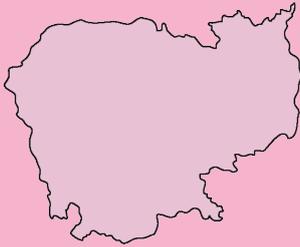


# CAMBODIA

## Supporting indigenous peoples' fight against hydro-power projects to protect their right to land and citizenship



**KBAL ROMEAS,  
SESAN,  
STUNG TRENG**

**CLIMATE JUSTICE  
FEMINIST  
PARTICIPATORY  
ACTION RESEARCH  
2017-18**

### COUNTRY PROFILE

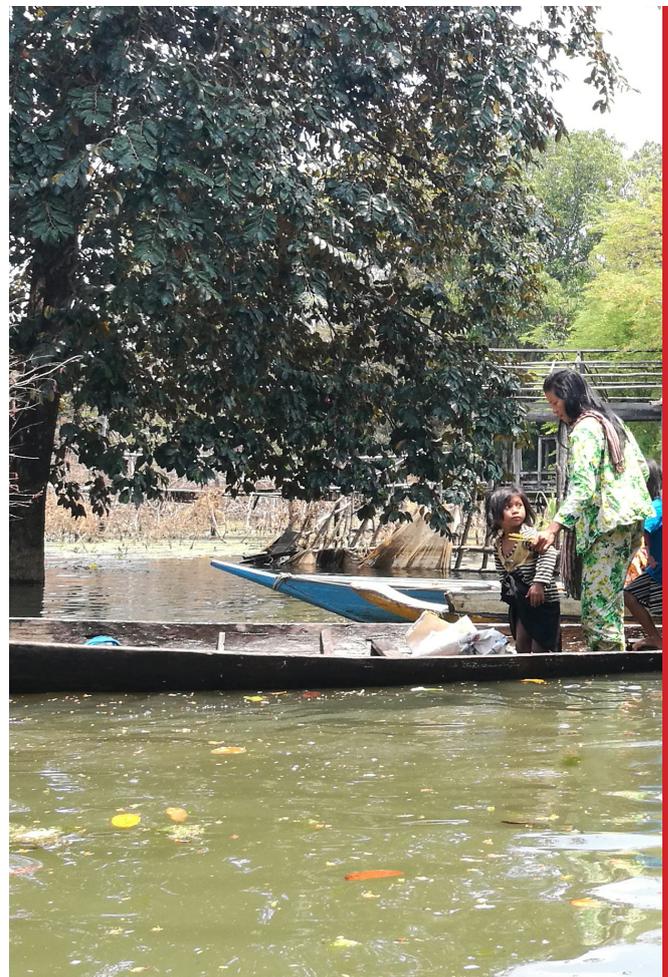
Cambodia has consistently been ranked amongst the ten countries that are most vulnerable to climate change. It is also one of the poorest countries in the world. Over the past few decades, Cambodia has been witnessing a steady increase in temperature and continual droughts, which have pushed its poor farmers to the brink of desperation. Additionally, the country's large indigenous population - whose land and resources are sustained by weather-dependent agriculture - is currently under attack by neoliberal development projects. Corporate forces engaging in rubber plantations, hydropower ventures and transnational railway projects, seek to control land and rivers, thereby leading Cambodia's internal war against its indigenous peoples. Relentless land and natural resources grabbing have made its already poverty-stricken population more vulnerable to climate change.<sup>1</sup>

The national government has a Cambodia Climate Change Strategic Plan 2014-2023 in place, which expounds programmatic

Highlanders Association (HA), an organisation working for indigenous peoples' right to land and natural resources conducted this Climate Justice FPAR along with the Cambodian Indigenous Youth Association (CIYA) and Cambodia Indigenous People Alliance (CIPA).

At Kbal Romeas, villagers have been resisting forceful displacement by the Lower Se San II dam project. The FPAR worked to document the stories of the villagers' struggles, and support their fight for justice.

measures and sub-national strategies to help increase people's adaptive capacity.<sup>2</sup> However, there is hardly any implementation of the policy at the local level.





