

Q1 2020

Keo Seima REDD+ Project
Impact Report

**EVER
LAND**



Wildlife
Conservation
Society

Keo Seima's model is meeting the moment

Income generation for Community Protected Area through sustainable bamboo products

Rescue of trapped Asian elephant by Keo Seima REDD+ project staff

Building improved law enforcement capacity

The wave of deforestation that has rippled through Cambodia over the past 10 years has now spread north from the flatlands toward the more hilly, highly forested periphery. Now it has advanced right to the border of Keo Seima. With a nearby 150,000 hectare park completely deforested in recent years, the threat to the Keo Seima landscape is pressing. COVID-19 presents additional threats with the potential for a large influx of people returning to Cambodia.

In Q1, the project has taken critical steps to ensure that it is ready to address these growing threats. The Keo Seima model emphasizes the crucial role of the local communities living in the project area, and the project has strengthened their position by launching an action plan – in partnership with the Provincial Department of Environment and the Police – to strengthen protection of indigenous community titles, thereby preventing people from outside the protected area to settle. As part of this plan, 20 villages in and around the site are being provided resources and support to enforce their legal right to patrol and protect resources within their indigenous lands.

With 130,000 international workers arriving back in Cambodia, the project is also preparing for new pressures as a result of COVID-19. It is strengthening income generation activities in and around the area, and – crucially – working with the Ministry of Land Use Planning and provincial government to find land for this new wave of repatriated Cambodians who will be looking for land to grow food.

The presence of the project has been indispensable at this moment of grave threat, and highlights how high-impact REDD+ can achieve durable forest conservation by deepening community resilience.



Sustainable bamboo production

Members of the newly-formed Sre Preah Community Protected Area have sold sustainably-produced bamboo for some time at a very small scale.

The project is now beginning to utilize bamboo planting as a way to rapidly reforest illegally cleared areas. Combined with training on producing value-added bamboo products, this offers a new way to provide alternative, sustainable income for communities and strengthen this conservation strategy.

Four villages received training on how to produce tea pots, cups, smartphone speaker boxes, and similar products, and the Keo Seima project team has engaged with four suppliers throughout Cambodia to facilitate market linkages.

This activity, though relatively small scale, can have an important impact on the community's livelihood: Small working groups within the community can already earn about \$250/year from this work, which is equivalent to about one year of individual income.



Highlights





Rescue of trapped Asian elephant

Project staff rescued a young male elephant who was trapped in a deep human-made pool in an area of fields and bamboo.

Keo Seima REDD+ project staff from WCS, Provincial Department of the Environment, local Fire Department, local police and local communities all supported the rescue effort

With an estimated 110 Asian elephants in the project area, KSWs holds one of the largest remaining populations of Asian elephants in Cambodia – which has approximately 450 elephants left.

Seima's elephant population is believed to be stable, with only 2 calves lost in the past in 4 years (one to a snare and one who fell into a hole in an accident similar to this one). The project continues to observe reproduction and new calves being born. Human-wildlife conflict, not poaching, is the biggest threat in the landscape.



Building improved law enforcement capacity

Project staff from WCS, the Provincial Department of Environment, and the police held a workshop, using the Law Enforcement Planning Toolkit (LEPT), to undertake in-depth analysis of wildlife crime in KSWs, prioritize key targets, identify gaps in current law enforcement practice, and assess training needs of protected area staff.

A Law Enforcement Strategy & Action Plan was developed, focusing on elephants, primates (Seima, features 80% of the global populations of the black-shanked douc and gibbon), and the Ibis (Cambodia's national bird).

Project staff from WCS, the Provincial Department of Environment, and the police joined the workshop, and agreed to focus strongly on empowering the 20 villages in and around the protected area with training, equipment, and financial support. Many of these are indigenous Bunong communities, with culturally significant spirit and burial forests. The Bunong have the legal right to patrol and to protect resources within their indigenous lands. The workshop team also identified equipment and training needs for the government patrol teams – especially related to utilization of the SMART technology introduced by the project.

Another priority that emerged was the urgent need to address the increasing threat of illegal forest clearance and land grabbing, an increasingly problematic issue in Keo Seima, which is located on a deforestation frontier.

COVID-19 and work-from-home



As a primarily field-based programs, reducing on-the-ground presence from WCS has necessarily impacted project implementation.

