

មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឧបកសារកម្ពុជា

GENOCIDE EDUCATION PROJECT

The Teaching of "A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)"

Democratic Kampuchea Textbook Distribution: A Public Education Forum between teachers, students and parents

Kampong Boeng Village, Kampong Hao Commune, Kampong Leng District, Kampong Chhnang Province

September 25, 2010



A flooded village and pagoda in Kampong Leng district, Kampong Chhnang

On September 25th, DC-Cam's Genocide Education Project conducted a public education forum in Kampong Boeng village, Kampong Hao commune, Kampong Leng district, and Kampong Chhnang province. There were approximately 200 participants in this forum which included 28 villagers, 18 teachers and 14 monks. The rest were students from Hun Sen Kampong Leng High School. The forum was held in the main temple of Ampeak Vorn pagoda located in the district center for about three hours, which began from 8:30am to 11:30am.

The forum began with a brief introduction of the objectives by Mr. Pong Rasy Pheng and was followed by the pre-forum survey to gauge participants' understanding and interest in studying the history of Khmer Rouge (KR). Afterwards, a commune representative gave a brief remark to welcome the forum and encourage participants to pay attention and learn from the forum. Later, Ms. Sokchamroeun Ly, one of the team members led the presentation and instruction of Chapter 9 (Office S-21 – Tuol Sleng Prison), which was followed by questions and answers. At the end, post-forum survey

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was distributed to participants to assess their attitudes and degree of understanding after participating in the forum. In the afternoon, the team conducted twelve interviews with the three villagers, two teachers and seven students.

Background Description of Public Forum Location

The team traveled from DC-Cam to Kampong Chhnang on September 24, one day prior to the forum day. The team arrived at the provincial town at around 11:30am and then continued their trip to Kampong Leng district which located about 13 kilometers from the provincial town. The only means of transportation to Kampong Leng district was by boat. The district was on the other side of Tonle Sap River. With a small boat, it took the team about half an hour to reach the district town. Since this was during the flooding season, some of the homes in the village of Po Andet were flooded included Po Andet Pagoda. Thus, the residential and religious structures were situated right in the middle of the river. However, the villagers took advantage of the flood as it produced a rich source of food for the villagers, many of whom relied on their catches of fish and prawns during this season.

When we arrived at the forum location of Kampong Boeng village, we met and discussed with Mrs. Vanthorn, commune chief and Mr. Seng Ly Ratanak, provincial teacher. These two important individuals helped us organized the forum and invited the villagers, teachers and students to participate in the forum. We were fortunate to be able to store all the forum's materials and books at Mrs. Vanthorn's house because it was near the Ampeak Vorn Pagoda. We took the opportunity to discuss with Mrs. Vanthorn about the general information of the commune and her experiences during the KR period.

From the discussion, we learned that Mrs. Vanthorn has served as a commune chief for two terms now. She lives alone in a small but comfortable house. She been a resident of Kampong Boeng village for most of her life. She was born in this village. After marrying a soldier, she and her husband moved to live in Phnom Penh. When the KR took over Phnom Penh in April 1975, she and her family were evacuated back to her hometown. She spent ten days travelling back. She managed to carry two children and some clothes in baskets. After arriving in her village, her husband was taken away and was killed. Later, her two children died of starvation. A while later, she was moved to Svay Rompea commune to plant rice and to carry soil to build O Tabun dam. O Tabun was one of the KR security centers in Kampong Leng district.¹ She said that 38 members of her family died during the KR. They were her husband, children, parents, brothers, sisters, grandparents, great aunts, cousins and other distant relatives. In 1979, Mrs. Vanthorn said she almost became crazy because too many members of her family passed away. She became very envious when she saw other family members reunite with each other. Mrs. Vanthorn described her experience of suffering as being recent and daily. She cried every time she recalls these sad memories.

