

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF LAND CONCESSIONS ON RURAL COMMUNITIES OF CAMBODIA: CASE STUDY OF BOTUM SAKOR NATIONAL PARK

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ABSTRACT

Land grabbing is a serious issue in Cambodia, where land concessions covered approximately 65 percent of the total arable land in 2013. Because of the 36,000-hectare land concession in the Botum Sakor National Park granted by the Cambodian government to a Chinese company, more than 1,400 primarily fishing families have been relocated to new villages built inland, approximately 20 km from the coast. Using a case study research design, this paper provides a unique glimpse into the lives of those relocated by assessing their living conditions, livelihoods, food security, housing and access to basic services approximately four years after the relocation. The results show that those affected by the land concession are worse off than they were before the relocation and will likely remain so in the short to medium term. They have lost their livelihoods, their food and nutrition security have worsened, and their access to both health services and education is problematic.

The roads and houses in the relocation sites are poorly built. There are limited water sources in the relocation villages, and the water does not meet the national standards for drinking water. Although some families did find jobs with the investment project, they were concerned about its long-term prospects.

Keywords: Large-scale land concessions, land grabbing, relocation, food security, Cambodia.

INTRODUCTION

Land grabbing is a serious issue in Cambodia. The 2007–2008 global financial and food price crises and the growing demand for energy increased land investment by transnational corporations, international financial institutions, foreign governments, local business elites and other investors in developing countries, including Cambodia (De Schutter 2011; Deininger 2011; UNDESA 2010), the land appropriation, often combined with forced evictions, had already been occurring in Cambodia since late 1990s. Other factors such as Asian money laundering and elite capture have driven land grabbing in Cambodia (Baird 2014). However, the consequences for small-holding farmers and indigenous people are same, regardless of who is responsible or what the driving forces for the land dispossession are; whether an investment was made to feed people in another country or escape the vulnerabilities of the stock market—issues identified as part of the global land grab meta-narrative; by Chinese companies investing in logging or building hotels, casinos and housing complexes; or, as described by the Cambodia Daily, the Vietnamese military assuming control of border areas inhabited by indigenous people (Blomberg and Roeun 2015).

Alliances among foreign investors, local business elite and state officials have enabled opportunities to be seized for appropriating resources and land grabbing in times of open markets and high indebtedness in developing countries (White et al. 2012). The governments of the Global South claim to sell land or provide long-term land leases or concessions to boost national economic growth and government revenue, promote agriculture intensification and agro-processing, for job creation, to increase export or to attract foreign direct investment (Cotula et al. 2009). Cambodian Land Law codifies land concessions¹ as a mechanism for the government to grant state land for agricultural and industrial-agricultural exploitation (RGC 2005). The Cambodian government considers granting economic land concessions to

private companies as its major strategy for economic development with the aim of (RGC 2014):

1. Developing an intensive agricultural base and promoting capital investment in industrial-agriculture;
2. Increasing employment opportunities in rural areas, intensifying and diversifying livelihood opportunities and natural resource management; and
3. Generating revenue from concession fees, taxation and other charges.

There is frequently an assumption of either an abundance of land or of the existence of idle, marginal, underutilised, fallow or vacant land in countries conducting large land deals. However, such land is often utilised by indigenous and other rural communities that do not have formal land rights (Borras and Franco 2011; Schneider 2011; Scoones et al. 2013; White et al. 2012). Their land use rights are often not codified in “modern” law and are non-existent in any formal legal terms but are based on local traditions (UNDESA 2010); alternatively, in the case of Cambodia, people might have the right to use the land based on the existing legislation but have not formalised it. These land users are marginalised from formal land rights and access to the law and institutions (Cotula et al. 2009). Large-scale land investment often lacks transparency and adequate consultation processes and is characterised by uneven access to information and failure to implement the domestic legal framework, which is often relatively well developed on paper, resulting in widespread conflict over land ownership and use and in the marginalisation of the affected communities (Cotula et al. 2009; Schneider 2011; Subedi 2014; UNHRC 2012).

The land concessions have major potential consequences for both economies and livelihoods (Scoones et al. 2013). Their social and economic impacts on local communities could be disastrous, especially when combined with forced evictions, displacement without fair and just compensation or prior public consultation, involuntary resettlement or poorly planned relocation of people from their homes and farm lands. Loss of land tenure deprives vulnerable people of their livelihoods, as a multidisciplinary World Bank team showed in 19 case studies from four continents (Deininger 2011). Large-scale land investors rarely employ numbers of people equal to those who lose their land tenure (UNDESA 2010; Deininger 2011). Most relocation areas do not provide affected communities with access to adequate public services and infrastructure, health services or schools, as the Forest Peoples Programme has documented in cases in Malaysia (Toh 2013) and Cambodia (Khiev 2013).

Major environmental problems, ranging from the destruction of forests to severe impacts on biodiversity to water resource pollution, result from related land use changes. The heavy use of pesticides and chemical fertilisers causes water pollution, poisons fish and increases the water shortage problem in communities affected by land concessions (Ravanera and Gorra 2011). Areas of spiritual and cultural significance for indigenous communities, are often encroached or destroyed, as documented empirically in concrete cases in Cambodia and Laos by Hanssen (2007), Prachvuthy (2011), and Neef et al. (2013). However, if the land concessions are regulated to mitigate negative impacts and maximise opportunities and if the projects are well-executed, they can generate large benefits that can be shared with local people (Deininger 2011; Borrás et al. 2013).

