

FOREST POLICY REFORM PROJECT

Technical Paper No 6:

**COMMUNITY LIVELIHOODS AND
COMMON PROPERTY RESOURCES
IN CAMBODIA**

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In an economy where agriculture provides direct employment to 80% of Cambodia's labor force and contributes 45% of GDP, decisions regarding land use and natural resource management are critical to economic development. Furthermore, the dependence of 85% of the Cambodian population on farming and land resources underscores the importance of considering the role rural people can and do play in the exploitation of those resources. Although the government is working towards increasing agricultural production of rice and improving the standard of living for rural farmers, man does not live by rice alone. It is on state-claimed land that many rural households fish, hunt, gather firewood and wild food, and collect the inputs for income-generating activities. Without access to these resources, many of which are being leased to private companies, rural farmers would not be able to survive--even if rice yields doubled. In years of disasters--floods or droughts--these resources on state land are precisely the resources, not the state itself, that serve to sustain families through the crisis.

Large areas of state owned land have been allocated by the central government over the last few years for a variety of purposes. The most discussed type of land allocation in the national and international press, has been timber concessions. The Ministry of Agriculture also grants agricultural concessions for private development. Additional allocations include military concessions, leasing of fishing lots and the declaration of protected areas. An estimate of central government land allocations made to date shows that nearly 70% of the national territory has been allocated. The largest land allocation type is forest concessions that cover 39% of the national territory. Protected areas cover an additional 18% of the country while agriculture, military and fishing concessions each cover 4% of the territory.

What are the consequences of these land allocation decisions on Cambodia's rural population? Rural farmers are living at the subsistence level with few accumulated assets to meet family needs during times of crisis or crop failure. Approximately 40% of Cambodians live in absolute poverty and do not have enough resources to consume the minimum daily calorie requirements. One half of children between the ages of 0 and 5 years are either stunted or underweight. The precarious situation of rural farmers indicates that they are still dependent on subsistence activities to survive, and have few additional resources on which to rely should resources become scarce or unavailable.