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Sahmakum Teang Tnaut Organization • a Cambodian Urban NGO

Fact and Figure #53

ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICE AND THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

**Analysis of Six Urban Poor Resettlement Locations
in Phnom Penh and Kandal**

April 2024



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Picture 1: Situation Houses and Residents at Vihea Sour Cheung, 2025

Cambodia is facing numerous challenges stemming from rapid urbanization, population growth, and vulnerability to climate change. These factors have significantly impacted public service delivery, particularly for poor communities displaced by various infrastructure development projects. This research examines the current status of access to public services and adaptation to climate change in six impoverished residential areas in Phnom Penh and Kandal Province, where residents were displaced between 2020 and 2023. The study sites are located in Khan Prek Proov, Khan Russey Keo, and Khan Chbar Ampov

of Phnom Penh, as well as the Khsach Kandal district of Kandal Province. The study focuses on three main objectives: first, to assess the provision of essential public services for those displaced to new housing; second, to examine the impacts of climate change and the adaptive capacity of residents in these new locations; and third, to provide actionable recommendations for stakeholders.

To achieve these objectives, a mixed methodology was employed, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative research methods. This included on-site visits, focus group discussions, and in-depth

interviews with displaced individuals, new residents, and civil society representatives. A review and analysis of national and international policies, laws, and legal documents were conducted to provide a broader understanding of the issues. Data was collected from multiple sources to ensure a comprehensive assessment of the challenges and solutions related to improving public service delivery and climate resilience for vulnerable communities.

The study identified several key findings, including the inadequate provision of basic public services such as clean water, electricity, healthcare, and education. Furthermore, poorly organized or insufficient infrastructure has led to substandard living conditions. Economic vulnerability has become an additional serious burden, as residents' remote locations hinder job stability, resulting in persistently low living standards. This situation has further exacerbated their vulnerability to the effects of climate change. Additionally, displaced communities often contend with issues such as contaminated water, rising temperatures, inadequate housing, and a lack of climate-resilient infrastructure. Moreover, there is a limited understanding of how to adapt to climate change. Communication and social protection systems also present significant challenges, moving to new homes has caused psychological stress, and

social relationships and cohesion have declined. Some families have lost their social protection support because their equity cards have expired and cannot be renewed in their new locations. Finally, although Cambodia has policies regarding relocation solutions and strengthening resilience to climate change, implementation remains incomplete. This may be attributed to limited resources, poor inter-agency coordination, and inadequate monitoring mechanisms.

Based on significant research, here are proposed recommendations to address the challenges faced by newly displaced people:

- ❑ Improve the delivery of public services, including water supply, sanitation, electricity, healthcare, and education. Local authorities should establish a task force to tackle resettlement-related issues and ensure timely solutions. Additionally, these basic public services should be prepared before the displaced individuals arrive at their new location. Local authorities should also explore partnerships with development organizations that can provide technical and financial support to enhance infrastructure and increase employment opportunities.
- ❑ Enhance livelihoods and other key priorities by having local authorities collaborate with the private sector

to establish job centers and skills development programs. The national administration can offer resource subsidies or loans to facilitate business creation.

- ❑ Increase resilience to climate change by investing in climate-resilient infrastructure. This includes constructing new housing in flood-free areas, utilizing quality building materials, and ensuring weather resistance in the new locations.
- ❑ Encourage civil society organizations to offer training courses on climate adaptation methods.
- ❑ Strengthen policy implementation at both national and local levels by establishing a coordinating framework to monitor long-term impact assessments. Seeking financial support from development partners is crucial to ensuring that policies are implemented effectively and transparently.

- ❑ Promote social inclusion for families relocating to new areas by fostering collaboration among the government, civil society organizations, and development partners. This teamwork should aim to rebuild networks and social connections to ensure psychological safety and positive relationships in their new environment.
- ❑ Overall, this study highlights the urgent need for a holistic approach to addressing the challenges related to public service delivery and climate resilience in new settlements in Cambodia. Effective collaboration among stakeholders on sustainable infrastructure investments and policy strengthening is essential for improving the livelihoods of all people, particularly vulnerable groups.



Picture 2: Aspect of Habitats at Vihea Sour Cheung, 2024

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I. BACKGROUND

Evictions and resettlement pose significant challenges for low-income housing in Phnom Penh. Rapid urban development and increasing urbanization have resulted in the displacement of many low-income families, often without adequate compensation or improved housing solutions, despite their rightful claim to adequate housing¹.

difficulties, lack of clean water, inadequate sanitation, and limited access to health care.

This ongoing issue highlights the need for urban planners to prioritize designing inclusive cities that consider the rights and needs of all residents, especially the most vulnerable populations.

Since 1980, more than 40,000 people in Phnom Penh have been evicted and relocated². The 2023 Phnom Penh Survey found that the number of urban poor settlements in Phnom Penh has decreased from 277 in 2017 to 191 in 2023, primarily due to forced evictions³. In addition, evictions and threats continue to plague inadequate housing in Phnom Penh, according to a report by the STT published in early 2024. The report identifies 11 urban poor settlements, affecting 884 families, or 3,798 individuals, who are at risk of eviction⁴.

