

# BOEUNG TOMPUN LAKE: FUTURE UNKNOWN?

## ***FIVE RESIDENTS TELL THEIR STORIES***

# F and F #25 February 2015

## **FACTS and FIGURES**

is a publication on urban issues  
by Sahmakum Teang Tnaut (STT)



Boeung Tompun is home to an estimated 1,500 families from 13 different communities around the lake. The Boeung Tompun lake area covers approximately 2,600 hectares of land, including 520 hectares of surface water, in the Meanchey district. It plays an essential role in Phnom Penh's wastewater treatment and flood regulation.<sup>1</sup>

When water is disposed of, the drainage system pumps it out to the wetlands south of the city, such as Boeung Tompun. There, the dirty water filters through the dense vegetation—that captures nutrients from the wastewater—before being released into the Tonle Bassac River. Boeung Tompun also helps control flooding in the city. The lakes around Phnom Penh serve as natural reservoirs, temporarily storing rainwater before being drained or pumped out to residents and businesses.<sup>2</sup>

In 2009, the government granted approval for private companies to develop Boeung Tompun Lake. Since then, development firms have been filling the lake in with sand. As expected, it has led to a number of environmental and sanitation concerns. Flooding in the city has intensified year by year and residents in the surrounding communities have suffered from growing levels of stagnant, dirty water and threat of eviction.



Derm Svay Community in Phum 7, Phsa Deum Thkov



Morning Glory & Water Mimosa Farm at Prek Takong 1



Settlement in Prek Takong Village



Construction near the International School of Phnom Penh (ISPP)

## Case #1: Mr. Kun Samnang



Mr. Kun Samnang outside his home in Prek Takong

I am forty years old and single. I was born in Takeo province and stopped going to school in grade 5. I have been living in this settlement for more than 15 years with 6 family members. I first came to live in Phnom Penh in 1981 and my family settled near our current house at the time. Before, I worked at a brick factory, which was owned by the state. After the factory collapsed, my family and other brick factory workers were moved to this settlement in 1998. There were approximately 20 families.

My family occupied a plot of land that measured 15m x 22m. Once we had constructed our house, the local authority would not ratify our occupancy. They claimed that “the land is state property and no one could own or privatize it.” We did not agree with the authority’s decision since private citizens and merchants already owned some of the plots of land. Thus, my community made a complaint to the Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction (MLMUPC). Finally, the authority reduced their threats; later on, some other households gradually relocated to this settlement as well.

I started planting water vegetables (morning glory/water spinach, water mimosa) in the Boeung Tompun area in 2007, by renting a flooded field of 0.5 hectares. I had to spend 2,000,000 Riel (around USD 500) per year to rent this cultivated field. I could harvest my vegetables two to three times per month with

earnings of 300,000 Riel to 400,000 Riel (around USD 75 to USD 100) each month. In 2011, development works began to take place, filling in the area with sand. I had to leave my cultivated field to the sand. I shifted to more than 5 different locations to try and grow more crops but they kept being filled in with sand. Consequently, I quit that job in mid-2013. I am now a construction worker, but I can only earn from 60,000 Riel to 80,000 Riel (around USD 15 to USD 20) per week.



Mr. Kun Samnang on the sand surrounding his settlement in Prek Takong

The company never communicated with the community about the development works. In 2013, the local authority came to measure our houses without informing the owners, which makes us worry about our houses. I am really scared of being evicted since I don’t have a legal land title. The local authority has never supported our housing and refuses to certify this settlement. I’m afraid that the authority will cause further harm and make us resettle. In the past, I was really happy with my simple livelihood, natural lake, and green environment. I’m so disappointed with losing the lake.

## Case #2: Ms. Khut Saren

I am forty-three years old and I have 12 family members (7 from my immediate family and 5 grandchildren). I was born in Angkor Borei district, Takeo province. I stopped studying in grade 2 and my parents died during the Pol Pot regime. My plan to cultivate rice in the province did not succeed so I decided to come to Phnom Penh to find a job.



**Ms. Khut Saren at her home in Phum Tnaut Chrum**

When I first moved to the city, I stayed with my brother who was a teacher near the PC market in Khan Meanchey and I lived there for 7 years. My family saved some money and we decided to buy a plot of land in the Boeung Tompun area. It was affordable and the living conditions were acceptable at the time. My current housing was certified by the commune village/Sangkat.

