

Livelihood Changes of Resettled Communities in the Koh Kong Province, Cambodia

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Transnational large-scale investments in land have been criticized for being conducted in an opaque manner. Questions remain about how they contribute to rural development and poverty alleviation. The Royal Government of Cambodia issued a new land law in 2001 which allows long term land leases in Cambodia. The Chinese Union Development Group, as part of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative, signed a deal with the Royal Government of Cambodia in 2008 and leased 45,100 hectares in the Koh Kong province in Cambodia for the construction of a commercial development zone. More than 1,400 families in 12 coastal, predominantly fishing villages had been relocated to 10 newly created villages deep inside the Botum Sakor National Park in 2011. Using the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, this study examines the livelihood changes of resettled communities at the household level, six years after the relocation. I conducted 35 interviews with relocated people, one interview with a commune chief, and two interviews with representatives from local NGOs. My findings show that the livelihoods of the relocated people have worsened in regards to almost all of the aspects considered by the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework. The unsuitability of the relocation site for farming and housing did not allow the relocated people to pursue livelihood strategies they could survive on. Instead, they turned to illegal logging and were at the mercy of their own government, which established a corruption scheme for forest access and benefited from the relocated people's hardship. Without access to natural resources, infrastructure and knowledge on good farming practices, people were unable to sustain their livelihoods. As a result, many villagers abandoned their homes and migrated from the relocation site to larger Cambodian cities or neighboring Thailand.

Key words: Cambodia, Sustainable Livelihoods, land grabbing, resettlement, displacement

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