

# PEACEMAKING AND THE ENVIRONMENT

## ANNUAL RESEARCH 2016



The purpose of this annual research is to explore how peacebuilding and environmental issues in Cambodia are interconnected, especially how peacebuilders, PBO partners, and non-partners have used peace KASH, active nonviolence, and conflict resolution and transformation to address the environmental challenges affecting Cambodians today.





## Introduction

The vast majority of Cambodians live close to the land and rely on it to fill their bellies and pockets. Because many Cambodians are dependent on natural resources, they are particularly vulnerable to environmental crises such as deforestation, climate change, pollution, natural disasters, and conflicts involving natural resources. But while Cambodians are vulnerable to these issues, many are also working to make their communities more resilient and stand up for themselves. Many Cambodians are taking active roles in combating serious environmental challenges by mediating local conflicts and raising awareness about the issues impacting their lives. Others are solving conflicts born of these issues such as domestic disputes and national issues like deforestation.

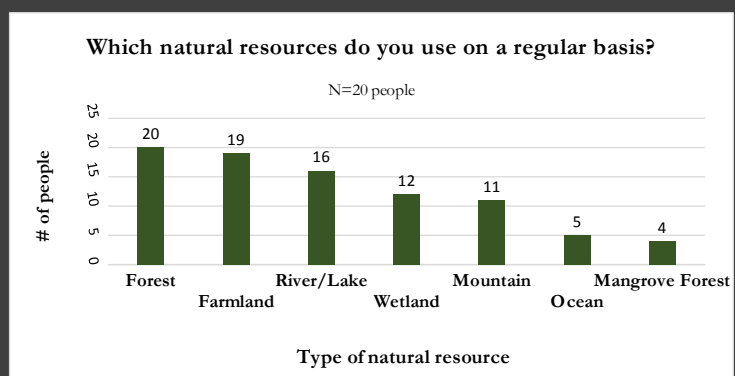
Peace Bridges believes all humans should be able to flourish and live in right relationships with one another. This is often prevented by conflicts that arise from environmental problems caused by human activities. Peace Bridges equips peacebuilders with the Knowledge, Attitudes, Skills, and Habits (KASH) to be agents of positive change in their own lives and their communities—that means applying peace KASH to environmental conflicts as well.

## Methods and Sample

Research methods included qualitative interviews, quantitative questionnaires, and two focus group discussions. RM&E staff interviewed 41 people, including 12 peacebuilders, 4 Prey Lang Core Committee members, 10 tree-planting participants, 1 Areng Committee member, 5 local authorities, and 9 staff at PBO partners/non-partners.

## Key Findings

This study found that Cambodians are very dependent on natural resources (see chart below) and impacted by a wide range of environmental issues that either create or are created by human conflict. Cambodians who take initiative to address these things face challenges including the great number of environmental problems, poor relationships between communities and authorities, personal danger and sacrifice, and conflict within environmental groups. Nevertheless, Cambodians are using nonviolent methods to protect environmental resources and mediate related conflicts. The Areng and Prey Lang communities and activist networks are great examples of this.





### Environmental Issues and Impact

Cambodia is blessed with a wealth of natural resources. Located in the Indo-Burma Hotspot, Cambodia enjoys forests, scrubland, rivers and lakes—including the Tonle Sap—mangroves, mountains, minerals, and much more. Because it is a mostly rural country, over 70% of the population depends on agriculture for their livelihoods (Open Development Cambodia). People grow rice, fish in the many lakes and streams, and gather non-timber forest products like bamboo and rattan, resin, natural medicine, vegetables, and honey in Cambodia's forests.

Unfortunately, a combination of corruption, irresponsible development, and illegal activities has led to rampant deforestation, land disputes, and other damage to the natural environment in Cambodia. Compounding these issues is the global threat of climate change as well as local problems, like increasing temperatures and drought.

Deforestation is one of the most pressing issues in Cambodia—a reality that was confirmed in the survey for this research. Cambodia's total forest cover has rapidly decreased from 72% of the country in 1973 to 48% in 2014 (Open Development). At this rate of destruction, Cambodia ranks fifth in the world for worst deforestation.

