land) in Khmer territory. The digging trench around granted area of the Chinese company is barrier to prevent the local people from their livelihood sources and natural resources that they are used to utilize and maintain for many generations. That digging trench is not only a boundary of the company’s location, but it also limits the accessibility of the locals to forest resources and endangers their cattle—there were six calves fell down into the digging trench and died last year. It causes the local people to feel “stress” under such development project. Although the villagers lost a part of their livelihood resources, there is no one from the village go to work for the company. In addition, the trench blocked some natural water way (natural streams) and wild animals, because that trench had been dug around the granted area with 1.2 meters width, and about 1.8 meters deep.

With being granting only 9,800 hectares which is stated in the agreement document, the company is actually operating on the area over 18,000 hectares. According to the villagers, the granted area is rectangular in size, and it has approximately three kilometers in width and more than six kilometers in length. Moreover, most of that area is not degraded forest as the government claim; it is Prey Chas (local term means old forests). That area is dense chaotic forest, and it is habitat of many kinds of animals and valuable timbers. More clearly, the commune land use and natural resources map of Kbal Dam Rey commune, which has been scientifically done by CCB-NREM project that supported by DANIDA and implemented by Seila Program, in 2006, identifies that area as ‘dry evergreen broad leafed forest’ (Figure 6).

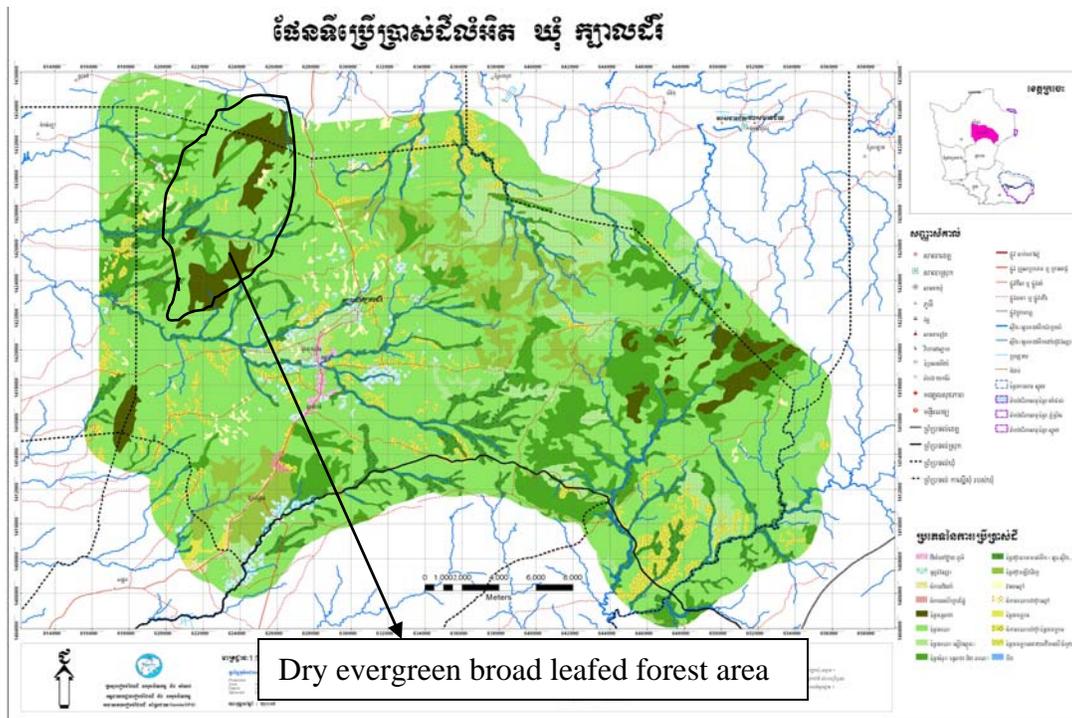


Figure 6: Map of land use and natural resources of Kbal Dam Rey commune  
 Source: Department of Provincial Land Mgt, Urban Planning and Construction, Kratie

## 6. Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated the forest grant to the company is not degraded as a numbers of people can still make living from the forests. What actually happen is in fact people have been barred to enter the forest as freely as they used to be able to before the entrance of the company. The O Tanoeng village can be an example to illustrate that too much emphasis on the national economic development, while little attention to the local people’s needs and natural environment maintenance. Those may cause the local people and natural resources to be losers. The people lose their livelihood resources, and more cultivation of teak plantation cause loses complexity of bio-ecosystems. Therefore, it can be highlighted that granting economic land concessions in Cambodia is creating a ‘climate of conflicts’. The conflicts between local people and private companies usually happen because of private companies with government’s assistance ignore the rights of the local people.

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