According to the discussion with Mrs. Vanthorn and other villagers, we learned that Kampong Leng district was one of the major battlefields between the KR and the Lon Nol government before 1975. After 1979, the district fell under control of the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) regime. The KR soldiers continued to terrorize, kill and loot the villagers in the district until 1998. In fact, Mrs. Vanthorn was arrested in 1998 by the KR for disseminating information as part of her work in the District Women Association. She was released in the evening of the same day when she promised that she would stop

working for the government. Kampong Leng was one of the most insecure places in Cambodia after 1979.

Ampeak Vorn pagoda, where the public forum took place, was one of the two oldest pagodas in the district. This pagoda was first located in Khleung Por village, Trangel commune at the foot of the mountain and was called Wat Krom. Another pagoda at the top of the mountain was called Wat Phnom, now renamed Kiri Reaksmeay



Ampeak Vorn pagoda where the forum was conducted.

pagoda. Since the two pagodas were located near each other, the chief monk of Wat Krom decided to move the pagoda to Kampong Boeng village where it is presently situated. The construction of the pagoda began in 1948 and was renamed Wat Thmey or Wat Po Thitreyi. King Monk Samdech Preah Sangreath Chuon Nat presided over its inauguration and it was renamed Ampeak Vorn, meaning full of mango trees. During the KR regime, the pagoda was used as the KR district's economic headquarter. The pagoda survived the destruction, but the Buddha statues in it did not. The KR mobile unit and soldiers lived in this pagoda. The main temple of the pagoda has three floors. The ground floor was used as a rice mill. The first floor was used as a storage facility to house rice and other materials while the second floor was used as a meeting place. In addition, the primary school next to the pagoda was also used to store salt during the KR. After 1979, the pagoda was the first to be operated in Kampong Leng district. People started to clean up, reconstruct the buildings and practice their religious ceremonies. The other pagodas nearby were destroyed and the steels from them were used to build bridges and dams by the KR regime.

Program of Public Forum

1. Opening Remarks

Mr. Pong Rasy Pheng opened the forum by explaining the objectives of the forum to the participants. He explained that the forum aims at generating dialogues within the families and the communities in remote areas of Cambodia where access to Khmer Rouge history textbooks and education are limited. Mr. Pheng emphasized that children could effectively learn about the history of Khmer Rouge by asking their parents and village elders, some of whom were present at the forum. When Mr. Pheng asked the students if they are learning about KR history in class, they all said "no". The "no" answer may explain the limited content of the KR history in the national social studies' curriculum and textbooks. Mr. Pheng talked about the book distribution. He stated that 300,000 copies have been distributed to all secondary schools across Cambodia while 700,000 additional copies are being published and will be distributed in subsequent years. He also mentioned about the

teacher training workshops that are in place to train thousands of teachers on how to teach the history of Democratic Kampuchea.

Mr. Pheng took the opportunity to talk about the objectives of the teaching of *A History of Democratic Kampuchea*. He stated that teaching about the history will help guide the Cambodian young generation away from anger and hatred and to help them promote national reconciliation and peace building in Cambodian society.

Next, Mr. Khen Sokhan, a commune representative, gave his remark to officially open the forum. Mr. Khen expressed his interest and warmly welcomed the forum. He viewed the forum as a historical event for his village to host a discussion on the KR atrocities that happened over 30 years ago. He then talked about his own experiences at that time. He expressed how thrilled he was to open the textbook and to see the construction of the dam and of S-21. He also shared that he was one of the KR cadres who worked in the district economic unit and who lived in this very pagoda. He also stated that KR destroyed Buddha statues in this pagoda and monks were all disrobed and were forced to do hard labor.

After the opening remarks, Mr. Pheng summarized the commune representative's speech to reiterate what daily life was like during DK. He told students to read Chapter 7 in the textbook if they wanted to know in detail about the suffering that Cambodian people endured during the KR period. Then the DC-Cam team distributed post-forum survey to all participants to fill in for fifteen minutes. At the same time, the team distributed the textbook to all participants in preparation of the next activity.

Mr. Pheng introduced Ms. Sokchamroeun Ly to discuss Chapter 9 of *A History of Democratic Kampuchea* with the participants. Mr. Pheng encouraged students and the villagers to ask Ms. Ly and author, Khamboly Dy a lot of questions. He also asked the villagers who lived through the KR regime to help answer the questions from the students to open a line of communication between the young and the old generations.

