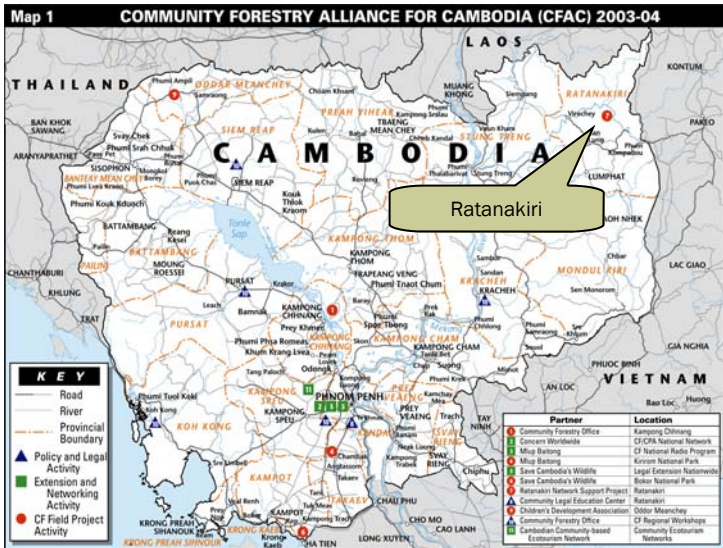


STORIES FROM THE FIELD...

Protecting Land Rights in Ratanakiri, Cambodia



shops are being organized to discuss the situation with regard to culture, rights and natural resource management.

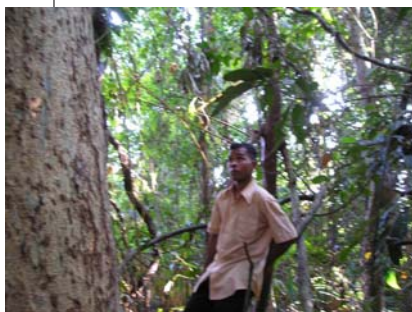
Indigenous communities are unique in that they have both historical, cultural, and religious attachments to the lands and forests they occupy. Villagers tend to associate the land with their ancestors, and burial grounds are usually located in forested areas. Because the indigenous people are animist, there is also a strong connection between and nature spirits. Numerous rituals are held before entering a specific area to appease these spirits and some forests are set aside as “sacred” with special rules of access and use. Trees are also

thought to be the homes of spirits, if these spirits are disturbed many indigenous people believe that they will suffer sickness or even death. Logging completely alters and destroys their landscape and, in doing so, the traditional, communal practices related to land use and resource access are also threatened.



Over the past three years, with support from USAID and the MacArthur Foundation, Community Forestry International has been training and educating energetic extension workers, both young and old, from the indigenous Tampuan, Jarai, and Kreung tribes of Ratanakiri province. These extension workers are part of an indigenous peoples’ network that is dedicated to protecting the land and forest rights of the unique indigenous communities of Ratanakiri province.

Most of Cambodia’s dense forest cover is located in Ratanakiri province at the northeastern corner of Cambodia, bordering Vietnam and Laos. Ratanakiri is divided into 9 districts covering 240 villages and approximately 100,000 people. Of these, 65% are minority hill tribes comprising groups such as the Jarai, Tampuan, Kui, etc. with only about 5% of the people literate. Over the past five years, international monitoring groups estimate that 120% of the land has been appropriated through land sales and concessions for logging, mining, and commercial agriculture.



Located between two Protected Areas (Virachey National Park and Lumphat Wildlife Sanctuary), community forests of the northeastern upland region provide a unique habitat rich in biodiversity.

Ratanakiri Natural Resource Management (RNRM) operates in 4 districts and approximately 30 communes that elect their network representatives. Over 100 villages have received basic land and forest rights training. In each commune work-

The government’s inability to properly enforce laws concerning logging practices has resulted in huge profits for private companies from other countries and payoffs to government officials and the military, at the expense of Cambodia’s forests and local communities who depend upon them for their subsistence and livelihood.

This initiative is building community capacity to resist illegal land sales that have been eroding indigenous culture, depleting forest resources, and threatening the rich biodiversity of the area. Due to these outreach efforts, a growing number of communities have rejected attempts by land grabbers to intimidate villagers and purchase their ancestral domain lands, including sacred forests, for large scale commercial development.

CFI is pleased to be able to continue supporting local NGOs who are making a difference in the lives of many rural Cambodians. For more information call: (855-23) 220 714.