According to Haakansson et al. (2011), approximately 56 percent of all arable land in Cambodia has been given to private companies for agro-industrial use, and Khiev (2013) claims that by 2013, such land concessions had already covered approximately 65 percent of the total arable land. Although some of these lands were gained for speculative purposes and were not developed, the communities have been evicted or are under serious threat of eviction and dispossession. Land concessions for agro-industrial use and other purposes supposedly meant that more than 22 percent of the country's total surface area was in the hands of private investors by the end of 2012 (Khiev 2013) though a significant proportion of these were awarded for mining exploration and will not be developed further. More than 770,000 Cambodians have been affected by land grabs and resulting conflicts over natural resources (ADHOC 2014).

Land grabbing occurs in many different manners based on the specific social, environmental, economic, legal and geopolitical circumstances, with important regional differences within countries. This paper illustrates how the practice of large-scale land concessions impacts local marginalised communities in southwestern Cambodia, an area that is largely overlooked by researchers due to its relative inaccessibility.

The research questions were formulated as follows:

- How have the livelihoods and income-generation opportunities and food and nutrition security of communities affected by large-scale land concession changed after relocation and compensation? Have the affected communities found long-term job opportunities with the land concession project?
- How have the living standards, including housing and tenure security and access to basic services such as education, health care, transportation and water/sanitation of the communities affected by large-scale land concession changed after the relocation and compensation?

This paper examines an infamous large-scale land concession in the Botum Sakor National Park in Koh Kong province, where the Cambodian government granted an economic land concession to Union Development Group (UDG) Company Ltd. More than 1,400 families in 12 coastal communities were living on the land in question, and most have been relocated to 10 new inland villages, approximately 20 km from the coast.

Cambodia: Socio-economic Overview

Eighty percent of the 15.1 million Cambodian population live in rural areas (World Bank 2014) and are dependent on natural resources and subsistence farming is the most prevalent form of livelihood. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (2011a, 2011b), 50 percent of the population is engaged in fisheries during certain periods of the year, and this sector provides approximately 75 percent of the total animal protein intake for the population.

Cambodia has recorded healthy economic growth in recent years and the per capita GDP based on purchasing power parity is almost USD3,000 (World Bank 2014). Inequality has increased, in part due to the growing concentration of productive assets, especially land (USAID 2011).

Although one quarter of the country's total area has been recognised as protected (World Bank 2014), the rate of deforestation is one of the fastest in the world, with an average annual deforestation rate of 2 percent since 1970 (USAID 2011). Deforestation and the subsequent expansion of permanent low-land monocultures have severely disrupted the agro-ecosystem stability and affected the landscape-wide environmental stability and resilience (Khiev 2013).

Table 1: Selected socio-economic indicators.

Indicator	Cambodia
Population (2013 est.)	15.1 Mil.
% Population living in rural areas (2011)	80%
GDP per capita PPP (2012 est.)	3,000 USD
% Labour force in agriculture (2010 est./ 2011)	56%
% Population engaged in fisheries (2011 est.)	50%
Gini coefficient	37.9%
Protected areas (% of country's total area)	24%
Average annual deforestation rate (1970–2010)	2%

Sources: World Bank (2014), FAO (2011a), USAID (2011).

Historical and Legal Aspects of Land Tenure in Cambodia

Attempts to introduce formal private land ownership by the French colonial administration in the late 1800s and the first half of the 20th century and by post-colonial governments were partially successful in the rice-growing plains but were largely unsuccessful in upland and forest areas (Sophal and Acharya 2002). Even where settled agriculture was the norm, the notion of land as private property contrasted with traditional ownership practices (Haakansson et al. 2011). The Khmer Rouge regime abolished private property in 1975, uprooted communities from their traditional lands, destroyed most land records and nationalised all the land. Recognition of private ownership of land began again only in the mid-1980s (Sophal and Acharya 2002; Engval and Kokko 2007; Westeröd 2010). The Land Law introduced in 1992 allowed people to apply for land certificates; the land ownership was limited to 0.2 ha for housing and possession was restricted to up to five ha agricultural land; if such agricultural land was left vacant for more than three years, it reverted to state ownership (Sophal and Acharya 2002; Engval and Kokko 2007). At the end of the millennium, approximately 70 percent to 80 percent of the total rural population possessed agricultural land, but only 1 percent had legal title to their land (Boreak 2000).

