



Development without Conformity: Impacts of Large-Scale Economic Development on Indigenous Community Livelihoods in Northeastern Cambodia

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Abstract Large scale economic development (LSED) has undergone rapid policy and sectoral reform in Cambodia. LSED is expected to generate revenues to support economic growth and development at both macro and micro levels. Yet, it is questionable about benefits and risks of such natural resource-consumptive and extractive development for the host areas, especially indigenous people (IP). IP communities in Northeastern (NE) Cambodia are vulnerable to such development. This region has been put under agricultural economic land concession, forest concession, and mining concession. The conversion of forestlands and farmlands into commercial cash-crop and agro-industry plantations as well as logging and mining zones has led IP communities to have limited access to land and natural resources. This caused to reduced livelihood capabilities (resources, knowledge and skills, activities, and protective security) and distressed cultural diversity and integrity and socio-demographic fabric of IP. By using sustainable livelihood approach/framework (SLA/F), this paper aims to investigate IP livelihood problems and identify LSED opportunities and strategies in Northeastern Cambodia and their impacts on IP livelihoods.

Keywords large scale economic development, SLA/F, indigenous communities, community capabilities, integrated economic and community development

INTRODUCTION

Growth, conservation, ownership rights, poverty reduction, capacity, equity, empowerment, participation, collaboration, precautionary approaches and governance considerations are embedded in most conceptualizations of sustainable development (Bryant and White, 1982; Agyeman et al., 2003; Bouapao, 2005). These considerations have placed importance on rural community development in order to reduce the imbalance caused by urban-oriented growth mechanism which generates dichotomy between rural and urban areas (Hirsch, 1987). The concept of rural community development allows (poor or marginalized) rural communities to participate in and benefit from economic growth and development. Their participation allows them to improve their economic and social lives and intervene in resource redistribution and consumption for the betterment of their quality of life and conservation (Chamber, 1983; Hirsch, 1987; Buller & Wright, 1990; Bouapao, 2005).

Successful community development needs to be grounded on the three pillars of sustainable development, while equitable access to and sustainable utilization of community resources should not be overlooked (Roberts, 1979; Green and Haines, 2001; Blackstock, 2005; Ashley and Maxwell, 2001). Yet, economic imbalance, social inequality and marginalization of the poor usually trigger over exploitation of resources, although over-consumption of natural resources is central to the

challenge of sustainable community development. Environmental injustice and economic inequality in rural development cause more poor people suffer from loss of livelihood assets, opportunities, and traditional knowledge. This happens when developers and planners do not pay much attention to local social structure/system and immediate needs of communities (Agyeman et al., 2003).

There are many factors that affect community livelihoods (capabilities, assets, and activities) and community enthusiasm to accept changes in their livelihoods, as well as the dynamic relationship between these. In response, the Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF) has been adapted by an increasing number of researches as a tool for analyzing complex livelihoods of people (Scoones, 1998; DFID, 1999; Ellis, 1998). The SLF is seemingly parallel to the Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA), and is used as a holistic, structural approach to identify influential factors that are centered on people and important in contributing to community livelihood diversification and livelihood sustainability supported by existing activities (Neth, 2008). The Department for International Development (DFID) (1999) and Carney (1998) articulated that this framework could be used by researchers, planners and developers who deal with a complex human subject, especially in rural areas, where people live in pressing social and environmental conditions. This tool helps these stakeholders with a range of perspectives and capacities to participate in structured and coherent study and deliberate over the factors that influence community livelihoods, their relative significance and the way in which these factors interact.

This paper uses theories and concepts of sustainable livelihood approach / framework (SLA/SLF), communal land management by modernized legal approaches and culture / right of indigenous community over resource access / use / management to discuss and produce research findings from a holistic analysis of literature, policy papers, reports of previous empirical studies, and primary data collected from fieldworks in Dak Dam commune.

OBJECTIVE

This paper aims to: (1) investigate indigenous community livelihoods by stressing their livelihood shocks, capabilities, and strategies; (2) identity of large scale economic development opportunities and strategies in Northeastern Cambodia; and (3) determine impacts of large scale economic development on indigenous community livelihoods.

