

Forest Monitoring in Prey Lang, Preah Rokar and Sorng Rokha Vorn wildlife sanctuaries

4th Monitoring Report
Executive summary



120,829

ha of tree cover loss

1.4%

its total area

16%

loss increased

Cambodia faced significant environmental challenges in **2023**, losing **120,829 hectares of tree cover**, equivalent to **1.4% of its total area** and amounting to **71.2 million tonnes of CO₂** released in the atmosphere as a **result of tree-cover loss**. Notably, **40% of this loss occurred within protected areas**, marking a **16% increase** from the previous year. Specifically, **Prey Lang** wildlife sanctuary lost 9,532 hectares (10.3% increase), **Preah Rokar** wildlife sanctuary experienced a loss of 575 hectares (**35% increase**), and **Sorng Rokha Vorn** wildlife sanctuary recorded a loss of 42 hectares (**50% increase**). To address these issues, the **Citizens Engaged in Environmental Justice for All (CEEJA)** initiative was launched, focusing on these three wildlife sanctuaries. CEEJA employs both community-based monitoring and advanced satellite technologies to assess and to increase the effectiveness of on-the-ground **forest protection** and combat tree cover loss.

Despite conservation efforts, **illegal logging remains a persistent problem** in Cambodia's protected areas. New logging routes have been discovered in Prey Lang wildlife sanctuary, with satellite imagery revealing

two new 12km roads originating from the Think Biotech concession.

Communities and experts warn that these new routes are likely to **intensify logging activities** in the area, potentially leading to **accelerated forest clearance and degradation** within the protected sanctuary. Additionally, mining operations pose a significant threat, particularly in Prey Lang, where **Late Cheng Mining Development Company** has been granted exploratory and extraction **licenses for gold mining**. These activities have led to forest clearance, **habitat fragmentation**, and potential **environmental hazards** from the use of cyanide in gold extraction.

Local communities play a crucial role in monitoring and protecting these areas. The **Prey Lang Community Network (PLCN)** recorded 8,428 events in 2023, a

130% increase from the previous year,

with 72% of entries related to forest resources and **24% documenting illegal activities**. Similarly, the **Preah Rokar Forestry Community Network (PFCN)** reported 734 entries in 2023, a

123% increase from the previous year,

with 62% related to biodiversity and **24% reporting illegal activities**.



↑ Figure 2
Communities of Preah Rokar wildlife sanctuary save saplings of endangered species from vulnerable areas to replant them

↓ Figure 1
Communities of Stung Treng province reporting a forest clearing inside a concession on 24 September 2023.



Finally, the **Monks Community Forest (MCF)** in Sorng Rokha Vorn documented 62 entries, a

170% increase from 2022,

with 79% of the reported entries documenting valuable resource and a smaller **11% of the entries reporting illegal activities**. These community efforts provide invaluable **georeferenced on-the-ground data** that complement satellite monitoring and offer proof in the form of **photos and qualitative details**. This evidence enhances our understanding of the situation on the ground and adds an **extra layer of information to the satellite data**, highlighting illegal activities and biodiversity hotspots in protected areas.

The **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework**, adopted in December 2022, sets ambitious targets for biodiversity conservation, including protecting 30% of land and sea areas by 2030. However, the situation in Cambodia highlights the **challenges** in implementing these goals at the **local level**. The framework's emphasis on recognizing indigenous peoples' rights and knowledge aligns with the work of local communities in Cambodia, but **threats from illegal logging, mining, and lack of government support** pose significant **obstacles** to achieving these global targets. The efforts of local communities in Cambodia demonstrate the **critical importance of grassroots involvement** in achieving global biodiversity goals. Their work in monitoring and protecting forests directly **contributes to the targets** set by the Kunming-Montreal framework. Among others, these efforts align with **Target 3** (protecting 30% of land and sea areas), **Target 4** (urgent management actions to halt human-induced species extinction and maintain genetic diversity), **Target 21** (ensuring that the best available data, are accessible to decision makers to guide effective governance) and most importantly, **Target 22** (ensuring equitable and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in decision-making related to biodiversity).

However, these communities face ongoing **challenges**, including **harassment from authorities and restrictions on their conservation activities**. To address these issues and align with global biodiversity goals, the communities **urge the Cambodian government** to take specific actions, including:

recognizing and supporting community-led conservation efforts, enforcing existing environmental laws, halting illegal logging and mining activities in protected areas, and ensuring transparent and inclusive decision-making processes for forest management.