The 2001 Land Law provided for more widespread granting of land titles; those who occupied and enjoyed uncontested possession of land for at least five years prior to 31 August 2001 and met other conditions gained legal possession rights that could be transferred to full ownership (RGC 2002). However, implementation and enforcement of the law has been problematic. According to Westeröd (2010), at the end of the first decade of the third millennium only 10 percent of Cambodian land had been officially titled. Although significant progress has been made, there are concerns about the exclusion of households and communities from land titling (UNHRC 2012). The 2001 Land Law recognises five categories of land: private land, state public land, state private land, common property and indigenous land. State public land cannot be subject to sale, transfer and economic or social land concessions. If state public land loses its public interest value, it may become state private land through formal re-classification. Such state private land may be subject to long-term leases, economic or social land concessions, sales or transfers of rights (RGC 2002). The Protected Areas Law, which came into force in January 2008, introduced a new zoning system of protected areas to effectively manage their conservation and development. They were divided into four distinct zones: core zones, conservation zones, sustainable use

zones, and community zones. No clearance or building is allowed in the core or conservation zones and any development within the sustainable use or community zones can only take place with government approval (Subedi 2014). The UNHRC (2012) reports that concessions granted to private companies within protected areas covered more than 500,000 ha, whereas Khiev (2013) specifically recorded 18 economic land concessions covering 272,597 ha.

Land Concessions in Cambodia

Official and publicly available data on land concessions are incomplete and are not updated regularly (UNHRC 2012). It is estimated that 3.9 million ha of land, equivalent to 22.1 percent of the country's total area, have been handed over to private investment, of which at least 2,657,470 ha was transferred by the government to private sector investors by the end of 2012 in more than 300 land concessions (Khiev 2013; UNHRC 2012). However, official statistics on economic land concessions published by the government in June 2012 listed 117 companies with only 1,181,522 ha from January 1996 to 6 June 2012 (UNHRC 2012). By 2013, land concessions for plantations of inter alia sugarcane, rubber, cassava, acacia, eucalyptus and palm oil under private sector investment covered approximately 65 percent of the total arable land (Khiev 2013). Many of these land concessions have been only partially developed or are undeveloped and were motivated by speculative or unproductive purposes (Toh 2013; USAID 2011; Löhr 2011).

Cambodia is prone to weak implementation and enforcement of the law; this:

... made it possible for influential individuals... and groups to acquire large landholdings (USAID 2011).

The Cambodian economy is controlled by a new elite—a sprawling network of Cambodian People's Party politicians, military brass and business families with patronage to Prime Minister Hun Sen and his close associates (Strangio 2014). This well-oiled system extends throughout Cambodian society and is widely accepted because it is how Cambodians understand the nature of power (*omnaich*), as not only being rich but also being above the law (Jacobsen and Stuart-Fox 2013).

The 2001 Land Law stipulates that the maximum size of an economic land concession is 10,000 ha, but many times this amount have been granted. As Global Witness (2013) reported, Vietnam Rubber Group and affiliated companies appear to have been allocated over 16 times the legal limit of land.

Some investors circumvent the limit by creating several different companies, which is illegal, too. Given the widespread criticism of the implementation of Economic Land Concession (ELC) policy, Prime Minister Hun Sen issued a moratorium on granting economic land concessions in May 2012 and called for a review of the existing land concessions, stating that they would be cancelled for companies that fail to comply with applicable procedures and contracts or that conduct illegal logging, encroach on land outside the land concession or leave the land vacant for resale (Subedi 2014). However, land concessions were granted even after this moratorium, with the justification that these leases were already being processed when the moratorium was declared; Khiev (2013) noted 33 such land concessions covering 208,805 ha, and UNHRC (2012) highlighted five concessions in protected areas.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology is based on a case study of the Botum Sakor National Park in Cambodia's Koh Kong province as the study region. Established in 1993, the 171,250-ha Botum Sakor National Park is Cambodia's largest national park. In recent years, the Cambodian government has reclassified large tracts of land into sustainable use zones and granted economic land concessions within the National Park to at least nine private companies for agro-industrial crop planting and eco-tourism, commercial development, water reservoirs, and hydropower dams (UNHRC 2012).

Koh Kong province is in the southwest and has a long, undeveloped coastline on the Gulf of Thailand and a mountainous, forested and largely inaccessible interior. The national parks, waterfalls, mangrove forests, islands and coral reefs have primarily been marketed as an eco-tourism destination in recent years. Koh Kong's economy largely benefits from cross-border trade and the tourist industry. The livelihoods of most rural people depend on agriculture and the forest or on fisheries in coastal areas. The main crop is rice cultivated on more than 9,000 ha, followed by fruit and permanent crops grown on almost 7,000 ha (CDC 2015). The annual fish production is estimated to be 34,600 tonnes of saltwater fish and 11,000 tonnes of freshwater fish, followed by limited aquaculture (CDC 2015). According to the FAO (2011b), the fisheries communities of Koh Kong are slightly better off than others in the country due to more productive fishing grounds.

The field data were collected in September 2014 by a team of nine development practitioners combining several qualitative methods: 10 focus

group discussions with 151 community members (54 percent of whom were women) conducted at each relocation site, 12 key informant interviews with selected government officials at provincial and district levels, including the provincial Vice-Governor and community leaders, service mapping (with geo-tagging) of key basic services (e.g., health, education), community observations and five in-depth interviews with affected individuals. Additionally, a water sample from one randomly selected well was taken in March 2015 for a physical and chemical analysis conducted by the Industrial Laboratory Center of Cambodia in Phnom Penh.

