



Alternative livelihood and income-generating activities in Phnom Kulen

Cambodia

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Background Information

Three-quarters of Cambodia's population are directly involved in agricultural activities and are dependent upon land for daily subsistence. Agriculture and forestry add to over 40% of the country's GDP. This strong economic dependence is unfortunately often based on unsustainable agricultural and forestry practices. Cambodia's forest losses are among the most significant in the region, with forest land declining by over ten percentage points in the period 2000-2011.

The Phnom Kulen plateau, also known locally as Kulen Mountain, is home to a population of 4,000 persons inhabiting over ten villages. The large majority of the local rural population are subsistence farmers. They practice 'slash and burn' agriculture by clearing and burning mostly forest land and use the plot for farming for one year. Moreover, recent trends in expanding cashew nut plantations have resulted in significant land pressure, forcing the villagers to clear increasingly larger areas of forest land for agricultural use. The cash-

Quick facts

Zone	Phnom Kulen
Programme started	2008
Topic	Regional Economic Development
Implementing Agency	Archaeology and Development Foundation (ADF)
Webpage	www.adfkulen.org/





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ew trees deplete the land leaving it unsuitable for vegetation re-growth. Illegal hardwood tree logging is also widely practiced.

In addition, as a result of the civil war, many parts of the region are contaminated with unexploded ordnance and landmines which pose a pending threat for the population.

The Archaeology and Development Foundation (ADF) started implementing the Phnom Kulen Program in 2008. The program covers a set of complex actions in the region which target the protection of the archaeological sites and promote sustainable rural livelihoods. ADF implements the activities in coordination with the national NGO Integrated Solutions Asia Cooperation (ISAC) which supports sustainable development activities. The foundation also partners with many national and international institutions as the National Authority for the Protection and Management of Angkor and the Region of Siem Reap (APSARA National Authority), Cambodian Ministry of Environment, Royal University of Fine Arts of Phnom Penh, Cambodian Mine Action Centre, Angkor Centre for Conservation of Biodiversity, UNESCO, the French School of Asian Studies and the University of Sydney.

Programme Development

ADF works to encourage the local rural population, especially poor families, to diversify their income-generating activities and progressively shift from unsustainable deforestation to high yielding and environmentally-friendly practices. The program covers a series of pilots in bio-diverse gardens, such as seasonal vegetable growing, in-house mushroom farming, fish farming and chicken raising. ADF also set the basis for a mushroom cooperative in Preah Ang Thom village to serve as a hub for other different locally grown products. The income from these activities is generated by pursuing environmental friendly alternative money gains and supplementing the household food requirements.

Willing families are provided with basic materials and training. They can choose which of the activities they would like to endorse and ADF supports them with supplies and provides technical advice. The income from the diversified activities is equivalent, and sometimes surpasses, families' previous gains from agriculture. In addition, a significant non-monetary gain is the time saved on long travel to distant fields (a trip that could take over one hour) and thus more time is spent with their family and children. In the case of growing seasonal vegetables like maize and salads, the local demand often exceeds the supply, and the vegetables are sold directly at producer's home avoiding transportation and time costs. The land for vegetable cultivation is bought by the local producer with the financial support of ADF, who provide finance at a low-interest rate.

ADF also organises informative campaigns in the villages on forest damage from excessive pressure from agricultural practices, and environmental education classes. The children learn about the importance of forests and their protection, and also grow vegetables in an improvised garden near the school facilities.

As of 2013, there are 8 fish raising demonstration farms in the Anlong Thom and Thma Chruogn villages, 6 demonstration mushroom farms in Thma Chruogn, and 4 operational demonstration mushroom farms in Anlong Thom, Thma Chruogn and Phum Thmey.

Challenges

The program has encountered a series of challenges. For example, there is a need for a cultural change in order to reshape mind-sets and behaviours. The rural population is poorly educated in sustainable development, environmental protection and green growth practices. High profits from illegal logging and cashew nut production represent strong disincentives for forest conservation and sustainable agriculture activities.



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Impact

The program offers development alternatives for communities highly dependent on agriculture, and increases their resilience to climate change and natural disasters such as frequent floods. It is important that rural development goes in parallel with the development of urban areas in order to avoid a high disparity, which would lead to increasing social inequalities and a rise in rural-urban migration. By providing alternatives to 'slash and burn' agriculture practices, the program also prevents deforestation and forest degradation.

References

The following documents informed the development of this paper:

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Olly301, 2010. Retrieved from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/olly301/4961009827>

