Initial Assessment of Community Resource Use in Sre Thom Village

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 General Situation

Sre Thorn is a remote village populated by indigenous highland Phnong ethnic minorities. The village landscape consists of forests and wet paddy fields surrounded by mountains. Even though villagers are living in areas where resources are rich and readily available, they generally build their houses from wooden poles, bamboo and thatch. Only the village chief has a wooden house with a corrugated tin roof. The village is subdivided into three sub-groups, namely Sre Thorn, Sre Thas and Kraoun, with each sub-group settled approximately 4-5 kilometres from one another.

1.2 Location

Sre Thorn village is located in Sok San Commune, Koh Nhek District - approximately 50 kilometers north of the Mondulkiri Provincial capital of Sen Monorom. It sits in highlands, southwest of Kok Nhek District Town. It extends from south to north with boundaries as below:

- North to the O (stream) Mynhia and Preytoul Sok San;
- South to Mleung mountain;
- East to O Vol and O Rovay
- West to O Chbar

1.3 History

Because the village has a large land area suitable for paddy rice cultivation, the village was named Sre Thorn: Sre Thorn was founded in 1951 with only two households. By 1966, three additional households had moved into Sre Thorn. Newcomers continued to arrive. In 1967, 20 more new households joined Sre Thorn, migrating from Tonh Village, Deshayes Commune in O Chbar District.

During the Lon Nol time (1970-1975), new immigration caused the population to rapidly increase. With the larger population, Sre Thorn divided into three sub-groups, living some distance from one another to facilitate their agricultural activities.

During Pol Pot time (1975-1979), the villagers, as most Cambodians, were forced to work as slaves. Agricultural lands were expanded and rural irrigation schemes built.

Although the Khmer Rouge was ousted in 1979, the civil war continued and the insecurity in the Sre Thorn Village area forced the villagers to move out. They lived in Sre Huy and O Boun villages in Sok San Commune until 1987, when they were able to return to Sre Thorn.

1.4 Population

The Population of Sre Thom Village - Total and Sub-Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Households</th>
<th>Total pop</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Children 1-6</th>
<th>Children 7-12</th>
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<td>Sre Thom village</td>
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<td>518</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>87</td>
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<td>Sey Thom group</td>
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<td>296</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>154</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sre Thas group</td>
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<td>110</td>
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<td>62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kraoun group</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.5 Occupation
1.5.1 Agriculture

Generally, Sre Thorn families cultivate highland rice and vegetable gardens. They are rice-based and rice farming is their main income, but they can farm only one crop per year with a yield of 1-2 tons per hectare. Villagers traditionally cultivate their rice without pesticides and fertilizers, although this is gradually changing.

Vegetable Gardens

Vegetable gardening is a secondary occupation mainly for domestic consumption rather than for commercial purposes. Villagers cultivate gardens near their homes and on land along the banks of the streams.

Livestock

Livestock is raised for at least two different purposes: 1) for labor and/or transport means and 2) for food and spirit ceremonies. Villagers raise pigs, chickens and ducks to eat and for sacrificial ceremonies but for labor they raise cattle, water buffaloes and elephants. During the dry season, villagers traditionally release and allow their livestock to graze in the forest areas and they only call them back if their labor is required.

1.5.2 NTFPs

In addition to the above-mentioned occupations, villagers in Sre Thorn harvest forest and non-timber forest products such as timber, bamboo, wild vegetables and medicinal plants. The collection of forest and non-timber forest products is mainly for local consumption, not for commercial purposes

Resin collection

Resin collection is the second major occupation after highland rice farming. Resin is one non-timber forest products that is readily available in most parts of the forest areas and has a high market demand. Villagers collect two types of resin: liquid and gum resin.