The primary methodological approach of the field data collection was focus group discussion because of the qualitative rather than quantitative nature of the research. The research team used convenience sampling and attempted to include approximately 10 percent of the relocated families in the focus group discussions. The semi-structured discussion between focus group discussion participants provided the researchers with an opportunity to hear issues that may have not emerged from their individual interaction with the researchers. The interaction among the participants led to increased emphasis on the participants' perspectives rather than those of the researchers and permitted discovery of aspects of understanding that often remained hidden in the more conventional in-depth interviewing method. As Liamputtong (2012) wrote, focus group discussion enables an examination of how and why people think the way they do about the issues that are important to them without pressuring them into making decisions or reaching a consensus.

Key informant interviews and in-depth interviews were added to obtain additional perspectives and triangulate the data collected through other field work methods and desk research.

To obtain a better understanding of the history and background of the Botum Sakor National Park economic land concession, the fieldwork data were supplemented with a review of a range of secondary sources: publicly available information from the Cambodian government, Cambodian English-language media, the "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia, Surya P. Subedi. Addendum: A human rights analysis of economic and other land concessions in Cambodia" presented to United Nations Human Rights Council as well as reports from Cambodian national NGOs.

Table 2: Focus group discussions conducted.

District	Village	Participants	
		Total	Females
Kiri Sakor	Peam Kay	15	6
Kiri Sakor	Preak Smach	16	7
Kiri Sakor	Kien Kralach	20	9
Kiri Sakor	Tani	12	5
Kiri Sakor	Pnhy Meas	23	14
Kiri Sakor	Cham Lorng Kor	11	7
Botum Sakor	Tanoun	18	9
Botum Sakor	Bak Roneash	14	12
Botum Sakor	Toul Por	7	6
Botum Sakor	Preak Kjong	15	7
Total		151	82

The paper also relies on dozens of semi-structured interviews with key NGO workers that were conducted between 2011 and 2016 and helped inform our understanding of land grabbing in Cambodia; their information is described in the discussion section.

The methodology implies that this study has the following limitations:

1. The description of the ex-ante situation of the relocated communities relies largely on the information reported by the people affected by the land concession and thus could contain several potential sources of bias because no independently verifiable baseline information on the situation, living conditions, livelihoods, and housing was available prior the relocations.
2. As with other land concessions in Cambodia, there is a general lack of transparency and information surrounding this land concession. The data provided by the Cambodian government remain incomplete and are not easily accessible by the public.

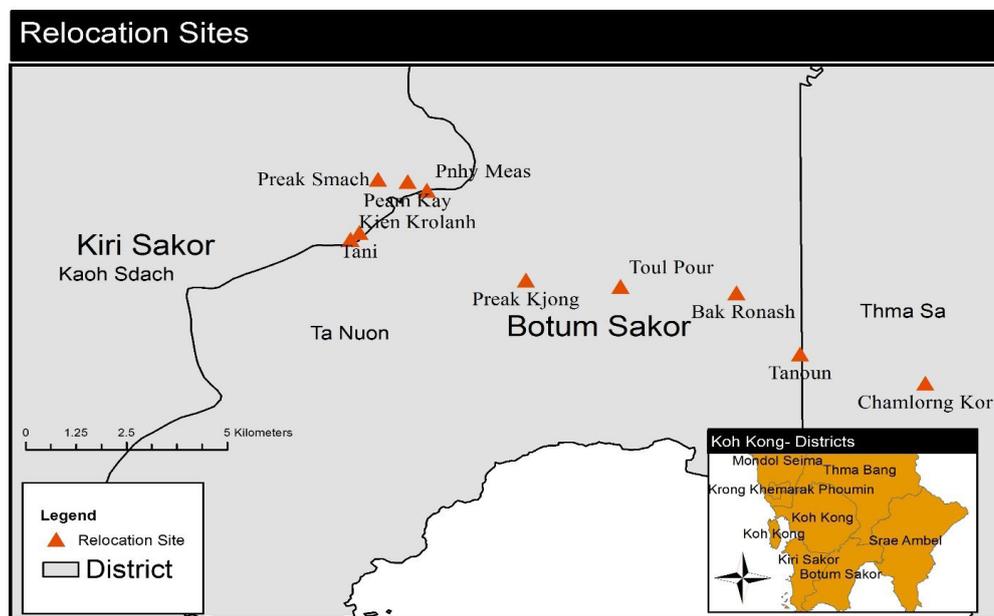
RESULTS

Granting of a Land Concession to UDG

In April 2008, 36,000 ha were excised from the Botum Sakor National Park and reclassified as state private land by Royal Decree (RGC 2005) and thus became eligible for long-term land concessions. One month later, a 99-year

lease contract was signed with UDG for the construction of a commercial development zone and resort to attract tourists and additional investment (UNHRC 2012; ADHOC 2012). This land covered a large portion of the coast in Kiri Sakor and Botum Sakor districts as well as 12 villages. Under the contract, UDG was authorised to develop infrastructure that would support the tourism sector, including casinos, condominiums, apartments and resorts, and to clear forest areas during the development (UNHRC 2012). However, villagers and some opposition politicians claimed in the Cambodia Daily:

... that large parts of the concession have been instead turned into plantations for cassava and palm oil trees (Crothers and Reaksmeay 2014).



Map 1: Relocation sites in Botum Sakor and Kiri Sakor districts.

