
[Cambodia: Resin tapping incomes at odds with logging](#)

Commercial-scale logging has a large number of impacts on local communities, among which the loss of sources of livelihood. One of such cases is the cutting of trees used by local people for collecting liquid resin.

A report recently released by Global Witness includes valuable information on this issue. The report says that liquid resin is collected from several dipterocarp species, most commonly the *Dipterocarpus alatus*, which dominates Cambodia's evergreen and semi-evergreen forest areas and is one of the most common trees to be logged. Holes are cut in the bases of the trees and the resin, which accumulates in the holes, is scooped out every three to seven days. The holes are burned out following each collection to increase the flow of resin.

Resin is an economically valuable commodity both in Cambodia and abroad. Its most important use is waterproofing and protecting the wooden boats used by fishermen and traders in Cambodia and other parts of Southeast Asia. Resin produced in Cambodia feeds the regional boat building industry and large quantities are exported, primarily to Vietnam from where some is reportedly re-exported to China and other countries.

Recent research conducted by the NGO Forum estimates that families living in forested areas earn at least 38-50 US dollars per month from the collection of resin. This is a substantial source of income for families that have few other means of deriving cash income. In general, indebtedness and other symptoms of financial insecurity are less common in resin collecting villages than in villages without this constant source of income.

In addition to being profitable, resin production is environmentally sustainable and actually helps preserve forests. There is no evidence that resin production kills trees. Villagers recognise private ownership of resin trees in clearly delineated patches of forest. Collectors of resin are meticulous in their management of forest areas and protect their trees against anyone trying to cut them down. Patches of forest with resin trees are considered off limits to clearing for farming.

Over time, the number of resin trees has rapidly decreased due to loggers who come, primarily, from outside local communities. Villagers are often coerced into selling resin trees, being told that the trees will be cut whether they sell them or not. In 1997, a guard working for Colexim shot and killed a person in Ronthas village, Sandan district, Kompong Thom, who was protesting against the cutting of resin trees.

Resin tappers have become more and more vocal in their challenges to concessionaires to defend their resin trees. The standard practices of, virtually all, concessionaires and all sub-contractors to concessionaires of cutting resin trees, intimidating villagers into "selling" resin trees and impeding access to villagers engaged in activities associated with resin collection and sale are clearly illegal.

As the policies of the Cambodian government shift to poverty alleviation and the drafting of poverty reduction strategies, it is important to recognise that the maintenance of community-based rights to

extract resin can make a significant contribution to reducing poverty in rural areas. Resin extraction is an occupation for which forest dwelling communities have no income-earning substitute. The cutting of resin trees, or the loss of access to resin trees, makes communities significantly and irreversibly poorer. Protecting the basic legal rights of resin producers contributes to the aims of sustainable forest management, poverty alleviation and generating foreign exchange. Protecting these rights would also help to preserve both Cambodia's forests and an occupation that is a valuable component of Cambodia's cultural heritage.

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