

Conflict resolution in REDD+: An assessment in the Oddar Meanchey Community Forestry REDD+ Site, Cambodia

Lessons Learned Report



PREPARED BY *Julien Brewster*

Introduction

The emerging REDD+ mechanism operates in a complex social and political ecology where a range of stakeholders with varied motives, priorities and interests interact. In light of this complex array of interactions, it has been anticipated by communities, practitioners, and policy makers that REDD+ will have significant implications for conflict over land and resources. This is especially relevant in South East Asia, where there is a long history of contention and conflict in the natural resource sector, particularly surrounding issues related to tenure arrangements, governance and access over land and forestry resources.¹ Forest conflicts are significantly complex, and can take place at a variety of levels. REDD+ is likely to have a considerable impact on the existing roles, responsibilities and power relations among key stakeholders in the forestry sector.

Cambodia is at an important stage of its REDD+ readiness process, with a host of management structures and mechanisms being established to support the national REDD+ program. While important progress has been made, some key gaps still remain before Cambodia can effectively meet the objectives of the National REDD+ program. The success of the REDD+ mechanism depends on the ability of stakeholders to be able to effectively resolve problems and conflicts that arise during REDD+ project development. Given the long history of conflict in Cambodia's forestry sector and the significant impacts REDD+ is likely to have on existing power relations, there is an important need for a holistic and considered approach to conflict resolution in Cambodia's REDD+ strategy.

Lessons from the subnational demonstration project in Oddar Meanchey, where an association of community forests are being linked to the voluntary carbon market, can provide useful insights into the steps that can be taken to prevent, manage and mediate emerging conflicts in community forestry REDD+ projects. This brief will document the lessons learned relating to conflict management in the Oddar Meanchey Community Forestry REDD+ Project (OM CF REDD+), focusing on community-level conflicts. A background on community forestry and conflict in Cambodia provides the context, before an analysis of the key conflicts that the OM CF REDD+ Project has faced. The solutions that have been derived to address these conflicts will then be discussed, along with a range of policy prescriptions for the national level REDD+ process.

The national context of forestry, conflict and REDD+ in Cambodia

Due to the strong link between rural poverty and forest dependency in Cambodia, sustainable forest management is crucial to the livelihoods of large parts of the rural population. Community forestry emerged in Cambodia in the 1990s, as a response to widespread illegal logging that was occurring and the recognition that centralized forest management systems were failing to halt deforestation and were instead a major part of the problem.² Enhancing the rights of local communities to manage, protect and benefit from the use of formally recognized community forests was seen as important way to improve rural livelihoods and forest management. The 2002 Law on Forestry, the 2003 Sub-Decree on Community Forestry Management, and the 2006 Prakas on Community Forestry Guidelines outline the legal framework enabling local communities to secure

¹ Uprety, D. Luintel, H & Bhandari, K. 2011. 'REDD+ and conflict: A case study of the REDD + projects in Nepal'. RECOFTC & ForestAction Nepal.

² Independent Forest Sector Review. (2004). *The forest sector in Cambodia—Part I: Policy choices, issues and options*. In *Independent Forest Sector Review report*. Phnom Penh, Cambodia: Joint Coordinating Committee, Forest Administration.

tenure rights to manage forest areas under 15-year renewable CF agreements. While the decentralization of forest management was viewed as a way to reduce deforestation, conflicts in the forest sector have remained one of the most significant constraints local communities face in implementing effective forest management.³ These conflicts have occurred both within and between communities and between communities and powerful external actors.⁴ External actors include state-supported economic and mining concessions, the Cambodian military, illegal loggers and land speculators.

REDD+ has been viewed as a way to address many of the challenges that have arisen in improving forestry outcomes in Cambodia. Cambodia's REDD+ development commenced in 2008, and has been progressing with the development of a national REDD+ Roadmap supported by technical and financial commitments from UN-REDD and a range of other donors. It is hoped that community forestry and REDD+ project development will be mutually reinforcing in Cambodia, in terms of stakeholder engagement and local participation, as CF leadership is strengthened and utilized. Furthermore, if implemented correctly, REDD+ provides incentives for improved forest management at all levels, and could generate long-term sustainable financing for forest protection. As such, the National Forest Program (NFP) 2010-2029 identifies community forestry as the preferred forest management model for engaging in REDD+. The integration of REDD+ into existing community forestry projects, however, involves new relationships between the state, market and community stakeholders, which can greatly enhance the potential for conflict. Elite capture, perverse incentives, insecure land tenure and social exclusion are real concerns, especially as REDD+ begins to move into implementation phase and carbon revenues are generated. If implementation is not seen as fair, the legitimacy and support for REDD+ projects will be compromised.⁵

