

Empowering Women in Forest Communities of Cambodia



Peace Bridges Organization

Project Summary

Background on Peace Bridges Organization and Past Projects

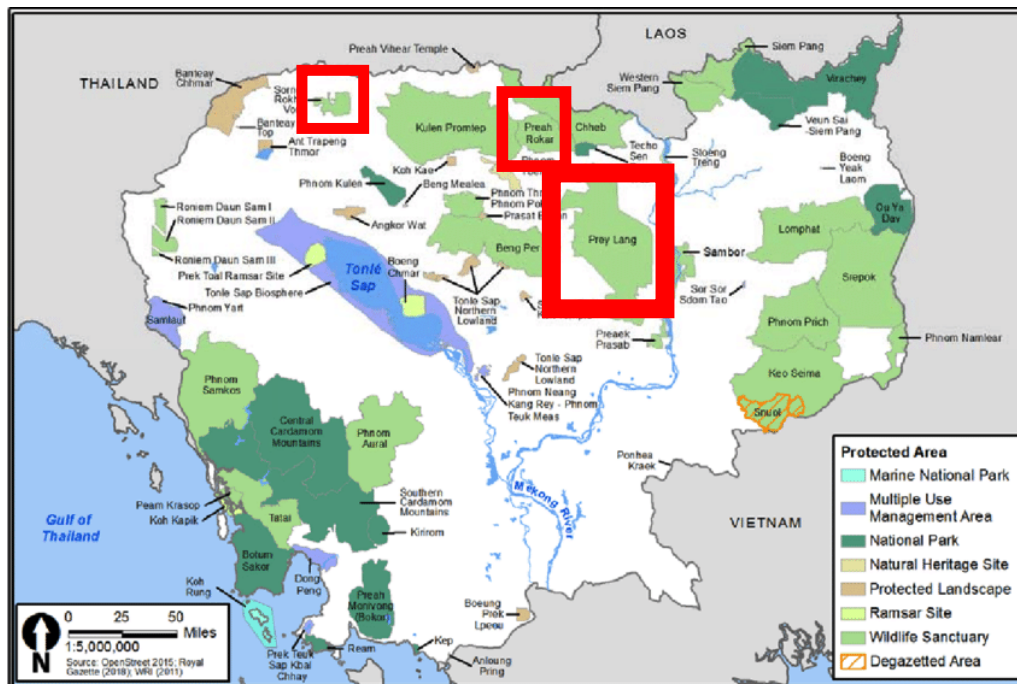
Peace Bridges is a Cambodian nonprofit organisation dedicated to long-term, strategic partnerships with committed individuals and organisations who want to develop knowledge, attitudes, skills, and habits for effective conflict resolution and transformation. Since its inception, Peace Bridges has evolved from working with local Christian pastors and churches to working with Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, and secular partners, as well as community-based organizations, local government offices (e.g., commune councils), and other strategic partners who offer conflict transformation services or mainstream peacebuilding into their work.

The mission of Peace Bridges is to join in advocating for people who experience injustice by building and mobilising a network of partners, conducting capacity building, and supporting the peacebuilders and partners to be resources to their communities on conflict resolution and transformation through active nonviolence. Peace Bridges is recognised by both community and government actors alike as a promoter of peacebuilding skills, a convener of dialogue, and a bridge among different stakeholder group.

Since 2016, Peace Bridges has been engaging with forest communities to increase their capacity to transform conflicts and mobilize their communities for social and environmental justice campaigns.

- **The Prey Lang Forest Network (PLCN)** since 2014
Location: Prey Lang forest (Kampong Thom, Kratie, Stung Treng and Preah Vihear provinces)
- **The Preahrokar Forest Community Network (PFCN)** since 2020
Location: Prey Preah Rokha forest (Preah Vihear province)
- **Forest defenders in the Monk Community Forest** since 2020
Location: Sorng Rukhavon forest (Oddar Meanchey province)

Over the next five years, we aim to expand our program and focus on training and coaching women leaders, building gender awareness in male leaders, and opening up opportunities for women's participation, networking, decision making, and dialogue in conservation and community issues.



