Land grabbing and forced evictions by Koh Kong's sugar industry, Cambodia

How bitter can sugar be: bulldozers clearing lands for giving it away to agrobusiness companies, with the support of the European agreement "Everything but Arms" (EBA)

Description

On May 19, 2006, without any prior consultation, bulldozers started to clear farmers’ land in villages in Botum Sakor and Sre Ambel district, Koh Kong province, and forcefully evicted the formal owners: small-farmers who have been living on the land since 1979 (1). Two months later, the land was awarded to the newly established sugar companies Koh Kong Plantation Co. Ltd (KKPC) and Koh Kong Sugar Co. Ltd (KKS), both owned by Thai KSL group, Ve Wong Corporation of Taiwan, and Ly Yong Phat, Cambodian ruling party senator and business tycoon. The companies received two adjacent Economic Land Concessions (ELC), amounting to 9,400ha and 9,700ha respectively, to develop industrial sugar plantations and processing factories. The total size of 19,100ha exceeds the legal limit of 10,000ha per company. In January 2010, KKS opened a processing factory in Sre Ambel and six months later export of sugar to UK giant Tate & Lyle started, who signed a five years contract to buy all sugar output. Since 2010, T&L imported 48,000 tons of sugar, with an estimated value of 24 million €. The investment was strongly motivated by the European agreement “Everything but Arms” (EBA) with least developed countries (LDC) such as Cambodia, offering them access to the European market without tariffs and at a minimum guaranteed price; which for sugar has been three times the world-market price (2).

See more...

Basic Data

Name
Land grabbing and forced evictions by Koh Kong’s sugar industry, Cambodia

Country
Cambodia (/country/cambodia)

Province
Koh Kong province

Site
Botum Sakor and Sre Ambel district

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
Plantation conflicts (incl. Pulp
Intensive food production (monoculture and livestock)
Specific Commodities
Land (/commodity/land)
Sugar (/commodity/sugar)

Project Details and Actors

Project Details
The European Union (EU) has supported the sugar industry through the agreement “Everything but Arms” (EBA) with least developed countries (LDC) such as Cambodia. Companies operating in Cambodia can access the European market without tariffs and at a minimum guaranteed price. For sugar, the minimum guaranteed price has been on average three times the world-market price. While the extent of Sugarcane plantations in Cambodia was negligible in 2006, in 2012 it amounted to more than 100,000 ha. Cambodian sugar exports jumped to 13.8 million $ in 2011, 92% of which was exported to the EU (2).

Koh Kong Plantation Co. Ltd (KKPC) and Koh Kong Sugar Co. Ltd (KKSS) are both owned by Thai KSL group holding 70% of the shares, as well as by Ve Wong Corporation of Taiwan and Ly Yong Phat, a Cambodian ruling party senator and business tycoon (2).

The concession land has been granted under the Economic Land Concession (ELC) scheme of Cambodia, which provides concessions for the development of large-scale agriculture under a lease agreement of up to maximum 99 years. Lease agreements are commonly set for 70 years (see legal ELC framework, below).

Both companies received two adjacent Economic Land Concessions (ELC), amounting to 9,400ha and 9,700ha respectively, to develop industrial sugar plantations and processing factories (3). The total size of 19,100ha exceeds the legal limit of 10,000ha per ELC (see legal framework). The concession land overlaps with villagers’ land, protected areas, and other concession land.

Since 2010, Tate & Lyle imported 48,000 tons of sugar from both companies, with an estimated value of 24 million € (2).

456 families were dispossessed by the ELCs in Sre Amble District (1). Based on average household size this corresponds to more than 2,100 persons.

1490 ha of farmers land were affected by clearing (1). Other sources say that families lost 5000 ha of land (3).

According to the 2001 Cambodian land law, the formal land owners are the villagers, since they have been living over 5 years prior to the land area (see land law framework).

Project Area (in hectares)
19,100
Level of Investment (in USD)
unknown
Type of Population
Rural
Potential Affected Population
> 2,100 (estimate)
Start Date
19/03/2006

Company Names or State Enterprises
Koh Kong Plantation Co. Ltd (KKPC) (/company/koh-kong-plantation-co-ltd) from Cambodia (/country-of-company/cambodia) - sugar industry, sugarcane
Koh Kong Sugar Co. Ltd (KKSS) (/company/koh-kong-sugar-co-ltd) from Cambodia (/country-of-company/cambodia) - sugar industry, sugarcane
Khon Kaen Sugar Industry Public Company Limited (63 group) (/company/khon-kaen-sugar-industry-public-company-limited) from Thailand (/country-of-company/thailand) - sugar industry, sugarcane
Ve Wong Corporation (/company/ve-wong-corporation) from china (/country-of-company/china) - food industry

Relevant government actors
Ly Yong Phat, ruling party (CPP) senator and co-owner of Koh Kong Plantation Co. Ltd and Koh Kong Sugar Co. Ltd.