### Social Costs of Environmental Conflicts

Climate change, natural disasters, land conflicts, and mismanagement of natural resources has serious repercussions on many aspects of Cambodians' lives. Loss of land or resources mean people lose their sources of income, homes, religious sites, food, and water.

Vulnerable communities and minorities are

disproportionately impacted when their livelihoods are taken away or resources destroyed. In Cambodia, many indigenous groups live in forests that are under attack by illegal loggers. One example is the indigenous Kuy people who live around the Prey Lang Forest. In recent years it has shrunk dramatically as the illegal logging continues to reduce the forest. Along with the indigenous and other minority groups, women and children, rural communities, and people who lack land or financial security are the most susceptible to serious effects of environmental conflicts.

### Conflict Resolution and the Environment

The Cambodian government has numerous laws on the books which are meant to protect and manage natural resources. There are also mechanisms in place to deal with conflicts. Cambodians must be equipped with peace KASH in order to deal with conflict effectively and nonviolently in their communities and homes as well as lobby for systemic change. Nonviolent conflict resolution, communication skills, and personal transformation are all important for people who want to also be agents of change in their communities. When equipped with peace KASH, they are more able to deal with local environmental conflicts and even larger calamities that impact their lives.



The latest PBO shirt says: "Peace and the environment begins with me."



**Survey Question:**

What do you think is the *most serious* environmental issue affecting Cambodians today?

**#1 Deforestation**

**#2 Climate Change**

## Peacebuilders



### Mr. Ret

Environmental activist, Areng valley, Koh Kong province

### Environmental peace KASH

Mr. Ret said he used to negatively affect the environment by clearing land to farm, cutting trees, hunting animals, and selling rosewood trees in the market. He used to throw plastic garbage on the ground. He changed his habits since studying with Peace Bridges. Now he puts his garbage in a bag and has cut down on using plastic and hunting wildlife. He also protects the forest by planting trees and joining local activist efforts.

### Peacebuilding and environment

Mr. Ret said that he has new peace KASH and knowledge of active nonviolence, as well as a deeper appreciation for the environment. When his community went to protest a proposed hydroelectric power dam that would destroy their village, Mr. Ret shared about active nonviolence. In the past, they used to shout loudly and commit violence against the private company representatives. Now they have stopped using violence. They sit and hold banners with slogans.

“I practiced active listening when my community had a conflict with local authorities. The authorities had arrested about 11 environmental activists in Areng Valley. I met with the other people to listen and ask questions. We were unable to free the community members, but we have not given up.”

### Challenges

A major challenge, he said, is that his community people are a non-book culture. Because they get information from what people say, it is easy to make quick judgments and create conflict. Another challenge is a poor relationship with the local authority.

### Expectations

He hopes that his community will continue to protect the environment, especially the forest. He wants them to have strong relationships with one another. Peace Bridges can help by training them on conflict resolution, the environment, and how to have better relationships.

The district governor of Sandan, Kampong Thom province (left) and PBO Executive Director (right) welcome the volunteers who joined the Arbor Day Tree Planting 2016. Behind him stand the local authorities, police, and PBO partnership manager.





**Mrs. Sopheak**  
PBer, Prey Lang Community  
Network member and activist,  
Kratie province

### Environmental peace KASH

**M**rs. Sopheak said that she used to behave in ways that damaged the environment, like throwing garbage on the ground and using many plastic bags. She said that she did not know it was bad for the environment and using plastic was convenient. Now she knows, so she tries has tried to change her habits. For example, when she goes on forest patrols, she brings her rice and food in a reusable container.

Mrs. Sopheak also said she used to not care that the forest was being cut down. Then three or four years ago, she learned about climate change and saw that the weather was becoming hotter and had more violent storms. She saw that the companies were cutting more and more trees. She realized she loved the forest and wanted to protect it.

### Peacebuilding and the environment

Prey Lang activists often have conflicts and cut off their relationships with each other. After they learned about peace, they could reconcile their relationships. Now they are not violent with their group or the offenders (illegal loggers).

