

### Keo Seima: Meeting the COVID challenge with community driven conservation

The Keo Seima REDD+ Project lies on the frontier of a deforestation wave that has devastated the surrounding landscape in recent years – including the total loss of the nearby Snoul Wildlife Sanctuary. In 2020, the repatriation of over 100,000 Cambodians working overseas due to COVID-19 put even greater pressure on the forest, increasing internal migration as people sought opportunities to meet their urgent livelihoods needs.

In 2020, the project responded to these threats by deepening its longstanding focus on community-driven conservation. Key achievements for 2020 include:

- 1. Advancing New Indigenous Community Land Titles. The project area falls within the traditional lands of the Bunong, an indigenous minority community with an animist spirituality linked closely to the forest. The Bunong communities are the most vulnerable community group in KSWS, as their traditional land is highly vulnerable to pressure from outsiders. Land titling, a core conservation strategy, grants the Bunong people legal tenure for, and user rights over, their traditional lands. In 2020 the Keo Seima REDD+ Project was able to obtain pre-approval for three new Indigenous Community Land Titles on behalf of the Bunong people (in the ng, ng, n ni ies, eng ess inv ving f iffe en inis ies, in i n to the seven already secured for Bunong villages within the project area.
- 2. Expanding Community-based Forest Patrols. There are only 55 government law enforcement rangers in KSWS, responsible for patrolling almost 300,000 Ha of forest. Yet there are also roughly 2,500 families iving in n e en e f es s e gni e e e is signifi n n e e ni ni ies in e nse v i n n effe ive n ge en f inv ve the project helped to establish, train, and equip 14 Community Patrol Teams, with more than 100 community members participating. The teams conducted nearly 450 km of patrolling in the forests during the year.
- 3. \$200,000 in Direct Community Investment. The Keo Seima REDD+ project involves directly sharing the fin n i enefi s f f es e in i ni ies n 0 0, 0 ge vi ges i in enefi s ing g ee en s, if ing e eive fnsf e е e signe eve vi ge i e eive 10,000 e si en ifie n en community, including support to small-scale ecologically sensitive businesses, home gardening, livestock raising, community patrolling, as well as education, health, and small-scale infrastructure initiatives.
- **4. Expansion of IBIS Rice Program.** IBIS Rice is a program developed by WCS in northern Cambodia, in which farmers receive a price premium of up to 50% for adhering to conservation rules including no forest clearance and no hunting. This is a critical long term strategy to decouple sustainable community livelihoods from the forest, and is one of the primary ways in which the Keo Seima REDD+ project is working toward a durable conservation model. In 2020, 33 farmers agreed to join the program in O Chra and Pu Char villages, and an i i n s e e i en ifie f 1 i e f i ies in ng vi ge
- n i i n ese ieve en s, e e e e e i s seven ine nse fie s ve ni e population status of 11 key species in KSWS. The survey, conducted by five teams over six months, covered a distance of 1,260 km. Critically, the survey found that population trends for all key monitored species are exceeding the projected "without-project" scenario, a remarkable achievement for this highly-threatened wildlife sanctuary.
- g e i e ess eff s f e i ife nse v i n ie e , i s ne s in e ni , n the Cambodian Government, the Keo Seima REDD+ Project continues to advance a durable model for forest conservation utilizing the REDD+ mechanism.

The Keo Seima REDD+ Project protects the Keo Seima Wildlife Sanctuary (KSWS), 167,000 hectares of pristine, biodiversity rich primary forest in Mondulkiri and Kratie Provinces, Cambodia. The project is home to more than 950 wild species, including 75 globally threatened species, and holds the world's largest populations of endemic primates including the critically-endangered Black-shanked douc and endangered Yellow-cheeked crested gibbon.