While the NFP and 2008 Protected Area Law contain measures to manage conflicts, these have not yet been operationalized. Similarly, although the REDD+ Roadmap pledges to develop a Complaints Mechanism and Conflict Resolution Mechanisms, these are still in development. Efforts to address conflict in REDD+ need to be enhanced and expanded. Ensuring that the necessary institutions, policies and processes are in place to effectively manage conflicts in an efficient, timely and ethical manner will be key to ensuring the success and sustainability of REDD+ in Cambodia

Background to the OM CF REDD+ Project

The OM CF REDD+ project was initiated in 2008 and is being implemented by the Cambodian Forestry Administration (FA) in partnership with Pact, Terra Global Capital (TGC) and several local actors. The aims of this 30-year project are to; mitigate climate change, improve local livelihoods and reduce poverty; and protect forests and biodiversity. The project involves a wide range of stakeholders at village, commune, district, provincial, and national levels. Community forestry has played a key role in the emergence and development of the OM REDD+ project, which utilizes a 'mosaic' methodology linking up 13 separate CF sites that encompass 64, 318 hectares in total. As the first community-based mosaic REDD project in Asia to achieve validation under the VCS and CCB standards, the OM CF REDD+ Project has been an important learning 'laboratory' regarding the

³ Nathan, I & Boon, T. 2012. *Constraints and Options in Local Forest Management in Cambodia: Is Decentralisation a Solution?*, *Journal of Sustainable Forestry*, 31:4-5, 396-420

⁴ United States Agency for International Development. (2004). *Cambodia. An assessment of forest conflict at the community level*. Burlington, VT: ARD.

⁵ Angelsen, A., Brockhaus, M., Sunderlin, W.D. and Verchot, L.V. (eds) 2012 *Analysing REDD+: Challenges and choices*. CIFOR, Bogor, Indonesia.

challenges that can arise when REDD+ is integrated into an existing community forestry framework.

Key conflicts in the OM REDD+ Project

A wide variety of conflicts have affected the OM CF REDD+ project. The forests in Oddar Meanchey have been under intense pressure from a range of different drivers, and have resulted in one of the highest deforestation rates in the country of 2.1% per year. Many of these conflicts therefore have arisen over the use of forest and land resources, and reflect governance and enforcement issues at the local level.

Economic Land Concessions (ELCs)

Like elsewhere in Cambodia, the allocation of forest land to private sector firms, in the form of economic land concessions (ELCs), has been a significant source of conflict in Oddar Meanchey. ELC owners have generally been businessmen or government officials who privately convert forest into commercial plantations. The minimal benefits local communities generally receive, coupled with the lack of consultation that occurs at the local level and a general feeling of powerless against these developments, have generated strong local opposition to ELCs. While all ELC projects are required to conduct an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and public consultations in the EIA process, the implementation of these requirements has been limited. Between 2007 and 2008, seven ELCs with a combined total of almost 55,000 hectares of land were approved in Oddar Meanchey by the national government.⁶ In some cases, these ELCs overlapped with proposed CF areas over which local communities were trying to gain tenure. For example, in Sangkruos Preychheu and Prey Srorng CF, the Samraong Rubber concession was found to overlap with the CF by 1,036 hectares. Communities have also claimed that that the agreed coordinates of ELCs on paper do not always correspond to the clearing that is taking place on the ground.

Now that all the CF areas in the province have been legalized, it is unlikely that new ELCs will be allocated within the project areas. Existing ELCs could become a source of conflict in the future, however, as they pose challenges for forest protection both within the CF areas and in the surrounding leakage belt.⁷ For example, there have been recent reports from Prey Srorng CF that an ELC company has been involved in illegal logging inside the CF area. Villagers contend that this ELC has been transporting timber from the CF to the ELC zone and claiming the timber was legitimately harvested in the land they have been allocated.

Military

The military has a strong presence in Oddar Meanchey Province and has been a key source of conflict in the forestry sector. In recent years, hundreds of soldiers and their families have been posted to the area to increase security along the border with Thailand. As part of this plan, many 'strategy' roads have been built through the CF areas to allow military access to the border. The government has supported soldiers to settle in Oddar Meanchey and other border provinces by allocating land to soldiers' families as an incentive. Soldiers generally receive low salaries and management within the military tends to be weak; these factors have led many soldiers to become

⁶ Bradley, Amanda (2009). *Communities and Carbon, Establishing a Community Forestry REDD Project in Cambodia*. Phnom Penh: Pact.