Here in Phum Tnaut Chrum, I am a farmer (planting water vegetables such as morning glory and water mimosa) and I started in early 2007. I can earn from 40,000 Riel – 50,000 Riel (around USD10 – USD12.50) per day. However, I need to spend approximately 30,000 Riel to 40,000 Riel (around USD7.50 to USD10) for daily household consumption and my children’s studies. Sometimes I want to quit, as it is a dirty, smelly, and unhealthy work. Since I have very little education, I cannot find a better job.

When the development company arrived, everything changed. It was very inconvenient for my job. I had to move and rent another cultivated field far away from my original place since it had been filled with the sand. As a result, the price to rent a field has sharply increased from USD 500 to USD 1,000 per hectare per year, as there was a shortage of cultivated land. I also had to pay extra for transportation to my new cultivated field. The cultivated water vegetable (water spinach, water mimosa) yield has gradually decreased because the new cultivated field was shallow and filled with dirty water. The development project caused flooding in my settlement.

In 2011, the company did not construct a wall around the development zone. As a result, huge amounts of dust came into our settlement. At that time, some families (including mine) said “we will sell our houses to whomever at whatever price since we are struggling in this terrible situation”.

I’m really afraid of being forcefully evicted. I don’t want to move or relocate because I can access public services easily here in this urban area. We all know about the cases of people at Borei Keila and Boeung Kak Lake when the residents were forced out of their houses without appropriate compensation. The rich always win and exploit the benefits while the poor are vulnerable.

### **Case #3: Som Sreylin\***

I am thirty-one years old and married with one child. I stopped going to school in grade 3 after the Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) coup on July 6th, 1997. We were quite poor at that time.

I currently work as a vegetable planter (morning glory/water spinach and water mimosa) and it is the main source of my family’s income. With favorable conditions, I can plant these kinds of vegetable in both the rainy and dry season. Our current settlement, Phum Prek Takong, is my birthplace and I have been living in this village for 31 years now. The Boeung Tompun Lake offers most of the people living here with a livelihood. When I was younger, some families cultivated rice paddies, planted multiple crops (such as morning glory, water spinach, water mimosa, lotus, water lily), and fished.

I chose to devote all my time to this profession, as there is a daily market demand. Due to my low level of education and limited business knowledge, I cannot get a better job. I can earn between 400,000 to 500,000 Riel (around USD100 to USD125) per month from selling water mimosa, while selling morning glory earns from 200,000 to 300,000 Riel (around USD50 to USD75) per month.

I used to live with my parents on a 15 x 18 meter plot of land, which was certified by the Sangkat. I got married in 2007 and my husband and I constructed our own house in 2013. We bought a plot of land from another villager, which measured 5 x 12 meters. The village chief certified our new land.

We only heard rumors related to the development project in our community in 2013, when the commune/Sangkat came and ambiguously told us “please don’t worry about the development project around your settlement; it will not harm your family. If there is any impact, it will be compensated with the appropriate value”. When I heard that, I was so afraid of being forcefully evicted since my house and others do not have titling by the Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction. We already knew about the forced evictions by the authorities through armed force and violence in other communities (i.e. Boeung Kak and Borei Keila).

There are several severe impacts the project has had on our community such as transportation difficulties and regular flooding. Furthermore, the community is always dusty and sometimes it is difficult to just have a meal. I do not expect this project to benefit the whole community. I believe it will have a negative impact on our socio-economic status and daily livelihoods.

I’m worried and afraid that once this project is completed, they will evict the poor people living in the area. I would prefer an on-site upgrading solution rather than having to relocate. But if the company asks us to move, we will demand an appropriate solution or compensation.

*\* Name has been changed for anonymity*

## Case #4: Ms. Thu Sarom



Ms. Thu Sarom standing by her settlement in Derm Svay community

I am a forty year old widow with 3 children. I first settled in Boeung Tompun in 1990 with the recognition of the village chief and Sangkat level. When I settled in Sahakum Deum Svay we had occasional flooding but the water was clean and the environment was not polluted at that time. Also here I feel safe; I have never been robbed in my community.

