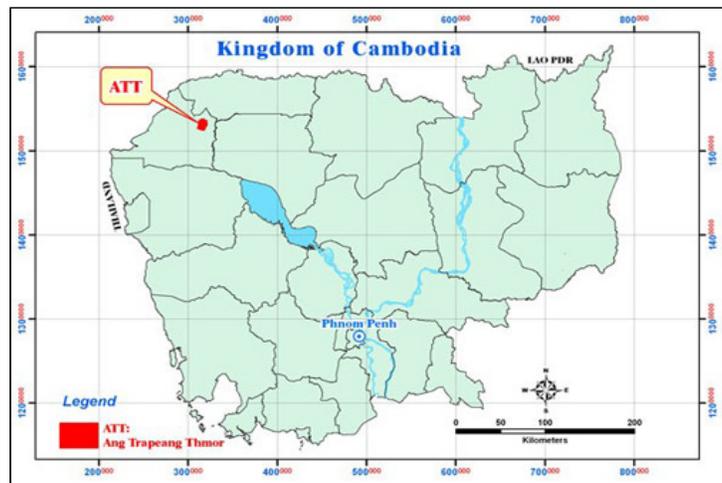


## **Sustainable livelihoods takes on an extra meaning and challenge in Cambodia.**

Ockenden is not just engaged in promoting self-reliance for displaced people, but its community forestry and capacity-building activities - with partner Kon Kleng Community-Based Organisation (KKCBO) - now includes a new dimension: helping to protect endangered creatures sharing their new settlements adjacent to the Ang Trapeang Thmar (ATT) wetland reserve.

***ATT in Kon Kleng area, Poy Char commune, Phnom Srok district, Banteay Meanchey province North West Cambodia.***



Cambodia's current relative peace came about in 1998 when Khmer Rouge forces finally gave up their armed struggle. It meant that many former refugees of the three decades of civil conflict were able to return from refugee camps in Thailand. However, many found there was no place for them in their original home provinces. Either their ancestral land was lost or there just was no longer enough of it to go around. So they became internally displaced, searching for new land where they could make a living. A lot are returning to the border areas where there is unused land, in the most remote rural locations. Here land can be marginal for rice and crop cultivation, or it may be landmine-infested, or ostensibly designated as national forestry to be conserved. Ockenden International is working with these people, along with local partner organisations and local authorities, in such new settlements. One though has brought even more complications than usual.

Ockenden has worked with KKCBO since 1999, and by any standards this is a remarkably successful organisation starting in just 8 villages and now working in 42. It means that they still face overwhelming pressures, because of poverty and hunger, to attract more donor support for livelihood projects and use all means at their disposal to secure food supplies and a decent standard of living. The forest is still important for timber, wildlife, mushrooms, berries, herbs and traditional medicines

Originally made up of soldiers and families of former Khmer Rouge, they cleared and settled in forestry areas. Early on, agreement was reached that would limit how much land could be taken. Despite years in the jungle, with little or no education, and suffering from food shortages, KKCBO succeeded in persuading them to embrace sustainable use of the forests. Ockenden helped broker a deal whereby 3,019 hectares were to be set aside as community forestry, covering 42 villages in three communes. Supported by administrative and forestry officials, they embarked on a programme of training and activities to mark out boundaries, erect signs, man guard-posts, even start a tree nursery, as well as to agree on how much and what kind of products could be extracted on a sustainable basis. It is acknowledged that without projects like this, Cambodia will continue to lose its forestry cover at an alarming rate - it lost 29% of its primary forests between 2000 and 2005<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately Kon Kleng's main new livelihood activities, started with funding from the European Union, UK's Big Lottery Fund, Kadoorie Charitable Trust and others<sup>2</sup> has - or at least had - put them in a position for the new community forestry and wetlands not be exploited.



KKCBO has:

- Cow banks for 967 families each with one cow, of which 782 are off-spring
- A cow-breeding centre (pictured left) with 44 cows and one bull, supplying their villages and other CBOs.
- 115 self-help groups, with 1,340 members now saving and borrowing with a wide range of new sources of income from pig-rearing and chickens to retailing and services such as transport, repairs, hair-cutting etc.
- Safe-drinking water wells and infra-structure improvements such as better roads.