Resin is harvested by the following traditional methods:

- **Liquid resin (Char Tuk)** is mainly collected from the Choeuteal tuk (*Dipterocarpus alatus*) and Trach (*Dipterocarpus intricatus*) trees. After selecting a healthy tree, villagers make a hole in the trees and place a fire in it for 1-2 minutes once every day to force the flow of resin from the trees. Generally, specific individuals in the village own the resin trees. Outsiders are allowed to harvest resin from other trees if no one else has claimed them. There are approximately 5-6 trees nearby Sre Thorn Village used for resin collection to make torches for visiting neighbors during the night.

- **Gum resin (Char Chang)** is collected from the Reang Phnom (*Shorea siamensis*) and Pchek (*Shorea obtusa*) trees. No one owns this type of resin tree and it is collectable everywhere: mainly on trees but also under the trees on the ground. Sometimes, villagers use slingshots to knock down pieces of gum resin from the higher branches of the trees. During the dry season, people make fires to collect gum resin in dry-dipterocarp forests. Chor Chong is for sold for 500-600 riels per kilogram. Generally, most adults can collect 4-5 kilograms of Chor Chong resin daily.

1.5.3 Hunting

Hunting is part of the traditional culture of the local community. In Sre Thorn, community hunting is a secondary occupation practiced after they have finished the rice farming. Some wildlife that is in high demand at the local market is:

- Brus (Sambar) (*Cervus unicolor*)
- Chlush (Common Barking Deer) (*Muntjacus sp.*)
- Pongroul (Sunda Pangolin) (*Manis javanica*)
- Pos Thlanh (cobra)
- Trokuot (monitor lizard)
- Andeak (turtle)

These are prime targets for hunters to make their income. However, it takes much time, resources and patience and sometimes hunters have to walk up to seven days in the forest to succeed. Hunters complained that the wildlife population is decreasing and large mammals such as Tigers and elephants are nowadays rarely seen.
1.5.4 Fishing

Sre Thorn villagers traditionally fish for family consumption. It is an important part of their daily diet. They harvest fish using traditional equipment such as fishing nets, hooks and bamboo baskets. Unfortunately, local villagers are under pressure to use illegal methods introduced by outsiders, namely electric shock. Fishing is practiced year round. The community fishes in areas near their settlements in rainy season but in streams and ponds during the dry time.

1.6 Income and Expenditure

Villagers rely almost exclusively on nature and forests for their income generation. They gain income from rice cultivation; collection of forest and NTFPs including resin; and other additional secondary occupations.

Typical expenditures are for health care, agricultural equipment, transport, clothes, building materials, cooking spices (monosodium glutamate) and other necessary household items and traditional festivals.

With incomes low and costs of living high, the villagers are poor. The result is lack of protein for children and villagers. Generally, there is a lack of clothing, food and medicines. Moreover, villagers lack food for at least two months a year, especially September and October. There is no local health center.

1.7 Traditional Belief and Religion

The ethnic Phnong, like other highland hill-tribes in Cambodia, believe in spirits in the forest areas. The Phnong community holds their traditional religious ceremonies as described below:

**Rice Ceremony** is held three times a year. It may be sponsored by each individual household or jointly with two or three others. Villagers sacrifice pigs and chickens over a jar of traditional rice wine.

1. **First ceremony**: To request robust and healthy rice for planting in April when the first rains come.
2. **Second ceremony**: When the rice is planted to request that the rice grows strongly and without problems.
3. **Third ceremony**: Held in January, after the rice has been harvested and put into storage, dedicated to the spirits for protecting the rice from pests and praying for good production in the coming year. This celebration depends very much on the rice yield; if the yield is high, the celebration is big, meaning that villagers will give a pig instead of a chicken or duck, as in the case of low rice yields.

**Spirit Ceremony** is celebrated with participation of all villagers. At the time of the ceremony villagers are not allowed to leave the village area and should attend the ceremony. It is held at the Spirit House located within the village. The Spirit Ceremony is held twice a year and it lasts for one day.