Mrs. Sopheak intervened in a conflict about a person who killed monkeys in the forest. Mr. Sopheak went to explain how he was damaging the environment. She invited him to join the forest patrol because she wanted him to know about protecting the forest and wildlife. He has not yet joined and still cuts trees and kills monkeys, but Mrs. Sopheak said it is less than before.

### Challenges

**S**he said one challenge has to do with security and how being a woman on forest patrols is not always safe. She also said her family is poor, so she worries about her family's livelihood.

### Expectations

**L**ooking ahead to the future, she hopes people will protect the Prey Lang forest so it will be around for future generations.

Mrs. Sopheak is an active member of the PLCN who frequently joins the Prey Lang forest patrols to protect it from illegal logging. In spring of 2016, Mrs. Sopheak was attacked while on a forest patrol. An unknown person cut her foot with an ax while she slept in her hammock at night. She suffered a serious foot wound. She has since healed and said she is still committed to protecting the forest.





## Partners and Non-Partners



### Mr. Savoeun

Director at Coalition of Cambodian Farmer Community (a PBO partner)

The CCFC has three projects related to agriculture, forestry, and community empowerment. At their office, the staff protect the environment by not using the air conditioner and reusing cups and dishes.

### Peacebuilding and the environment

Mr. Savoeun said, “Peacemaking and the environment is related because community

people practice nonviolence when they talk to offenders and the local authorities.”

His work team helped mediate a land conflict between a land concession company and community people. First, the CCFC helped strengthen the forest community association’s capacity on advocacy, environmental law, and nonviolence. Then the community association worked with partners and advocated for their community forest. This caught the attention of the local authority who joined them to help find a solution. After all of this, the company gave back land to 17 communities in four provinces and kept only the land that they had leased from the government.

“I love trees  
because they are  
my life!”



### Mr. Kheang

Deputy of projects at Winrock Organization (not a partner of PBO)

Winrock has four projects related to forest protection, nonviolent conflict resolution and transformation, livelihood improvement, and the environment.

### Peacebuilding and the environment

Mr. Kheang said when people know about peacebuilding and have “peace in their heart,” they do not try to get wealthy at the expense of other people. He said people want to cut and sell trees in order to earn money that they then spend on electronics or other things. He said that cycle of destroying the environment for personal gain is a “I don’t care about people around me or the environment” mentality.

Mr. Kheang has heard communities say their livelihoods are impacted by logging. The community people know confronting loggers is dangerous. Nevertheless, they keep patrolling the forest and no longer buy or sell wood to make expensive furniture.

Mr. Kheang said that Peace Bridges should train people about peace and active nonviolence so that they have it in their heart to join the forest patrols. Then Peace Bridges should share the communities’ stories on the radio and other media outlets.

### Challenges

One challenge is that patrolling the forest is a difficult task. Travel, making food, and sleeping is not easy in the forest. It is also a sacrifice of time and energy. He said, “although the activists and Forest Administration want to patrol the forest all the time, it is so challenging for us.”



### Local Authority



#### **Mr. Leang**

Deputy chief village at  
Achen village, Kratie  
province

**M**r. Leang said his job as local authority does involve environmental protection.

He cooperates regularly with Prey Lang activists and the others who patrol the forest. He has some knowledge about local environmental laws which he has shared with environmental activists and community members.

#### **The community's environmental issues**

Mr. Leang remembered a time when his community had large forests with wildlife. Now the forest is much smaller and has few remaining animals. This is why he wants to assist those who are trying to protect the forest against deforestation.

Deforestation in his area has mostly been caused by private companies, powerful individuals, and some community people. They also hunt the wildlife, which is illegal. Mr. Leang said that if they lose all their natural resources, people will lose their source of income and the smaller forest will contribute to climate change.

#### **Mediating environmental conflicts**

People in Achen village were protesting against a private company that had taken their land and community forest. Mr. Leang met with them to mediate this conflict and help them find a

resolution. Mr. Leang realized that the company had taken more land than was originally agreed upon, so he and the company representatives measured the land and then negotiated a resolution. Throughout this process, he had a lot of help from Mr. No (right), a Prey Lang activist who studied with Peace Bridges. Mr. No used nonviolent communication, active listening, and negotiation skills to work out a solution with the company. In the end, the company gave the land back to the community.