⁷ The leakage belt refers to a zone approximately 5 kilometers beyond the project boundaries which is monitored to ensure that deforestation activities are not displaced to nearby forests outside the project area

involved in illegal activities such as logging, hunting and land clearing to earn additional income.⁸ More recently, military families have established settlement camps in three of the 13 Community Forestry areas. In Romdoul Veasna, for example, more than 740 migrant and military families have moved into the CF area over the past few years. Community forest patrollers can do little against armed soldiers, and say they are often too afraid to go patrolling in the forest due to the security risk. Villagers in these areas have been barred



A 'strategy' road built by the military through Andong Bor CF

access to the CF to collect forest products, patrol and conduct Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MRV) activities. For example, when a large patrolling group, made up of the local FA officers, community members and the local CF and CFN Chief, went on patrol in Romdoul Veasna in 2010, the team was threatened and beaten with sticks by local military personnel who told them they would be thrown in prison if they returned.

Land clearing

Land clearing for agricultural development or the selling of land has been a source of conflict in the OM CF REDD+ Project. Population growth in Oddar Meanchey has tripled over the last decade, largely as a result of people migrating from other provinces in search of agricultural land. Land clearing has often occurred so that people can make claims over land which is later resold as prices increase. In many cases, these land sales are illegal as the land sold to private buyers is inside the CF area, even though the community has received management and tenure rights over this land. The problems that arise from this reflect broader problems related to land rights such as weaknesses in the legal framework regarding land tenure and its enforcement.⁹ There is also a lack of clarity on the rights that exist to buy and sell land. There is a general perception that tenure rights over land are strengthened once the land has been cleared and transformed into agricultural land. Recently, CF members have alleged that local villagers have been clearing land inside the CF in the hope of claiming tenure over this land when volunteer students come to measure and allocate land plots under the prime minister's land titling plan announced in June 2012.

Illegal logging

Illegal logging in Cambodia is widespread and poorly controlled. In Oddar Meanchey, communities report ongoing challenges to control illegal logging in the CF areas, especially of high-value 'luxury

⁸ Poffenberger, M., De Gryze, S., & Durschinger, L. 2009. *Designing Collaborative REDD projects: A case study from Oddar Meanchey Province, Cambodia*

⁹ Nathan, I & Boon, T. 2012. *Constraints and Options in Local Forest Management in Cambodia: Is Decentralisation a Solution?*, *Journal of Sustainable Forestry*, 31:4-5, 396-420

wood.' Communities claim that most of this activity is perpetrated by powerful people from outside that often have military backing. While according to the Forestry Law, community members have the authority to apprehend illegal loggers in the CF areas, many villagers claim that they do not feel comfortable apprehending loggers, because in many cases they are protected by soldiers, and as such, they 'would not try to stop the loggers without the support of the FA.'¹⁰

Conflicts between community institutions and local government

The success of the OM CF REDD+ Project strongly depends on cooperation between community forestry institutions and local government authorities, especially the FA. Cooperation between these institutions has generally remained poor and has been a reoccurring source of conflict in the project. It has also restricted the extent to which other local conflicts have been resolved. A variety of factors have contributed to this poor and at times adversarial relationship. The limited enforcement capabilities of the FA has often generated resent from local community groups, who believe that the FA should be doing more to crack down on illegal activities. CF leaders often submit reports to the FA on illegal activities occurring inside their CF areas. They rarely gain feedback from the FA or witness follow up activities. There are also allegations from villagers that some local FA officers are involved in illegal logging. The provincial FA, comprising of Division, Triage and Cantonment officers, has often been too under-equipped, understaffed and in some cases unwilling to conduct law enforcement in project areas. There are currently 35 local FA officers stationed in Oddar Meanchey, which results in each officer being responsible for managing nearly 13,000 hectares of forest land. According to the policy of the FA, each field officer must change post every 5 years, which places further challenges on the fostering of close relationships. With these limited human as well as financial resources, the FA faces many challenges in assisting local communities claim their legal rights and address local forest conflicts.

Internal CF conflicts

Some of the community forestry groups have faced serious internal conflict and management issues. Changing social dynamics, such as population increases and in-migration, coupled with a lack of resources at the local level to implement CF activities, have threatened the strength and solidarity of many of the CF groups. Many of these problems have arisen over conflicting internal interests and ideas surrounding the management of the CF areas. Participation in and support for the CF institutions has varied according to a number of factors, including active recruitment by CF leaders, community cohesion, understanding of benefits, and the level of trust in CF committee members.¹¹ The lack of available resources to support the forest protection efforts of management committees and patrol teams has also limited community engagement in the CF groups, and has led some community members to view forest management as a burden. In Samaky CF, internal problems surrounding corruption, social exclusion and factional divisions have led to the breakdown of existing trust and have significantly challenged the structure and solidarity of the CF group (see Box 1).

¹⁰ McMahan, Dennis. *CF Assessment and Migration Study*, 2008.