The Cambodian government was made responsible for the administrative functions associated with relocation and compensation and UDG was to bear the costs of compensation and construction of the relocation site. In August 2011, the government issued a sub-decree to reclassify an additional 9,100 ha as a sustainable use zone and granted a second land concession to UDG to develop a water reservoir and hydropower plant (UNHRC 2012). The communities were relocated away from the coastal areas, although many of the communities depended on access to the Gulf of Thailand for their food and income. The villages affected by the land concession had been in existence for generations—the community members are a mix of families who settled in the area before the Sihanouk regime in the 1960s (UNHRC 2012).

According to Cambodian NGO ADHOC (2012), the affected communities were not consulted about the project and its potential impacts but only noticed company representatives and governmental officials travelling throughout their communes and measuring land before the contract was signed in 2008. Some people became aware that:

...of this only when the company came to gradually clear, dismantle, and burn down their houses from the beginning of 2011... Though people filed complaints with the local authorities and relevant institutions at national level..., there has never been any proper resolution.

The communities were reportedly officially informed of the project for the first time in November 2009 during a visit by government officials and UDG representatives (UNHRC 2012). They were informed that they were on state land and were therefore obligated to move. They were offered relocation (a single-family house at the relocation site approximately 20 km from the coast and the allocation of residential and farming land) and compensation, depending on the status of the land and the level of documentation that the household possessed (between USD250 and USD 8,000 per ha of farmland). Negotiations for compensation packages took place in 2010, and approximately 1,000 families were relocated in 2011. Some families resisted relocation and continue to do so, and some of the villagers reported that they accepted the compensation under pressure, threat, or lack of information or alternatives (UNHRC, 2012). Crothers and Reaksmeay (2014) quoted the NGO Forum in the Cambodia Daily that:

...398 of the 1,963 affected families have yet to receive any compensation for loss of land.

The resistance of the communities affected by the relocation was described by Touch and Neef (2015) using the land concession in Botum Sakor National Park as a case study. The villagers tried to challenge the actions of UDG and its high-level government backers through a combination of open and collective defiance, advocacy resistance, everyday politics and official resistance, albeit with limited success. In May 2010, approximately 200 families travelled to Phnom Penh to submit a complaint and call on the Prime Minister to intervene in the land dispute and redress the inadequate compensation packages. In December 2011, National Route 48 was blocked for eight hours by relocated families. In March 2012, community members travelled to Phnom Penh to participate in the ASEAN People's Forum and submit a complaint to the

Chinese Embassy. They were briefly detained at the police commissariat and escorted back to their villages. In February 2014, UDG security guards, backed by soldiers, reportedly destroyed 44 houses in Tanoun and Koh Sdech communes, which resulted in a protest by 100 villagers who stayed outside the UDG offices for two days. Violence erupted again in November 2014 at UDG construction sites, where some defiant protesters remained. In two separate incidents, UDG security guards reportedly destroyed 17 houses of residents that had resisted relocation.

Land Tenure Security, Housing and Sanitation at the Relocation Site

The relocation site is spread over 4,000 ha deep inside the Botum Sakor National Park, approximately 20 km from the coast. According to key informant interviews conducted, 1,412 families or 5,791 individuals had been relocated as of September 2014. However, according to focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, some families later migrated from the relocation site, leaving an estimated 10–20 percent of the houses empty, as observed by the research team.

Based on the findings from key informant interviews and focus group discussions, relocated families were offered 0.5 ha of residential land with a 6.5 m by 7.5 m constructed wooden house and a two or three ha plot of farmland. Focus group discussion participants across all communities felt insecure with their land entitlement because the land is officially a protected area that has yet to be transformed into state private land so land titles can be issued to those affected. At the time of research, they did not possess the land tenure certificate for their farm lands, only a temporary title for the housing land. Many families reported during focus group discussions that the land provided was not usable for farming without heavy ground work to clear the forest, which they could not afford. Some families reported that their allocated farmland was as far as 5 to 6 km away from their house. It was reported during several focus group discussions that a few families had sold this allocated farm land because they needed the cash to feed their families.

It was reported and confirmed by research team observations that the housing provided was of poor quality. Many villagers raised concerns about how it would cope in strong winds and other severe weather conditions. The field team observed that at least two houses had already collapsed during storms, according to information provided by the occupants of the neighbouring houses. The research team observed that approximately 30–40 percent of the houses in the relocation villages were in poor condition, with

the roof, windows or walls partially removed by wind or rain. The team also documented incidences in which it was no longer possible to access the houses because large crevices had opened between the road and the property. Some families have installed makeshift bridges to overcome this, but others have abandoned their homes. A small minority of families had invested their own money into upgrading, extending or maintaining their houses. No electricity system reached the villages, so they relied on generators and car batteries. None of the houses provided included a sanitation facility, and although some people found the means to build them themselves or received assistance from the Provincial Department of Rural Development, an estimated 95 percent of households practiced open defecation. It was observed that, on average, the communities had approximately 5 to 6 latrines.

During the semi-structured interview, the provincial Vice-Governor acknowledged that the living conditions of the displaced communities were worse after the move than before.

