

Final Evaluation Report
Project “Management of community Forestry biodiversity for contributing to increase sustainability of community livelihood in the biodiversity areas of Cardamom Mountain “



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Acknowledgement

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

We sincerely thank you for your valuable support and active participation in the final evaluation of the "Management of Community Forestry biodiversity for contributing to increase sustainability of community livelihood in the biodiversity areas of Cardamom Mountain" project, implemented by AK Organization and supported by the GEF SGP/UNDP.

We extend our heartfelt appreciation to the management of AK Organization for their exceptional efforts in organizing the field schedule and project orientation. Their efficient coordination ensured our evaluation team had the necessary resources, information, and stakeholder engagement for a comprehensive assessment.

We also thank the Forestry Administration Division (FAD) of Kravanh district, Forestry Administration Triage (FAT) of Samrong commune, Samrong commune council, the Veal Community Forestry Management Committee, and Veal Community Forestry members for participating in interviews and discussions. Your valuable insights have deepened our understanding of the project's achievements, challenges, and opportunities.

We greatly appreciate the collaborative spirit and open dialogue that characterized the interviews and discussions. Your willingness to share knowledge and experiences significantly enhanced the credibility of our evaluation and ensured accurate reflection of the project's outcomes.

We are grateful for the support provided by the GEF SGP/UNDP throughout project implementation, facilitating the evaluation process and ensuring its quality and rigor.

On behalf of the project evaluation team, we express our sincere appreciation to AK Organization, the Forestry Administration Triage (FAT) of Samrong commune, Samrong commune council, the Veal Community Forestry Management Committee, and Veal Community Forestry members for your invaluable contributions to the final evaluation. Your dedication has been crucial in providing a comprehensive evaluation of the project's impact and guiding our future strategies for sustainable development.

We look forward to continued collaboration as we enhance livelihoods and natural resource management in the community.

Thank you for your exceptional support.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Vong Thavy

External Evaluation Team Leader

Abbreviation

AK	Anakot Kumar
CDP	Commune Development Plan
CIP	Commune Investment Program
CF	Community Forestry
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GEF	Global Environmental Fund
KII	Key Informant Interview
MAFF	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
SGP	Small Grant Program
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

Executive Summary

Anakot Kumar (AK) has been engaged in implementing a project entitled "Management of Community Forestry Biodiversity for Contributing to the Increase in Sustainability of Community Livelihoods in the Biodiversity Areas of Cardamom Mountain." This project is being carried out with the support of (GEF SGP UNDP) Cambodia, under the project number KHM / SGP / OP7 / Y2 / CORE / BD / 2022/05.

The project's objective is to enhance the effective and sustainable management of the Veal Community Forestry biodiversity systems by actively engaging and inspiring local communities in the implementation of Community forestry management plans that can serve as a model for Pursat province. The primary focus of the project is to raise awareness among members of the Veal Community Forestry regarding the sustainable management of forests, wildlife, and natural resources. Furthermore, the project aims to foster their active participation in implementing Community Forestry management plans and facilitate the adoption of robust legal measures to safeguard community forests.

Additionally, the project strives to establish a transparent financial management mechanism for the Veal Community Forestry Management Committee. This mechanism will enable the committee to cover the necessary costs associated with conserving the forest, protecting wildlife, and preserving natural resources within the community.

The project is being implemented in the Phnom Samkos Wildlife Sanctuary, located near the Central Cardamom Mountain National Park in Veal Village, Samrong Commune, Phnom Kravanh District, Pursat Province. The project benefits a total of 204 families, comprising 787 individuals (467 women), with 52 beneficiaries being people with disabilities (32 men, 18 women, 1 boy, 1 girl). The program (GEF SGP UNDP) in Cambodia has supported the project under the project number KHM/SGP/OP Y2/CORE/BD/2022/05. The project commenced on September 6, 2022, and is scheduled to conclude on February 29, 2024.

A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Pursat Forestry Administration Cantonment and Anakot Kumar Organization to establish cooperation and support for the implementation of the Forestry Administration by relevant officials (including the Cantonment, Division, and Triage of Kravanh Forestry Administration) and local village and commune authorities. This cooperation aims to provide technical and legal assistance and address any challenges encountered during the project implementation.

This project has been successfully implemented, demonstrating effectiveness, efficiency, and a significant positive impact on the community's capacity. A notable shift in the community's perspective on natural resource control has occurred, as they now recognize the benefits of collecting non-timber products and the importance of preserving natural resources for future generations. The community has taken decisive action in conserving natural resources through a range of activities, including the construction of fire roads, the cultivation and maintenance of small trees, the provision of education on environmental and forestry laws to fellow community members, and the regular patrolling of their forest. Furthermore, the community has forged

closer collaborations with local authorities, the forestry administration, and environment rangers in the Phnom Samkos Wildlife Sanctuary.