Environmental justice organisations and other supporters
Community Legal Education Centre (CLEC)
Equitable Cambodia
Inclusive development international
Hands off the land Alliance

The NGOs that signed the joint statement supporting the villagers claim were:
- Cambodian Human Rights Action Committee (CHRAC)
- Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)
- Equitable Cambodia (EC)
- Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)
- Community Peace Network (CPN)
- NGO FORUM
- Building Community Voice (BCV)
- Community Legal Education Center (CLEC)
- EarthRights International (ERI)
- Inclusive Development International (IDI)

**The Conflict and the Mobilization**

**Intensity of Conflict (at highest level)**
HIGH (widespread, mass mobilization, violence, arrests, etc...)

**When did the mobilization begin**
In REACTION to the implementation (during construction or operation)

**Groups Mobilizing**
Farmers
Indigenous groups or traditional communities
International NGOs
Local ejos
Local government/political parties
Local scientists/professionals
Religious groups

**Forms of Mobilization**
Blockades
Creation of alternative reports/knowledge
Development of a network/collective action
Development of alternative proposals
Involvement of national and international NGOs
Land occupation
Lawsuits, court cases, judicial activism
Official complaint letters and petitions
Public campaigns
Street protest/marches
Boycotts of companies/products
Refusals of compensation

**Impacts**

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

**Health Impacts**
Visible: Accidents, Malnutrition, Mental problems including stress, depression and suicide, Violence related health impacts (homicides, rape, etc.), Deaths, Other Health impacts

**Other**
increase in domestic violence

**Socio-economic Impacts**
Visible: Increase in Corruption/Co-optation of different actors, Displacement, Increase in violence and crime, Lack of work security, labour absenteeism, firings, unemployment, Loss of livelihood, Militarization and increased police presence, Social problems (alcoholism, prostitution, etc.), Specific impacts on women, Violations of human rights, Land dispossession, Loss of landscape/sense of place, Other socio-economic impacts
Potential: Loss of traditional knowledge/practices/cultures

**Other**
abuse of child labour

**Outcome**

**Project Status**
in operation
Pathways for conflict outcome/response

Compensation
Corruption
Court decision (undecided)
Court decision (victory for environmental justice)
Repression
Deaths
Violent targeting of activists
Land demarcation
Migration/displacement

One community activist, who documented the land clearing in 2006, was killed. His death has never been properly investigated.

Development of Alternatives

Proposals/recommendations put forward, according to the "Bittersweet Harvest" report (2), released by Equitable Cambodia (EC) and Inclusive Development International (IDI):

To the EU: that EU should investigate impacts; temporarily suspend EBA trade; verify that producers are not involved in Human rights abuses or environmental destruction; ban import of agricultural goods produced on illegally acquired land.

To The Cambodian Government: Enforce the moratorium on new ELC; assure that the required social and environmental impact assessments are conducted; cancel concessions that violate human rights; support dispossessed families in returning to their land; return illegally granted concession land; and stop state military-backed evictions, among others.

To the involved companies: Stop forced evictions; stop destruction of community natural resources; stop using violence against people; return illegally appropriated land; stop using child labour.

Do you consider this as a success?

No

Why? Explain briefly.

The project goes on and the killing of one community activist has never been properly investigated.

Sources and Materials

Legislations

2005 Subdecree on Economic Land Concessions (ELC) in Cambodia
[click to view](http://www.cambodiainvestment.gov.kh/sub-decree-146-on-economic-land-concessions_051227.html)

Cambodia’s land law and related regulatory frameworks
[click to view](http://www.cambodiainvestment.gov.kh/investors-information/land-site-development.html)

References

1. Joint statement signed by Cambodian NGOs in support of the case (accessed 16/02/2015)
[click to view](http://www.earthrights.org/sites/default/files/1NC%20Joint%20Statement%20on%20Amreihe%20Hearing.pdf)

[click to view](http://www.inclusivedevelopment.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Bittersweet_Harvest_web-version.pdf)

Links

3. Earth Rights International on the case (accessed 16/02/2015)
[click to view](http://www.earthrights.org/egs/are-amei-communities-and-koh-kong-sugar-plantation)

[click to view](https://www.cambodiantoday.com/view/families-to-rejoin-protests-against-sugar-farms-77215)

5. Inclusive Development International on the recent EU’s commitment to investigate impacts of the EBA agreement (accessed 16/02/2015)
[click to view](http://www.inclusivedevelopment.net/commenments-of-cambodian-bledsugar-reparations-process-a-cruial-step-towards-justica)

6. The Guardian - Cambodia’s sugar rush leaves farmers feeling bitter at ‘land grab’
[click to view](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jul/09/cambodia-sugar-land-grab-claims)

Media Links
Other Documents

**Child labor - sugarcane plantations** source: the guardian; http://static.guim.co.uk/sys-images/Guardian/Pix/audio/video/2013/7/2/1372776474369/Boy working in sugarcane–016.jpg (accessed 16/02/2015)

**Map of concession land** Source: www.boycottboddsugar.net (accessed via Google, 16/02/2015)

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**Meta Information**

**Contributor**
A. Scheidel (ICTA-UAB) / arnim.scheidel "at" gmail.com

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**Related conflicts**

**Forced evictions and land grabbing for sugarcane plantations, Oddar Meanchey, Cambodia (/conflict/forced-evictions-and-land-grabbing-for-sugarcane-plantations-oddar-meanchey-cambodia)**

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