These expulsions are often justified as essential for infrastructure development projects or urban growth. However, the low-income residential areas affected by such projects face numerous challenges, including job loss, school dropout, daily living

1. STT, Evictions, Compensation and Debt, 2023, Access through link: <https://teangtnaut.org/research/reports/Eviction,-Compensation,-and-Debt-Report-2023>

2. STT, Eviction and Relocation, June 2020, Access through link: <https://teangtnaut.org/research/reports/-Evictions-and-Relocations>

3. STT, Phnom Penh Survey, A Study on Urban Poor Settlements in Phnom Penh, 2023, Access through link: <https://teangtnaut.org/research/reports/THE-PHNOM-PENH-SURVEY-IN-2023:-A-Study-on-Urban-Settlements-in-Phnom-Penh>

4. STT, Land Security of Urban Poor Communities, Challenges and solutions, 2024, Access through link: <https://teangtnaut.org/research/reports/Land-Security-of-Urban-Poor-Communities:-Challenges-and-Solutions-2024>

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

2.1 Objectives

This study aims to understand the evolution of public services in new residential areas. It investigates six urban poor settlements in Phnom Penh that were relocated between 2020 and 2023, focusing on their adaptation to climate change. The study emphasises the need to promote economic growth, family stability, social equity, and environmental sustainability. The specific objectives of this study are:

- ❑ To understand the status of local public service provision for low-income households moving into new housing areas.
- ❑ Identify the direct and indirect impacts of climate change on the new settlement location.
- ❑ Provide recommendations and interventions to address the needs of communities relocated to new housing areas.

- ❑ How can the government and relevant stakeholders address the challenges faced by people at new resettlement areas?

2.2 Research Problems

- ❑ What specific public services are most important for individuals relocating to a new residence?
- ❑ How do gaps in public service provision in resettled areas increase vulnerability to climate change?
- ❑ What mechanisms has the Royal Government implemented to support the well-being of residents relocating to new areas?

III. RESEARCH METHODS

The study employed a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods. This included field visits, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews with both relocated members and representatives of the original villagers who lived alongside the new residents. The research targeted two groups: first, local residents from the original village, and second, representatives of the new residents, facilitating focus group discussions on essential public services and climate change in the new location.

The collected data was further validated through presentations to residents in the new area. Additionally, secondary data, such as policy documents, laws, and existing national and international legal documents, were gathered from several key sources to support the analysis and cross-check the main research findings. The research aims to illuminate the experiences and challenges faced by residents in the new location and serve as a reference document for policymakers regarding evictions and resettlements influenced by development projects.

Table 1: Urban poor settlement location selected for study

No	Names of Urban Poor Settlements in Old Locations	New locations			
		Village	Commune/ Sangkat	District/ Khan	Province/ City
1	Banteay Sleuk	Vihea Sour Cheung	Vihea Sour	Khsach Kandal	Kandal
2	Boeung Tamok (First location)	Toul Punsang	Punsang	Prek Phnov	Phnom Penh
3	Boeung Tamok (Second location)	Sre Dountoch	Punsang	Prek Phnov	Phnom Penh
4	Railway	Boeung Salang and Doeum Chan	Toul Sangke	Russey Keo	Phnom Penh
5	Toul Sangke A	Doeum Chan (Krol Ko)	Kilomet 6	Russey Keo	Phnom Penh
6	Chamroeun Akphivath (Prek Pra)	Champus Ka'ek	Prek Thmey	Chba Ampov	Phnom Penh

IV. OVERVIEW OF PUBLIC SERVICES AND CLIMATE CHANGE CHALLENGES IN NEW RESIDENTIAL AREAS

The residents faced climatic challenges such as rising temperatures . Their housing can be categorized into four types: Type 1: Houses with wooden walls and thatched roofs; Type 2: Houses with thatched walls and thatched roofs; Type 3: Concrete wall houses with thatched roofs; and Type 4: Concrete wall houses with tiled roofs.

Upon arrival at the new sites, nearly all the housing lacked concrete roads and drainage systems, and the water and electricity services were not operational. These systems were supposed to be ready prior to their arrival. In some areas, residents spent their own money to connect to the water and electricity systems, with costs ranging from 120,000 to 270,000 riels. Although they still live in poverty, most families interviewed reported a lack of access to social protection systems, such as ID Poor card.

One elderly woman, for example, suffered a traffic accident that broke her right leg. Without access to treatment at a referral or private hospital, she borrowed 400,000

riels from a neighbor to see a Khmer traditional healer⁵. While her ID Poor card from their previous location had expired, they could not be used at the new site. Additionally, the main challenges related to climate change include the severe impact of rising temperatures and the issue of contaminated water, particularly during the rainy season.

5. Krou Khmers are referred to by locals as traditional Khmer healers, who possess knowledge in treating diseases and healing bones using traditional methods.



Picture 3: Habitat in Toul Punsang was put on sale because the owner immigrated to other province, 2025

V. LEGAL ASPECTS OF HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNING CLIMATE CHANGE

5.1 About law and human rights

The Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia⁶ clearly stipulates that all citizens have equal rights, especially the right to adequate housing and the right to live with dignity⁷. To ensure these fundamental rights and in response to current challenges in Cambodia, the Royal Government decided to establish a “National Housing Policy” in 2014⁸. This policy aims to address the housing needs of citizens so they can live safe, healthy, and dignified lives. Among the nine housing options outlined in this policy, two main options warrant further analysis: Option 1: Affordable Housing and Option 6: Relocation to a New Place, specifically for the communities selected for study in this report.