¹¹ Bradley, A. 2011. *Does Community Forestry Provide a Suitable Platform for REDD? A Case Study from Oddar Meanchey, Cambodia*. Wisconsin Land Tenure Center

Box 1: The situation in Samaky CF

A number of internal conflicts have recently been occurring in Samaky CF, which provide important insights into the complex nature of the conflicts local forest management institutions can face when engaging in REDD+. A new village named Samaky has recently been established on the border of the Samaky CF project site. The land for this village has been allocated by the CF leader, who claims that the close proximity villagers will have to the forest will better enable them to patrol and protect it.

Interviews found that many villagers in the surrounding area, along with newly arrived migrants, were offered land to build a house in the new village. At the same time, many CF members claim that they have been “cut” from the CF list and are no longer invited to participate in CF activities. While many of these former members remain unsure as to why they were “cut,” some believe it is because they were late or unable to join certain CF activities, or they refused to move to the new village.

The CF leader who is in charge of managing this CF is the only female CF leader in the project area. In managing the CF, she has adopted a very authoritarian leadership style, which could stem from her background as a Khmer Rouge leader and her attempts to assert her authority as a women leader in a patriarchal context. Many villagers have claimed that she has been charging people to purchase the land in this new village, and there are allegations that her son is involved in illegal logging in the CF area. Recent satellite imagery has also shown that part of the new village area is actually inside the CF area. Reported membership in two nearby villages dropped from a combined 45 member households last year to ten member households. The village chief of nearby Trapeang Tav village, believes that the complex internal problems this CF is facing is deterring villagers from wanting to join this CF.

The internal problems Samaky has been facing demonstrate the significant risks and challenges that can arise with decentralized forest management in REDD+. These problems illustrate the importance of not viewing REDD+ forest communities as single entities, and recognizing the array of different interests local community members may have with regards to local forest management and use. The significant social exclusion that has occurred in this CF group highlights the important need to have governance mechanisms in place at the local level to manage conflicts and mitigate against elite capture. It is important that these mechanisms are put into place prior to project implementation, when greater direct benefits to local stakeholders will heighten the potential for conflict.

Conflicts that will arise during project implementation: benefit sharing

According to an agreement between the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) and Terra Global Capital, and consistent with Law GD 699 issued by the RGC, at least 50 percent of the net income from the carbon credit sales will be directed to local communities for local development projects. This amounts to a projected potential investment in these projects of approximately \$10 million over 30 years. CF leaders have many different ideas about how REDD+ revenues should be invested in the community. The way that these benefits are distributed could become a significant source of conflict for the project. Disagreements may arise between community members on how project revenues should be invested. There may also be conflicts if certain groups are excluded from project benefits, such as the elderly, the poor, migrants, and people who live far away from the forest. Establishing inclusive and equitable benefit sharing mechanisms will be key to mitigating and managing these conflicts.

Conflict management practices used in the OM CF REDD+ Project

A variety of different approaches have been used in the OM CF REDD+ project to address the conflicts that the project has encountered. These have varied in their effectiveness, and several

conflicts, such as the military encroachment into CF areas, are ongoing. Resource constraints have restricted the extent to which project stakeholders have been able to implement many of the activities that could address and resolve project conflicts. These and other challenges to conflict resolution in the OM CF REDD+ project will be discussed in this section.

Awareness raising and consultation with local stakeholders

In order to gain the support of local communities and authorities for the OM REDD+ Project, awareness raising activities were conducted early on in the project. These consultations were an important way to detect and mitigate emerging conflicts. During 2008, awareness raising workshops on REDD+ were held in more than 50 villages in the project area to build local understanding of the project and seek advice on implementation. District workshops were also held, which were attended by 129 district government officials, along with local police and



Several billboards were installed in the provincial town to increase awareness of the project.

military personnel. These communication and training activities were crucial in ensuring the support of local stakeholders and authorities, and played a role in guaranteeing the endorsement of the Provincial government. While it is hard to measure the extent to which this has prevented project-related conflicts at the local level, local communities strongly believe in the role that project awareness can play in reducing forest conflicts. In a recent social assessment, community representatives from all the CF groups were asked what the best method would be to cut down on deforestation in the project areas. Nearly 16% of all responses were support for more information dissemination on the project and the CF laws, including the establishment of signage as a strategy to increase awareness.¹² Recent research has indicated that local awareness towards the project remains quite limited, illustrating the challenges of explaining REDD+ to local communities and the need for even more extensive awareness raising efforts over time.