2. Presentation on Chapter 9: Office S-21 (Tuol Sleng Prison) by Sokchamroeun Ly

Before Ms. Ly started her teaching, Mr. Khamboly Dy briefly summarized the content of the textbook for participants to provide an overview of KR history before they start looking specifically on Chapter 9 regarding Tuol Sleng prison. Mr. Dy asked if they had seen the book before. Several students



Ms. Sokchamroeun Ly and Mr. Seng Ly Ratanak (a provincial teacher) led the discussion with participants.

raised their hands and responded that they have read the textbook in the school library. Mr. Dy told participants that the textbook consists of 11 chapters describing the historical facts of KR, life under KR and the total collapse of KR. Mr. Dy stated that the study of KR history can take place in different settings and through different forms, not just in the classroom taught by teachers. The students can learn from their parents, grandparents and anyone who survived the KR period. Mr. Dy pointed to Venerable UI Bun as an example. Venerable UI Bun is 76 years old and has lived through many regimes since Issarak time. He would surely be a person with countless knowledge, stories and experiences to share.

Mr. Dy asked participants to open the book to page 59 about Tuol Sleng prison. He asked if the students wanted to know in detail about Tuol Sleng and if anyone had visited Tuol Sleng before. One lady raised her hand. Mr. Dy invited her to come to the stage and asked her to describe Tuol Sleng to other participants. The lady described the following experience:

I went to visit Tuol Sleng in 1979. The government opened it for the public to see the real horrors that occurred in Tuol Sleng. I saw the place where they pulled out prisoners' finger nails and where they dumped their heads into a jar. Prisoners were bitten and bloodied. Prisoners were put into small cells. Skulls were dugged up from the graves from the backyard and were piled on top of each other. In the small cells, prisoners were unable to move and had to defecate in the small containers used to store bullets. The cells looked like coffins. Walking through the prison compound, I felt frightened and felt as though I went through the experience myself. Professors and diplomats were detained and killed there. Prisoners were marked with numbers hung on their necks. The KR photographed them even after they died. Visitors who found the photos of their relatives cried there. There were many rooms used for torture.

After this, Ms. Sokchamroeun Ly started her teaching of Chapter 9. Before the start of the lesson, Ms. Ly checked to make sure that all participants have a copy of the textbook in hand. Then she divided participants into six small groups to read and discuss six main points of Chapter 9.

- Group 1 was asked to read and discuss about “the buildings at S-21” on page 60.
- Group 2 was asked to work on “the prisoners” on page 60-61.
- Group 3 was asked to work on “prison condition” on page 62.
- Group 4 was asked to work on “interrogation” on page 63.
- Group 5 was asked to work on “leaders at S-21” on page 67.
- Group 6 was asked to read and discuss about “the execution” on page 67.

Ms. Ly asked each group to read and list four or five important points from each topic in order to share and discuss after finishing the reading. Each group had seven minutes to complete the task. After this reading, Ms. Ly asked representatives from all groups to share their understanding of their respective topics.

Group 1

Sim Kimsang from Kampong Leng High School summarized topic number 1 about the buildings at S-21:

“S-21 was a former Chao Ponhea Yat High School built in 1962. The compound was built on a 600 meters in length and 400 meters in width of land. There were four main buildings. Rooms on the

ground floor were divided into small cells of 0.8 x 2 meters for individual prisoners. Rooms on the first floor were used for holding 40 to 50 prisoners. One room was used as Duch's office and the other room was used to keep documents. The houses nearby were used to interrogate and torture prisoners."

At this point, before proceeding to the next point, Mr. Dy asked all participants to take a pen and open the textbook to page 60 to edit one mistake in the textbook. Mr. Dy asked the participants to change the original content that reads *"behind the school fence were two wooden buildings with thatched roofs, one of which had been the Boeng Keng Kang Primary School"* to *"behind the school fence were two wooden buildings with thatched roofs, one of which had been the Tuol Sleng Primary School"*.