Relevant stakeholders, such as local authorities and the Forestry Administration, have expressed high satisfaction with the project's achievements. They appreciate the opportunity to collaborate with AK and fulfill their roles in natural resource management within the community Forestry, which has been delegated to empower the community in controlling natural resources.

Promisingly, the Veal Community Forestry Management Committee has exhibited the capability to sustain natural resource control once AK phases out its interventions. Through subsidies for investment acquired via savings and loans, the community has been able to generate interest and capital to cover expenses during forest patrols. Additionally, the 92 families who received loans from the community have the potential to generate income through applying modern agricultural techniques, such as vegetable cultivation, chicken farming, and small businesses. These endeavors not only improve the livelihoods of these families but also contribute to reducing disaster risks and addressing climate change in Cambodia.

The positive outcomes achieved in this project can be attributed to the effective methods of empowerment employed by AK, the unwavering commitment of the community, the collaboration of key stakeholders, and the supportive legal and policy framework provided by the government. These results will significantly contribute to conserve 340 ha of Community Forestry areas, improving livelihood of CF members and reducing disaster risks and addressing climate change on a broader scale in the project target area as well as Cambodia.

Gaps and Challenges

While the project has achieved successful results according to the plan, it is important to acknowledge that there are still some gaps and challenges that need to be addressed.

- Some individuals are taking advantage of the situation by intentionally setting fire to the forest to encroach upon the land, often resulting in the destruction of fire roads. These incidents predominantly occur during nighttime.
- Land encroachment poses a significant challenge: Without robust law enforcement by the local authority, both outsider and insider communities can continue to encroach upon the land. The Veal Community Forestry Management Committee responsible for forestry has reported that six local citizens, who own land near the community forest area, have encroached upon the land within the community forest area. The village chief, along with the Community Forestry Management Committee has reported all these cases to the Forestry Administration and local authorities. However, the Forestry Administration has only invited these offenders for discussions, without taking further action to halt their encroachment.

- While the community forestry management committee has shown commendable dedication to forest patrolling, some community members interviewed have revealed that they are unable to participate in patrolling activities due to their busy schedules. They are primarily occupied with their own businesses, such as farming and collecting agricultural products, in order to earn a living.
- Regarding the legality of the expanded land size of 430 hectares, the Veal forestry community forestry management committee was initially granted the rights to control 285 hectares of land by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries. However, the Community Forestry has expanded its control to an additional 430 hectares, which has been acknowledged by the Forestry Administration but has not yet been officially recognized by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (MAFF).
- With the strong support and monitoring provided by AK, the Community Forestry Management Committee has demonstrated effectiveness in managing the revolving fund. However, there is a concern that the management system might weaken once AK withdraws its intervention. This is primarily due to the absence of a financial policy and annual budget, which are crucial for ensuring the continued effective management of the revolving fund.
- The commune administration has acknowledged the importance of integrating certain activities from the Community Forestry management plans into the commune development plan and commune investment program. However, due to the allocation of a significant portion of the commune budget towards infrastructure projects, there is currently limited funding available for implementing community forestry control and natural resource management (NRM) initiatives.

Recommendations for future project implementation

For future success, the project can effectively address the challenges related to forest fires, land encroachment, community participation, and land recognition. This will contribute to the sustainable management and protection of the Veal community forestry, ensuring its long-term viability and benefits for both the community and the environment, the evaluator would like to give the following recommendations:

1. **Strengthen Fire Prevention and Law Enforcement Measures:** Implement strict surveillance measures, increase patrols, and reinforce the construction and maintenance of fire roads to prevent intentional forest fires used for encroachment.
2. **Enforce Land Ownership and Address Encroachment:** Take decisive action against encroachers, both from outsider and insider communities, through thorough investigations and legal measures. Establish a clear process for resolving land ownership disputes and protect the rights of the community.

3. Enhance Community Forestry Members Participation in Forest Patrolling: Address the challenges faced by Community members with busy schedules by offering flexible patrolling options, organizing training sessions during non-peak periods, and incentivizing participation. Raise awareness about the benefits of community involvement in forest patrolling.
4. Seek Official Recognition for Expanded CF Land Size: Collaborate with relevant authorities to obtain official recognition for the expanded land size under Veal Community Forestry management. Provide necessary documentation and evidence to support the community's claim and advocate for timely review and approval.
5. The Veal Community Forestry Management Committee should enhance its financial management practices and ensure the ongoing effective management of the revolving fund. This can be achieved by developing a comprehensive financial policy and an annual budget plan, as well as implementing proper documentation of expenditure filing. Moreover, AK, as a partner organization, should conduct periodic spot checks to promote transparency, accountability, and control over the utilization of the fund.
6. The Veal Community Forestry Management Committee should persist in integrating the Community Forestry management plan into the Community Development Plan (CDP) and Community Investment Program (CIP). By doing so, the commune administration can consider allocating commune funds for Community Forestry control in the future, recognizing its importance and ensuring its inclusion in the broader development framework.