1. **The First Celebration** is held in April asking for plentiful rain
2. **The Second Celebration** is held in January requesting happiness and protection for themselves and that the Spirits watch over their domestic animals that feed in the forest areas. Generally, chickens, ducks or pigs are sacrificed but it is very much up to the capacity of the household.

1.8 Marriage

Traditionally, the Phnong ethnic minority celebrates its wedding ceremony similarly to lowland Khmer tradition. There is an engagement before the wedding ceremony happens. Importantly, it is not an arranged marriage. Generally, the engagement ceremony takes place at the women's house. At the engagement, the man brings some gifts to show his respect to his soon-to-be bride, i.e., beads-necklace and other things based on his qualification and finances. Additionally, he brings two chickens (one chicken is cooked as a food during the engagement event. The other is raised and reserved for the wedding ceremony). Foods are provided and prepared by the girls family. The two families determine when is the best time for the wedding. The wedding ceremony lasts for two days with the participation of relatives, friends and village guests.

Divorce rarely happens in Phnong society but it does happen on occasion. The divorce settlement depends upon whether or not the man slept with the woman, if the woman is still a virgin, if there are children involved and how many children.

1.9 Death
**Funeral Ceremony:** Everyone in the village participates in the funeral ceremony, assisting and providing necessary labor for carrying out the funeral activities. The corpse is put in a coffin, which is made from the Kapok tree according to cultural tradition. Its construction requires skill and expertise. The guests eat the proffered food and drink rice wine. Cash, white cloth and clothes and other items are placed in the coffin with the corpse. The body is taken to the Burial Forest for burial.

1.10 **Education**

Sre Thom is like many remote rural areas, not easily accessible. Education is poor and almost ignored by the government. Most of the population is illiterate except only a few who gained literacy during the Sihanouk Regime (pre-1970). The community lacks educational facilities and schoolteachers for both children and adults.

1.11 **Health**

Generally, villagers are drinking non-boiled water (stream water) and their foods are low in protein. They aren't really aware of sanitation. Additionally, there is lack of toilets. Diarrhea, cholera, colds and malaria are common diseases in Sre Thom.

In Sre Thom Village there is no health center or medical staff, only a few traditional healers. Following their cultural traditions villagers rely on prayer to the spirits and medicinal plants for treatment from disease and illness. If the traditional treatment is not effective, villagers will make a 3-4 hours trip to the District Health Center located in Toul Village, Koh Nhek District.

1.12 **Water Source**

Streams and ponds are the major water sources in Sre Thom for both local consumption and agricultural purposes. O Chbar River is the main water source for Sre Thas and Kraoung sub-villages of Sre Thorn in both dry and wet seasons. However, Sre Thorn sub-village is collecting water from Boeung Meki, two kilometres from Sre Thorn. Most streams and ponds are dried out during the dry-time, except O Chbar River and Boeung Meki.

During the dry season, February to April, Or Chbar and Boeung Meki still have water, but it is dirty and shallow. Because of the paucity of water there is high demand for utilization from both humans and animals. The rain starts again in April and ends in December. From Mayor June to November, rainfall is average. It is higher between July to October.

1.13 **Infrastructure**

Sre Thorn is located in a remote area. It is connected to other villages by a transport network composed of rural paths, paddy fields and streams. To reach the district or commune town, villagers travel by ox-cart or by foot. Few villagers have motorcycles.

1.14 **Interaction with other nearby villages**

In general, the villagers in Sre Thorn do not often communicate with the other villages due to the bad transportation system, especially in the wet season. They communicate when necessary in the case that people are seriously ill and are unable to be cured in the village, or to discuss issues related to the local authority.

In the dry season, the villagers go once to the district market to sell their rice or to purchase materials for the family.

1.15 **Other Job Opportunities**

At the present, Sre Thom villagers do not have other opportunities for employment to generate extra income besides farming, planting vegetables or fruits, and harvesting the forest and NTFPs.

There are plans to repair the water gate in the villages irrigation system. If this is done the villagers will be able to farm dry season rice and be able to increase the family income.