Then Ms. Ly asked if anyone from group one wanted to add anything else. One student named Chroek Peng Hour from Kampong Leng High School summarized topic one. Chroek Peng Hour added:

"S-21 was surrounded with electric barbed wire and corrugated iron sheets so that prisoners could not escape. No single prisoner in the four buildings could escape due to strict security guard."

Ms. Ly praised the participants for their active contribution. She added that there were about 14,000 prisoners at S-21, and only 12 survived after the collapse of the KR regime.

Group 2

Mr. Seng Ly Ratanak, a provincial teacher helped Ms. Ly coordinate the discussion at this point. Student Peng Nary from Kampong Leng High School represented group 2 and summarized about the *"prisoners"* in S-21. Nary said:

"Most prisoners were accused of betraying the party and the revolution. The leaders were suspicious that betrayers were everywhere in the country.

Each month, cadres from various regions were arrested and taken to S-21."



A student summarizes the lesson from the textbook after reading in the group.

Mr. Ratanak encouraged the other participants to add to topic number two. Seeing that some students were nervous while standing and talking in front of too many people, Ms. Ly allowed them to talk from where they sat. A student named Rachana added:

"Most answers at S-21 were false answers because prisoners did not do anything wrong. They answered only to avoid torture."

Mr. Ratanak asked how many Vietnamese prisoners were held at S-21. Since no one in the group added anything more, Ms. Ly and Mr. Ratanak continued to group 3.



Participants reading the history textbook and the booklet on Duch's verdict

Group 3

Chea Sreyneat from Kampong Leng High School summarized topic 3 regarding the "conditions at S-21":

"Upon arriving at S-21, all prisoners were photographed and asked to write their biographies beginning from their childhood up until the the time of their arrest. All prisoners were

stripped of their clothes and their belongings were confiscated. Then prisoners were shackled and put into cells. Prisoners were not allowed to converse. If they wanted to drink water or do anything, they had to ask for permission from the guards; otherwise, they would be tortured."

Sreyneat also cited Mr. Vann Nath's story:

"Mr. Vann Nath was shackled with a long iron bar with about 40 other prisoners. The prisoners received two meals per day. They got only a few spoons of porridge with soup that was mixed with tree leaves. Prisoners received a shower every four days. Those who were shackled near the windows did not receive enough water."

She also added,

"Since the condition in S-21 was dirty, some prisoners suffered from ringworm, rashes and lice. There was no doctor to cure diseases."

Mr. Ratanak asked if the guards from other units could enter various places that were not their duties. Sreyneat replied that they were not allowed to move from one place to another.

Group 4

A female student came up to the front and summarized about the "interrogation" in S-21. She said,

"The interrogator tortured prisoners so cruelly. They hit prisoners with tree branches, stick or hand. Prisoners were shocked with electricity or tied upside down. The cadres pulled out prisoners' finger nails and poured alcohol on the wound. They even tortured female prisoners by cutting their

breasts and brutally raping them even though rape was against the KR policy. The guards who were found raping female prisoners were arrested and killed as well. Prisoners were asked to confess in their biographies about the time they served the revolution and about their traitorous activities."

Mr. Ratanak asked if the confessions talked about relatives or friends. The student answered that the confessions also contained the names of people who participated in the traitorous acts. The people in the confessions were usually friends, those the prisoners knew, and even their own parents.

Ms. Ly asked if anyone from group 4 wanted to add more information. Mr. Ratanak asked participants to read the five bullet points on page 64 which pointed out an example of a confession at S-21. He asked participants to read and analyze these five points in order to consider the condition of forced confession at S-21. He also asked participants to review another example of a confession on page 65.

Group 5

Group 5 read about "leaders at S-21". A female student summarized:

"S-21 was under the supervision of the Ministry of Defense led by Son Sen aka comrade Khieu. He used to study in France and later became a teacher. Other leaders included Duch and his Deputy Khem Vak, Peng and Chan. Pon was the interrogator. These people were former teachers.