I. Introduction:

1.1. Background of the Organization

Anakot Kumar (AK) is a local non-governmental organization (NGO) that was formerly an international organization known as SKIP. Since March 2003, AK has fully localized and transformed into a local NGO.

AK is a non-political, non-religious, non-profit organization dedicated to promoting community development. It is officially registered with the Ministry of Interior (MoI) under registration number 293, dated 18 March 2003.

The organization is committed to working with the absolute poor in remote areas by partnering with local government entities such as village authorities, commune councils, and district authorities. Additionally, AK collaborates with key stakeholders in government departments, including the Provincial Health Department (PHD), Provincial Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (PDAFF)/Forestry Administration Cantonment (FAC), and Provincial Department of Rural Development (PDRD).

At the community level, AK works directly with community-based local institutions such as Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), Village Disaster Management Groups (VDMGs), Community Forestry Management Committees (FCMCs), Village Health Support Groups (VHSGs), Commune Accountability Facilitators (CAFs), and Water Sanitation & Hygiene (WASH) Management Committees.

AK's programs focus on enhancing the lives of the poor, extremely poor, and marginalized groups. These programs include community-based institution development, community-based income generation and livelihood activities, building community well-being, natural resource management, local good governance, and child rights and education.

Over the years, AK has gained extensive experience in capacity building for grassroots CBOs, citizen/youth leaders, women, and marginalized individuals. This capacity building aims to foster active engagement and functional participation in community development programs, thereby increasing ownership, accountability, transparency, and long-term sustainability. AK has the following vision, mission and goals.

Vision: AK envisions active participation and decision-making by the Cambodian people, particularly vulnerable groups, in their community development processes.

Mission: The organization's mission is to serve the long-term sustainable community development and social development needs by empowering people, children, youths, women, and vulnerable groups to engage with their government in protecting their rights and meeting their needs. AK is committed to working in partnership with national and international institutions to promote self-reliance, climate change resilience, local good governance, social accountability, and children's rights in Cambodia.

Goals: AK aims to increase opportunities for disadvantaged groups, indigenous minorities, and local community members by fostering effective participation, benefits, and responsive

government institutions. Additionally, AK seeks to improve children's rights in local communities through advocacy at the provincial and national levels.

To achieve its vision and fulfill its missions, Anakot Kumar adheres to core values and a code of ethics:

Core Values:

- **Cultural value:** Upholding dignity, promoting education, and respecting traditions, culture, religious beliefs, and government laws.
- **Staff value:** Valuing individuals who act within the boundaries of the law, take responsibility, demonstrate morality, and possess a willingness to learn.

Organizational value:

- ✓ Operating on non-political and non-religious principles and practices.
- ✓ Fostering equal partnerships based on equity, fairness, transparency, accountability, honesty, and dignity.
- ✓ Empowering groups to address and resolve issues collaboratively.

Code of Ethics:

- Working effectively with partners and stakeholders to develop Cambodia based on principles of fairness, equity, transparency, accountability, and human rights.
- Respecting the values of morality, tradition, culture, and religion within societies, while upholding dignity.
- Collaborating with government technical and expertise departments and citizens to rebuild Cambodia and improve the living standards of its people through full participation and partnership.
- Conducting all professional activities with honesty, sincerity, fairness, and public openness, and allowing external audits and assessments of the organization's work.
- Opposing all forms of corruption, misconduct, and bias. Providing opportunities for staff to further their personal and professional development.

1.2. Background of Project

Currently, AK has been engaged in implementing a project entitled "Management of Community Forestry Biodiversity for Contributing to the Increase in Sustainability of Community Livelihoods in the Biodiversity Areas of Cardamom Mountain." This project is being carried out with the support of (GEF SGP UNDP) Cambodia, under the project number KHM/SGP/OP7/Y2 /CORE /BD/2022/05.

The objective of the project is to enhance the effective and sustainable management of Veal Community Forestry biodiversity systems by inspiring and actively involving local communities in the implementation of Community Forestry Management Plans. These plans serve as a model for Pursat province. The primary purpose of the project is to raise awareness among Veal Community Forestry members regarding the sustainable management of forests, wildlife, and natural resources. Additionally, the project aims to encourage their participation in

the implementation of Community Forestry management plans, as well as to facilitate the adoption of effective legal measures to protect community forest areas. Moreover, the project endeavors to provide the Veal Community Forestry Management Committee with a clear financial management mechanism to cover the costs associated with conserving the community forest areas, wildlife, and natural resources within the community.