Food Security, Nutrition and Livelihoods

One of the most significant challenges reported during the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews was the change in livelihoods and income-generation opportunities resulting in negative impacts on food security and nutrition. Many families, such as that of 32-year-old Sao Bunheat with two children, had relied on fishing and farming low-lying agricultural lands in coastal areas and were often unable to continue these activities once relocated.

Focus group discussion participants from all villages unanimously agreed that there has been a significant shift in the types of food they eat since the relocation. The mere distance from coastal areas has had a reported negative impact on dietary diversity. Previously, they were eating rice, fish, seafood and vegetables that they caught or produced themselves. In the low-lying coastal areas, many villagers had their own small gardens and grew a range of vegetables, farming rice, with a reported production of over three tons of rice per season per household, and corn and catching fish, meaning that they had relatively plentiful access to diverse food. Since the relocation, only a limited number of villagers have established home gardens, and they no longer produce rice. Fish has been substituted in some peoples' diets with meat bought infrequently from the market.

Since the relocation, most families have shifted from subsistence economic activities—largely producing their own food—to certain degree of market dependency that has had negative effects on the households' budgets;

villagers need to spend more buying food than prior to relocation. Some focus group discussion participants reported that they had a shortage of food during certain periods because they had no money. Despite the challenges of accessing a variety of food stuffs, they did not report any signs or symptoms related to malnutrition such as stunting or wasting in children and these were not observed by the research team during their time spent in the communities.

The focus group discussions were unanimous that their current livelihood activities could not provide the same level of income as previously (which some reported to be as high as USD10–15 /day). Ms. Thoeun Khorn, for instance, whose family was relocated from Preak Kjong village to Tanoun commune told the researchers that before relocation her family produced 3 tonnes of rice per season and corn and other crops year round but:

... has been unable to utilise the agricultural land provided as part of the compensation package from the company due to its being hilly and forested.

As many as 20 percent of the focus group discussion participants' households found work as hired labour with UDG, which paid USD150/month. Some Tanoun villagers who worked as golf caddies and hotel cleaning staff reported earning as much as USD200/month. However, many of them raised concerns about their long-term job security. Other existing income-generation opportunities at the relocation site were irregular as noted in focus group discussions, key informant interviews, in-depth interviews and research team observations; they included selling unskilled labour in the community, small-scale enterprise activities such as grocery shops or recycling, forest-related livelihoods, including the illegal harvesting of forest trees for house construction and producing charcoal, and income-generation activities linked to collection of non-timber forest products such as rattan, mushrooms, herbs and honey. Forty-nine-year-old Mr. Sok Phan, living with his wife and four children, reported that he could only find very low and irregular income from collecting non-timber forest products and his unskilled labour. He was considering migration to another area to meet the family's needs.

Respondents agreed that many of the community members continue to fish and that it remains their primary source of income. However, they noted that there were additional costs associated with this because they had to travel using roads that were in poor condition. Some of the fishing families did not regularly stay at the relocation site and have returned to their old villages to stay with their former fellow community members who resisted relocation or have set up a temporary shelter to fish. Due to the difficulty in securing

livelihoods, it was often seen as necessary for children to participate in such livelihood activities, in lieu of attending school.

Participants identified potential opportunities for new, alternative livelihoods (animal husbandry or farming cash crops such as cassava, cashew, jackfruit, mango, aromatic culinary herbs, and pineapple) but they often felt they lacked the necessary technical skills or start-up capital required.

After the relocation, many families found it difficult to support themselves and consequently had to spend their savings and survive on the dwindling financial compensation they received. They estimated that the number of families indebted with micro-financial institutions² was 10 percent in Tani, over 50 percent in Pnhhy Meas, 60–80 percent in Peam Kay, 70–100 percent in Toul Por, 99 percent in Tanoun and 100 percent in Cham Lornng Kor and that their ability to repay was uncertain, given the lack of income-generating opportunities.

Access to and Quality of Basic Services and Water

In some villages, the roads are worn away by rain or flood water, making transportation between and within villages very challenging. At least two areas visited by the research team were passable only by a four-wheel drive vehicle or on foot.

During discussions and interviews, community members identified the poor state of the roads and the associated high cost of transportation as a significant barrier to accessing health care services. No new health care facilities were constructed as part of the relocation, and residents must travel to health care facilities outside the relocation areas, i.e., a health post in Preak Smach and health centres in Thmor Sar, which is reportedly often closed, and Koh Sdeach, both of which are more than 20 km from most of the relocation villages. Moreover, the health centre in Koh Sdeach is located on King Island, off the west coast of Kiri Sakor, and getting there requires a 15-minute boat crossing that can be dangerous or impossible during bad weather. The physical condition of these health facilities was found to be inadequate when visited by the research team. The health post in Preak Smach is in a converted house that was in a dilapidated state with virtually no equipment, supplies or material. At the time of the research team visit, the post was unstaffed, overgrown with grass and appeared to have been unused for some time. Focus group discussion participants also commented negatively on frequently absent health workers, particularly at this health post. Two-months-pregnant Ms. Thoeun Khorn

planned to go to Thmor Sar commune for antenatal care and delivery, which is approximately 30 km from her new home.