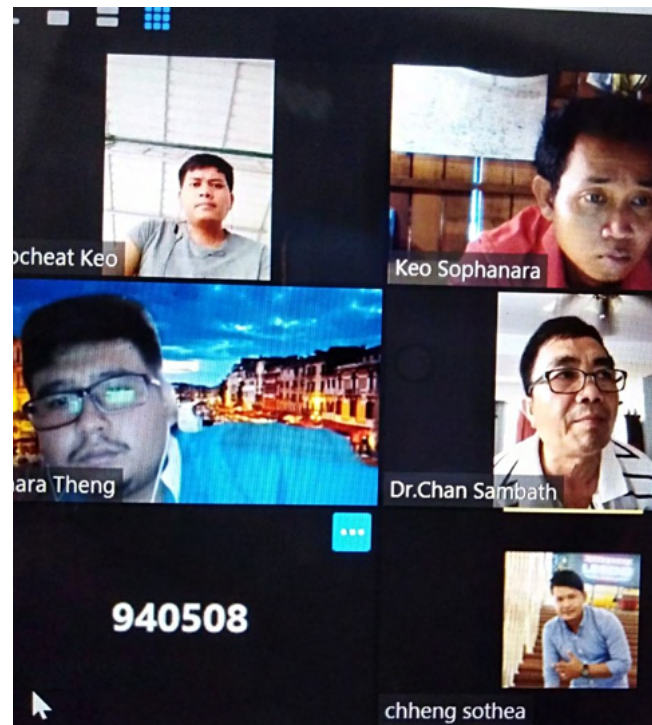
However, Provincial Department of Environment officials continue essential patrols and WCS staff are using the time to improve remote work skills and complete desk-based tasks while coordinating remotely with local community partners.

The biggest concern associated with COVID-19 is that 130,000 international workers have lost work and come home to Cambodia, an emerging issue throughout the country. Two key potential issues emerge. First, these unemployed workers may turn to clearing forest to grow crops or hunting wildlife for food). Second, the loss of remittances from overseas workers will further impact the economy and likely drive further pressure on Cambodia's forest resources.

The project also anticipates loss of income in the project area from reduced eco-tourism later in the year during the normally-busy dry season.



Challenges



Ongoing land clearance on borders of REDD+ project area

The wave of deforestation that has rippled through Cambodia over the past 10 years has now spread north from the flatlands toward the more hilly, highly forested periphery. Now it has advanced right to the border of Keo Seima. With a nearby 150,000 hectare park completely deforested in recent years, the threat to the Keo Seima landscape is pressing. Significant rural-to-rural migration is driving much of this pressure as people seek out employment. With economic opportunities in forest plantations, and vast improvements in the roads servicing these areas (the drive from Phnom Penh to Seima is now only 6 hours, when only recently it took 2 days), towns have popped up on the project border where there were just a few houses 8 years ago. With further pressure from COVID-19 (as described previously) also looming, the situation is daunting. In response, the project has convened a high level multi-agency task force to coordinate a response. Key elements include:

1. through the Ministry of Land Use Planning and the provincial government, finding land for new settlers outside the protected area;
2. protecting indigenous community titles, and supporting the communities in preventing people from outside the protected area to settle in their lands.

