



Farmers sowed rice in accessing their land right in June 2024

# CASE STUDY

## Unified Action for Food Sovereignty: Communities Control Against Corporate takeover

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study explores the transformative journey of communities in the Hengfu concession area of Preah Vihear province, Cambodia, who have become strong, mobilized, and unified both locally and nationally to defend their rights and regain control over their food systems amidst the looming threat of corporate takeovers. Faced with the challenges posed by large-scale land acquisitions and the aggressive expansion of corporate agriculture, these communities have demonstrated remarkable resilience and determination. Through the implementation of sustainable agricultural practices, these farmers have not only improved soil health and biodiversity but also reduced their reliance on chemical inputs, leading to increased crop yields and farm incomes.

Key to their success has been the formation of robust networks and alliances, both within their localities and extending to national and regional levels. These networks have facilitated the exchange of knowledge, resources, and strategies, enabling communities to collectively resist corporate encroachments and advocate for their rights more effectively. The project has also fostered significant improvements in food security and nutrition, empowering women and marginalized groups, and ensuring more equitable distribution of resources and decision-making power.

Moreover, this initiative has seen the communities actively participate in national platforms on food sovereignty and people's empowerment, linking their local struggles with broader regional and global movements. This integration has not only amplified their voices but also strengthened their capacity to influence policy changes in favor of smallholder farmers and indigenous populations. By highlighting these concerted efforts and the tangible outcomes achieved, this case study underscores the importance of community solidarity and collective action in safeguarding food sovereignty and securing sustainable livelihoods against the backdrop of corporate pressures.

### INTRODUCTION

In 2012, the Cambodian government granted economic land concessions (ELCs) in Preah Vihear province to five subsidiaries of a Chinese company named Hengfu, covering a total of 42,422 hectares. These concessions encompass all or part of 26 villages across ten communes, in three districts: Tbaeng Meanchey, Chaeb and Chey Sen significantly impacting the local communities who rely on this land for their livelihoods.

The arrival of Hengfu brought with it plans to transform the region into large-scale sugarcane plantations, a move that threatened the sovereignty, sustainability, and economic stability of local farmers.

### CONTRIBUTIONS

By 2021 The project began by identifying and selecting motivated farmers to participate in trial farms. Regular meetings were facilitated, allowing farmers to analyze current practices, plan collectively, and exchange knowledge. Support was provided as farmers conducted experiments individually and collectively on trial and verification farms.

The project encouraged crop and livestock diversification and reduced reliance on chemical inputs, which led to increased farm incomes and improved soil health. Networking was promoted among trial farmers from different villages within the Hengfu concession area and other districts in Preah Vihear province. This included facilitating farmer-to-farmer exchanges and networking with organizations like the Coalition of Cambodian Farmers Community (CCFC) and Building Community Voices (BCV), broadening their access to resources and expertise.



Farmers exchange to Pursat in October 2023



Prame Indigenous community accessed collective farming in June 2024

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### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

PKH staff will facilitate farmer-led research, exchanges, and the development of a food sovereignty platform to help farmers and allies mobilize against corporate takeovers, focusing on the Hengfu concession area. PKH has supported these communities for years, helping them reclaim and productively use their land.

A farmer-led research program will be implemented to promote innovation, networking, and agro-ecological practices. A food sovereignty platform will be created in collaboration with CYN, CCFC, and others, with participation in regional platforms encouraged. These efforts aim to build strong, unified communities dedicated to defending their rights and food systems.

PKH will train CNA and MPN in community organizing and advocacy. CNA will support community leaders in organizing collective action. These supports will be provided for advocacy efforts to cancel concessions and recognize land rights, involving community-led research, land re-occupations, and sustained campaigns. These actions will disrupt Hengfu's operations and enable communities to control their land.

### LESSON LEARNT

Here are the key lessons learned from the case study, summarized concisely:

- **Community Resilience:** Training and empowering communities enhances their ability to resist external pressures like corporate encroachment.
- **Sustainable Agriculture:** Adopting agro-ecological practices improves soil health, diversifies crops, and boosts economic resilience.
- **Effective Advocacy:** Establishing networks and engaging in advocacy strengthens community voices and influences supportive policies.
- **Economic Stability and Food Security:** Diversifying income sources and promoting local food production improve economic stability and food security.
- **Inclusive Governance:** Empowering women and marginalized groups in leadership roles enhances community participation and decision-making processes.

### OUTCOMES

Throughout the project period, significant strides have been made:

1. strengthening community resilience and control over local food systems amid corporate pressure through training initiatives have equipped community members with essential skills, fostering active participation in resilience planning and reducing corporate interference. Communities have shown increased preparedness and unity in defending their sovereignty, especially indigenous communities.
2. Sustainable agricultural practices, particularly rice-research methods, have been widely adopted, improving soil health and crop diversity. These practices enhance environmental sustainability and reduce dependence on external inputs. For instance, women rice-research group of rice adaptability trial farm.
3. Networking and advocacy efforts have thrived, resulting in new local networks and successful policy advocacy. These efforts have amplified community voices in policy dialogues at regional and national levels. For instance, PCN, NGO Forum, CCFC, BCV, PANAP, PCFS.
4. local farmers have re-accessed their farmland for both individual and collective use. This regained access has enabled them to cultivate their land productively, further enhancing their economic stability and food sovereignty. Supporting document with list of farmer re-occupied in 2024.
5. Inclusive governance initiatives have increased the participation of women and marginalized groups in leadership roles, ensuring diverse perspectives in decision-making. For instance, women trial farm, community fund.

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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Farmer Campaigns with Regional forum of the year