Strengthening land tenure and forest protection

Securing CF tenure is critical because it ensures long-term management rights and provides legal recourse in the event of conflicts. From the start of the project, it has been very important to provide training and coaching to the community on the process and requirements of acquiring land tenure through CF legalization. In order to address the conflicts that arose throughout this process, both within communities and with external groups, to the project has worked closely with local authorities such as the FA, to ensure that participating communities had clearly demarcated parcels where there were no other claims. Since CF Agreements have been obtained in all 13 CF areas, it has become clear that support for clarifying and strengthening land tenure can play a key role in addressing conflicts in the project areas. Along with enhancing the community's ability to protect and conserve forest areas, securing these legal agreements has increased community trust and participation in local management structures, specifically the Community Forestry Management Committees.

¹² This figure was drawn from the 2012 Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRA), conducted with each of the 13 CF groups

Villagers contend that many of the conflicting land use claims that have arisen in and around the CF project areas – such as the clearing of land for agricultural development, market speculation or migrant settlements – have arisen because CF borders are unclear. The demarcation of boundaries using signs and cement posts has thus played an important role in helping communities strengthen tenure rights and prevent further conflicts over CF land.¹³ While funding has not been available to demarcate all the CF areas, this will be an important area of focus once carbon revenues are generated. Inconsistencies in the GPS datum systems (WGS84 and IndianThailand) being utilized by government departments, CF leaders and concessionaires have also been the cause of uncertainty and conflict over project boundaries. These conflicts have been caused by spatial differences (500m) that arise when different GPS datum systems are utilized. Ensuring that the same Datum system is used, and that this is made clear to all project stakeholders from early on, can play an important role in preventing these tenure conflicts.



A group of women from Samaky CF assist with a biomass inventory

Local forest management structures

The community forestry management structures in the OM CF REDD+ project have provided an important framework for addressing conflicts at the local level and encouraging participation and support for the project. These include Community Forestry Management Committees (CFMCs), village Sub-Committees, CF Groups and the Community Forestry Network (CFN). The structure of the local forest management institutions have been formed by pre-existing social networks and bonds developed throughout long periods of conflict. The Project Team has worked through and supported these existing structures. As a way of preventing conflicts from emerging, project staff have worked to support good internal management of the CF groups, through engaging respected local leaders (see Box 2), supporting wider CF participation in project activities such as monitoring, and working to improve communication and cooperation both within the CF groups and with local government authorities and NGOs. To improve the local governance of these community institutions, it also been important to ensure that there are measures in place through which members can hold their CF leaders accountable. This has necessitated important support for transparent and regular elections for Management Committees, regular meetings, and clear and consistent communication.

¹³ *The success of boundary poles and signs as a strategy for reinforcing tenure varies. Poles and signs are most successful where boundaries are already acknowledged and disputes have been solved. In areas where there are unsolved conflicts, newly installed boundary poles may be knocked down or destroyed.*

Box 2: Monks Community Forestry Association (MCF)

The Monks Community Forestry Association (MCF) has played a key role in mobilising support for community forestry and REDD+ in Oddar Meanchey. With the guidance of a charismatic leader, the Venerable Bun Saluth, the MCF has been influential in gaining the trust and support of villagers for forest protection. Since 2002, the sustained patrolling and awareness efforts of the MCF, which incorporate the use of Buddhist teachings and 'soft' methods towards offenders caught conducting illegal activities inside the Sorng Rokavorn CF, have been highly effective in reducing illegal activities and conflicts inside this CF area. The activities and approach of the MCF has also been very important in generating a core base of committed volunteers to undertake routine management tasks such as patrolling. The long history of community engagement and ownership around forest protection in this area, coupled with the deep respect many Cambodians have for the shared Buddhist belief system, have demonstrated how effective forest protection can be when it is linked to the local cultural context. Identifying and supporting agents of change such as Bun Saluth, that have strong character and leadership qualities, will be important to national REDD+ objectives of addressing and reducing conflict in local forest management.



The Venerable Bun Saluth talks to villagers on a Forest patrol in Sorng Rokavorn CF

Strengthening the Community Forestry Network (CFN)

The Community Forestry Network (CFN) was informally established in 2008 to represent all the CFs in Oddar Meanchey province. A representative from each of the 13 CF groups partakes in the network. The CFN plays an important role in resolving the key problems affecting the CFs, particularly conflicts over forest land use and the internal management of the CF groups. Pact has supported the CFN through the provision of resources and capacity building, to allow regular meetings to take place and enhance the strength of the network. This support has enabled CFN members to travel to different project sites as a way of collecting and sharing information in the target communities. The CFN has been involved in efforts to raise awareness on the REDD+ Project, the Forestry Law and other relevant regulations. They also partake in patrols in various CF areas to verify reports of illegal activities and assist CFMC members file reports to local authorities as a way of strengthening enforcement efforts. The presence of this higher authority plays a key role in assisting with the mediation of internal CF conflicts. For example, the CFN chief recently mandated that Samaky CF hold new CF elections due to the discontent of CF members with the current CF Chief.

