

# SUCCESS STORY

## Tradition Meets Innovation:

### The Cham Pen Ecotourism Initiative

JULY 2024

#### INTRODUCTION

In the tranquil village of Bangkoeun Phal, nestled within the lush landscapes of Rotom Commune in Rovieng District, Preah Vihear Province, a remarkable journey unfolds. The Bangkoeun Phal Indigenous community, recently recognized as a legal entity and progressing toward communal land titling, is pioneering an ecotourism initiative that blends traditional wisdom with sustainable development. Spearheaded by a dedicated group of elders, this initiative aims to preserve cultural heritage and create economic opportunities through the creation of traditional ox-drawn carts as part of the ecotourism master plan in the Cham Pen Community Protected Area, officially sanctioned by the Ministry of Environment in 2020 with total size of 3422hectares.

#### BACKGROUND

The Bangkoeun Phal Indigenous community, with a population of 958 people (470women) from 256 families, is renowned for its vibrant cultural heritage and profound connection to the natural world. Generations of this community have thrived in harmony with the land, embodying a way of life that respects and nurtures the environment.

Cultural and Legal Milestones:

- **Self-Identity Recognition:** On 2 September 2015, the Bangkoeun Phal community has long identified itself as an Indigenous group with a rich cultural heritage, practicing traditional customs and maintaining a deep connection to their ancestral lands.
- **Legal Entity Status:** On 23 December 2016, the community achieved legal entity status, formally recognizing their rights and autonomy under Cambodian law. This milestone has been pivotal in allowing the community to undertake significant development projects while preserving their cultural practices.
- **Communal Land Titling:** The process of communal land titling began in 2024, with the community working towards formal recognition of their ancestral land rights. This step is crucial for securing long-term control over their traditional territories and resources.



Elders: Mr. Prom Chhum and Mr. Ruos Lim  
at Cham Pen site

With these advancements, the community is capitalizing on their newfound legal status to promote their culture and bolster their local economy through sustainable ecotourism. Their initiatives include the creation of two traditional ox-drawn carts, part of a master plan for the Cham Pen Community Protected Area, which has been officially sanctioned by the Ministry of Environment. This project not only showcases their cultural heritage but also supports environmental conservation and economic development.

**The Challenge:** Balancing economic opportunities with environmental preservation was crucial. The community needed a sustainable form of transportation that would highlight their unique cultural identity while minimizing environmental impact.

#### THE ELDERS' INITIATIVE

At the heart of this initiative are four esteemed elders: Mr. Ruos Lim, Mr. Kong Norm, Mr. Prom Chhum, and Ms. Sin Saba. Drawing on their extensive knowledge of traditional practices, they embarked on a mission to create a mode of transportation that would serve both the community and its visitors.

**Creation Process:** Using locally sourced materials and age-old techniques, the elders crafted two ox-drawn carts, embodying the ingenuity and sustainability of traditional design.

**"We wanted to create something that connects us with our ancestors while offering a unique experience to visitors,"** said Mr. Ruos Lim. **"The carts are not just vehicles; they are symbols of our heritage."**

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Elders are installing part of cart

## IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT

**Integration into Ecotourism:** The carts have become a centerpiece of the ecotourism experience, offering visitors an authentic journey through the breathtaking landscapes of Cham Pen site. As tourists travel in these traditional vehicles, they gain a deeper appreciation for the cultural and natural heritage of the area.

"When tourists see the carts and hear the stories behind them, they understand our respect for the land," explained Ms. Sin Saba. "It's a way to share our culture and values with the world."

**Cultural and Environmental Impact:** The project has revitalized traditional skills and fostered cultural pride among community members. By opting for an eco-friendly form of transportation, the community has significantly reduced its carbon footprint, setting a benchmark for sustainable tourism practices.

## OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

**Obstacles Faced:** Initially, the elders encountered skepticism from some community members, outsiders and faced challenges in acquiring materials and resources for their creation.

"At first, not everyone saw the potential of our idea," noted Mr. Ruos Lim. "But with perseverance and community support, we were able to bring our vision to life."

**Solutions and Adaptations:** Through determination and collaboration, the elders organized community fundraisers and partnered with local NGOs, PKH to secure the necessary resources. They also conducted meeting to pass on traditional skills to younger generations, ensuring the project's sustainability and success.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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## COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS

**Empowerment and Involvement:** The initiative has fostered community cohesion, empowering women and youth to actively participate in ecotourism activities and decision-making processes.

"This project has brought our community together in a way we haven't seen before," said Mr. Kong Norm. "Everyone feels proud to contribute and share in our success."

**Economic Opportunities:** With the rise in ecotourism, local businesses and artisans have seen increased patronage, contributing to the community's economic resilience. The project has created jobs and generated income for the village, enabling them to invest in further community development plan.

## LESSON LEARNT

This initiative exemplifies the power of integrating traditional knowledge with modern sustainability practices, inspiring other communities to pursue similar endeavors.

## CONCLUSION

The story of the Bangkoeun Phal elders is a powerful reminder of the enduring value of cultural heritage and community-driven innovation. Through their dedication and vision, they have not only preserved their traditions but have also created a brighter, more sustainable future for their community.



Traditional ox-drawn cart