Lessons learned and best practices from the project will be compiled at the conclusion of the implementation phase for future reference and implementation. It is expected that, through the project, the members of the Veal Village Community Forestry will gain a comprehensive understanding of the forest management plan and actively participate in its implementation. The Veal Community Forestry Management Committee will enhance its capacity to facilitate the implementation of the Community Forest Management Plans and safeguard the forest from illegal logging and land encroachment for private land ownership. The Committee has established financial management mechanisms and credit management regulations to support the management of the CF mini-trust fund and the expenses associated with conservation efforts and the implementation of Community Forestry Management Plans. Additionally, community saving groups have been established to provide loans to poor households, enabling them to establish income-generating businesses and improve their livelihoods.

The project is being implemented in the Phnom Samkos Wildlife Sanctuary, located near the Central Cardamom Mountain National Park in Veal Village, Samrong Commune, Phnom Kravanh District, Pursat Province. The project benefits a total of 204 families, comprising 787 individuals (467 women), with 52 beneficiaries being people with disabilities (32 men, 18 women, 1 boy, 1 girl). The GEF SGP UNDP in Cambodia has supported the project under the project number KHM/SGP/OP Y2/CORE/BD/2022/05. The project commenced on September 6, 2022, and is scheduled to conclude on February 29, 2024.

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1.3. Project Objectives

The overall objectives of the project are as follows:

To enhance people's livelihoods effectively and sustainably by actively involving and encouraging the full participation of local communities in implementing of Community forestry management plan, which serves as a model for Pursat province.

Specific Objectives:

Objective 1: By the end of February 2024, 204 community members from community forestry (CF) in Veal village have increased a better understanding of sustainable forest and natural

resource management, actively participating in the full implementation of Community Forestry management plan.

Objective 2: By the end of February 2024, the Community Forestry Management Committee have established a financial management mechanism to cover the costs associated with sustainable conservation.

Objective 3: By the end of February 2024, lessons learned and best practices obtained from the project implementation were compiled, distributed, and disseminated to the community and stakeholders for future implementation.

Final project Evaluation Objective:

The Evaluation aims to evaluate the project's relevance, effectiveness, sustainability and impact resulting from the implementation of all project activities. It also intends to document successful experiences and lessons learned during project implementation and provide recommendations for future project planning and implementation.

II. Project Methodologies

To ensure the quality of data collection and analysis for the report of findings, the consultant employed the following methodologies:

1. Desk review:

From February 19 to 20, 2024, the consultant conducted a comprehensive review of the project monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) indicators. This involved gathering secondary data to design questionnaires, develop tools, and write the final evaluation report with clear evidence-based analysis. The following documents were reviewed:

- Project proposal with a logical framework approach
- Project budget
- Project reports
- Attendance lists of the events

2. Kick off meeting with AK management staff:

On February 21, 2024, the consultant joined a meeting with AK management team to receive clear orientation on the project, discuss the actual schedule for data collection, and provide feedback on the questionnaires.

3. Data collection in the field:

Data collection took place from February 23 to 24, 2024, utilizing the following methods:

3.1. Key Informant Interviews (KII) with AK project management team:

Separate interviews were conducted with technical and management staff to gather insights into the project's outputs, outcomes, relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability plans, as outlined in the project proposal. Executive Director, program

coordinator joined the interview and guided the consultant team to meet relevant respondents in the community forestry area.

3.2. Key Informant Interviews with relevant stakeholders:

Interviews were conducted with officials from the Forestry Administration Cantonment and the commune council to explore information and results related to the relevance, satisfaction, outputs, and outcomes of the Community Forestry. Discussions also covered on observed gaps and challenges, sustainability, and recommendations for the next project design.

3.3. Focus Group Discussions:

Two focus group discussions were held. The first involved with 8 community forestry management committee members including 1 woman and the second group consisted of 15 community forestry members, including 10 females. The discussions aimed to explore the relevance, outputs, outcomes, impact, sustainability, and identify any gaps, challenges, and suggestions for AK and donors.

3.4. Field and household observations:

The consultant reviewed actual project achievements by visiting model farmers and smallholder business and the forest in the community Forestry area.

4. Data tabulation and analysis:

The consultant was responsible for tabulating and analyzing the collected data. They ensured that an adequate amount of information was gathered from the respondents to facilitate the analysis and reporting of findings.

III. Findings

1. Relevance of the project goal and objectives

1.1. Addressing the Needs of the Forestry Community:

The project effectively addresses the needs of the Community Forestry by focusing on capacity building in agricultural skills, small business skills, and providing a revolving fund. It also provides education on forestry laws and sustainable natural resource management. These efforts empower community members to take control of their natural resources and promote sustainable use of the forest. As a result, some community members have been able to generate income through activities such as vegetable growing, chicken raising, and starting small businesses like selling cakes, groceries, and producing banana chips for sale within and outside the community.