Option 1 involves the Royal Government constructing housing for middle-income, low-income, and vulnerable groups by providing low-cost homes for sale at affordable prices and/or through long-

term installment plans. Option 6 proposes establishing new settlements near towns that have basic infrastructure and services, ensuring easy access to employment and safe living conditions.

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) has established seven minimum criteria for adequate housing, including⁹:

- ❑ Security of tenure: housing is not adequate if its occupants do not have a degree of tenure security which guarantees legal protection against forced evictions, harassment and other threats.
- ❑ Availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure: housing is not adequate if its occupants do not have safe drinking water, adequate sanitation, energy for cooking, heating, lighting, food storage or refuse disposal.
- ❑ Affordability: housing is not adequate if its cost threatens or compromises the occupants’ enjoyment of other human rights.

6. Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia, 21 September 1993, Access through link: <https://constitution.ccc.gov.kh/preahreachokram.php>

7. United Nations, Human right to adequate housing, Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, Access through link: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-housing/human-right-adequate-housing>

8. Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction, National Housing Policy, 09 May 2014, Access through link: National Housing Policy – Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction (mlmupc.gov.kh)

9. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Fact Sheet No. 21 on the Right to Adequate Housing, Dec 2012, Access through link: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/FS21_rev_1_Housing_en.pdf

- ❑ **Habitability:** housing is not adequate if it does not guarantee physical safety or provide adequate space, as well as protection against the cold, damp, heat, rain, wind, other threats to health and structural hazards.
- ❑ **Accessibility:** housing is not adequate if the specific needs of disadvantaged and marginalized groups are not taken into account.
- ❑ **Location:** housing is not adequate if it is cut off from employment opportunities, health-care services, schools, childcare centres and other social facilities, or if located in polluted or dangerous areas.
- ❑ **Cultural adequacy:** housing is not adequate if it does not respect and take into account the expression of cultural identity.

particularly those affecting individuals with limited means from poor communities, must ensure freedom from discrimination by competent authorities. Vulnerable groups have the right to regular and safe access to (a) essential food, clean water, and sanitation; (b) basic shelter and housing; (c) appropriate clothing; (d) essential medical services; (e) livelihood sources; (f) fodder for livestock and access to common property resource previously depended upon; and (g) education for children and childcare facilities. Additionally, the section states that the State not only has a responsibility to provide adequate compensation but should also ensure that members of the same family or community are not separated due to eviction¹⁰.

5.2 About Climate Change

Moreover, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Cambodia has issued "United Nations Commentary and Guidelines on Eviction and Resettlement," which include essential points in the "After an Eviction" section, focusing on "Immediate Relief and Relocation." This section emphasizes the government's responsibility to provide adequate compensation and appropriate accommodation, or restitution where possible, as soon as feasible after eviction, except in cases of forced eviction. Evictions,

Current affairs: Climate change is a major challenge facing the world, and its impacts profoundly affect human lives¹¹. In addition, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration found that global temperatures have increased by 1.1 degrees Celsius (°C) from 1850 to 2023, significantly impacting the world's population. Notably, vulnerable groups are the most affected due to social inequalities¹².

10. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Cambodia, United Nations Commentary, Guidelines on Eviction and Resettlement, June 2013. Access through link: <https://cambodia.ohchr.org/kh/content/united-nations-commentary-and-guidelines-eviction-and-resettlement>

11. NRDC, What are the effects of climate change? 24 October 2022, Access through link: <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/what-are-effects-climate-change>

12. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Impacts of Climate Change, 13 August 2021, Access through link: <https://www.noaa.gov/education/resource-collections/climate/climate-change-impacts>

Similarly, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has warned that the risks of climate change are more severe than previously thought, with 3.6 billion people living in areas highly vulnerable to its effects. Developing and low-income countries are particularly affected, experiencing mortality rates 15 times higher than those in less vulnerable regions. The World Health Organization is addressing the health impacts of climate change, particularly in Asia, with the aim of achieving universal health coverage (UHC). Additionally, climate change is increasing foodborne illnesses and disease mortality, which threaten access to health services and contribute to hunger and food insecurity¹³.

Cambodia, a developing country in Asia, is being severely affected by climate change, highlighting the urgent need for adaptation to its impacts. Without effective adaptation and mitigation measures, Cambodia could face costs of up to 9 percent of its gross domestic product by 2050, and the poverty rate could increase by 6 percent by 2040¹⁴. This finding presents a significant issue for poor or vulnerable urban housing locations, which are not only affected by climate change but also lack access to adequate housing. In fact, a report by the Habitat for Humanity Cambodia in 2023 found

that 40 percent of urban residents live in unregulated informal settlement areas¹⁵.