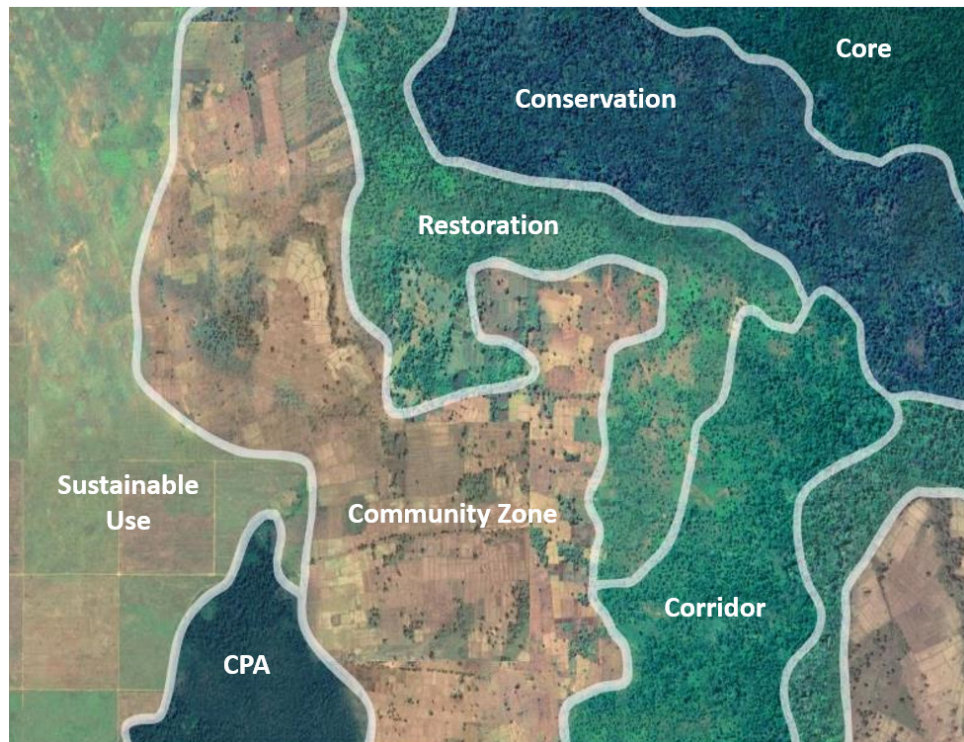


Lack of defined management zones

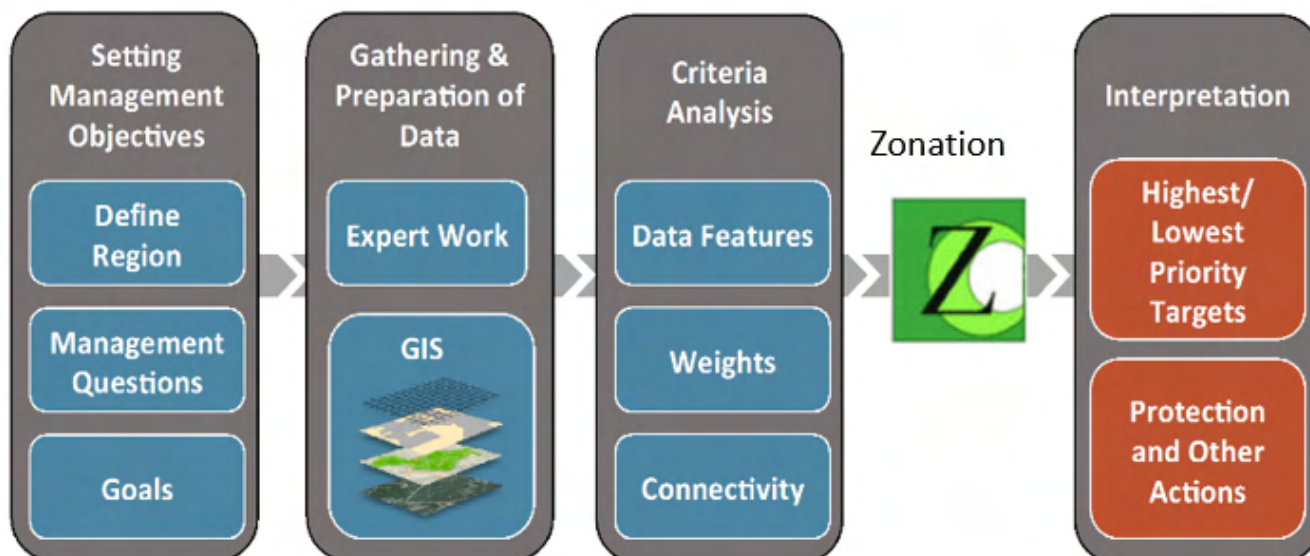
Lack of defined management zones for KSWs result in lack of clarity for law enforcement and community protected areas

The project continues to facilitate and support the development of a Zonation and Management Plan which will define the management zones and allow improved application of the 2008 Protected Area law, and clarify access rights for local communities

An objective, data-driven decision support process was used in the development of the zonation plan, and first for Cambodia.



Geospatial Planning – Decision Support



Impact Over Time



Forest Impacts

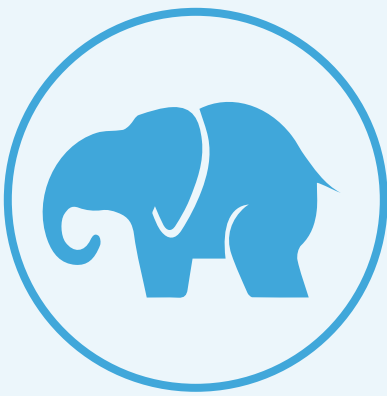


25,000 hectares
of deforestation avoided
since 2010

12,763 Community members
trained on a wide range of
sustainable natural resource
management skills, including
NTFP collection and bamboo
harvesting, ecotourism service
provision, and community patrol
team skills



Wildlife Impacts



Highest number of wildlife species recorded in any protected area in Cambodia

World's largest stable populations of several charismatic primate species

Cambodia's first data-driven zonation process, with more than 40 spatial data layers



Impact Over Time

Community Impacts



Preserved cultural identity and natural resources for over **2,500 households**

449 jobs created through the project (law enforcement and community agents)

Indigenous community land titles for 7 Bunong communities, 6 more under review by Ministry of Environment and 4 in process

Established the Jahoo Gibbon Ecotourism Camp, bringing more than **\$14,000** annually in community income



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One forest at a time**

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