1.2. Enabling the Forestry Administration Cantonment in Performing Their Roles:

(add the MoU as reference) The officials of the Forestry Division and Triage of Kravanh District, Pursat Province, have demonstrated a strong commitment to supporting the forest community in various areas, including capacity building, conflict resolution, and patrolling to safeguard the forest. They emphasize that this project significantly contributes to the needs of the forestry community and aligns with the annual plan of the Forestry Administration Division and Triage by supporting the forestry community in enhancing their understanding of forest and sustainable natural management laws, managing conflicts, and conserving natural resources. This is achieved through activities such as maintaining small trees and patrolling the forest within the boundaries of the Veal Community Forestry. Despite the limited budget of their department for implementing the plan, the project has engaged them to fulfill their responsibilities that align perfectly with the project's objectives and interventions.

1.3. Commune Development Planning:

The chief of the commune expressed satisfaction with the project implemented by AK and believed that it effectively addressed the community's needs in terms of conserving the Community Forestry area, as stipulated by the forestry law, as well as the need for livelihood improvement within the entire community. This was achieved through initiatives such as vegetable growing, chicken raising, and small businesses aimed at generating income for target beneficiaries.

As part of their obligations, the commune council is responsible for developing the Commune Development Plan (CDP) and Commune Investment Program (CIP). These plans focus on natural resource management and sustainable agricultural development, taking into account the relevant issues and concerns of the community. The commune council aims to integrate these concerns into the commune development plan, allowing them to mobilize the commune fund or seek other sources of funding to address these issues. However, the commune administration has faced challenges in mobilizing resources due to limited funds provided by the government.

As a result, the commune council always participates in project activities whenever they are informed or invited by the Community Forestry. They recognize that the project creates an opportunity for better engagement among the commune council members, the Community Forestry committee and members, and Forestry Administration officers enabling the commune council to effectively perform their role in natural resource management. This role has been delegated to the Community Forestry committee by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and fisheries.

2. Efficiency

2.1. Partnership and Collaboration

To ensure the effective and efficient implementation of the project, AK has established a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Pursat Forestry Administration Cantonment. This MoU aims to establish cooperation and support from relevant officials, including the

Cantonment, Division, and Triage of Kravanh Forestry Administration, as well as local village and commune authorities. Through this partnership, technical and legal assistance were provided, and any challenges encountered during the project implementation were addressed with a noticeable result.

2.2. Community Awareness of Sustainable Forest and Natural Resource Management

Significant strides have been made in raising community awareness about sustainable forest and natural resource management. An impressive 85% of the 204 community members involved in the Community Forestry (CF) in Veal village have demonstrated a notable improvement in their understanding of the laws of forestry and natural resource protected area, procedures and technique of forest measuring following their participation in dissemination and training events. This increased knowledge has played a pivotal role in implementing the community forestry management plan, which aims to preserve 715 hectares of community forests for sustainable utilization.

Moreover, with the valuable support and collaboration of the Forestry Administration Triage, a commendable 80% of the activities listed in Community forestry management plan has been effectively put into action. This includes the establishment of forest patrol posts, the implementation of capacity-building initiatives, the replenishment of seedlings, the mobilization of resources, and the establishment of savings groups and community credit programs. The partnership between the community and the Forestry Administration has been instrumental in achieving these outcomes and ensuring the sustainable management of forest resources.

2.3. Small Grant Management for Sustainable Conservation, Empowerment, and Community Development

The Community Forestry Management Committee has been awarded a small grant (Mini-trust fund) of \$ 8800 from the project for earning income for conserving and protection of community forest areas, which they have decided to invest in a savings and loan program. In order to effectively manage the interest generated from the savings and credit program and cover the costs associated with sustainable conservation of CF forest areas, the committee has developed a robust financial management mechanism and established a statute for financial management.

The project has placed significant emphasis on building the capacity of the Community Forestry Management Committee in finance and loan management. As a result, 90% of the 15 committee members have expanded their knowledge and skills by participating in a comprehensive training course on financial management and accounting. Additionally, a careful selection process of community forestry credit management was conducted, resulting in the appointment of three competent community forestry credit managers from a pool of 15 participants, ensuring effective oversight of the community forestry credit.

The total of 92 families have received a revolving fund of \$100 per family. This fund has been specifically designed to support various initiatives, such as poultry farming, vegetable cultivation, and small business establishment, with the aim of generating sustainable income for

their families. Moreover, the project provided these 92 disadvantaged families with essential skills in micro-agriculture and business planning to further empower them and improve their livelihoods. This revolving fund not only fosters economic growth but also encourages active participation in Community Forestry management and patrolling?.