5.3 Public Service Relations in the Context of Climate Change

Population growth and urbanization are continually reshaping cities around the world, leading to significant challenges such as climate change, social inequality, and economic hardship. Addressing these challenges requires timely consideration of solutions to help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Currently, more than half of the world's population is urban, a figure expected to reach 2.4 billion by 2050. This substantial population growth is driving rapid urban expansion, which poses challenges for governments. Additionally, unplanned urban development exacerbates the negative impacts of climate change, while the increasing demand for housing affects over 1.1 billion people¹⁶. UN-Habitat published a report in 2024 estimating that more than 2 billion urban dwellers will face rising temperatures by 2040. These individuals, primarily from vulnerable populations and underdeveloped areas, are the most at risk from the effects of climate change¹⁷.

13. World Health Organization, Climate Change, 12 October 2023, Access through link: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health>

14. World Bank, Cambodia Country Climate and Development Report (English), 01 November 2023, Access through link: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/099092823045083987/P17887106c6c2d0e909aa1090f3e10505c1>

15. Habitat for Humanity, Habitat for Humanity in Cambodia, Access through link: <https://shorturl.at/xWZed>

16. Rossbach, As Global Cities Expand Rapidly, People Must Be at the Center of Planning, 20 December 2024, Access through link: <https://time.com/7203147/sustainable-urban-development/>

17. UN-Habitat, World Cities Report 2024, Cities and Climate Action, 2024. Access through link: https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2024/11/wcr_2024_-_full_report.pdf

The growth of humanity worldwide and the expansion of cities are constant and unstoppable processes. Clear, long-term planning for urban development is essential. To ensure sustainable development and effectively address climate change, special attention should be given to vulnerable groups, including those living in informal settlements and impoverished housing areas that are being resettled. It is crucial to prepare adequate local infrastructure, particularly regarding social connectivity and green diversity that can withstand climate change. In response to these challenges, Cambodia has developed a "Phnom Penh Sustainable City Plan 2018-2030¹⁸. " A roadmap for policymakers at the national and sub-national levels, along with national and international development partners, aims to develop urban areas that promote economic growth, poverty reduction, and inclusive development while aligning with climate change mitigation goals. However, many newly resettled poor communities have not yet received adequate housing and infrastructure. This issue must be addressed promptly to ensure their livelihoods can adapt to climate change. Therefore, the challenges they face should be resolved in a timely manner.

5.4 Features of Climate-Resilient Local Infrastructure

Rapid urban population growth and urbanization are interconnected in urban land use planning, which seeks to balance economic, social, and environmental development. Living in the context of climate change is unavoidable for all citizens, but planning and adapting to it is the responsibility of the Royal Government to ensure that the lives of all citizens, especially vulnerable groups and those in poor residential areas being resettled, are resilient. Their key needs include basic infrastructure and housing that can withstand climate change. Planning infrastructure and housing that effectively responds to climate change encompasses six key points¹⁹:

- ❑ First, climate-adapted housing design: Housing should be constructed with careful consideration of layout and orientation. Natural airflow, strategically placed windows and shades, light-colored materials, and insulated ceilings are essential. Building a home according to these principles can create a comfortable and inviting environment.
- ❑ Second, reduce energy costs: Lowering energy costs can decrease daily expenses and reduce energy consumption, particularly electricity, which contributes to the negative effects of climate change. This can be achieved in three ways: 1. Using natural light by incorporating plastic bottles or candles instead of electric bulbs; 2. Designing a home that allows

18. NCSd, GGGI & ICEM, Sustainable Urban Development Plan for Phnom Penh 2018-2030, 19 November 2024, Access through link: Sustainable City Plan for Phnom Penh 2018-2030_En

19. STT, A handbook for poor communities in Cambodia, Climate Smart Guidelines, Access through link: https://app.teangtnaut.org/storage/attachments/332/Climate-Smart-Design-Guidelines_MIS-SCCF--STT.pdf

ample natural light to enter; and 3. Utilizing solar energy.

- ❑ Third, low-carbon and upcycled materials: Recyclable or low-cost materials should be considered for housing construction, especially for low-income residents. Materials like bamboo or natural wicker can be used for walls, ceilings, or other areas of the home, depending on their availability and practicality. Additionally, air bricks and eco bricks are good options for constructing walls, as they offer excellent thermal and acoustic properties to keep homes cool. Using eco bricks also benefits the environment by recycling solid waste as raw material. Furthermore, stone or plastic bottles can be used to build parts of the house's walls, as these materials are readily available and inexpensive.
- ❑ Fourth, management solid waste: Reusing, reducing, and recycling solid waste is an effective strategy for lowering daily costs and combating climate change. This can be implemented through various methods, including establishing waste collection sites, composting kitchen waste, and creating biogas plants. These approaches help maintain a clean local environment, reduce the impacts of climate change, and improve living conditions.
- ❑ Fifth, clean water and sanitation: Access to clean water and sanitation is essential for everyone. Each house should be equipped to collect natural

rainwater for storage, and a water filter should be used to ensure that the water is safe for consumption. This method is particularly effective in areas without a clean water supply. Additionally, well-designed drainage systems should be implemented to prevent stagnant water and maintain hygiene.

