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## THE STORY OF VEAL KANSAENG COMMUNITY FORESTRY'S FIGHT FOR THE FOREST AND THE FUTURE

SCALE-UP 2 PROJECT  
JULY 2025

# “WE PROTECT TODAY, SO OUR CHILDREN CAN STILL HEAR THE FOREST TOMORROW.”

In the early morning mist of Kratie province, the sound of birdsong still lingers soft, hopeful and defiant in the air. For the people of Veal Kansaeng, every note is a sign that their long, quiet fight for the forest is paying off.

*“We saw our forest fading before our eyes,” recalls Sum Saray, now the leader of Veal Kansaeng Community Forestry. “Hunting was increasing. Land was being grabbed. If we didn’t act, our children would have nothing.”*

This fight began over two decades ago, not with weapons or protest signs, but with a shared decision: to protect what was left. Trees were falling. Wildlife was disappearing. And the future felt uncertain.

In 2001, Saray and his neighbors came together with one goal: to save their forest. They started by designating the unofficial boundaries of the forest with wooden poles, marking the community’s enduring ties to the area. The lines were drawn not just on a map, but in their hearts.



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Over time, with support from the Forestry Administration, WWF-Cambodia, RECOFTC and FLO, those lines became legally recognized. By 2017, Veal Kansaeng was no longer just a dream. It was a formal community forest, protected by a community that refused to give up. But their journey was far from over.

Getting the forest recognized was only the first step. Over the years, the community faced land disputes, illegal logging and mounting pressure to give up. Still, they stood firm.

WWF and partners stepped in to help with patrol gear, legal advice and small funding tools. Using a \$7,000 mini-trust fund and community credit system, the community forest found ways to survive and grow.

Patrol teams – 13 members strong, including five women – began walking the forest weekly, searching for snares, tracks and signs of life returning. They weren't just protecting trees. They were protecting a future.

Saray smiles when he talks about the vision: **“One day, we want people to come here, to walk our trails, to see wildlife again. We want the forest to live and to live with us.”**

In early 2025, after years of paperwork, setbacks and determination, the community achieved something historic: a legal land title for 1,618.62 hectares of forest, officially recognized by Cambodia's Ministry of Land Management.

They are the only community forest in Kratie province to earn an official land title.



Community land title



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**“It wasn't easy,” Saray says. “We lost some land to illegal encroachment. There were days we thought we'd never make it. But we did.”**

With this title, Veal Kansaeng Community Forest can finally plan for the long term – investing in sustainable agriculture, wildlife-friendly ecotourism and education for the next generation.

Today, the community isn't just surviving – they're leading. **“This forest gave us everything,” Saray says, gently. “Now, it's our turn to give back.”**

As the sun breaks through the trees and birds call out above, the message is clear: conservation isn't just about protection. It's about people, perseverance and the belief that even the smallest community can protect something great. In Veal Kansaeng, they're not just saving a forest: they're safeguarding a legacy.



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