### 2020 Impacts



## **V** Forest Patrol

- Additional 14 Community Patrol Teams were established, trained and equipped
- Conducted nearly 450 km of patrolling in the forests



## **Biodiversity**Monitoring

- The population of 11 key species in the Keo Seima Wildlife Sanctuary (KSWS) were monitored between 2010 2020 using line transects
- A total distance of 1,260 km of line transects walked by five teams over six months
- Estimated 110 Elephants in the project area (450 left in Cambodia)



## Community Development

- 20 villages signed agreements for spending REDD+ community development funds
- In this round of funding, each village will receive \$10,000, and community development activities funded by this begin in January 2021
- Three additional indigenous communal land titles (ICT) obtain pre-approval
- 33 farmers agreed to join Ibis Rice scheme

#### **Q4 2020 Summary**

# REDD+ community development fund delivers progress and encourages community engagement in conservation of the Keo Seima Wildlife Sanctuary

As a direct result of payments made through the REDD+ community eve en f n , ni ies i ex e ien e signi n improvements in health and education services, access to clean water, and better infrastructure. The community is strongly involved in the prioritization and implementation of REDD+ activities and continues to be committed to forest and wildlife protection.

- 20 villages sign agreements to activate community development initiatives
- W Boundaries marked to prohibit illegal activities and protect natural resources
- V A rare and reassuring elephant herd sighting
- V Verification of the final year of the first 10-year baseline period





## 20 villages sign agreements to activate community development initiatives

A critical part of the Keo Seima Wildlife Sanctuary REDD+
e inv ves s ing n n i ene s f f es e i n
with local communities. During this period, all 20 REDD+
ge vi ges signe ene s ing f n g ee en s
— meaning they can receive funds for community
development in proportion to the amount of income from
carbon credit sales. In this round of funding, each village
will receive \$10,000, and community development activities
funded by this will begin in January 2021. The annual REDD+



community work plans and terms and conditions were discussed with communities before signing at an event attended by REDD+ community committees, community protected area committees, commune councillors, village chiefs, and other key stakeholders.

During this round of funding, the priority activities selected by the local communities, which take place through a transparent and participatory process, included support to small-scale ecologically sensitive businesses, home gardening, livestock raising and community patrolling. Additionally, the funding will support education and health, and small-scale infrastructure initiatives such as building pump wells, household water supply, and repairs to roads, schools, and meeting halls.



## Boundaries marked to prohibit illegal activities and protect natural resources

The Sre Preah Community Protected Area (CPA), which consists of over 200 families across three villages in the Sre Preah commune — OChra, Pu Char, and Pu Kong — brought forward improving the management of their borders as a high priority this past quarter. These CPAs, which give communities the right to directly manage and use forest resources in a sustainable way, were established in January 2019.

During Q4, The Sre Preah CPA management committee began to install signboards marking their CPA boundary in order to improve management and to deter illegal encroachment and other crimes. The signboards serve to inform people of the CPA boundaries, detail prohibited activities, and explain the importance and the need to protect natural resources.

Wildlife Conservation Society facilitated the production of 250 CPA boundary signboards following a request from the Sre Preah community committee for posting along Sre Preah CPA border. Signboard installation was carried out by CPA committee members, the chief of the ni e en n iі vin i e en f nvi n en, enf e en nge s, e vi ge ief, n i ife nse v i n ie s December 2-4, 2020. To date 63 out of 250 signboards have been nailed to trees along boundary of the CPA, and the rest will be installed in early 2021.





#### A rare and reassuring Elephant herd sighting

Whilst walking in the south of Keo Seima Wildlife Sanctuary to collect non-timber forest products late last month, villagers from Pu Char village heard the sound of approaching elephants. They quickly climbed trees for safety and one of them, Mr. Poeun Koeun, immediately took out his smartphone to e e e n s, n e s e sse ene e , fee ing n

The herd included at least 14 individuals, and several young elephants, and appeared in good physical condition. Herds are normally led by an older female, and often include her relations and their

s ing n 100 e e n s e g ive in , g i is e see e in e i and even rarer to see such a large, healthy, reproductive group.