The CFN has played a fundamental role in representing the needs and interests of the CF groups to government authorities, at both the provincial and national level. Working as a network has thus strengthened the voice of the CF groups and their advocacy efforts. For instance, in April 2012, the CFN chief led efforts to put together a petition from the communities to the Minister of Agriculture, Fishery and Forestry (MAFF) to address the military occupation of Andong Bor and Dung Beng CF.

The petition contained thumbprints from 2,000 community members and requested the government to find a solution to this problem. This resulted in a visit by the FA's Deputy Director to the affected area and the formation of a provincial level committee.

Community mobilization

Community action has made important contributions to addressing and resolving forestry conflicts in Oddar Meanchey. This community mobilization has generally been led by CF leaders and the CFN Chief, and has resulted in important outcomes for forest protection and conflict resolution. For example, strong community action in Ratanak Ruka prevented the expansion of ELCs that threatened to engulf a large proportion of a local community forest. Local CF leaders played an instrumental role in revoking the land these concessionaires were allowed to develop on, by collecting thumbprints from 1,786 villagers and travelling to Phnom Penh to meet with government officials and lobby donors and NGOs. This community activism eventually gained the attention of MAFF and FA officials who visited the project site to negotiate a compromise. It is important that the national REDD+ framework supports the important potential for communities to bring attention and solutions to forest conflicts.

Enhancing government engagement and cooperation

The OM CF REDD+ project has highlighted the important role that government support plays in addressing forest conflicts. Certain conflicts, such as the military encroachment, will not be resolved without strong and coordinated support from the national level. Cooperation and support from local government authorities is also key to resolving forest conflicts. For example, while communities apprehend illegal loggers in the forest, a strong relationship and backup support from local FA officers is essential in making sure cases are prosecuted. There has, however, been mixed success in engaging different levels of government to solve conflicts in the OM CF REDD+ Project. This partly reflects broader structural problems related to governance and forest management in Cambodia. For example, the lack of integration and cooperation between the local government system, which falls under the Ministry of Interior, and the community forestry system, under MAFF, restricts the extent to which local government institutions such as Commune Councils can assist communities to resolve forest tenure conflicts and claim their legal rights over CF areas.¹⁴

While efforts have been made to decentralize forest management in Cambodia, there is a significant lack of downward accountability in the forestry sector, and CFMCs are to “follow the instructions of the Forest Administration.”¹⁵ The CFMCs therefore remain reliant on the FA to assist them in managing forest conflicts and land tenure problems, which often has too few resources or staff to effectively implement these activities. As a way of addressing these limitations and strengthening the cooperation between local authorities and community groups in addressing forest conflicts, Pact has taken steps to establish a provincial Mobile Enforcement Unit (MEU). This has involved provincial level workshops with representatives from the FA, the Military Police, the Police, and the CFN to examine ways to improve cooperation. During these meetings, a Terms of Reference (TOR) was developed for the unit for when carbon revenues allow the MEU to become operational.

Regarding the military conflict, the lack of cooperation and communication between the Ministry of Defence and MAFF, at both the provincial and national level, also restrict the extent to which land use conflicts in the CF areas can be resolved. Mobilizing the support and cooperation of the RGC to

¹⁴ Nathan, I & Boon, T. 2012. *Constraints and Options in Local Forest Management in Cambodia: Is Decentralisation a Solution?*, *Journal of Sustainable Forestry*, 31:4-5, 396-420

¹⁵ Royal Government of Cambodia. 2003. *Sub-decree on community forestry management*. Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

solve conflicts and secure the access and tenure rights of local communities is going to be crucial to conflict resolution efforts in REDD+ CF projects.

Financial support

REDD+ differs from traditional conservation and community forestry approaches to forest protection in that it has the potential to provide large-scale funding and performance-based support. The lack of financial support to REDD+ demonstration projects, however, has restricted the extent to which local communities can address illegal activities and forest-related conflicts in their CF areas. For instance, the lack of available resources for patrolling (fuel, food, motorbikes) has significantly limited the amount of forest patrols community members can conduct. The Sorng Rokavorn CF (18,261 ha) is the largest and best protected of all the CFs in the province. An important part of this success is the financial resources the Monks Community Forestry Association (MCF) has received. Donations from the pagoda, along with occasional international support, has allowed much needed financial resources to be allocated to forest protection activities (patrolling, training, boundary demarcation). This has shown that with adequate resources, and better cooperation with local authorities, local CF groups are effective in solving conflicts and enforcing forest management rules, aside from when those conflicts involve powerful political interests or the military. In a recent study on REDD+, the Center for Clean Air Policy (CCAP) stated that “It is essential to grant landholders up-front credit as a core component of the expansion of demonstration activities and as part of a policy solution for REDD+” (CCAP 2011).¹⁶ Providing funding support to local communities before the REDD+ financing mechanism takes effect can play an important role in improving forest protection and addressing local conflicts.