Mr. No

#### **Challenges**

A major challenge for him has conflict between community people and other local authorities. The people do not want to cooperate with the authorities. Some continue to cut trees even though it is illegal. Additionally, some of Mr. Leang's superiors blame him for some serious conflicts that he could not help people resolve.

#### **Expectations**

In the future, he wants to see people in his community improve their relationships and cooperate to protect their natural resources. He hopes they will stop using violence and will use their knowledge to reduce deforestation. Mr. Leang also wants to Peace Bridges to train them on nonviolence, peacebuilding, and environmental law.

As for Mr. Leang, he said he will continue to do his part to share with people about protecting what remains of their forest.



## Environmental Protection Groups



### Mr. Pov

Deputy of the Areng Committee,  
Areng, Koh Kong province

Mr. Pov said his duty is to protect the environment and the forest in his community. People there are dependent on the forest for non-timber forest products and growing rice.

### The community's environmental issues

Mr. Pov said the Areng valley was the proposed location of a new hydroelectric dam project. Mr. Pov assisted with research on the environmental and social impact of the dam. When the community people knew that the dam would destroy their homes and wildlife, they conducted a nonviolent campaign to oppose it. At one point, they blocked the road and asked the company people to leave. As a result, Mr. Pov said that 11 of Areng committee members were arrested.

### Applying peace lessons

Mr. Pov said that some community people studied nonviolent communication and conflict resolution with Peace Bridges. Those people shared these lessons with people in the community, and those people decided to remain nonviolent. He hopes that Peace Bridges will help them strengthen their relationship with the local authorities as well.



### Mr. Sokhoeurn

PLCN supervisor and core group,  
Steung Treng province

As a leader in his community, Mr. Sokhoeurn encourages people to protect the Prey Lang forest. They replant trees and patrol the forest. He also talks with loggers to persuade them to find other ways to support themselves.

### The community's environmental issues

In Stung Treng province, many people collect resin from the forests and sell it. Other people plant cassava, cashews, and raise cows. Recently, however, they have had difficulties with irregular rain, hotter temperatures, and drought. He said this is partially because of climate change and deforestation. Some families have reduced their agriculture production by 50%.

### Applying peace lessons

In the past, the forest patrol teams used to burn the wood that they took from illegal loggers in order to intimidate them. Now they have stopped doing this and negotiate with the loggers to create a contract. Some of the offenders apologize and promise they will stop cutting trees to earn money. Some do not admit they are wrong, but the patrol teams still do not use violence against them. He has observed that the internal dynamics of the PLCN have improved because of their mutual respect and nonviolent communication.

The Areng Valley, Koh Kong province



Focus group discussion with the PLCN committee, 2016.



### Cambodian Tree Planters



**Mr. Sambath**

Project manager at Mission Alliance, Phnom Penh

#### Environmental peace KASH

Mr. Sambath said he does some things that damage the environment. He uses plastic and drives a motorcycle or car. He also wears clothes that are produced in factories. Mr. Sambath said it is difficult to avoid some harmful choices, for example, he must drive a car because there is not a good public transportation system. He has recently

made some changes, like not using plastic and turning off lights when he does not need them. He has stopped eating wildlife and using furniture made from Cambodian trees.

#### Peacemaking and the Environment

According to Mr. Sambath, active nonviolence and conflict resolution can help people preserve the environment. He believes knowledge about how to address conflict nonviolently is an important skill that activists and other people should have. Sometimes they have conflicts within their group that makes it difficult to work as a team. Peace KASH can help them negotiate with private companies, offenders, and local authorities.



**Ms. Chanra**

Deputy director at CCFC

#### Environmental peace KASH

Ms. Chanra said she has done things that harm the environment, like burning gasoline in her moto, using plastic bags, littering, and eating wildlife. She said she must make these decisions because they are popular and convenient. Some of these habits, however, she has changed. Now she

does not throw out her garbage in public places and she uses reusable containers. Even though she likes eating some wildlife, she does not do it. She will continue to join the tree planting and sharing about environmental protection to people around her.