- ❑ Sixth, small vegetable garden: Creating a small garden is an easy and low-cost option that significantly enhances well-being for homes with limited space. These gardens can be made from old plastic bottles and cups, tailored to the available space. Old cardboard can also serve as a substitute for vases or plant pots, which are inexpensive and easy to find. Moreover, flowers and other plants in these small gardens improve indoor air quality and increase the oxygen levels that people need.

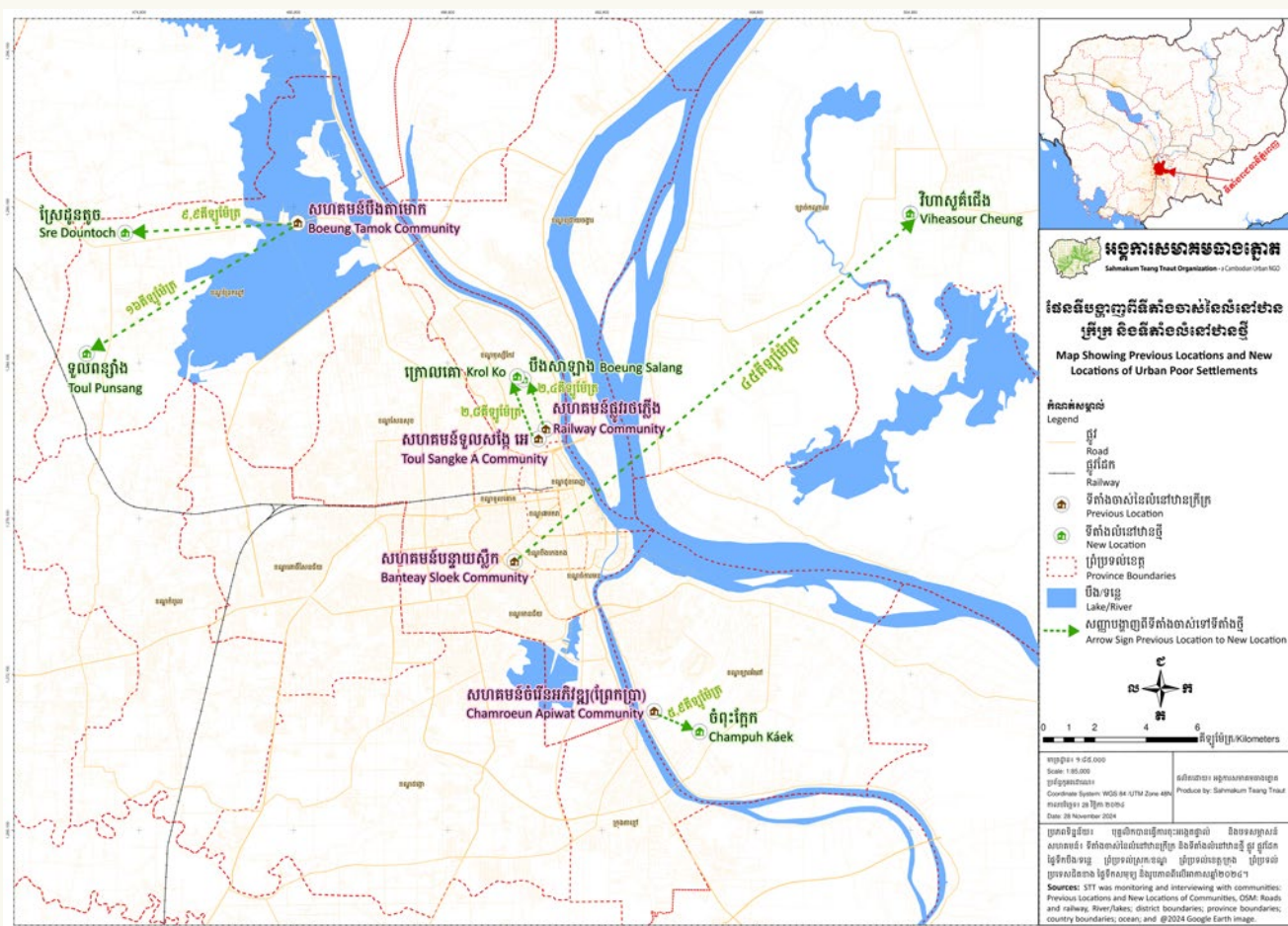
VI. KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

6.1 The Different Forms of Compensation

Table 2: Summary of Compensation form for settlement

No	Old location of Urban Poor Settlements	Compensation	Number of Household	Distance from Old Location to New Location	Address of the New Location
1	Banteay Sleuk	Land size: 4m x 15m Budget: \$100 No house	87	45 kilometers	Khsach Kandal District
2	Boeung Tamok (First location)	Land size: 5m x 18m Budget: \$1,000 No house	11	16 kilometers	Khan Prek Phnov
3	Boeng Tamok (Second location)	First installment (1 household): • Land size: 5m x 30m • Budget: \$10,000 • No house Second installment (12 households): • Land size: 5m x 30m • Budget: \$10,000 • 1 house	13	9.9 kilometers	Khan Prek Phnov
4	Railway	Land size: 4m x 15m No budget No house	32	2.4 kilometers	Khan Russey Keo
5	Toul Sangkae A	Land size: 4m x 15m No budget No house	300	2.8 kilometers	Khan Russey Keo
6	Chamroeun Akphivat (Prek Pra)	Land size: 4m x 15m No budget No house	300	5.9 kilometers	Khan Chbar Ampov

Table 2 summarizes the compensation arrangements for the six poor housing sites. The compensation varied and included land plots, funds, and houses. The smallest land plots measured 4 x 15 meters, while the largest measured 5 x 30 meters. The amounts of funds received also varied significantly; the highest was \$10,000, with some families receiving no funds at all. Furthermore, the distances between the old and new sites illustrate the inconsistency of the relocation mechanism. The closest site was 2.4 kilometers away, while the furthest was 45 kilometers away, making it more difficult to access than the others.