Training, coaching and capacity building; the role of intermediary organisations

An important lesson learned throughout the OM REDD+ Project is the important need for capacity building and support at the local level for project-related activities, including conflict resolution. While no specific training has been offered to the communities on conflict resolution, the extensive workshops and trainings that Pact and other NGOs have facilitated in the project area, on a range of project-related topics, has played an important role in enhancing the interaction of local stakeholders and their capacity to discuss project issues, build networks and develop solutions to conflicts. Strengthening and supporting this social capital is very important to building the ability of local communities to deal with and resolve conflicts at the local level. The specialized knowledge, skills, and responsibilities that CF leaders have developed in engaging in the OM CF REDD+ Project have also helped to increase the level of respect from local constituents and authorities. This has demonstrated how REDD+ project development and community forestry can be mutually reinforcing.

In providing this support, Pact has had to balance its support for community advocacy with its relationship with the government, and has worked to support community-driven activities and initiatives, rather than directly setting the agenda for community groups. Supporting community efforts to resolve conflicts has involved putting local community groups in touch with the media and advocacy NGOs, providing advice to communities on how best to advocate on the issues

¹⁶ Center for Clean Air Policy (CCAP). 2011. ‘REDD+ Design in Cambodia, Indonesia and Mexico: Lessons to inform International REDD+ Policy Development’. Accessed 15 May 2012. Available at: http://www.ccap.org/docs/resources/1019/CCAP_International_Lessons_from_Country_REDD_Studies_June_2011.pdf

affecting them, and sharing useful project data and documentation with CF groups. For example, satellite imagery maps displaying forest cover change in the CF areas were recently provided to CF groups and have assisted them in their negotiations with local government officials by proving the nature, timing and extent of military activities inside the CFs.

Community members recently gained feedback on a petition they submitted to MAFF. As part of this effort, three CF groups submitted separate letters to MAFF documenting their respective issues surrounding military encroachment in their CF areas. The feedback from the national-level FA on this submission was that the CF groups need to better utilise their strength as a network, and should have worked together to submit one formal letter under the authority of the CFN. There was also a call for more hard evidence to be provided, such as GPS coordinates and photographs of illegal activities in the CFs. The feedback provided exemplified the important need for the CF groups to receive training on conflict resolution and advocacy. It also demonstrated the need for communities to have improved access to data and technology as a way to assist them resolve conflicts inside the CF areas.



CF members record the details of a group of villagers illegally clearing land inside the CF

Policies and procedures to manage project conflicts

A comprehensive set of Project Policies have been developed for the OM CF REDD+ Project, which outline how the project intends to deal with a range of issues, including safety, benefit sharing and communication. Local community members have been consulted in the development of these Project Policies, and Khmer copies of the policies have been distributed to each CF group. The Project Policies include a policy on Complaints and Grievances for Project Stakeholders, which outlines how community members and other project stakeholders can raise complaints and grievances to the Project Team.¹⁷ All submitted complaints, written responses, and any other evidence that supports the complaint will be recorded and filed by the Project Team Secretary and

¹⁷ The Project Team is made up representatives from the core project management group, composed of the FA, Pact (1st 5 years), Children's Development Association (CDA), CFN, and the Oddar Meanchey Provincial Government

made available to third-party auditors and the Technical Working Group on Forestry and Environment (TWG F&E). If the Project Team cannot solve the issue, there will be a third party mediator, which will be chosen based on further community consultation. Developing the project policies has been an important way to enhance the communities understanding on various aspects of the project, and to avoid misconceptions about the project that could result in conflict. It has also been important to ensure that communities are aware that there is a Complaints and Grievance Policy for the project, and that there are support structures in place for when project-related conflicts arise. In Nepal, village based conflict mediators have been highly effective in reducing conflicts¹⁸. It is hoped that community monitors in the OM CF REDD+ Project, that will receive training and resources from carbon revenues, could play a similar role in mediating project-related conflicts.

Conclusions and recommendations

The experience in Oddar Meanchey reveals the diverse array of conflicts that can arise in REDD+ community forestry projects, and the different ways in which these conflicts can be resolved and mitigated. The lessons learned from this project can play a crucial role in informing best practices for REDD+ implementation, at both the national and subnational level. It is important that conflict management strategies are implemented during this early phase of REDD+ in Cambodia, to prevent the escalation of conflicts when REDD+ implementation commences. Any policies or processes implemented should also be harmonized with the existing laws and regulations of the RGC, such as the National Forestry Program. Below is a list of key recommendations for consideration:

Identify existing and potential conflicts and grievances that may impact on REDD+ implementation

The development of REDD+ in Cambodia will have impacts on a wide number of stakeholders. A detailed understanding of these stakeholder groups, their interests and how they will be impacted by any potential activities for REDD+ will be important if future mechanisms are to be efficient, effective and equitable. Conducting a baseline survey on potential conflicts in REDD+, along with consultation workshops at the subnational level, will help to ensure the efficacy of the conflict management mechanisms that are established and their credibility to potential users.

