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## [Cambodia: Villagers defend their resin trees](#)

Tapping trees for resins has a long history in Southeast Asia. The traditional tapping practice involves cutting a hole in the base of the trunk and using fire to stimulate a continuing flow. Resin from Cambodia is traded throughout Indochina and to other parts of Southeast Asia and China.

In almost all areas of Cambodia that still have forests, people obtain their family income from collecting resin. Those forest areas are subject to highly developed systems of community-based management. Villagers own resin trees privately; when one person has tapped a tree, usually no one else collects resin from that tree. Resin can be collected from a given tree for many years, with resin trees passed on to children at the time of marriage. The forest is effectively divided into plots that are managed by individual families.

Due to the value of resin collection as a source of income for local communities, resin collectors play an active role in protecting the forest. The owner of resin trees protects his or her resin trees as well as the surrounding forest and does not allow anyone to cut the forest or convert it to farmland.

Both Cambodia's current forest law, and the draft forest law under review by the National Assembly, prohibit the cutting of trees villagers have tapped to collect resin. However many concessionaires, via their subcontractors (and sometimes military units), violate this and other forest laws and regulations. Resin trees are cut, or else villagers are coerced into selling their resin trees.

Currently there are villagers in many areas who want official recognition of their resin forests. It is these villagers who are now beginning to play a critical role in monitoring and enforcing forestry laws and regulations in remote areas.

In February 2001, seeing that the Pheapimex Fuchan Concession Company was cutting their resin trees, 17 villagers from O Lang village went together to guard their resin trees. When the company workers arrived, the villagers showed them copies of the forest law forbidding cutting resin trees. They stopped cutting. About a month later, Pheapimex workers came to put tags on villager's trees; villagers informed the commune chief and he went with 53 people (from three villages) to the area. They met the workers putting up tags, and explained that the law forbids cutting resin trees. The company took down the tags, and stopped cutting trees. Since then, there has been no cutting of resin trees in the area.

Also, early in 2001, villagers in Tum Ar filed complaints to the national government protesting the tagging of their trees by the Grand Atlantic Timber (GAT) Concession Company in preparation for cutting. As a result the company broke off these preparations. Then in July, GAT prepared to cut again. A Community Consultation Committee (CCC) was elected in the village, after which villagers started patrolling their resin forests (in conjunction with collecting resin). In Tum Ar, people now have a very clear understanding of the forest law, and continue to patrol their forest areas.

Likewise in Ronteah, when villagers learned recently that their resin trees were being cut, some twenty people went to stop the loggers and succeeded.

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In Kampong Damrei commune, Casotim Concession Company was cutting trees. Around May, villagers started putting stickers ("Save Resin Tapping") on their trees. They also attached the Department of Forestry "Instruction" on resin to their trees. Those trees were not cut. Recently, just after the Community Consultation Committee was elected, the company cut three resin trees which had not been labelled. They organised 20 people together to go and meet the people cutting the trees. But the loggers had already evacuated their forest camp, and only company soldiers were still there. They said, "Don't you realise that if you create a community forest, you won't have anything to eat? The government will take everything". The villagers then discussed what to do about this at the monthly provincial meetings that Consultation Committee members attend. The Provincial Environment and Forestry Officials said that there should be a meeting in which the provincial governor invites the military to attend and work out how to co-operate on the issue.

Local communities living inside or near Cambodia's forested areas have been significantly affected by the cutting of resin trees. Until recently, these same communities were largely ignorant of the laws governing forest concessions. The education and empowerment of forest dwelling communities reliant on resin collection is playing a central role in creating domestic incentives (in effect, a domestic constituency) demanding that forestry institutions enforce laws and regulations governing timber harvesting by concessionaires. As this same domestic constituency becomes more knowledgeable and empowered in relation to forest laws and regulations, it becomes a most active, and potentially most effective, enforcer of forest laws in its own right.