Ms. Ly asked if the other heard what their group member had summarized and if they wanted to add anything more. She emphasized that members from the other groups could add on this topic as well. Mr. Ratanak gained participants' attention by pointing out Pon's role in the interrogation of important prisoners such as Keo Meas, Nay Sarann, Hu Nim, Tiv Ol and Phok Chhay. He clarified that the KR interrogated not only ordinary citizens, but also important KR members who were accused of betraying the revolution.

Group 6

The monk who the DC-Cam team met on the first day at the pagoda shared point number 6. The monk read aloud about the "killings at S-21" for all participants.



Monk reading section in the history textbook for participants

Mr. Ratanak explained to the participants about the term "smash" the KR used interchangeably with the term "kill." He added that confessions at S-21

were sometimes hundreds of pages long. The KR did not care about the conditions of the prisoners. They only cared about the confessions that accorded their need. In the first year

of S-21's operation, the dead bodies were buried nearby. In 1976, after they ran out of burial land, prisoners were taken to Boeng Cheung Ek which is 13 kilometers from Phnom Penh. Boeng Cheung Ek is now identified as a historical site where so many lives were lost. Mr. Ratanak shared his experience of visiting Cheung Ek, which was sponsored by DC-Cam.

After participants discussed all the six points, Ms. Ly summarized the whole chapter again for them. Then Ms. Ly asked some comprehension questions to assess participants' understandings of the chapter before allowing them to ask questions.

3. Questions from participants.

At the end of the forum, the DC-Cam team encouraged participants to ask questions for about twenty minutes.

1. So Visal from Kampong Leng High School asked: "Where did KR receive their ammunitions from?"
2. Van Sreyleak from Kampong Leng High School asked: "What kind of people were the KR? Why did they kill Cambodian people?"
3. Soun Seiha from Kampong Leng High School asked: "The textbook mentioned that foreign delegations visited Cambodia at that time. Were these delegations their cliques? Did they know about the situation and the DK policy? Why were the intellectuals taken for execution while the illiterate were promoted to leadership?"
4. Ry Sreya from Kampong Leng High School asked: "Why were foreigners detained at S-21?"
6. Kong Sokan from Kampong Leng High School asked: "Why did the KR evacuate people from the cities to the countryside and force them to do hard labor? The production was transported to China in exchange for ammunitions. Why did they want the ammunitions? The KRT indicted Duch to 35 years in prison. Will Duch's family members be indicted?"

At the end of the questions and answers session, the DC-Cam team distributed post-forum surveys to see if their knowledge and attitude toward studying KR history changed after attending the forum.

Outcomes and Impacts

Studying the history of the site prior to the forum had a great impact on the discussions and interactions during the forum. Upon arrival, the team members met with different key stakeholders to organize the forum and to learn about the important historical events related to Kampong Hoa commune and Kampong Leng district as a whole. The team learned about Laban Security Center and that the pagoda was used as the KR economic unit office and to store materials and rice. At the forum, the DC-Cam team linked the discussion in the textbook to some of the important events that took place in the village during the KR period. Making this connection in history encouraged the villagers to recall their personal experiences and to share their stories with their children. Before the forum, the DC-Cam team observed that not many old people were familiar with the Laban Security Center and that the pagoda was used by the KR. After the forum, many people, including children learned about important events and stories of their village during the KR period. By linking their village's stories to Chapter 9 - Tuol Sleng Prison, the

community integrated and made connections to a larger context of the KR history. This allowed participants to extend their knowledge of KR history in a meaningful way that they could relate based on their prior knowledge/experience.

The provincial teacher not only helped us in organizing and preparing the forum but they also participated in the teaching. Based on previous training experience, having the provincial teacher help with the teaching and leading of discussions are very important. The provincial teacher, Mr. Seng Ly Ratanak



Mr. Keodara Prak (project's team member) interviewing a student

used his knowledge of the village, skills and experiences he gained from the training to share and teach participants. Teaming with the provincial teacher added knowledge, confidence and a sense of comfort to the forum.

The team learned that Kampong Leng High School received only a few copies of the DK history textbook. One teacher told us that students took turn reading the textbook. This lack of resources discouraged the effectiveness of learning about KR history in the classroom. The forum provided not only additional materials, but extra incentives and encouragement to both students and teachers.