Support training and capacity building on conflict resolution

There is an important need for local stakeholders engaging in REDD+ to receive capacity building training on conflict resolution. Workshops should be organised at the subnational and national level, and include representatives from the local community, local forest management institutions, government authorities and NGOs. Training could be focussed on topics such as: non-violent communication skills, negotiation and mediation, advocacy, media engagement, legal rights, and complaints procedures.

Strengthen provincial and national networks of community forestry groups engaging in REDD+ projects

There are approximately 281 CF groups in Cambodia that have been approved by MAFF and have signed CF Agreements.¹⁹ By networking together, community forestry groups can share experiences on REDD+ and strengthen their collective action and advocacy efforts around issues that affect

¹⁸ Uprety, D. Luintel, H & Bhandari, K. 2011. 'REDD+ and conflict: A case study of the REDD + projects in Nepal'. RECOFTC & ForestAction Nepal.

¹⁹ Forestry Administration. 2012. *Community Forestry Statistics in Cambodia*. Publication supported by NTFP-EP, JICA and RECOFTC. Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

them. Support for these networks can play an important role in enabling community groups to address and resolve conflicts. Support could involve national and subnational stakeholder forums, study tours, and support to civil society initiatives supporting REDD+ activities. Building these networks into a powerful advocacy group could assist community forestry institutions affect national action on forest and REDD+ related conflicts.

Strengthen coordination between national level government authorities with decision making power over REDD+ outcomes

National-level efforts will be key to addressing REDD+ related conflicts and strengthening tenure security at the local level. The lack of coordination and support from key government ministries has restricted the efficacy of many local level initiatives to resolve conflicts. Greater coordination, cooperation and communication between government institutions at the national level, through regular stakeholder forums and meetings, could greatly enhance outcomes for conflict resolution in REDD+.

Improve coordination between local government authorities (FA) and community forest management institutions engaging in REDD+

Enhancing cooperation between local government authorities, such as the FA, and community forest management institutions, will be key to conflict resolution efforts in REDD+. This could involve developing an explicit framework for cooperation and increased engagement, involving regular meetings and consultations between key stakeholders. Local FA staff need to be provided with clear guidelines on how to take the next step when communities bring illegal activities to their attention. Training should be provided to local communities on what their rights are in relation to illegal activities in CF. Providing more human and financial resources to field FA offices will allow them to better address problems.

Develop dispute resolution mechanisms

A grievances institution should be established to address land conflicts and other issues that arise with REDD+ implementation. Dispute resolution procedures should be transparent and accessible to all stakeholders. The Consultation and Safeguards Technical Team, in consultation with local community groups and drawing from the experience of subnational projects, can play a key role in developing these institutions. This mechanism should be coordinated with and supported by existing national frameworks related to conflict resolution in the forestry sector, such as the National Authority on Forest Land Conflict Resolution.

Develop and disseminate a national complaints procedure for REDD+ projects

A national Complaints and Grievances Procedure should be developed in consultation with local REDD+ stakeholders and disseminated accordingly. Training and guidelines should be provided to REDD+ stakeholders on how complaints and grievances can be raised, as an important way of managing and mitigating potential conflicts in REDD+.

Include an Advisor on Conflict in the national REDD+ management structure

In order to ensure that conflict resolution is effectively incorporated into Cambodia's national REDD+ strategy, resources should be provided for an advisor on conflict resolution. This position would develop and support strategies for conflict prevention and resolution throughout the REDD+ implementation process from capacity development to benefit sharing mechanisms.

Document, share and use the lessons learned on conflict resolution from REDD+ demonstration pilots

It is important that the lessons learned from subnational pilot projects on conflict resolution in REDD+ are shared with REDD+ stakeholders and are used to inform REDD+ policy development. An important component of this would be to compile the lessons from pilot projects and demonstration activities into an accessible national database, to help improve subsequent implementation of these activities.

Establish equitable benefit sharing mechanisms

In order to minimize the potential for conflict when carbon revenues are generated, the necessary institutional mechanisms, procedures, and norms for benefit sharing will need to be established. These mechanisms should involve the use of participatory tools and ensure that all relevant stakeholders develop the skills and commitment for key management issues such as leadership selection and fund allocation.



The Sorng Rokavorn CF group gathers for a meeting in the forest