Elephants across Cambodia are threatened by the destruction of the forest in which they live, which is often cut illegally for farms inside protected areas. With only 450 elephants left in Cambodia, it is e ss ing n geg f e e e n s ing in e e e

## Verification of the final year of the first 10-year baseline period

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# Strong support from local authorities will help improve the effectiveness of conservation work

Support from local authorities plays a critical role in supporting the conservation of the Keo Seima Wildlife Sanctuary and community development in the REDD+ villages. There is an opportunity to increase the participation of local authorities in this important conservation work by collaborating with commune chiefs and local communities to integrate the workplan for the REDD+ community funds with the Commune Investment Plans (CIPs). This collaborative approach means that REDD+ activities get

i e gni i n f e ne council while also bringing sub-national authorities into the KSWS REDD+ project.

- V Integration and collaboration with local authorities to benefit the community
- V Provincial spatial planning to balance prosperity and the protection of natural resources
- ▼ Restrictions from COVID-19 cause minor disruptions to field activities





#### Integration and collaboration with local authorities to benefit the community

During this past quarter, Wildlife Conservation Society supported communities from 20 REDD+ villages to take part in a process of Commune Investment Plan development. This entailed esen ing e e i e en s f e vi ge s, n ei ns f s en ing enefi sharing funds in an integrated way.

In order to successfully implement the workplans for REDD+ community development funds, it was fis e ie i ies, n ni ge s en in eg eve workplans with the commune workplans.

Through this process, each REDD+ village had the opportunity to identify which proposed activities had budget support from REDD+ funding and which activities would be best supported under the Commune Investment Plan (under the Ministry of Economy and Finance Commune Investment Fund).

This integration of REDD+ community development workplans into local Commune Investment ve en s in e ive ing enefi s signifi n i ni ies in e i n in e i s eff ne ffi i s ens e enefi sharing activities in REDD+ villages are successfully integrated into the Commune Investment Plans



#### Provincial spatial planning to balance prosperity and the protection of natural resources

vin i s nning signi nse v i n i e n e ess n e development in the Mondulikri Province.

Due to the rapid pace of development in the Mondulkiri Province, forests such as the Keo Seima Wildlife Sanctuary are at risk from unplanned developments — such as illegal settlements, new road construction or upgrading, and the construction of inappropriately located ecotourism facilitates.

en i iss es, i ife f nse v i n ge ese ee ings e by the Mondulkiri provincial government to help develop a spatial plan for Mondulkiri (2020–2040). Provincial spatial planning aims to determine the future spatial structure of the province and assigns n ingf n i ns i e en esfe vin i e i e s for the future has been elaborated based on situation analysis, existing planning documents elaborated by provincial administration and line departments, and consultation with key stakeholders.

The meeting provided an opportunity to discuss with the Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction (MLMUPC) the critical importance of preventing infrastructure development in the core of conservation zones of KSWS and to avoid overlap with the KSWS REDD+ project area.



#### **Restrictions from COVID-19 cause** minor disruptions to field activities

There were two small COVID-19 community outbreaks in Phnom Penh during November and December 2020, which caused some disruption to activities at the Keo Seima Wildlife Sanctuary. As a precaution, Wildlife Conservation es i e ve en fs ie leading to delays in implementation of activities. Some activities, such as the consultation on use of the REDD+ community development funds and the signing of agreements, were able i ee i s е i ns. while others have been postponed until conditions are more suitable. WCS continues to ensure that activities are conducted in line with current government recommendations and that the safety fs ni e s prioritized. The number of people attending in-person meetings have been reduced, which makes the dissemination of project activities to the wider community more challenging.



#### **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

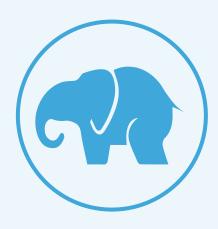






#### **Impact Over Time**

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- W Highest number of wildlife species recorded in any protected area in Cambodia
- World's largest stable populations of several charismatic primate species
- iss s iven 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 MoE and 4 in process
- Established the Jahoo Gibbon Ecotourism Camp, bringing more than \$14,000 annually in community income