1.16 **Social Structure**
Management that recognizes both the traditional and the Modern State authorities characterize village conveyance.

Traditional Governance:

These procedures have existed for centuries, which the Phnong people continue to follow. There is one person called the "Mei Kantrin" who is generally the oldest and most respected man in the village. He is knowledgeable in Phnong tradition and culture.

The Mei Kantrin leads the people in the community and is responsible for dealing with all problems in order to seek justice and peace for the community villagers. His decisions are based on discussions with other community elders and consensus must usually be reached before any decisions can be taken.

States Governance:

A Village Chief, with the assistance of two sub-group Chiefs and four village militiamen, governs Sre Thorn.

- **Village Chief**: He governs the village population, reporting to the local commune authority. He records statistical data and takes responsibility for resolving conflicts or problems arising within the local community such as criminal cases, civil cases and some internal affairs or conflicts between the local villagers and outsiders, including other neighboring villagers.

- **Sub-Group Chiefs**: There are two Sub-group Chiefs. One is responsible for Sre Thas sub-group and the other responsible for Khaon sub-group. The Sre Thorn sub-group is governed directly by the Village Chief. The two Sub-Group Chiefs report to the Village Chief.

- **Village Militiamen (4)**: This is an armed force to maintain security in the village. They report directly to the Village Chief.

Currently of management in Sre Thorn is jointly shared between the State and traditional procedures. All issues are settled in co-operation between the Village Chief and the traditional village leader or Mei Kantrin. In cases where the problems are too serious and difficult to solve they are sent to the local commune authority, district level authorities and if all else fails, to the provincial authorities.

Fines and Penalties

Traditionally, ethnic Phnong charge fines to those who break the community rules and regulations. Examples of some offenses are having a secret lover, theft and conflict among villagers, both in and outside the village. The Mei Kantrin is the judge. The level of the fine is based on the offense. If the offender is not able to pay the penalty then his or her children will be responsible to pay this fine. If the Mei Kantrin is unable to resolve a case, then he may transfer the case to the Village Chief to resolve. If the Village Chief is also not able to mediate, then the case will be referred to the District Governor.

1.17 Outside support

Due to the fact that the village is remote and the road system leading to it very poor, even the locally based commune authority rarely visits the village. The community is not assisted by any development institutions or organizations, whether NGOs or State.

2. LAND USE AND MANAGEMENT

Generally, the land law has not been widely publicized or disseminated in the remote areas and its implementation in the local community is not effective.

2.1 Land Use and Land Title

As a result, land use and management are conducted through traditional procedures. Land in Sre Thorn is classified accordingly as:

*Residential Land*
This kind of land is used for housing, feeding animals and planting, but normally the villagers in Sre Thorn are not interested in planting things around their houses, due to interference by cows, buffaloes, pigs, chickens and ducks, and the lack of water in the dry season. In general, poles are used to mark the boundary and to prevent access to animals, but most residential land is not fenced.

**Forest Land**

This category includes customary forestland that is not being used for other purposes, other than animal grazing. In general, this land is not recognized by the law, but reflects traditional use and management in the local community.

**Farm Land**

Rice paddy land is publicly recognized by the District Authority, who allocates about 5 hectares of land for each family, but without designation of location. The villagers in Sre Thorn have not received the maximum amount so they have cleared forest to obtain their full allocation. Rice land is privately used and is sold, exchanged, transformed or given away as the owner wishes. However, there is no certification for the land, but it is a form of traditional governance for land use and management.

**Spirit Forests**

Some forest areas are designated as Spirit Forests.

**Burial Forests**

Some forest areas are designated as Burial Forests, where the traditional village cemetery is located.

**Unclassified Land**

This includes the majority of the land that has been not designated by the local authority. In general this is land that was once farmed (swidden fields) and is now regenerated forest. It may also consist of small vegetable plots and fruit tree orchards. This land is known and respected by everyone, although the ownership is not recognized by any authority other than the villagers themselves, they have customary traditional rights to sell or transfer their property.