The three forest areas where Peace Bridges is supporting local peace and environmental protection efforts.

Project Overview: Empowering Indigenous Women in Forest Communities

Project Duration: January 2025 – December 2029 (five years)

Project Locations: Phnom Penh, Kratie, Stung Treng, Preah Vihear, Kampong Thom

Direct Beneficiaries: 20 individuals (12% men)

Indirect Beneficiaries: 4000 (50% women, youth and children)

Background and Project Rationale

Gender discrimination has limited the capacity of women in forest communities to build peace, and advocate for women, children, Indigenous people, and the environment. This project builds the capacity of women and creates opportunities for women to address these injustices.

Project Goal

To enhance women's capacity to engage in community peacebuilding and environmental protection activities, and to support their active participation, decision-making, and leadership within the community.

Key Activities

Networking: Women leaders will actively engage in various women's gatherings to exchange experiences and gain inspiration from other women leaders and activists.

Decision-Making Engagement: Women leaders will be supported to participate in meetings with male leaders to stay informed and actively contribute to decision-making processes that impact the community's future and well-being.

Natural Resources Protection and Conservation Efforts: Women will be supported to join efforts to safeguard local natural resources, promote sustainable practices, and advocate for policies that prioritise environmental conservation and community resilience.

Leadership and Support for Women to organise Community Peacebuilding Initiatives (CPIs): CPIs are community-driven events and initiatives designed to foster peace and collaboration within the community. Women leaders will be supported to lead local women's groups, empowering them to actively organise and participate in community events and collaborate on strategic planning to address local challenges effectively.

Six-Monthly Capacity-Building and Coaching: A key form of support for leaders in organising CPIs are regular capacity-building and coaching sessions held every six months. At these training meetings, men and women leaders are equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to evaluate past CPIs, and plan and implement future CPIs.

Project Overall Budget & Source of Funds

Total Project Cost for Year 1	Amount	Partners
US\$ 77,907	US\$ 7,659.00	Goal for Global Giving Fundraiser
	US\$ 26,648.00	Donor 1
	US\$ 22,000.00	Donor 2
	US\$ 2,600.00	Donor 3
	US\$ 2,000.00	Donor 4
	US\$ 5,000.00	Donor 5
	US\$ 12,000.00	Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)

Background: Challenges faced by women in forest communities of Cambodia

The intersectional issues for the women Peace Bridges works with in Cambodia's forest communities can be simplified into four inter-linking injustices:

Minority group discrimination

The Kuy people in the forest communities that Peace Bridges works with, are one of the 24 Indigenous groups representing 1-2% of the Cambodian population, compared to the Khmer who constitute 90% of the population.¹ The Kuy experience stigmatisation and marginalisation as a result of their ethnic identity.

The traditional Kuy belief system is tied to the forest landscape. The sacred sites within the forest often hold deep cultural and spiritual significance, serving as repositories of traditional knowledge, rituals, and practices passed down through generations. However, these sites are increasingly threatened by deforestation, land development, and environmental degradation. As a result, the cultural identity and spiritual well-being of minority communities like the Kuy are under threat, exacerbating existing inequalities and marginalisation within Cambodian society.

Poverty

Poverty remains a significant issue in rural Cambodia, of which forest communities are a part. Many rural Cambodians rely on subsistence farming, which provides limited and unreliable income. Small-scale farmers often lack access to modern agricultural techniques and financial services that could improve productivity and income. The volatility of agricultural markets further exacerbates their economic vulnerability.

Rural areas are particularly vulnerable to climate change impacts like droughts, floods, and changing weather patterns. These environmental challenges can devastate crops and livestock, leading to food insecurity and deepening poverty.

Government services and infrastructure in rural areas, such as health clinics, schools, roads, clean water, public transport, electricity, and communication are often under-resourced, unreliable, and difficult to access. This leads to poorer health, education and economic outcomes compared to urban areas.