METHODOLOGY

This study used both primary and secondary data. Documentary review and analysis were carried out with relevant theories, concepts and empirical facts from previous research findings as well as other sources. As part of a comprehensive, extensive study in NE Cambodia, Dak Dam Commune in Mondulkiri (MDK) Province was selected as a case study area due to its unique characteristics and irreplaceable condition as an overlapped concession area in the IPs communities which lead to complex IPs livelihood problems, overlapped mandate and conflict of interest, controversial government-company-community relations, dynamic land use change, and community responses based upon IPs collective knowledge and activism. The area has been put under many resource-extractive plans, ranging from commercial logging and community forestry (CFs) since in the late 1990s (McAndrew and Il, 2009), ELCs (economic land concessions) and mining license, since in the mid 2000s (Guttal, 2006; Neth *et al.*, 2011), and social land concession for communal land titling, since in the late 2000s (Neth *et al.*, 2011). Primary data were collected from several methods, such as: (1) household survey in the three villages (Pou Chhorb, Pou Andreng, and Pou Les); (2) in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with local authorities, village elders and IPs community leaders; and (3) expert interviews with reps of concerned institutions and academia.

Description of research site

Dak Dam is located in southeastern MDK province and administratively registered as one of the

two communes of O'Reang District. Despite being home to abundant natural wealth, Dak Dam possesses less cultivated land area than other communes in MDK. Yet, more than 73% of its total population is engaged in irrigated and non-irrigated rice farming. In addition, crop cultivation, such as corn, soya bean, mungbean, peanut, cassava, sweet potatoes and sesame also play crucial role in Dak Dam's rural production and local livelihood system (Neth *et al.*, 2011). Most of the agricultural activities in the area are rain-fed and depend largely on local traditional wisdom (*ibid.*).

The majority of the population belongs to Phnong ethnicity. Their occupations range from rice and crop cultivators to non-timber forest products (NTFP) collectors (including resin collection), hunters, and paid workers in nearby plantations (Neth *et al.*, 2011). A few Khmer households are also found to have settled in Dak Dam, most of who are newcomers from across Cambodia. These newcomers migrated into Dak Dam in search of agricultural land and business opportunities with highland indigenous communities who have less experience in business.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Community livelihood problems

Indigenous people living in Dak Dam are seen to be very impoverished, vulnerable and susceptible to new economic development plans. Because of its large land area, easy access to the provincial township, fertile agricultural lands, and high mining resource potential, a vast part of Dak Dam's territory have been put under LSED plans. The extensive land conversion into agricultural and agro-industrial plantations and mining zones together with the influx of lowlanders, land speculation, and land encroachment have resulted in limited access to natural resources by the indigenous locals in Dak Dam. Forest resources and by-products have been main sources of their livelihoods for generations. Limited or the loss of access to these resources is not only translated into reduced livelihood capacity or livelihood loss, but it also affects local cultural diversity and integrity as well as the socio-economic, demographic and cultural fabric of the Phnong ethnicity.

Current environmental problems

The lack of representation within the provincial and national authorities together with language barriers makes the indigenous Phnong become a disadvantaged group in their own area. The geo-political conduct of the government and the growing interest of investors are often seen as lack of clarity and sensitivity to local culture and livelihoods. These leave local communities in Dak Dam at high risk of further violations, intimidations, livelihood loss, and socio-cultural corrosion. The designation of the area for macro-economic purposes by disregarding local needs, and the conclusion of concession agreements (between the government and companies) without consultations with local communities have triggered negative impacts on the locals as well as on the business environment. For the communities, on the one hand, these actions could be translated into complete contempt for local wellbeing, culture and livelihoods that depend upon available lands and resources. On the other hand, the companies have been reported to face constant disruption to their operations (e.g., the community shows resistance in the forms of public condemnation, strike and counteract) which could retard concession processes or even distress companies' properties and interests.

Community's system and right

Current LSED-oriented policies considerably affect local livelihoods and culture. This could set off declined community's capabilities (resources, skills, knowledge, activities, and rights), declined community livelihood strategies, and depletion of natural resources (land, water, and biodiversity). Especially, it weakens community's system (i.e., traditional management system) which eventually results in limited collectivity and community's customary rights.

At present, community's system and rights are being influenced by external and internal