I used to be a vendor (selling clothes) at Heng Ly market, but I quit that job after 3 years because there was very little pay and the market was far from home. Now I work as a water vegetable cultivator (parsley, herbs, etc.). In this profession, I can earn approximately 60,000 riel to 80,000 riel (USD 15 – USD 20) per day. In turn, I need to spend approximately 30,000 riel (USD 7.5) a day for my children’s studies and food.

In late 2014, just before the water festival, the Sangkat and the company invited the 42 affected families (including mine) in this settlement to a meeting. They said, “Your housing will be affected by the Samdach Techo Boulevard construction and those households will be compensated”. But they have not yet told us how much they plan to compensate us with. A rumour I heard from others households is that the company proposed USD 350 per square meter (m<sup>2</sup>) of land, but no one is happy with this. Instead, we suggest at least USD 1,000 per square meter. It is also rumored that the company threatened the affected households saying “you should accept the

proposed price or you will get nothing if you don't".

I'm not sure if the development project will benefit poor people like me, even if this area will become a modern city with nice infrastructure. If they demolish my house, then it will only cause suffering. Development is always good for the rich but always affects the poor.

Boeung Tompun Lake was a beautiful natural lake that people always enjoyed for its views. I am very unhappy to lose the lake, but the government wants more development.

### Case #5: Ms. Aom Sopheap



Ms. Aom Sopheap, a mother living in the Toul Roka 4 village

I am a forty-seven year old widow with one child. I never even finished primary school, as my family was quite poor at the time. I am now living with my sister in Phum Toul Roka 4, Sangkat Chak Angre Kraom.

After the collapse of the Pol Pot regime, many people gradually came and settled in this community. I bought a plot of land next to the swamp in 1990 and finished construction of my house in 1997. The plot was ratified by the group leader and the village chief at that time. I used to work in a beauty salon. I earned approximately 40,000 to 50,000 Riel (around USD10 – USD12.50) a day. As an additional source of income, we planted a lotus garden in the swamp in Boeung Tompun Lake near my house, which I bought from the neighbors. I collected its flowers and seeds and sold them

at the market, which usually earned 60,000 to 80,000 Riel (around USD15 – USD20) a week.

Later on, I decided to quit these two jobs and I now own a small business selling street food (desserts, drinks and fruits) targeted at primary school students, which makes a small amount of money. I can earn between USD 120 to USD 130 a month from renting rooms to garment workers in the area. The sand filling in the development area not only forced me to stop renting rooms, but also affected many other people who depend on this area for income.



Ms. Aom Sopheap's Home in Toul Roka 4 village

The village chief clearly told us "the land in this settlement will be affected by the development project of Samdach Hun Neang road". He also suggested that all households living near the site should leave their homes and rent somewhere else for 7 to 8 months so that they could implement the road development project and the authority claimed that they would be responsible for the rental costs incurred for those affected households during this period. In addition, they promised to compensate all affected households with an actual plot of land with houses, equivalent to our current ones if we agreed to move. However, they showed us photos of the relocation site they proposed to relocate us to and it is barren, with no housing and is still covered by the water. We are totally unclear about the negotiation progress between the affected households in this settlement and the authorities. All the affected households were strongly opposed to the suggestion, and claimed that they were

legally occupying their land. They have been living in this settlement for many years, ever since the collapse of the Pol Pot regime. Most of them demanded appropriate monetary compensation. Many people (including myself)

are living in fear of being forcefully evicted. I am not happy with the current construction project or the Samdach Hun Neang road. It has led to the loss of our lake and has severely affected people's livelihood opportunities.

### **Benefits of Boeung Tompun:**

- Provides employment opportunities for income; people can fish and plant crops such as morning glory in the lake and sell these at markets in Phnom Penh.
- Offers families an affordable place to live close to the city.
- Plays an important role in the environment, as it acts as a natural reservoir for flood relief and wastewater storage.
- It is a natural lake that provides residents with a beautiful landscape.

### **Issues with the Development Project:**

- For several years, flooding has become much more frequent and flood waters take a lot longer to drain away.
- Settlements are covered with floodwater and waste, which is a sanitation and environmental hazard.
- Waterborne diseases have led to widespread illnesses such as fever, skin infections, and diarrhea.
- Residents don't have enough money to buy or rent elsewhere.
- The flooding has partially damaged some of the housing structures.
- Noise disturbance.
- Transportation has become difficult as the main road is blocked with a sand barrier.
- The dust from all the sand and construction blows into people's houses, affecting food etc.
- The presence of insects, snake, and mosquitos has increased significantly.