Map 1: Showing previous locations and new locations of Urban Poor Settlements

6.2 Limited Access to Public Services

The research results indicate that the lack of basic public services in the new locations presented numerous challenges. Many families were unable to receive full financial support and public services because they had used their own funds or borrowed money to construct their new homes. Additionally, they incurred extra expenses for water and electricity

connection fees. Furthermore, the ID Poor card, which is crucial for their livelihood support, could not be utilized. This situation highlights their inadequate access to essential public services, despite the Royal Government's efforts to establish policies and programs aimed at improving these services.

In the case of the Banteay Sleuk community, which relocated to Khsach Kandal district in Kandal province in 2020, residents are

facing significant livelihood problems. Upon settling in their new homes, they discovered there was no clean water or electricity. They ended up spending more of their own money than the \$100 compensation they received, along with the materials salvaged from their old site, to build their new houses.

6.3 Job Opportunities and Life

The employment opportunities in the new location do not align with the previous occupations or skills of the residents, creating a significant obstacle that impacts their daily lives. Most individuals who have relocated must either change jobs or migrate elsewhere to find work that can support their families, as there are no positions available that match their prior skills. For instance, among the 11 families that moved from Boeung Tamok to Toul Punsang village in 2021, 8 families have already migrated to other provinces in search of better job opportunities. The remaining families are living in inadequate conditions. The jobs available to them primarily consist of construction work, which does not provide a stable income to support their daily livelihood, resulting in a lack of consistent monthly employment. Moreover, they face the risk of exploitation and fraud from construction managers.

6.4 Adaptation to Climate Change

Climate change, particularly heat waves, along with inadequate compensation such as climate-resilient housing, has significantly impacted the livelihoods of people relocated to new areas. Interview results indicated that the form of compensation remains unclear. Out of 796 households relocated from six impoverished housing sites, only 12 households that moved to Sre Dountoch village in Khan Prek Pnov received compensation in the form of a stone house with a thatched roof on a 5 x 30 meters plot of land. However, these houses were not resilient or adaptable to climate change, forcing residents to spend additional money to build better homes. The findings reveal that most individuals who relocated did not receive housing compensation, leading them to incur further debt while still being unable to construct houses capable of withstanding climate change.

6.5 Main Challenges of New Residential Locations

Since moving to a new residential location between 2020 and the present, many still face significant challenges, including a lack of job opportunities, debt, inadequate access to education for children,

insufficient social protection services, and difficulties in adapting to climate change, particularly rising temperatures. Employment is the most crucial factor enabling them to earn an income to meet their daily needs; however, the absence of proper mechanisms that address their employment opportunities is a critical issue that warrants serious attention. The lack of job opportunities not only impacts their income but also contributes to a debt crisis and hinders their ability to support their children's education, leading some children to drop out of school. These challenges are interconnected and can adversely affect their livelihoods in the

long term. Furthermore, issues related to income are compounded by the lack of social protection services, such as social assistance and social security, as well as ineffective local health services. This situation forces them to spend a significant portion of their own money on medical treatment, further undermining their livelihoods.



Picture 4: Feature small business of people living in Toul Punsang, 2025

Case study: Living conditions after moving to a new residence

Mrs. Sophy (pseudonym) was a member of an urban poor settlements in Phnom Penh, moved to a new location in the Khsach Kandal district of Kandal province in 2020, about 45 kilometers from her previous location. Since leaving her old home, she, her husband, and her elderly mother have been living in their new place; and they are struggling in a dilapidated house made of wood, straw, and other materials salvaged from the old site. Her elderly mother said, *"When I first arrived, it was very miserable. There was no water and electricity, so I had to get it from a rented house nearly 2 kilometers away."* For the first month, her family received a month rent subsidy and only \$100 in compensation. However, they needed a significant amount of money to build a house and cover their daily expenses. Since their income had also decreased, her husband had to work far from home in construction in other provinces to support the family. For months, her family continued to live in hardship and faced many problems, especially with daily expenses, including healthcare services. In addition, thieves stole property and materials from their house. Ms. Sophy noted, *"It's just that we don't have anyone living there, and the walls are not strong at all."* Further difficulties arose for her family when, on March 8, 2024, her elderly mother had a traffic accident that resulted in a broken leg. Additionally, her ID Poor card was no longer valid. She could not afford to treat her mother in the hospital due to the high costs, so, as a last resort, her elderly mother had to be treated by a Krou Khmer in the traditional way because it cost a small amount of money²⁰. To date, her family's living conditions have not improved, and her mother's health has still not recovered.