3. Gender discrimination

Some of the ways in which gender discrimination manifests for women in these forest-dependent communities include:

- Traditional gender restrictions on participation in wage labour or entrepreneurship
- Gender disparities in access to land, credit, and productive resources
- Unequal access to education and healthcare
- Primary responsibility for unpaid care work such as looking after children and household chores
- Gender-based violence including domestic violence, exploitation, and trafficking together with limited access to legal recourse, support services, and social protection.

Since 2020 Peace Bridges has been working with women in forest communities. These women have identified as concerns family violence; drug and alcohol dependence; poverty; gang violence; and natural resource destruction. However, gender

¹<https://opendevelopmentcambodia.net/topics/ethnic-minorities-and-indigenous-people/>

discrimination has means women are effectively excluded from participating in community life and so have not had opportunities to develop skills for collectively campaigning about the issues that affect them. Empowering women as agents of change and decision-makers in community issues is essential for promoting gender equality, poverty alleviation, and sustainable development in these areas.

Environmental injustice and natural resource conflict

As previously stated, the Kuy's customary land is under enormous threat from deforestation. Destruction of local natural resources significantly impacts women. They are the main collectors and users of non-timber forest products to directly provide family needs and as a source of family income.

Community networks engaged in forest protection find themselves in conflict with those involved in land grabbing, forest encroachment, and illegal logging. They are often faced with pressure from outside, as well internal conflicts that arise from working together under stress and threats.

Appendix:

1. Vision

We want to see all people in Cambodia living with peace, dignity and justice.

2. Mission

To promote the participation and cooperation of all Cambodians in addressing injustice, managing access to [natural] resources, promoting respect for human rights and upholding good governance practices.

3. Identity & Values

Peace Bridges is a Christian non-government organisation that engages in peacebuilding through: 1) building local capacities for peace, 2) serving and embracing all diverse communities [religious, ethnic, socio-economic] and 3) grounded in its core values as an organisation. We have identified several core values which are central to the work of our organisation, and to which we are fully committed as staff members of the organisation. They are as follows:

- **Transparency** We commit to transparency within the organisation as well as in the community. To us this means sharing information internally and with the communities and ensuring that staff are involved in decision making of the organisation. We will use do no harm and financial audits as tools for ensuring transparency.

- **Accountability** - We commit to accountability in the use of donor resources, in our responsibilities to the community, and to ourselves as an organisation. To us this means taking care of financial resources, listening to and respecting the voice and needs of the community members, and making sure they are satisfied with our services. We plan to use do no harm and regular evaluations as tools for ensuring accountability.
- **Honesty and openness** - We commit to the value of honesty and openness in all our internal and external dealings. To us this means being open about our Christian identity, while at the same time embracing and respecting all faiths [see non-discrimination and diversity]. It also means being open to and receiving feedback in an honest way, and being courageous to share our ideas within the team and to listen to one another. We plan to use active listening and non-violent communication as tools for honesty and openness.
- **Non-discrimination** - We commit to non-discrimination of all people, regardless of class, age, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, sexual preference, political orientation, ability or faith. In line with our Christian ethos, we work with and serve people from all walks of life.
- **Respect for diversity (religious, political)** - Peace Bridges is a Christian organisation based in the values and beliefs of the Christian faith. We are committed, however, to embrace people from all faiths (Muslim, Buddhist, animist, other) in our work with the communities. Moreover, we are inclusive in terms of celebrating and encouraging people from different backgrounds to practice their faiths. To us diversity also includes all the characteristics mentioned under non-discrimination. We will use reflection and learning to ensure that we respect diversity.
- **Cooperation and teamwork** We are committed to working together, with solidarity, unity, mutuality, and respect as a team. To us this means respecting each other's ideas, sharing information and knowledge freely, supporting one another with tasks, encouraging each other to develop our weaknesses, and growing together. Cooperation and teamwork outside the organisation means working in productive and mutual beneficial and open partnerships with other organisations.