### **Residents' Requests**

- We would like to call on the government and NGOs to come and help the poor people in this settlement, as we are under threat of eviction.
- If they offer appropriate solutions or compensation (a plot of land and housing in an urban area where I can access public services like I can now), we will consider it.
- The government should compensate us in cash with the appropriate market price of our land.
- We suggest that the government and the development agency should consider the poor and the impact from any project on the community and the environment.
- We call on the government not to use violence or forcefully evict residents.

### **Source acknowledgements, References:**

1. Sokheng, V. (2011). Fears for more lake projects. Retrieved from <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/fears-more-lake-projects/>
2. Odom, S., & Rhoads, C. (2014). As lake disappears, a development dilemma. Retrieved from <https://www.cambodiadaily.com/archives/as-lake-disappears-a-development-dilemma-62718/>

# ផែនទីបឹងទំពុន

## BOEUNG TOMPUN MAP

### ស្ថានភាពបច្ចុប្បន្ននៃការចាក់ឧស្ម័នលំដាប់បឹង Current Situation of Sand-Filling of the Lake



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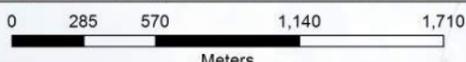
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 Datum: WGS 1984



ប្រភព:  
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 Sources: AZ Proposed Development area, Proposed Sewage area (AZ, 2012), Sand Filling  
 (Google earth pro, 2013, 2014, 2015), University, Pagoda, Stream (STI, 2009), Main Road  
 OpenStreetMap 2013)

### សមាគមធានាគ្រួសារ

Sahmakum Teang Toun - a Cambodian Urban NGO

#### កំណត់សម្គាល់ Legend

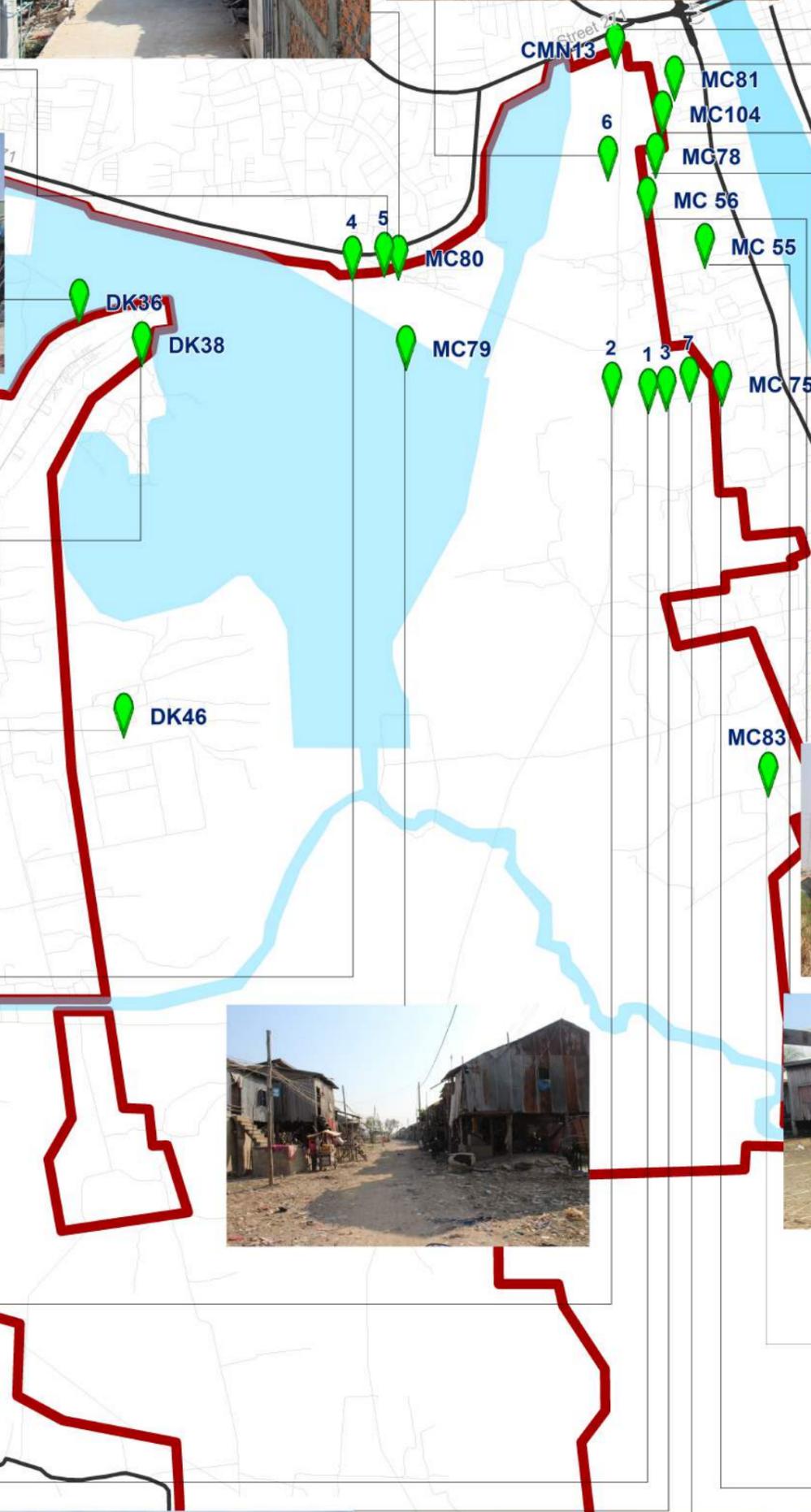
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- សាកលវិទ្យាល័យ
- University Area

