

Fostering the livelihoods and culture of indigenous peoples in Cambodia

OHCHR has been supporting indigenous communities in their quest for security of land tenure that will ensure their survival and benefit future generations



Photo: OHCHR Cambodia

Mr Choet Chorn preparing his presentation before a meeting with MLMUPC and GIZ's delegations in June 2015

Choet Chhorn, a representative of the Por indigenous community from the Phnom Rey village in Battambang province, has a very special relationship with his land – his livelihood, culture and hence his very existence, depend on it. To ensure their survival, indigenous peoples need security of land tenure, which in Cambodia is available to them in the form of communal land titles. However, this can only be achieved by completing a complex application process that hardly corresponds to the way they have been living for the past hundreds of years. But this is not their only obstacle.

To make matters worse, their ancestral lands are often part of economic land concessions granted by authorities to local and international companies. In order to assist indigenous peoples affected by problematic land concessions, which makes them particularly vulnerable to land grabs, OHCHR launched a special initiative in 2011 to help them claim and protect their land rights. Accordingly, it has been providing legal, financial and logistical support to seven villages inhabited by Bunong indigenous communities in Pichreada district, Mondulkiri province, three Suoy indigenous communities in Aoral district, Kampong Speu province, and one Por community in Samlot district, Battambang province. Aside from trainings – on the complex process of being legally recognized as an indigenous community, mapping their land and applying for communal land titles – delivered to indigenous communities, local NGOs and representatives of local authorities, OHCHR also assisted with the different steps of the process, including filling out and filing the necessary applications.

Since the launch of the initiative, most of the communities supported by OHCHR have successfully completed two of the four stages of the lengthy application process for a communal land title. Faced with rapid concession development threatening the process, one group – the Por people from the northwestern Battambang province – also succeeded in being awarded an interim protective measure of their ancestral lands in 2014, which enabled them to proceed to the next steps in a more secure environment as they received the green light to register their communal land title in 2015.

“Without OHCHR’s support to make things happen and recognize us as a legal entity, I can’t imagine how my community would be able to secure our land rights or preserve our tradition and culture. With their support, we also managed to claim more than 700 hectares of our land back from the plantation.”

Choet Chhorn, community representative, Phnom Rey village, Battambang province

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