

Keo Seima REDD+ Project **Impact Report**

**Q1-Q2
2021**



**EVER
LAND**



**Wildlife
Conservation
Society**

Keo Seima REDD+ Project

Location: **Cambodia**

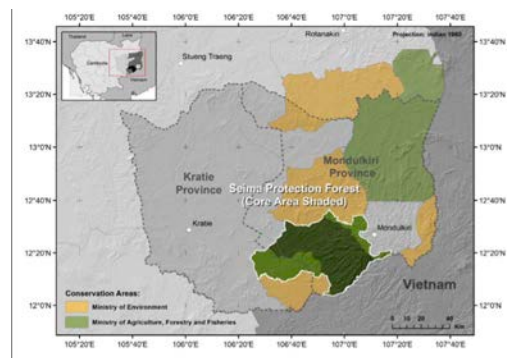
Developer: **Wildlife Conservation Society**

Key Partners: **Royal Government of Cambodia, Ministry of Environment**

Standards: **VCS, CCB**

A transformative year underway

The first half of 2021 has been filled with exciting opportunities for growth and prosperity at the Keo Seima Wildlife Sanctuary. With significant funding from the sale of Verified Emissions Reductions, the Keo Seima REDD+ Project is working on an ambitious strategy to scale its forest conservation and community development initiatives, has developed financial guidelines to streamline communities' use of the REDD+ benefit sharing funds, and has had the success of another Community Protected Area for a Bunong Indigenous village approved. With growing success, the project has also faced many challenges in light of the ongoing global pandemic. Working closely with both government and community stakeholders, the project has found opportunities to pivot and adapt their approaches to face these challenges and move forward with perseverance.



14,658,257 tonnes of CO₂ emissions avoided to date
1,465,826 tonnes of CO₂ avoided per year

About the Keo Seima REDD+ Project

Keo Seima Wildlife Sanctuary (KSWS) is home to more than 950 wild species, including 75 globally threatened species. It is also the ancestral home of the indigenous Bunong people, whose unique culture and beliefs are inseparable from the forest in which they live. Originally designated as a protected area in 2002, KSWS is managed by the Royal Government of Cambodia's Ministry of Environment, with technical and financial support from WCS Cambodia.

KSWS plays a vital role in the preservation of the region's important and vulnerable wildlife, including the world's largest populations of the endangered black-shanked douc and yellow-cheeked crested gibbon, as well as a nationally important population of Asian elephant and many other species. At the same time, it supports the sustainable development of local communities, most notably through securing communities legal title to their traditional lands, and through the REDD+ Benefit Sharing Mechanism which provides significant funding to community-chosen and community-led development projects.



Impact Highlights

REDD+ success catalyzes ambitious strategy to scale forest conservation and community development

The Keo Seima REDD+ project (KSWS) has received new funding from the sale of a significant amount of VERs. This funding is making it possible to expand the scope and ambition of the core project activities. This guaranteed, long-term financing also means there are fewer restrictions on project planning, restrictions that resulted from lengthy donor project cycles and funding insecurity. The new funding will also enable significant improvements in management practices and research and development to better understand inefficiencies and where operational improvements can be made.

Experts from all project teams, with input from community and government partners, have drafted a new comprehensive strategy for forest conservation and community support. In the coming months, with consideration for COVID-19 guidelines on large gatherings, local communities will meet to review the draft plan in detail. A final plan approved by the community will then be submitted to Cambodia's Ministry of Environment (MOE) for approval.



Financial guidelines developed to streamline communities' use of REDD+ benefit sharing funds



Since the KSWs REDD+ project began selling carbon credits in 2015, local communities have received a proportion of the income from carbon credit sales in recognition of their commitment to ensuring the success of the project in stopping deforestation and protecting wildlife.

Communities use this money to fund development priorities they have identified themselves. These have included installing clean, piped water systems, constructing toilets, and constructing or maintaining community-owned buildings such as meeting halls. For many villages, this is the first time they have been responsible for managing substantial funds earmarked for community development. To ensure the income is managed in a transparent way and that local contractors provide timely, high-quality services, the KSWs REDD+ team has worked with representatives from each community to develop easy-to-follow guidelines for financial management. The guidelines were written to be easy to understand and followed by individuals with no formal financial training but are also rigorous enough to ensure that spending and investment is documented and that any external contractors can be managed efficiently.