#### Peacemaking and the environment

She said that peacebuilding is useful for forest activists because they need to know how to address conflicts with offenders (loggers) and to mediate their other conflicts.

#### Expectations

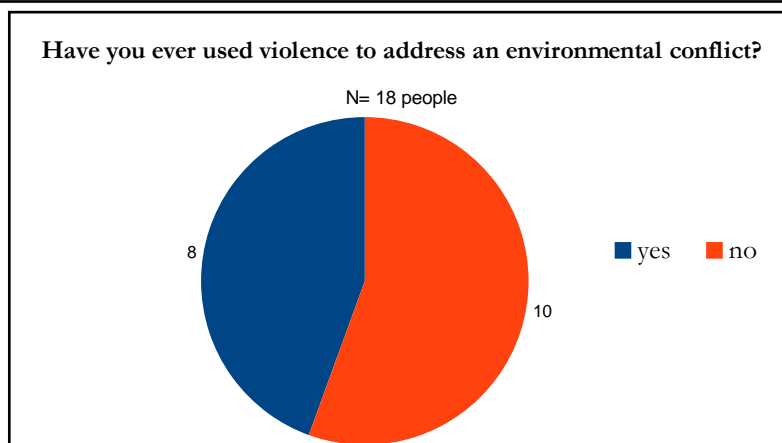
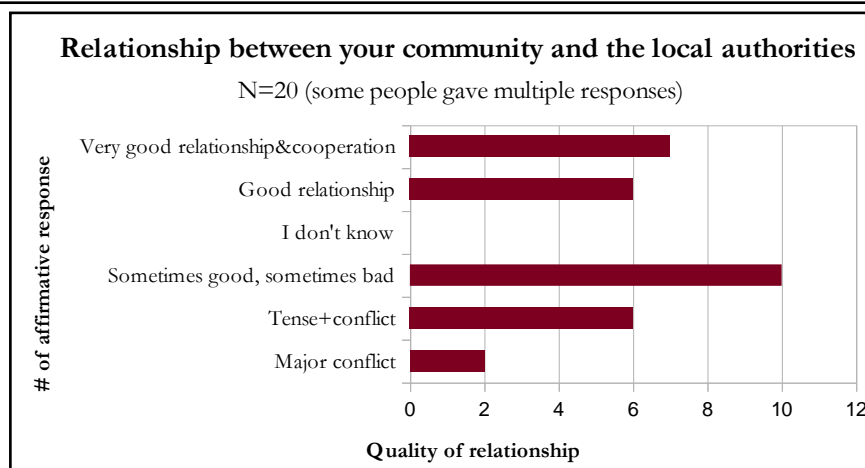
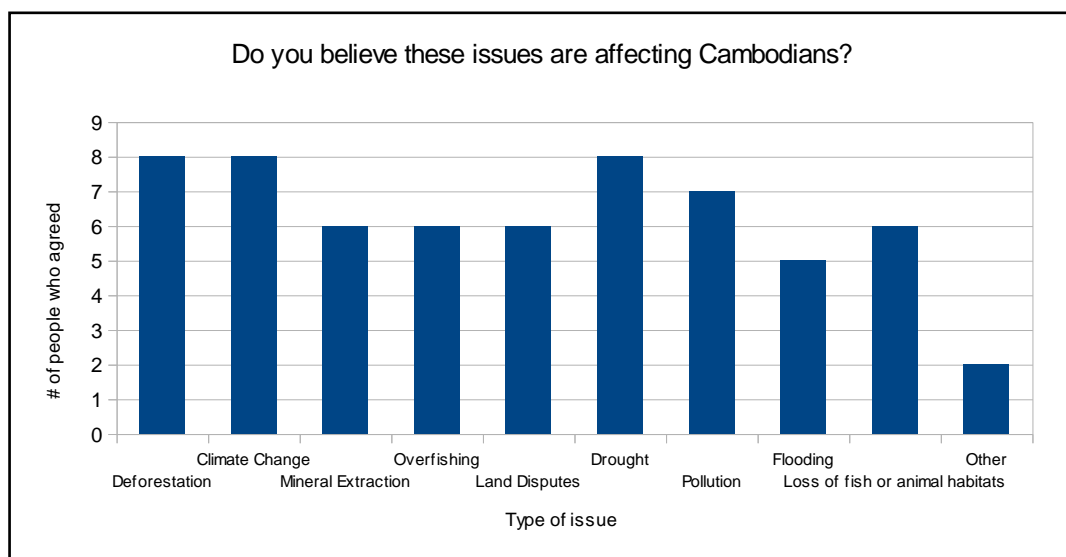
Ms. Chanra said she hopes more people will think critically about their actions and how they affect the environment.





