

# Banding Together

By uniting to fight land grab by business interests, members of the Preynub II Community Fishery in Cambodia have set an example for other communities

It's early Tuesday morning, and along a dike that separates the mangrove forest from the fish nursery habitat, Ream Mosavy is collecting blue shell mussels. For generations, his community has harvested mussels here, a means to their very survival. But in 2016, a powerful business person grabbed 45 ha of the community's land, threatening the community's food supply. Approximately 45 ha of the mangrove forest were encroached upon by the entrepreneur who wanted to convert the land into a coconut plantation. "Our community depends largely on natural resources—fishing

and internal rules and regulations to manage resources on its common property. This status put Preynub in a relatively stronger position to exercise its community's rights in excluding outsiders. To counter the powerful vested interests that were responsible for the encroachment, Preynub used the mass media to focus on the issue. They reached out to television channels and provided information on the encroachment. Their story received widespread news coverage, and attracted the attention of provincial and national authorities.

The Provincial Governor quickly called for an investigation that led to the community being granted back its land, with a commitment of no further attempts at encroachment. "It's because of this dependence (for food) that our community makes special efforts to take care of our resources," Mosavy says. "We are able to not only manage our resources, but, if required, we can also mobilize collective efforts to stop encroachment of our forest land from external commercial interests." The Preynub II Community Fishery is responsible for managing an area of 4,500 ha, which comprise 650 ha of mangrove forest. Its prized location, close to rich resources and along the national highway, provides it with easy access to natural resources, local markets and public services.

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and forests—for our daily needs, and we don't have to spend a lot of money on purchasing food items. If the forest is no more, we would find it extremely difficult to survive," says Mosavy, Chief of the Preynub II Community Fishery.

Mosavy knew if the community did not act soon, they would lose their land. So they organized a campaign to regain control of it. First, a formal complaint was filed with support from the Fisheries Administration. In a sign of internal solidarity, all community members stood up against the entrepreneur and either signed or put their thumbprint on the complaint.

Preynub, as a registered Community Fishery, has legal documents endorsed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries that include a clear defined boundary,

## Alternative livelihood

The Cambodia REDD+ Programme, supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (REDD = United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries) and the Forest Carbon Partnership

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Villagers with blood cockles collected from the sea. Preynub's success shows that empowered local communities can protect their resources and property

Facilities, in collaboration with the Fisheries Administration, supports Preynub's efforts to reduce deforestation and forest degradation. The programme enhances the capacity of local communities and authorities to address forest encroachment through awareness raising, patrolling activities, reporting and documentation. In addition, new and alternative livelihood opportunities such as ecotourism provide an incentive for communities to protect resources.

There are signs too that within the government there is recognition that strong communities bring both better protection of the environment and

stronger economic growth. The draft Environmental Codes, championed by the Minister of Environment, Say Samal, give wide-ranging powers to the local government and local communities. The codes also provide a new direction in sustainable development, and a radical transfer of powers to local councils and communities. Preynub's success in regaining its land proves that empowered local communities that band together and work with the local authorities can protect their resources and property. It can serve as an important lesson for other communities facing similar situations. ♣

#### For more



<http://www.fao.org/3/a-i7206e.pdf>

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