One-hundred-fifty water sources, open and tube wells, were constructed, mostly by UDG according to findings from key informant interviews. Additional wells have been added in some communities, e.g., in Preak Kjong, as observed by the research team. However, focus group discussions stressed that access to drinking water remained a challenge, especially during the driest months of March and April when the wells dried up and families had to travel 400 to 500 m to fetch water from streams or other available sources. It was observed by the research team that only 5 wells serve a community of 79 families in Tanoun. Some people in the focus group discussions mentioned that they did not consider the water potable because of its strong metallic and mineral taste, which was confirmed by the research team. Rain water or river water were thus preferred drinking water sources. The water test conducted in March 2015 from one of the randomly selected wells in Tanoun village showed that the water did not meet national standards for drinking water in at least four characteristics: Ph 5.58 (the standard is 6.5–8.5), Fe 8.68 mg/L (the standard less than 0.3 mg/L), NO₂ 22 mg/L (the standard less than 3 mg/L) and turbidity 57 NTU (the standard less than 5 NTU).

The educational infrastructure varied greatly by community, from brand new, not yet open schools with sanitation and other facilities to run-down wooden structures that required repair to no schools within easy walking distance. Four schools were constructed by UDG and two more buildings were constructed by NGOs. According to Mr. Sien Sok Ry, the principal of Peam Kay School, there were only two wooden school rooms in the village but the school must accommodate more than 150 children from grades 1 to 6. Whereas most people in the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews felt that the access and quality of education has worsened compared to the pre-relocation situation, one community reported that because they were now closer to a school, it was thus easier for their children to attend than before the relocation. In the case of another village, the nearest primary school was reportedly 8 km away. In most cases, children had to travel 2–3 km to reach a school, often walking along dangerous roads and through flooded areas. The research team observed that the sanitation facilities were not functioning in Peam Kay School and that there was no water available.

BOTUM SAKOR CASE STUDY IN RELATION TO OTHER ECONOMIC LAND CONCESSIONS IN RURAL CAMBODIA

The economic land concessions in Cambodia suffer from a lack of free, prior and informed consent of affected land-users. The case study of Kiri Sakor and Botum Sakor districts confirmed the findings documented in Srae Ambel district by Haakansson et al. (2011) and by Neef et al. (2013) for several land concessions in Kratie province.

In terms of compensation, the affected communities in the Kiri Sakor and Botum Sakor districts received 0.5 ha of housing land with a built house, 2 to 3 ha of farm land (though forested and without legal title) and financial compensation of USD250 to USD8,000 per ha of farmland. They were relatively better treated than others in Cambodia. Borrás and Franco (2011) documented the land concession in Omlaing commune in Kampong Speu province where:

Each household was given USD25 disturbance compensation and dumped in a resettlement location lacking in both infrastructure and suitable farming potential... Most of the villagers who had farms inside the contested land and who had been settled there for a long time were offered USD100 per hectare compensation for the irrigated rice lands.

Chev et al. (2011) reported that in Choam Sangke commune of the same province, 35 percent of households were granted less than 0.5 ha, 16.7 percent were granted 0.5 to 1 ha, 18 percent were granted more than 1 ha and 10 percent were evicted without any compensation. All of the families had to rebuild housing at their cost. Prachvuthy (2011) documented in Monduliri province that:

Compensation has been USD200 per hectare depending on the family, with families... of village chiefs or local authorities, receiving better compensation.

In the case of Srae Ambel district, the farmers were offered only “a small compensation” for the loss of crops, not the value of the land, because the farmers did not possess land titles (Haakansson et al. 2011).

The 20 percent of people who found work with the investor in the Botum Sakor National Park land concession is relatively high compared to other land concessions in Cambodia and at USD150–200/month they also earn much more than is common elsewhere. However, there are still concerns in the

affected communities of Botum Sakor about how long the job opportunities with UDG will remain available. Chev et al. (2011) reports that in Choam Sangke commune in Kampong Speu province, only 9 percent of people found work with the investor in 2006 and that the number decreased every year to 2 percent in 2010, earning USD1.5/day. Moreover, the work was seasonal and lasted only 2 to 3 months. In the case of the Srae Ambel district land concession:

Some people who lost all their land have had no choice but to work on the plantations. The pay is low and the work is irregular. When working at the Ly Young Pat's sugar plantation (one) can earn EUR1.7 per day, but (one) will only have work 3–4 months a year (Haakansson et al. 2011).

The Guardian reported from the Koh Kong sugar plantation that many villagers seek work from the very company they are now suing in British courts for evicting them (Hodal 2013).

Indigenous people affected by land concessions in Ratanakiri and Mondulkiri provinces interviewed by Prachvuthy (2011):

...agreed that companies had provided employment, albeit limited—they observed that companies prefer hiring in-migrant workers to hiring indigenous people, as the former are more productive and agree to lower wages.

The initial wage per day was approximately USD5 but a few months later, after bringing in outside workers, this decreased to USD3.65. Interestingly, in the case of the Botum Sakor National Park land concession, strong resentment against working for the company responsible for the eviction was not observed, unlike that observed by Neef et al. (2013) in Kratie province, where villagers reiterated their strong determination that they would not work for the concessionaire. During interviews with indigenous people affected by land concessions in Ratanakiri and Mondulkiri provinces, Prachvuthy (2011) found that 76 percent of the respondents were unwilling to work for the concession company because the work was hard “with no freedom” and the:

... lack of experience with wage labour... made working on a plantation hard for them, particularly as workers have to get up very early to travel to work and have limited time for lunch..., and too angry with the company for taking their land and destroying their spirit forests...; 58-year old man said that I and my generation will not work for those concession companies even if we are starving.

