



# Gender assessment of tenure rights in Kansaeng Veal Community Forest

Info briefs

## O Krouch Village, Salavisai Commune, Prasat Balang District, Kampong Thom Province, Cambodia

Som Sopheak, Action for Development

### Context

Community forestry is a mechanism aligned with Cambodia's national policy to strengthen natural resources management. It also supports the customary practices of local communities, especially peoples.

As of 2018, there were 636 community forests in the country.<sup>1</sup> In 2019, the national Forestry Administration reported that community forests covered more than 510,000 hectares of forest land. Out of 169,248 families totaling 493,197 people, 49 percent of them were female. They were registered as community forest members who directly benefit from community forestry management activities.

The current Forestry Law of 2002 gives the Ministry of Agriculture Forestry

and Fisheries the authority to allocate a community forest to a community located inside or near a forest. The law also recognizes communities' customary use rights and their statutory rights. Men have the predominant roles in community forestry. This research was conducted in Kansaeng Veal Community Forest in Kampong Thom Province, Cambodia, where 95 percent of the community belongs to the Kouy indigenous group.

### Research questions

- What are the roles and rights of women and men in community forestry? What is their level of awareness about their roles and rights?

- What is the gender issue occurring in relation to women's rights in community forestry? More specifically, what challenges do women and men face to access different bundles of rights in community forest management?
- What are the potential actions to reduce gender issues and strengthen the rights in the community forestry management? What are the enabling factors and constraining factors to solve problems?

## Methodology

Primary data was gathered through 20 key informant interviews, three focus group discussions and direct observation. Secondary data was also compiled from the Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Women's Affairs and international and local non-government organizations, research reports, books, journals and relevant websites.

## Findings

The regulations of Kansaeng Veal Community Forest clearly state that all community forest members have equal rights to access and use resources in the community forest. Women and men can collect non-timber forest products and undertake other activities to support their livelihoods. However, the regulations do not mention that vulnerable groups of community forest members should be able to benefit from community forest management activities.

The study in Kansaeng Veal Community Forest showed that women and men more or less equally participated in community forestry activities. They

also exercised their rights according to the community forest agreement and regulations. Widows participate less in community forestry activities because they are the heads of households and responsible for livelihood and income. Poor, elderly and young women also are confronted with many challenges and do not fully participate, as community forestry does not provide enough income for them due to resource degradation. Some migrate to work in the city for income.

In Kansaeng Veal Community Forest, women and men participate in tree planting, meetings and some patrolling activities. Women exercise three rights more often than men do: the right to enter the community forest area; the right to withdraw forest resources; and the right to manage forest resources.

Women understand the community forest regulation that allows them to enter the forest and harvest non-timber forest products for their income and livelihoods. This activity does not require heavy labour and is related to their daily lives. Men exercise more rights and engage the most in managing community forestry activities. These include reporting to and informing local authorities and the forestry administration about their patrolling activities and illegal activities in the community forest area. They also include carrying out tasks that require heavy labour and overnight stays, such as cracking down on illegal logging and installing boundary poles. Only 20 percent of women participated in boundary demarcation.

Community forest members, community forest committee members and local authorities in Kansaeng Veal Community Forest have different perceptions and understanding of gender roles.

Vulnerable community members such as young people, widows, elderly people and poor families have a relatively low understanding of gender concepts.

There are varying degrees of understanding among committee members, as some committees received training courses on gender provided by non-governmental organizations that clearly explained the concepts. Local authorities acknowledged that Kansaeng Veal Community Forest members understand gender concepts and practice gender mainstreaming in their community forest management. Community members know that women and men have equal rights to participate in community forestry activities.

Men recognize the important roles of women in community forest management, particularly their strong negotiation, communication and financial management skills. Women who have participated in capacity building programs organized by NGOs are able to build their confidence in speaking and sharing their ideas and moving into leadership positions. Men encourage the women to speak up and raise their concerns and ideas.

## Conclusions

In Kansaeng Veal Community Forest, women and men more or less equally participate in community forestry activities. They also exercise their rights according to the community forest agreement and regulations. The engagement of women in the community clearly demonstrated their essential role, which is recognized by men and local authorities as well.

Community members, community committee members, and local authorities demonstrated an understanding of gender concepts in community forestry. However, the study found that not everyone has similar opportunities, with vulnerable groups of women at a particular disadvantage.

## Recommendations

- Ensure that all women, including those who are young, widowed, poor or elderly, are enabled to take leadership positions in the community forest management committee so that their voices are heard in decision-making.
- Amend the regulations of the Kansaeng Veal Community Forest to require and enable the participation of all vulnerable groups of women.
- Include the participation of all vulnerable groups of women in community forest management planning.
- Young people will be the community forest managers in the future. Encourage young people, especially young women, to participate in community forestry activities and consider establishing a youth network for the community forest.

## Endnotes

1. Food and Agriculture Organization. 2021. Cambodia strengthens community forestry. 21 January. [fao.org/in-action/eu-fao-flegt-programme/from-the-field/stories-details/es/c/1370481/](https://www.fao.org/in-action/eu-fao-flegt-programme/from-the-field/stories-details/es/c/1370481/)

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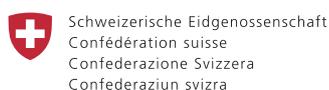
#### RECOFTC

PO. Box 1111  
Kasetsart Post Office  
Bangkok 10903, Thailand  
T +66 (0)2 940 5700  
F +66 (0)2 561 4880  
info@recoftc.org



recoftc.org

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