## Quantitative Survey Results

A quantitative survey was given to 119 people—12 peacebuilders, 8 partners and non-partners, and 99 people who joined the 2016 tree-planting event in Kampong Thom province. This survey assessed their opinions about current environmental issues, their own relationship to the environment, and how they have dealt with environmental-related conflicts. At the time this was published, only the results of the 20 core informants were finalized. Here are the highlights from the peacebuilder, partner, and non-partner Cambodian questionnaires.





## Arbor Day Tree-planting Event 05 - 08 July 2016



More than 170 people from Phnom Penh, local forest communities, and various provinces worked together to plant 2,600 saplings in the Prey Lang forest near Kbal Klaa community, Kampong Thom province. Highlights included sharing by local forest activists, song and theater performances, a forest walk, and dance parties.





## Conclusion

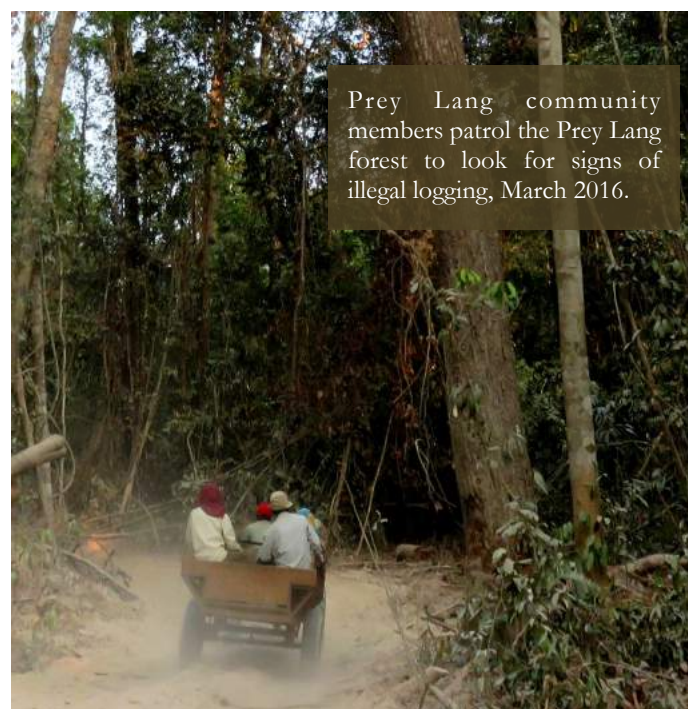
Like other countries around the world, Cambodia is facing a myriad of environmental issues that have negatively impact the lives of Cambodians. Because 70% of the population relies on natural resources as the source of their income, issues like deforestation, climate change, land insecurity, and degradation of the environment take a serious toll on many people. Rural and indigenous communities and other vulnerable populations are disproportionately affected.

Environmental issues are interconnected with human conflict in Cambodia. These issues pit loggers against forest communities, activists against authorities, neighbors against neighbors, communities against companies, and even activists against activists.

This study revealed that there are many Cambodians who care deeply about the environment and are committed to acting on their convictions. People have made individual KASH changes, joined collective campaigns, and patrol Cambodia's forests to rid them of loggers.

There is still a great need for more people to develop peace KASH related to active nonviolence,

conflict resolution and transformation, forgiveness, nonviolent communication, and active listening. The more people are able to practice these things, the better they will be able to address conflicts that often get in the way of the ultimate goal: being stewards of the environment so that everyone can benefit from it now and in the future.



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