In addition to these efforts, the project has undertaken important community development initiatives. It has overseen the construction of four tourist huts, installation of six 200-watt solar lights, and the establishment of a two-room toilet. These infrastructures are not only important for local tourists who stay there when they visit the forestry area but also for the community forestry management committee's use during their patrols. Furthermore, the water supply network has been expanded, ensuring access to clean water for 86 families in Veal village, significantly improving their quality of life and livelihoods.

2.4. Development of Best Practices and Lessons Learned

In order to develop best practices and draw lessons learned from the project implementation, AK implemented the following interventions:

- a) **Workshop on Project Results:** AK has conducted a one-day workshop by the end of February 2024, with a total of 65 participants, including 65% women and 5 people with disabilities. The workshop aims to showcase the project's results and provide a platform for sharing knowledge and experiences among stakeholders.
- b) **Strengthening Staff Capacity and Mission Costs:** AK has prioritized the strengthening of staff capacity and allocated resources for mission costs in collaboration with donors and stakeholders. This investment in staff development ensures that the project team possesses the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively implement and manage similar initiatives.
- c) **Final Project Evaluation and Internal Inspections:** AK has engaged an independent consultant to conduct a comprehensive final evaluation of the project. This evaluation will provide an objective assessment of the project's outcomes, impact, and effectiveness. In addition, AK has conducted internal inspections of the institution in the target area to closely monitor project progress and identify areas for improvement.
- d) **Compilation of Case Studies and Production of a Best Practices Video:** AK has undertaken the task of compiling three case studies that highlight the challenges, good practices and experience from the project regarding chicken raising, banana chip production and saving management. Additionally, a short video were ~~will be~~ produced to effectively share these best practices with the community and stakeholders.
- e) **Provision of Essential Equipment and Staff Support:** As part of additional activities, AK has provided the Veal Village Committee with a laptop (Dell Rem 4G, HD 1T) for \$280, an HP LaserJet Pro M135a printer for \$160, and supported two staff missions in Pursat for \$20. These provisions aim to enhance the CF committee's capacity and improve project implementation.

3. Effectiveness and Impact

3.1. Partial Improvements in Livelihoods and Positive Impact of the Project Intervention

According to the evaluation consultant's findings, the community has experienced partial improvements in their livelihoods, contributing effectively and sustainably to the overall objective of the project, which aims to enhance people's livelihoods. Although the project did not fully achieve its objective due to the relatively short implementation period of 18 months, from September 6, 2022, to February 29, 2024, it did demonstrate significant progress towards its overall goal. The following indicators highlight positive changes:

- **Increased Awareness and Attitude Change:** There is noticeable evidence of a shift in the community's attitude and behavior towards forestry conservation. Most community members now understand the importance and benefits of conserving forests for non-timber products and as a heritage for future generations.
- **Effective Community Forestry Management:** The community forestry management committee members have assumed a proactive role in overseeing the management of the community's forestry resources for collective use within the community. They have developed the necessary skills and expertise to effectively govern the community forest areas and have fostered partnerships with forestry administration and civil society organizations, such as Conservation International (CI), to successfully implement collaborative patrol initiatives.
- **Enhanced Capacity of Committee Members:** The community forestry committee members have gained capacity in natural conservation through their participation in various awareness raising events, including training courses, meetings, and discussions focused on forestry law, patrolling procedures, and empowerment methods related to the project.
- **Implementation of Annual Forest Management Plan:** The community actively participated in the development and implementation of an annual community forestry management plan, covering a total area of 715 hectares of community forests. This active involvement demonstrates their strong commitment to practicing sustainable forestry and effectively managing the available resources.
- **Active Engagement in Conservation Efforts:** The Veal community Forestry members have actively participated in forest conservation efforts because they receive a small grant as a revolving fund in the amount of \$8800 USD. This serves as a sustainable financial management mechanism to support the implementation of the CF patrol action plan and related conservation activities.
- **Economic Empowerment:** Additionally, 85% of the community members and committees, comprising 204 families and 812 individuals, including 609 women, have started saving and received loans from the forestry community management committee. These funds are utilized for starting businesses or engaging in agriculture, thereby generating income for their families.

- **Transparency in Saving and Loan Management:** To ensure transparency in saving and loan management, the community forestry management committees have conducted regular monthly meetings to discuss matters concerning the management of the community forestry area and loan. During these meetings, they openly share information about the small grant savings and credit management program with the community members.

As part of the project, a small grant of \$8800 has already been provided to the Veal community forestry management committee. The head of the community forestry has reported that this grant is utilized as savings and loans for a total to 92 families. Each family received \$100 from the community forestry committee. The revolving fund is specifically provided to community members who have clear plans to start raising chickens, growing vegetables, or engaging in small businesses.