Picture 5: Mrs. Sophy's house (representative name) and her living situation, 2024



Picture 6: Wall at the back of her house got cracked by thieves, 2024

20. Krou Khmers are referred to by locals as traditional Khmer healers, who possess knowledge in treating diseases and healing bones using traditional methods.

VII. ANALYSIS OF KEY FINDINGS IN LIGHT OF LEGAL, HUMAN RIGHTS AND CLIMATE CHANGE PERSPECTIVES

Why does the Royal Government of Cambodia ratify international treaties and regulations?

Laws, treaties, agreements, and other relevant international regulations play an important role in enhancing cooperation and global order. The significance of international law and its provisions includes the maintenance of peace and stability²¹, facilitating economic development, enhancing the coherence of provisions, promoting human rights²², and protecting the environment. International human rights law establishes obligations that states must uphold. By ratifying and becoming parties to international treaties, states incur obligations under international law to respect human rights. They must respect, protect, and fulfill these rights²³. Therefore, in the case of Cambodia, a member of the United Nations, it must respect, protect, and guarantee the right to life, as well as the right to adequate housing for all citizens without discrimination, particularly for vulnerable groups in urban poor housing areas.

Have mechanisms for relocating the six urban poor settlements been fully implemented in accordance with national and international laws, policies, and legal instruments?

Based on relevant documents and research results, it is clear that the six new housing sites have not yet received adequate housing that can address climate change.

If we examine the seven minimum criteria for adequate housing from the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), we can analyze each of them as follows:

❑ *Security of tenure*: From 2020 to the present, the six new residential sites have not received a certificate of ownership (land title deed) that proves legal land tenure (hard title type) as these issues may be related to land concession conditions or other reasons. This means that residents are still living in insecurity, as only the certificate of ownership can confirm their full rights to manage, use, and benefit from the land they occupy. In fact, some families who moved to Vihear

21. United Nations, Secretary-General of the United Nations, 2011 Convention. Access through link: <https://shorturl.at/Q2KNR>

22. United Nations, The 2010 Treaties, Towards universal participation and implementation, Access through link: https://treaties.un.org/doc/source/events/2010/Press_kit/fact_sheet_5_english.pdf

23. United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Foundation of International Human Rights Law, Access through link: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/udhr/foundation-of-international-human-rights-law>

Sour Cheung village since 2020 are still at risk of land acquisition, as families living on lots 1 to 32 have not yet separated their land from the company, and they continue to protest for a solution up to the provincial level.

- ❑ *Availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure:* Among the six poor households relocated to new locations, only two were closer to their old locations: the railway line and Toul Sangke A, which are about 2 kilometers away. The others were moved to locations between 5 and 45 kilometers away, most of which are far from the city. Consequently, these households do not have access to the same quality of services, infrastructure, and public amenities as those in the city. For example, 13 families relocated from Boeung Tamok (Second location) to Sre Dountoch village in 2022 still lack access to clean water, and the local roads are in a dilapidated state, making travel difficult.
- ❑ *Affordability:* Because the compensation provided to displaced residents mostly are not kind of shelters, therefore they have to use their own budget of loans in order to build new shelter themselves. Due to this, it leads them to facing crucial challenges, especially the possibility to fall into debt.
- ❑ *Habitability:* As shown above, most residents in the six new housing

sites did not receive housing options; only 12 families in Sre Dountoch village were provided with housing. Additionally, only 2 of the 6 poor housing sites received cash compensation, with the highest amount being \$10,000. Moreover, residents had to spend their own money to build livable housing. The lack of adequate cash compensation and housing options posed a significant obstacle in obtaining decent housing. This situation forced many to rebuild their houses at the new sites using old materials and salvaged items, while others had to seek additional loans to construct homes within their means. Consequently, they did not have access to adequate housing that was resilient to climate change.

- ❑ *Accessibility:* Research results indicate the types of housing currently occupied are as follows: Type 1: Houses with wooden walls and thatched roofs; Type 2: Houses with thatched walls and thatched roofs; Type 3: Stone-walled houses with thatched roofs; and Type 4: Stone-walled houses with tiled roofs. Among these, only Type 4 houses can withstand climate change and demonstrate resilience. An analysis of housing conditions reveals that only two new housing locations, which relocated from the Railway Road and Toul Sangke A communities, feature Type 4 houses. Additionally, the homes in the other four new locations lack the

ability to withstand cold, wet, and hot weather, as well as rain, wind, and other health threats.

- ❑ *Location:* Three of the six resettlement sites are located in Sre Dountoch village, Toul Ponsang village in the Prek Pnov district, and Vihear Sour Cheung village in the Khsach Kandal district. The new locations, which are distant from the previous ones, often lead to lost job opportunities and compel residents to rent houses in the city or migrate to other provinces. Therefore, these new housing sites are unsuitable for them.
- ❑ *Cultural adequacy:* This significant issue concerning culture and tradition is particularly challenging regarding livelihood habits, especially for the people of Sre Dountoch and Toul Ponsang villages. These settlements traditionally fished on the surface of Boeung Tamok Lake

for their daily income but now live in the mountains. Consequently, their new living environment is incompatible with their previous lifestyle.



