



# Gender and customary tenure in natural resources management

Info brief



## Boeung Totil Community Protected Area, Kampong Thom Province, Cambodia

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### Context

Cambodia's forest cover is 46.86 percent with an annual loss of 0.64 percent between 2016–2018.<sup>1</sup> There are two main management systems for forests: protected areas, which cover more than 7.5 million hectares; and production forests, which cover about 1.5 million hectares.

Established in 2005, Boeung Totil Community Protected Area is part of Boeung Per Wildlife Sanctuary. The sanctuary covers parts of three provinces and is entirely within the boundaries of Kon Kaek Village, in Sambo Commune, Prasat Sambo District, Kampong Thom

Province. In Kon Kaek Village, both women and men use natural resources and forest products for food, housing materials, spiritual purposes and other traditional uses.

Village residents used to belong to the Kouy indigenous group. They did not register their clan identity with the government and have claimed Khmer citizenship. They now find that their traditional practices are disappearing except for rice planting. However, women's and men's roles and responsibilities are still influenced by the customary division of labour along gender lines in their productive, reproductive and community roles.

## Research questions

- How are customary tenure rights arranged and practiced in Beoung Totil Community Protected Area? How do customary rights differ for women and men?
- How have the legal changes of natural resources governance influenced the practice of customary tenure rights; how have they affected women's rights to forest resources (space and products) since the community protected area was established?
- How do women and men engage in the community protected area? What are the challenges?

## Methodology

Primary data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with key informants knowledgeable about the community, three focus group discussions, mapping and direct participant observation. Secondary data was compiled mainly from the Department of Community Livelihood of the Ministry of Environment, the Provincial Department of Environment in Kampong Thom and the Sambo Commune committee.

## Findings

The research focused on three periods: before 1993; 1993–2010 before the community protected area was established; and after the community protected area was created in 2010. It looked at three key types of rights: access

and use of resources, management and local institutions, and resource transfer. The study also looked at women's engagement in community protected area management, especially gender roles and responsibilities, control and use of resources and community participation.

Before 1993, deforestation in the community was rare. Trees were felled for minor rice planting because of low demand for household consumption. In 1993, some parts of the forest areas in and surrounding Kon Kaek Village were established as Boeung Per Wildlife Sanctuary, which meant that people needed to inform authorities before entering the forest. In 2008, the Protected Areas Law recognized that gender issues are not often addressed as major community concerns under both the customary system and the current governance system.

After 2010, women and men living in and around Boeung Totil Community Protected Area have different roles and responsibilities in relation to the forest. The division of labour and responsibility in households has created uneven rights to different parts of the forest and forest resources.

Women are often losing their rights to forest resources in part because their household workload means that they do not have time to fully access control forest land and resources. However, both women and men say that there is equal access, control and use of farm and housing assets.

The management and conservation practices of women and men differ

according to the methods and intensity of use and according to the knowledge and information they have. Only 30 percent of women can read and write, which prevents them from participating fully in managing the community protected area. As a result, the needs and voices of women may not be taken into account in decision-making.

Beyond gender, the research found that there are some weaknesses and obstacles within the community. These include disappearing Kouy ethnic norms, culture and practices, which leads to loss of local traditional knowledge due to the erosion of the customary tenure system. Local governance capacities and the community protected area committee are still weak and the number of women members is limited.

## Conclusions

The community protected area is one means to defend the community's rights. Community management of natural resources brings benefits and individual property rights to land and resources help to sustain the common property resources.

Both the customary and current governance systems provide opportunities for women and men to engage in livelihood activities and the community development process. However, very few women are represented in decision-making at the community management level. This means that the voices of women are not heard in decision-making and women's concerns are not being addressed.

The research found that customary practices supported fair gender relations

and social inclusiveness that included the participation of women in all tasks. However, there are still some constraints for women, who are fulfilling productive, reproductive and community roles at the same time.

## Recommendations

- Improve the monitoring and enforcement for the community protected area.
- Increase the number of women at the community protected area management level. Apply quotas internally to increase women's engagement in supervision at the community level.
- Deliver capacity development through a series of specific trainings on natural resources management, planning and budget management, women's empowerment and leadership, and violence in the family.
- Encourage women to take literacy classes and encourage parents to send female children to school.
- Strengthen the existing savings group needs at individual and group so that community members can access the community fund services.
- Develop an ecotourism activity to showcase the traditional experience of the Kouy ethnic group for customary system survival, community development and livelihood improvement.

## Endnotes

1. Ministry of Environment, Cambodia forest cover 2018.

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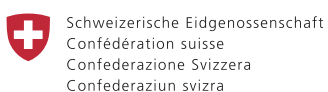
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