3. **ETHNOBOTANY (relationship between community and forest resources)**

3.1 **Forest Sector**

Sre Thorn is located on an upland plateau; surrounded by small rivers, rice paddies and forest rich with diverse plants that are important and valuable natural resources. The villagers living here depend on natural resources for their livelihoods.

According to scientific classification the forest types are:

- Mixed forests
- Bamboo forests.

In contrast the villagers classify the forest according to its use such as:

- Village forest is located near the village residences
- Burial forest is designated for the community cemetery
- Lower forest along the small rivers
- Upper forest is in the mountains and the higher hilly land.

3.2 **Differing Perspectives of the Forest Community and Scientists**

The local community realizes that the forest is a place that contains a wide variety of plants and tree. For the ethnic Pnong, the forest is not designated based on the physical bio-diversity but on the use of forest.
Therefore there are spirit forests, burial forests, etc. The word forest is "prey" in the Phnong (and Khmer) language. This one word includes both small and big trees and plants.

Normally, the word prey” is added as an adjective to clearly define the use or geographical condition of the forest. For example, forests along rivers (prey tamo), large forests (prey toul), burial forests (prey kob khmouch), etc.

3.3 Forest Resource Use

NTFPs The villagers collect non-timber forest products including resin, bamboo, vines, wild vegetables and fruits, potatoes and rubber. They also hunt animals and fish

The Forest Products use

Tree cutting is mostly for family housing not for business exploitation. It starts in the dry season when people are free from agricultural work. Most housing consists of small trees, bamboo and grass roofing. Except for two new houses made from processed wood, all the house in the village it this description. Wood is also used to construct carts and plows. Forest resources have not been degraded so much in this area.

4. FOREST MANAGEMENT

At present, the forest management in Cambodia has been paid considerable attention and received extreme criticism from the national and international donor community. Meanwhile, regulations and the draft law on forest management have not been approved or adopted. The existing law has been widely applied in most of the country, under the responsibility by the Department of Forest and Wildlife. In Mondulkiri however, the forest law has not been effectively implemented, especially in remote areas such as Sre Thom Village. In Sre Thom Village the forest and natural resources are managed by local communities through traditional practices.

5. RIGHTS OF FOREST RESOURCE USE

In the new draft law developed by DFW Chapter 10, Article 2 of the General Regulations states that all forest on land or in water and in areas along the mountains overlay or by the various natural condition of The Kingdom of Cambodia belong to the State and has to be considered as the States natural resources except those resources growing on private land.

Chapter 7, Article 31 states that all the sub-forest and forest products are available for harvesting by obtaining a permit letter.

- Permit letter "A" is used for collecting products in the concession areas for industrial investment-
- Permit letter "B" is used for collecting products for domestic needs.
- Permit letter "C" is used for collecting products in the local community forests where rights are given to the nearest villagers through traditional rights use. The permit letters are valid subject to the following conditions:
  - Within a duration of not more than one year
  - With a single forest location designated clearly on the boundary.
  - The products are measured in cubic meter, steer, pieces, poles, kilogram, hap and litters.
  - With a sample permit letter printed and issued by the forestry administration.

- These letters can be suspended in the case that evaluations by forestry administrative agents clarify the condition permitted or delayed but no more than one third (1/3) of the first duration issued or approved.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The research study found that the ethnic minority people living in the northeast region live in the forest
according to traditional beliefs, religion and customs.

Traditions and religion are closely linked to the rights to use the sub-forest and forest products, as well as land use, forest clearance for housing, cultivation, bamboo harvesting, fishing and forest burning for wildlife hunting.

Furthermore, it is easy for villagers to designate forests for religious and spiritual use.

In absence of effective dissemination and implementation of National Land and Forest Laws, the Sre Thorn Villagers will continue following their traditional land tenure system.