Picture 7: Housing compensation at Sre Dountouch (on the left, the house owner added their own money to finish the construction), 2025

VIII. CONCLUSION

The results of the research show that the implementation of the eviction and resettlement mechanism is still incomplete. This issue requires the Royal Government and relevant parties to jointly address the identified shortcomings. In general, development is considered a positive improvement, and residents—especially those in poor residential areas affected by development projects—should be given consideration regarding in-situ development options or relocation. New housing sites should offer compensation and take into account the right to adequate housing. However, the poor resettled in new housing sites, particularly in Sre Dountoch village, Toul Ponsang village, and Vihear Sour Cheung village, do not yet have full access to public services and lack adequate housing that meets the minimum criteria for adequate housing set by the United Nations Habitat Program. The absence of adequate compensation mechanisms contributes to the poor living conditions of people affected by development and poses an obstacle for the Royal Government in achieving sustainable country development. Moreover, most of their homes are not resilient to climate change. While Cambodia is vulnerable to climate change, overall development in these areas has not improved livelihoods or living conditions. Some families are facing declining incomes and a lack of job opportunities, leading to debt and other challenges.

This study highlights the key challenges and climate change issues facing impoverished settlements that have relocated to remote areas due to development projects. Despite mechanisms for evictions and resettlements, gaps remain in the provision of public services, infrastructure, and adequate housing—basic necessities for many resettled families. These gaps in policy implementation hinder efforts to improve the livelihoods of vulnerable groups and achieve sustainable development. Key findings indicate that access to clean water, electricity, and essential public services in new settlement remains low; compensation is inadequate and unclear; and housing does not meet international standards. This situation exacerbates poverty and vulnerability to climate change. To effectively address these challenges, Cambodia must urgently implement climate-friendly and sustainable development practices. Policymakers and stakeholders should strengthen the implementation of appropriate compensation mechanisms, prioritize public services, and develop infrastructure that is resilient to climate change.



Picture 8: House condition at Champuh Ka'ek used old materials remain from previous location, 2024

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on research findings regarding the key challenges faced by residents after eviction and resettlement, as well as the gaps in implementing appropriate compensation mechanisms, several recommendations are proposed for relevant parties, including the Royal Government of Cambodia, development partners, and civil society organizations, to address these challenges.

1) Improve public service delivery at the local level

- ❑ Royal Government: Establish a special task force at the local level to address resettlement issues and ensure adequate access to water supply, sanitation, electricity, healthcare, education, and social protection systems.
- ❑ Development agencies: Provide technical and financial support to improve infrastructure in the resettlement areas.

2) Increase resilience to climate change

- ❑ Royal Government: Invest in climate-resilient infrastructure, such as housing located in flood-free areas and constructed with materials that promote climate resilience. Additionally, long-term planning for the relocation of residents living in unorganized areas should be undertaken to identify clear new locations with adequate public services and infrastructure that can withstand climate change.

❑ The Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning, and Construction (MLMUPC):

- Develop a framework for incorporating standardized green spaces into urban planning, in particular resettlement of urban poor settlement.
- Encourage land planning for housing and building construction that can adapt to climate change, and construction should be affordable for low-income families, especially families moving to new resettlements areas.

❑ Civil society organizations: Organize training programs for residents in new housing locations on climate change adaptation strategies.

❑ Residents in new resettlement areas: Organize regular cleaning of homes and plant additional trees to enhance greenery and provide shade against the heat.

3) Improve living standards: The Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training, along with local authorities, should collaborate with the private sector to establish job centers and skills development programs near new housing locations. They can also provide resource grants or incentive packages to businesses to encourage job creation for residents in the area.

4) Strengthen policy implementation

- ❑ Government should establish a coordinating

framework to monitor long-term impact assessment systems and seek financial support from development partners to ensure that policies are implemented effectively and transparently.

- ❑ MLMUPC should comprehensively improve monitoring and evaluation the implementation of policy strategies, especially the National Housing Policy 2014.
- ❑ Department of Identification of Poor Households of the Ministry of Planning should review, interview and re-evaluate the possibility to obtain the equity card for relocated residents.
- ❑ Development agencies: Support monitoring systems to assess the long-term impact of migration policies on the well-being of citizens.

5) Promote inclusive social and spaces for communities

- ❑ Royal Government and Civil Society Organizations: Organize activities to build networks and strengthen social relationships for residents in new locations.
- ❑ Development agencies: Establish a funding program to provide social and mental health support for newly displaced families.

6) Solve common challenges

- ❑ Royal Government: Ensure that the relocation process is carried out transparently, with informed consent, without fear or coercion, and with the participation

of affected individuals. However, if the condition for on-site development is possible, the government should build houses for residential people, sell or rent in lower price for longer periods with various options including shophouse, and houses for living. The government may collaborate with civil society to collect data, and work with private companies to construct and manage sales contracts with citizens.

- ❑ Civil society organizations: Collaborate and monitor the implementation of policies related to evictions and resettlement to ensure compliance with international standards.

This study highlights the urgent need for a holistic and inclusive approach to address challenges related to public service delivery and climate resilience in newly resettled locations in Cambodia. Effective collaboration among stakeholders, sustainable infrastructure investments, and strengthened policies are crucial to improving the livelihoods of vulnerable populations.



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