Importantly, all community members are well-informed about how the interest earned from the loans is utilized within the community. The community has outlined a clear allocation plan for the interest earned from the loans. They have explained that 10% of the interest is dedicated to covering operational costs, 30% is allocated towards increasing capital, 30% is used for conservation and patrolling activities and 30% used for committee members. This transparent breakdown ensures that community members are aware of how the funds are being utilized and allows for accountability in the management of the small grant program.

3.2. Replicability of Project Intervention and Approach in Natural Resource Protection:

The project intervention, approach, and experiences can be replicated by NGOs and CBOs working in natural resource protection because this project not only builds the capacity of the community forestry committee members to perform sustainable natural resource management, but also provides them with CF patrolling materials and equipment. Additionally, it improves the livelihoods of community members who depend on the forest resources for income generation through improving agriculture products and small businesses. Furthermore, the project has reduced expenses for clean water supply connections for 86 poor households. The establishment of four tourist huts has also welcomed many visitors to the community forestry area, providing valuable experience for potential eco-tourism projects in the future.

4. Sustainability:

The project's implementation period of only 18 months poses a challenge in assessing its long-term impact and sustainability. Nevertheless, the evaluator can highlight several achievements thus far, including increased knowledge, a positive shift in the community's perspective towards land and forests, and active engagement from state actors. The project has also facilitated the application of learning and reinforced the roles of the community in sustainable natural resource conservation. Previously, the community and other stakeholders were passive in their efforts towards natural resource conservation.

While it is premature to determine long-term sustainability, the evaluation consultant has identified some promising signs. These include the community's commitment to continuing forest patrols and the development of a community forest management action plan for implementation within a short timeframe. The community plans to utilize a portion of the small grant savings provided by the project to cover expenses related to patrolling. Additionally, the community now holds a positive perspective towards the forest, recognizing the importance of protecting natural resources. Furthermore, there has been integration of community needs into the local planning process, including the Community Development Plan (CDP) and the Commune Investment Program (CIP). This integration enables the commune council to allocate funds for activities related to natural resource conservation when AK phases out its interventions.

IV. Gaps/Challenges and Lessons learned from project implementation

4.1. Gaps/Challenges

- Some individuals are taking advantage of the situation by intentionally setting fire to the forest to encroach upon the land, often resulting in the destruction of fire roads. These incidents predominantly occur during nighttime.
- Land encroachment poses a significant challenge: Without robust law enforcement by the local authority and FA, both outsider and insider communities can continue to encroach upon the CF land. The CF management committee has reported that six local citizens, who own land near the community forest area, have encroached upon the CF land within the community forestry area. The village chief, along with the community forestry management committee, has reported all these cases to the forestry administration and local authorities. However, the forestry administration has only invited these offenders for discussions, without taking further action to halt their encroachment.
- While the community forestry management committee has shown commendable dedication to forest patrolling, some community members interviewed have revealed that they are unable to participate in patrolling activities due to their busy schedules. They are primarily occupied with their own businesses, such as farming and collecting agricultural products, in order to earn a living.
- Regarding the legality of the expanded land size of 430 hectares, the community forestry was initially granted the rights to control 285 hectares of land by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries. However, the community forestry has expanded its control to an additional 430 hectares, which has been acknowledged by the forestry administration but has not yet been officially recognized by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (MAFF).
- With the strong support and monitoring provided by AK, the community forestry management committee has demonstrated effectiveness in managing the revolving fund. However, there is a concern that the management system might weaken once AK withdraws its intervention. This is primarily due to the absence of a financial policy and annual budget management which are crucial for ensuring the continued effective management of the revolving fund.

- The commune administration has acknowledged the importance of integrating certain activities from the community forestry management plan into the commune development plan and commune investment program. However, due to the allocation of a significant portion of the commune budget towards infrastructure projects, there is currently limited funding available for implementing community forestry patrol and natural resource management (NRM) initiatives.

4.2. Lessons Learned

1. The successful implementation of the project can be attributed to the effective collaboration and networking, both in formal and informal settings, among the community Forestry and key stakeholders, including the commune council, district authority, and forestry administration. Additionally, the professionalism of AK staff has played a crucial role in empowering and capacity building, as well as in coordinating planning efforts with the community forestry and stakeholders.
2. The development and review of a community forestry management plan, which involved active participation from the community, local authorities, and the community forestry, will significantly contribute to building the community's capacity in planning and empowering their rights to control over natural resources. This, in turn, will aid in reducing the impacts of climate change.
3. By effectively managing the CF credit and savings, the community Forestry will be able to generate more interest and capital. This will provide them with the necessary budget to cover expenses related to CF areas conservation, such as constructing fire roads and protecting against fires, illegal tree cutting, and land encroachment.
4. The community's management of subsidies through CF savings and revolving fund has been highly effective, largely due to the strong support and monitoring provided by AK during the project implementation phase. However, there is concern that this management system may weaken once AK withdraws its intervention.

V. Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1. Conclusion

This project has been successfully implemented, demonstrating effectiveness, efficiency, and a significant positive impact on the community's capacity. A notable shift in the community's perspective on natural resource control has occurred, as they now recognize the benefits of collecting non-timber forest products and the importance of preserving natural resources for future generations. The community has taken decisive action in conserving natural resources through a range of activities, including the construction of fire roads, the cultivation and maintenance of small trees, the provision of education on environmental and forestry laws to

fellow community members, and the regular patrolling of their forest. Furthermore, the community has forged closer collaborations with local authorities, the forestry administration, and rangers in the Phnom Samkos Wildlife Sanctuary.

Relevant stakeholders, such as local authorities and the forestry administration, have expressed high satisfaction with the project's achievements. They appreciate the opportunity to collaborate with AK and fulfill their roles in natural resource management within the community Forestry, which has been delegated to empower the community in management of natural resources.

Promisingly, the community has exhibited the capability to sustain natural resource control once AK phases out its interventions. Through subsidies for investment acquired via savings and loans, the community has been able to generate interest and capital to cover expenses during forest patrols. Additionally, the 92 families who received loans from the community have the potential to generate income through applying modern agricultural techniques, such as vegetable cultivation, chicken farming, and small businesses. These endeavors not only improve the livelihoods of these families but also contribute to reducing disaster risks and addressing climate change in Cambodia.

The positive outcomes achieved in this project can be attributed to the effective methods of empowerment employed by AK, the unwavering commitment of the community, the collaboration of key stakeholders, and the supportive legal and policy framework provided by the government. These results will significantly contribute to reducing disaster risks and addressing climate change on a broader scale in Cambodia.

5.2. Recommendations for future project implementation

For future success, the project can effectively address the challenges related to forest fires, land encroachment, community participation, and land recognition. This will contribute to the sustainable management and protection of the community forestry, ensuring its long-term viability and benefits for both the community and the environment, the evaluator would like to give the following recommendations:

1. Should Strengthen Forest Fire Prevention and Law Enforcement Measures:

It is crucial to address the issue of intentional forest fires that are used as a means of encroachment. Implement strict surveillance measures, especially during nighttime, to identify and apprehend individuals who deliberately set fire to the forest. Collaborate closely with local law enforcement agencies and forest rangers to increase patrols and ensure the prompt response to fire incidents. Additionally, reinforce the construction and maintenance of fire roads to enhance accessibility for firefighting efforts and deter encroachment.

2. Should Enforce Land Ownership and Address Encroachment:

To combat CF land encroachment effectively, it is imperative to strengthen law enforcement mechanisms. The local authority should take decisive action against both outsider and insider communities that encroach upon the CF land within the community forest area. The forestry administration must work closely with the local authorities to investigate reported cases thoroughly and take appropriate legal measures against the offenders. This will serve as a deterrent and discourage further encroachment. Additionally, establish a clear and transparent process for resolving land ownership disputes and ensure that the rights of the community are protected.

3. Should Enhance Community Forestry Member Participation in Forest Patrolling:

Recognize the challenges faced by community members who are unable to actively participate in forest patrolling due to their busy schedules. Explore alternative approaches to engage these individuals and encourage their involvement in protecting the community forest. This could include flexible patrolling schedules, organizing training sessions during weekends or non-peak periods, and incentivizing participation through rewards or recognition. Additionally, raise awareness among community members about the importance of their active involvement in forest patrolling and the long-term benefits it brings to their own livelihoods.

4. Seek Official Recognition for Expanded CF Land Size:

Work towards obtaining official recognition from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (MAFF) for the expanded CF land areas of 430 hectares under community forestry control. Collaborate closely with the forestry administration and MAFF to provide the necessary documentation and evidence to support the community's rightful claim over the additional land. Advocate for the timely review and approval of the expanded CF land size, ensuring that the community's efforts in managing and conserving natural resources are duly recognized and supported by the relevant government authorities.

5. Strengthening Financial Management and Accountability for Community Forestry Management

The Veal community forestry management committee should enhance its financial management practices and ensure the ongoing effective management of the revolving fund. This can be achieved by developing a comprehensive financial policy and an annual budget plan, as well as implementing proper documentation of expenditure filing. Moreover, AK, as a partner organization, should conduct periodic spot checks to promote transparency, accountability, and control over the utilization of the fund.

6. Integration of Community Forestry Management Plan into Community Development Planning and Investment Programs

The community forestry management committee should persist in integrating the community forestry management plan into the Community Development Plan (CDP) and Community Investment Program (CIP). By doing so, the commune administration can consider allocating commune funds for community forestry control in the future, recognizing its importance and ensuring its inclusion in the broader development framework.

Annexes:

1. ToR
2. Project Result Framework
3. Schedule of Field Data Collection
4. List of Respondents
5. Questionnaires