<sup>1</sup> <http://news.mongabay.com/2005/1115-forests.html>

<sup>2</sup> Ockenden International thanks also Swiss, UK, and Japanese Embassies

- New Education and Vocational Skills such as primary health, sewing and craft-work, village livestock agents.
- Experimental Crop Farm. This is located with the cow breeding centre. As well as mango trees, and vegetables, they have discovered their own upland variety of rice seed "Srou Phnom" that has been successfully pioneered. Kaen Um (aged 15, pictured right) is drying the rice below. Her family was one of the most destitute to arrive in Kon Kleng without scarcely any possessions; the CBO has given her father a job there, and have allowed the family to erect a small grass house. Um hopes that she can now go to school and progress beyond Grade 3.



This good progress has suffered a blow in recent weeks. The scourge of Cambodia, land-grabbing, is now threatening their new community forestry. Ty Sokun, Director of Forestry Administration, has said the government is committed to maintaining 61 percent of Cambodia's land area - 11 million hectares - as natural forest but *"between 1979 and 2002 250,000 hectares of forest had been grabbed by powerful people in the armed forces, and by the rich, especially in the northwest from Chhlong to Mondulkiri"*. For ordinary people such as those in Kon Kleng, it is very hard to resist such powerful people, but with support from Ockenden International and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), it is hoped that they will be amongst the first to succeed. Their chances are much improved with the personal entry of the Prime Minister Hun Sen who has warned government officials, business people and the armed forces that illegal land seizure must stop, or there could be a "farmers' revolution" against the government.

*"Stop grabbing land and forestry,"* he told participants at the National Conference on the Management of Natural Resources to Reduce Poverty in December 2005. *"I declare and announce to all of you who have violated the law and have grabbed forestry areas and encroached on state land for your own property and have affected poor people - especially officials on duty - it is time for you to stop."*<sup>3</sup>

With this encouragement, Ockenden and WCS is supporting KKCBFO to bring together the widest possible alliance. The whole community is to unite behind the principle of conserving their forest and wetlands, so children and their teachers (some untrained from the Khmer Rouge) are having their first education about such issues, cultivating new pride in their local environment. Next the very few people within their own community who have encroached are being actively deterred through friendly persuasion and peer education. Thirdly all local authority officials, including ones responsible for forestry, are being engaged constructively to give support and resist the temptation of illegal payment to sign documents. Finally their advocacy message **"We want to preserve our forests and wildlife!"** is being taken far beyond their own community, thanks to the Good Governance initiative supported by the UK's DFID, on to the outside world through this website. Maybe then, the people and the wildlife will be able to live together in harmony and tranquility as the picture below suggests:



◀**The Eastern Sarus Crane (*Grus antigone sharpii*) is Globally Endangered.** Photo courtesy of Eleanor Briggs.

The ATT area represents the worlds most important non-breeding site for this species.

Known by the acronym ATT, "Trapeang Thmar" was originally "Stone Pond" the name given during the Angkor Empire (800-1400 AD) "Ang" which means "reservoir" was added during Pol Pot's time. It is the biggest reservoir built by human labour during the Khmer Rouge rule. Now it is an internationally important wetland for 1 Critically Endangered, 2 Endangered, 7 Vulnerable and 6

Near Threatened species of birds plus an additional 28 species of regional conservation significance.<sup>4</sup> Also found there is a globally significant population of the threatened Eld's Deer (*Cervus eldii*) (latest census approx 60 animals). Ockenden International appreciates and acknowledges the assistance of Mr Joe Walston, WCS Country Director, for this project and the technical details for this website.

<sup>3</sup> <http://cambodiamorning.blogspot.com/2005/12/stop-land-theft-warns-hun-sen.html>

<sup>4</sup> Per formal criteria established by IUCN Red Data Book of Globally Threatened Species