The guidelines will ensure communities can access, mobilize, and benefit from the funding and support their self-determined development and community management goals.



Approval of an additional Community Protected Area for Bunong Indigenous village



The Ministry of Environment (MoE) has released a prakas (legal instrument) officially recognizing the establishment of a 443 ha Community Protected Area in O Pung Rung, close to Pu Trom village, home to 175 local community members.

Meetings were held over the last two quarters to identify Non-Timber Forest Product (NTFP) usage, conduct a forest timber inventory, and develop management plans for the site. Based on these plans, different areas are demarcated for conservation, NTFP and timber collection, ecotourism, reforestation, and silviculture, and as spirit forest — an animist belief that areas of the forest are sacred and that trees have powerful spirits. Issuance of this title grants the Bunong Indigenous community secure rights to the area and supports their efforts to sustainably manage the site to ensure continued long-term benefits.

Mr. Royerm Pherl, O Pung Rung CPA management committee chief, said “After my CPA O Pung Rung got formal recognition from MoE, I am very happy and I feel that my community is able to manage, protect, conserve, and use the resources in our CPA ... We commit to protect and manage the resources in the CPA sustainably.”





Challenges & Opportunities

Ensuring effective provincial administration engagement

Cambodia's government recognizes the KSWs REDD+ project as an important flagship project. This recognition can sometimes not reach the sub-national, provincial authorities. Engagement and alignment both between the project and provincial authorities, and within different sets of provincial authorities, can be challenging. Because these authorities can have a large impact on the success of the project, especially in law enforcement, ensuring their effective collaboration and inter-authority coordination is critical.

To improve this coordination, a provincial unified command was established, where sub-national law enforcement authorities have regular meetings to share issues and support their resolution. This effort has improved communications and coordination amongst stakeholders.



COVID-19 restrictions prevent large workshops: Ibis Rice pivots approach to training of trainers



The Ibis Rice program typically holds large workshops with multiple farmers to discuss, train, and coordinate the implementation of the Ibis Rice program, that buys organic, conservation-supporting rice at a premium from local farmers.

COVID-19 meeting size restrictions have prevented these large meetings over the last six months. To overcome this challenge, the Ibis Rice team has conducted “training of trainers” workshops, where representatives from Village Marketing Networks (VMNs, the local community groups that coordinate participating farmers) are trained so they can later train smaller groups of farmers. This has allowed the project team greater flexibility to engage farmers, as many had been unable to attend group meetings as they were occupied with farm work. Individual meetings can be held at the farmer’s house at a time that suits them, leading to increased participation. This is also increasing the responsibility and sustainability of the VMNs to operate with less training input needed from Ibis Rice.



Addressing human-wildlife conflict with bull elephant in musth



An attack by a wild bull elephant led to the serious injury of an elephant at the Elephant Valley Project (a long time partner of the project and one of the leading Elephant sanctuaries in Cambodia). Crops grown in farms in the neighboring area have also been destroyed. Project staff and partners tracked the wild bull elephant, and supported communities to protect their crops and themselves from the elephant

KSWs holds a significant proportion of Cambodia's remaining wild elephants, and human-wildlife conflict (HWC) incidents are expected to become more frequent as elephant habitat is lost and disturbed around protected areas, as well as from illegal clearance within.

The project is developing a process for sub-granting to local expert elephant NGOs that can support development and implementation of HWC mitigation strategies to address this challenge. Currently, the project has a lead point who visits sites in the protected area, collects event information and offers basic advice. Longer term, the project will look into crop selection. Shorter- and medium-term solutions include partnering with an organization called E.L.I.E that runs Cambodia's best elephant sanctuary and will be investigating a range of options and mitigation strategies.

There is no silver bullet for addressing human-wildlife conflict, so it remains important to incorporate a variety of solutions. In addition to the above mentioned strategies, the project also utilizes traditional mitigation practices, such as making noise to scare elephants away (fireworks, dogs, lights, etc) and appeasing elephant spirits. The Bunong relationship with elephants is long and deep; Elephants were used as tractors for farm labor and play a central role in Bunong customs. Elephant spirits are considered to be one of the most powerful of all of the animal spirits.