As was the case in other land concessions in Cambodia, the relocation of affected Botum Sakor National Park communities had disastrous effects on their livelihoods, income-generation opportunities and food security. In Srae Ambel district:

... food insecurity has increased as farmers have lost valuable farmland, grazing land and access to the forest. Affected farmers can no longer grow enough food to sustain their families. Poverty has risen in the area because the farmers have no more or little land left to cultivate (Haakansson et al. 2011).

People in Botum Sakor and Kiri Sakor districts who want to continue their original livelihoods—fishing—must travel 20 km (or stay illegally in basic shelters close to the sea). As with the indigenous people of Ratanakiri and Mondulkiri provinces, some families had to travel 20–35 km to collect non-timber forest products, their source of livelihoods, after the land concessions were awarded (Prachvuthy 2011). Interestingly, non-timber forest products and timber or firewood have been identified as a potential source of livelihoods and income for the relocated people of Botum Sakor and Kiri Sakor districts whereas in other documented cases, land concessions meant that people lost this opportunity or that it became more difficult for them (see Chev et al. 2011 for Choam Sangke commune in Kampong Speu province, Prachvuthy, 2011 for Ratanakiri and Mondulkiri provinces and Neef et al. 2013 for Kbal Damrey commune, Kratie province). Families in the Botum Sakor National Park are indebted with various micro-credit schemes and face difficulties in repaying loans due to the loss of income sources, as documented in Srae Ambel district (Haakansson et al. 2011). There is increased pressure to keep children out of school in the relocation areas of the Botum Sakor National Park to help with income-generation for the family, as observed in Srae Ambel district (Haakansson et al. 2011) or the Guardian who interviewed 38-year-old mother Chea Sok, who was affected by the sugar plantation concession:

I had to pull my kids out of school and send them to work on the plantation after they took our land away because we couldn't afford to eat (Hodal 2013).

Except for one village where it is easier for children to attend school than before the relocation, the public infrastructure and access to basic services has worsened in the Botum Sakor National Park. Conversely, Prachvuthy (2011) recorded that in Mondulkiri and Ratanakiri provinces:

...companies had helped improve infrastructure in indigenous communities, through road, school and health centre construction.

Interestingly, although the investors or Cambodian government should be responsible for building public infrastructure at the relocation sites, NGOs sometimes stepped in. An NGO worker whose organisation started building health clinic and sanitation facilities in the relocation areas of Botum Sakor and Kiri Sakor districts told us:

UDG has given money to the government to build decent infrastructure in the relocation sites but the infrastructure has either not been built or has been built in very poor quality. We acknowledge that it is wrong and not very systematic to substitute the government but if we do not do it, no one will and lives of people will remain miserable.

UDG, through Mr. Wang Chao, its Communication Manager, confirmed in April 2015 that the issues of compensation and relocation are to be handled by the government:

UDG does not have the technical ability to solve these problems, company still lacks the capacity to solve the community issues because we have never done it before. The government is taking care of the relocation issues and promised to compensate those living legally in the area, and evict those who were living there illegally. We financially supported this, but the company cannot identify who is legal or not, and leaves that to the government.

CONCLUSION

This research was, as Scoones et al. (2013) described in their article, rather “quick and dirty” and involved a short fact-finding mission and rapid assessment. Some of the methods used, especially focus group discussions and observation, could have been influenced by the stances of those who facilitated the discussions or provided the observation data, by people who come from the INGO/UN background. Long-term, in-depth academic research using quantitative methods with established baselines, counterfactuals, comparative frames and careful sampling is necessary for more credible and authoritative data and analysis.

It will be important to see whether relocated people obtain land titles for the new lands because this could improve tenure security for some of

them. The question also remains whether the affected people will be able to keep their jobs with the land concession project after it is developed. Further research might be needed to determine whether the selection of sites for the relocation inside the national park has led to further negative environmental impacts because the forest required clearing for the relocation sites and the influx of people will likely increase the number of incidents of forest clearing, poaching and environmental pollution in this environmentally sensitive area.

We conclude that there is clear evidence that most of those affected by the Botum Sakor National Park land concessions are worse off than before the relocation and will likely remain so in the short- to medium-term. However, as the coastal waters of Koh Kong are depleted by overfishing, switching to alternative livelihoods—if people are provided with necessary skills and start-up financial support—might represent an opportunity for sustainable long-term food and income security for those affected. Determining if this is the case would require further multidisciplinary research.

NOTES

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- 1 In Cambodia, there is also a mechanism of so-called social land concessions intended as a redistribution of state-owned land to poor, land-less people. When referring to land concessions in this paper, unless otherwise stated, economic land concessions are meant.
- 2 Unfortunately, the research team was not able to determine what percentage of families took a loan from micro-financial institutions prior to the relocation, if the percentage has increased or if families took additional loans because of the relocation.

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