- បរិមាណឧស្ម័ន ២០១៣
- Sand filling 2013
- បរិមាណឧស្ម័ន ២០១៤
- Sand filling 2014
- បរិមាណឧស្ម័ន ២០១៥
- Sand filling 2015
- អូរ
- Stream

- គម្រោងប្លង់អភិវឌ្ឍន៍ទីក្រុងរណបឹងទំពុន
- Proposed Boeung Tompun Satellite City Development Area
- គម្រោងប្លង់តំបន់ស្តុកទឹកស្អុយ
- Proposed Sewage Area
- គម្រោងប្លង់មហាវិថី
- Proposed Boulevard
- ផ្លូវសំខាន់ៗ
- Main Road

# បឹងទំពុន៖ អនាគតកាលមិនច្បាស់លាស់

## BOEUNG TOMPUN LAKE: FUTURE UNKNOWN?

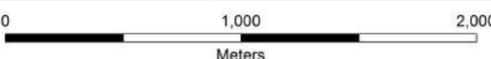


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**Sources:**  
 Urban poor settlements (STP:2014), Phnom Penh boundary (NEC: 2012), Khan boundary (NEC: 2012), Sangkat boundary (NEC: 2012), Road (OSM:2014), Railway, River/Lake (Unknown).



### កំណត់សម្គាល់ Legend

- ទីតាំងលំនៅឋាន នៅតំបន់បឹងទំពុន  
Settlement at Boeung Tompun Lake Area
- ផ្លូវ  
Road
- តំបន់គម្រោងអភិវឌ្ឍន៍  
Proposed Development Area
- បឹងទំពុន  
Boeung Tompun Area

- | Code Name                     | ID Name                          |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| CMN13 : Deum Svay             | 1 : ISPP                         |
| MC55 : Prek Takong 2          | 2 : Next to ISPP                 |
| MC56 : Prek Takong            | 3 : COMIN KHMER                  |
| MC75 : Toul Roka 4            | 4 : BOREY PENG HUOTH (a)         |
| MC78 : Prek Tanou             | 5 : BOREY PENG HUOTH (a)         |
| MC79 : Prek Takong 1          | 6 : Path across Development Area |
| MC80 : Tnaut Chrum            | 7 : Under Construction 1         |
| MC81 : Prek Tanou 1           |                                  |
| MC83 : Prek Talong            |                                  |
| MC104 : Prek Tanou 2          |                                  |
| DK38 : Chong Toul             |                                  |
| DK46 : Cheung Aek             |                                  |
| DK36 : Kdey Sangkheoum I/Khva |                                  |