The monks were drawn into the discussion with students. On the day the team visited the forum site, the DC-Cam team accidentally met a monk who was teaching students to read and write. Knowing that the team was going to conduct the forum on KR history, the monk showed his interest and asked if he could participate in the forum. The team welcomed his participation and asked if he could invite other monks in the pagoda to attend the event. On the day of the training, about fourteen monks showed up. All monks listened attentively and took notes on the presentation. At the end, the monk that the team met the previous day read one section of the textbook for participants.

The forum created communication dialogues within the family and the community. After the forum, the team ate lunch at a house of one of the villagers in front of the pagoda. Finishing lunch, the team members rested to gain energy to conduct the interviews. While resting, the team heard a group of villagers discussed about their lives during the KR. They said that they were asked to transport seedlings to plant rice. The KR asked them to produce fertilizers from cow dung and wild plants and to build dams. One villager added that her father was injected with water from the river in which he died from instantly. She also added that her young brother had to steal potatoes because he was so hungry. He was caught and was beaten in front of her. She cried but could not do anything to help him.

Her brother died as a result of the beating. Another villager said that her father was a medic working for Lon Nol government. During the KR period, her father had to attend the meeting every day after work. Being too tired, her father slept with his eyes open while sitting. After discussing about their life experiences during the KR period, the villagers went on to talk about the Khmer Rouge Tribunal. They showed their support of the work of the tribunal and wanted to see the KR leaders prosecuted as soon as possible.

During the interview with Mrs. Bo Navy, the team learned that the district and commune officials as well as teachers like reading the magazine *Searching for the Truth*. Mrs. No Navy said that she liked reading the magazine greatly because she wanted to know more and more about new research and developments. Hearing our conversation, her son who sat nearby, said,

“Mom, dad has one copy. He carries it every day.”

Mrs. Navy informed us that she has not received the new issues recently. She requested that issues of the magazine be sent to her district regularly.

During one of the discussions at the forum, we found out that Laban Security Center was another prison site where many people were brought in and killed. The mapping project team did not reach Laban Security Center due to security reasons. According to the report, the team could not stay there for too long and had to return back to the provincial town at around 3 or 4pm for two reasons: (1) to escape the darkness at which time the KR could enter the village and (2) to avoid evening storm that could sink a boat. The report suggested that the team conducted more research on security centers and killing pits which existed in many parts of Kampong Leng district and which have not yet been researched. The new findings can add to the number of KR security centers DC-Cam already recorded on the killing map.

Challenges

The evaluation administered at the end of the forum consumed one third of the entire forum duration. We have two evaluations: pre-forum and post-forum evaluations. Each evaluation took about half an hour, which meant both evaluations consumed one hour out of the three-hour forum. Old villagers who could not read and write depended totally on the team members. The team had to work with individual villagers on the evaluation, and this took a lot of time. The pre-forum survey made the whole forum less interesting. For the next forum, the team has to strategize the best way to conduct the evaluation.

Moreover, the team spent too much time on the administrative/housekeeping work and the presentation. For example, the commune representative talked for about twenty minutes and this decreased the attention of participants who were waiting for the main content of the event. For the next forum, the team has to inform the commune representative in advance on the content and length of his/her speech. His/her talk should be focused on the importance of genocide education.

The project team members, when addressing participants, frequently referred only to students while ignoring the presence of the villagers and teachers. This caused the villagers and teachers to feel uncomfortable and out of place. Culturally, it is important to

address all groups equally. The team observed that some monks and villagers left in the middle of the forum. At the end, only a few villagers remained seated, and all monks were gone. Moreover, the team normally conducted forums in the pagoda, a traditional gathering place for people living around the pagoda. Pagoda is a place that is not controversial and is free of politics. In the Cambodian culture, seating arrangements should be considered for monks because they need to be seated at a higher level. The forum did not provide this accommodation until a monk got upset. After realizing this mistake, the team quickly rearranged the stage to accommodate the monks.

¹ Mapping report shows that O Tabun was also the name of the KR prison in Svay Rompea commune where many people were killed.

Project team members:

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