**In Kbal Romeas, the construction of the Lower Se San II Dam that blocks the two major rivers, Sre Pok and Se San, is posing serious environmental and social threats to the community. Although the villagers have been resisting displacement from their ancestral land, nearly 80% of the people have been coerced to move elsewhere. 58 households who are still refusing to relocate have been blocked by the reservoir and are stranded without any road connections or basic facilities. They continue to live in their ancestral village to demand their rights as citizens.<sup>2</sup>**

## DAM CONSTRUCTION AND FORCED EVICTION

Due to the dam construction, the indigenous population of Kbal Romeas and the nearby areas have seen drastic changes in their lifestyle and livelihoods.

**Loss in Livelihood and Income:** Indigenous peoples have earned livelihoods for ages through plantation of crops, rotation farmland, spare land and from non-timber forest products. The rivers provide firewood and fish. Due to the Se San II dam, villagers have lost non-timber products, areas for fish to lay eggs and natural resources. A chunk of the population also lost their jobs as many government offices and services including schools and hospitals were closed. People

who have resettled in the new village have been given new houses. However, no land has been allotted to grow food or raise animals.

**Loss of Identity and Culture:** Indigenous peoples' cultural and spiritual identities are rooted in their land, its ecology and supporting habitat. Their ancestors lived on these lands for centuries with their forest deities, pagodas and cemetery; the dam has inundated several of these cultural markers in the village. The displacement of a part of the village has caused a tear in the common identity of the village.

**Lack of Public Services:** Women, children and old people can no longer access health care. Road construction had been halted as the Government initially refused to build any roads towards the old village, Kbal Romeas. Schools were discontinued and teachers have not been paid salary. Due to this, around 80 children in Kbal Romeas community have lost access to education.

**Women Excluded from Decision Making:** Out of the 252 people living in the village, 125 are women.



However, women were not included in any of the discussions regarding the construction of the dam or relocation of people.

**Militarisation and inaccessibility:** Heavy militarisation has made Kbal Romeas inaccessible to the outside world including Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). The *Law on Associations and Non-governmental Organisation* (LANGO) adopted in 2015, was used to further restrict functioning of NGOs that came forward to support the community.

Recently, Ministry of the Interior issued a letter to the sub-national level governors to restrict NGOs on the ground. NGOs require permission at least three days prior to conducting any activities with a community. Researchers have faced heavy restrictions as access was not allowed in the newly resettled villages either.

On 17th May 2018, representatives from six youth groups submitted their demands to the provincial governors to - create collective land register; build roads, schools, and health centres; provide teachers, and healthcare workers; clean water; freedom to travel; and space for NGOs to work with the community. Additionally, the community also demanded that the three people, who were arrested on the charges of inciting the community, are set free. The authorities announced that they will first construct the road on priority during the dry season of 2018, and then other demands will be met.



## WOMEN-LED ACTIONS

**Women's collective to document stories and raise voices:** Using information on climate change and tools learnt through the FPAR, the women from the community have been documenting their own experiences of the dam construction and its impacts. The collective has been mobilising local women to resist against the dam project and demand justice for indigenous peoples.

**Advocacy with stakeholders:** The women are meeting with various stakeholders, including the local government in Stung Treng to be able to continue living in their village without forced relocation.

## COMMUNITY DEMANDS

**Free, Prior, Informed and Continuous Consent:** All development projects in Indigenous Peoples' territories should be done with comprehensive participation and getting continuous free, prior, informed and consent (FPIC) from the community.

**Keep promises made to communities:** The government must implement promises made to the community immediately or on-time, without delaying the process, to providing basic facilities to the villages.

**Respect national and international laws:** The government should respect and implement all national and international laws that protect the rights of indigenous peoples. Private sectors or investors have to obey the domestic laws and international laws, and should incorporate good practices models which do not harm the people or destroy environment and community lives.

## FUTURE ACTIONS

The community plans to strengthen their movement with support from other affected communities. They also plan to build their negotiation skills, legal awareness, and further engage with indigenous peoples' movement to strengthen their struggle. The women of Kbal Romeas are determined to take their work forward at every level of governance to get justice. They will also take their movement beyond Kbal Romeas to talk about rights of indigenous women and demand their protection.

<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.internationalrivers.org/campaigns/lower-sesan-2-dam>

<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from [http://www.kh.undp.org/content/cambodia/en/home/operations/projects/environment\\_and\\_energy/cambodia-climate-change-alliance.html](http://www.kh.undp.org/content/cambodia/en/home/operations/projects/environment_and_energy/cambodia-climate-change-alliance.html)

<sup>3</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.internationalrivers.org/campaigns/lower-sesan-2-dam>



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