
[Cambodia: Pheapimex resume deforestation for a projected pulp and paper mill](#)

In Cambodia, more than 80% of the population lives in rural areas and 36% lives in extreme poverty, earning less than 50 US cents per day. Though many villagers make a living out of the forest products, deforestation is part of the national policy and economy, showing that local and state authorities pay lip-service to the needs of the poor.

In mid November, another move where the most affected had the least say in deal making took place. The giant firm Pheapimex Co. Ltd. started works to clear 6,800 hectares of forest from its 315.000-hectare land concession, to later plant the land with eucalyptus and acacia trees to supply a planned pulp and paper mill in Kandal province. The land concession of the company reaches across the Pursat and Kompong Chhnang provinces, and is one of the many concession the company has in Cambodia (in Stung Treng, Kratie, Kompong Thom, Koh Kong provinces). The concessions system began in the mid-1990s and still remains the preferred method of managing forests in Cambodia, despite widespread criticism.

Pheapimex had started the project in 2001 but stopped because of the strong opposition from NGOs and local villagers, who saw their livelihoods under threat. Now, the company has stricken back, resuming the clear felling of the forest. But again it has encountered local people's resistance. Hundreds of villagers have rallied about 5 km from the worksite and gathered in the Krakor district of the northwestern province of Pursat. Over 100 stayed overnight at the protest site to wait for the protest to go on the following day, but during the night they were attacked by a hand grenade which injured six of them.

Seven villages fall within the concession area where the forest is part of the livelihood of the villagers who collect fruit and other products. "If we lose that land, it means we lose our jobs. I survive because of that forest", said Hem Sam, 42.

The logging company has decided to insist on pushing upon its commercial interests, but the local community is, once again, determined to defend their forest, their livelihoods, and their lives.

Article based on information from: "The death of Cambodia's forests", Keith Andrew Bettinger, sent by Oliver Pye, E-mail: opye@oxfamamerica.org ; "Villagers Protest Plans for Forest Clearance", The Cambodia Daily, <http://www.e-khmer.com/news> ; "Protest against clear felling of a Cambodian forest", ABC Asia Pacific, http://www.abcasiapacific.com/news/stories_to/asiapacific_stories_lofi_1243023.htm