

# មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជា

## 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

Wat Phnom Village, Kampaeng Commune, Kiri Vong District, Takeo Province

October 17, 2010



Participants in the Public Education Forum in Kampaeng Commune, Kiri Vong, Takeo

On October 17, 2010, the Documentation Center of Cambodia's (DC-Cam) Genocide Education Project conducted a Public Education Forum between teachers, students, and parents in Wat Phnom village, Kampaeng commune, Kiri Vong district, Takeo province. Participants in the forum included 80 students, 60 villagers, five teachers, and eight monks. The forum was conducted in the meeting hall of Wat Phnom pagoda for the purpose of distributing and discussing the textbook *A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)*. The forum started with a brief description of DC-Cam's work, the Genocide Education Project, and the objectives of the forum. Then the commune Chief, Mr. Kong Pheang, gave brief welcome remarks to all participants; he also talked about the importance of studying Khmer Rouge (KR) history. One of the team members, Mr. Keodara Prak, provided a presentation on textbook Chapter 5 entitled "Administrative Division of Democratic Kampuchea," which was followed by questions and answers with the textbook author, Mr. Kamboly Dy. In the afternoon, the team members conducted eleven interviews with the villagers and students to document their experiences during the KR and to learn about their interests in studying KR history. The following sections include descriptions of geography, forum activities, outcomes, impacts, and challenges.

## General and geographical descriptions

The team traveled to the site one day prior to the forum day to prepare the ground work and to meet with the commune Chief about participants, agenda of the forum, and history of the commune in connection to the KR regime. According to Mr. Kong Pheang, Kampaeng commune consists of 13 villages with 1,864 families. The total number of the population in the commune is 7,663 people among which 3,922 are women. Kampaeng is about 40 kilometers from Takeo provincial town. The commune can be reached by two ways through soil roads. Since this is a rainy season, the roads are eroded by rain and large transportation cars. The team drove for about 20 minutes from the provincial town to the intersection road leading to Kampaeng commune, but spent more than one hour from the national road to the commune.

Arriving in Kampaeng, the project team members visited the house of the commune chief for discussion. After that, the team and the commune chief visited Wat Phnom pagoda, the forum site, in order to ask for permission from the head monk to conduct the forum for the next day. The team met the head monk who warmly welcomed the forum and assured the team that he would help preparing the meeting hall and set up the microphone. The head monk also offered to allow all monks in the pagoda to attend the forum.

It should be noted that Wat Phnom pagoda was completely destroyed during the KR period. Among several buildings in the pagoda, only one library for monks survived. The library survived because the KR used this library as their hospital office. The nearby Sok An Secondary School was used as the KR commune hospital. Both the library and school building used as the KR hospital still exist today. The main building of the pagoda (Preah Vihear) was reconstructed in 1986.



**Pagoda's Library: The KR used it as their hospital office**



**Stupa where the bones and skulls are preserved**

According to the discussion with Mr. Kong Pheang, Kampaeng commune is relatively well-off in comparison to the previous regimes. To date, although no single villager owns a private car, there are 637 motorcycles in the commune. There are six pagodas and one health center. People can receive treatment in the commune, unlike the past years in which people had to travel to Kiri Vong district town for health treatment. There are six primary schools and one secondary school, providing education from grades 7 to 9. Children in the commune do not have to go to the district town to attend secondary education.

Kong Pheang has been Kampaeng commune chief for two terms (including this term). He was also Kampaeng commune chief in 1979 in which he participated in rebuilding the Kampaeng commune after the genocide. Because he has lived in Kampaeng since he was born, and was only briefly out of the commune during the KR period, serving as a soldier in Kampong Speu in the People's Republic of Kampuchea (CPK's) regime, Pheang knows the details of the history and the development of Kampaeng commune through various periods of history. Pheang's story is one of the examples of how the history of the commune is preserved and how local population participated in the national reconstruction project after the genocide.

During the KR regime, Pheang, like other people in Kampaeng commune, was evacuated to Tramkok district. The KR considered people in Kampaeng commune and Kiri Vong at large as the 17 April people because they lived close to the Vietnamese border. Those who committed light crimes were forced to do hard labor such as produce "number one" fertilizer near the KR cooperative office. Those who committed serious mistakes would be sent to Wat Preah Theat Soursdey prison in Ream Andeuk commune. This prison was the KR main prison in Kiri Vong district.

On February 20, 1979, a Commune People's Revolutionary Commission (CPRC) was established to reconstruct and protect Kampaeng commune. Pheang was the head of the commission among the five members. Besides dealing with security, the primary work of the commission was to create the solidarity groups, which involved ten to twenty families helping each other in rice production and sharing food. "Coming from the running" (a euphemism for returning back home after the collapse of the KR), people lived in the commune with some distance between residences. The land distribution was assigned on a first-come-first-served basis. Although people had no ownership of their land, they could possess cattle and other private property. Pheang said that education in his commune was zero after the KR regime. Surprisingly, he said the security in his commune was safe because there were no thieves or robbers, only KR soldiers who were living in dispersed places on the nearby mountains. However, those KR soldiers damaged and looted people's properties. From time to time, they defected to the local authority. They brought with them a lot of weapons which were given to the district People's Revolutionary Commission. Pheang killed a cow to make food for welcoming those soldiers who later became ordinary citizens. With permission letter from Pheang, such soldiers chose to either live in Kampaeng or return to their home villages.

Anger and a sense of revenge among the villagers of Kampaeng commune was extremely strong in 1979 and the early 1980s. The panicked KR soldiers submitted themselves to the local authorities and were, in some cases, summarily executed by the villagers whose

parents, siblings and relatives were killed or died during the KR. Hearing that the KR soldiers were coming to join the local government, the villagers set up a road block to ambush the soldiers. "Being fired upon, the KR soldiers ran away, [and] they did not fire back," said Pheang. These incidents caused a lot of casualties, and the dead bodies were left out in the forest, where surrounding areas contained land mines. Several people were killed by mine explosions at that time. In addition, the villagers also killed former KR cadres who helped identify the pit that is on the foot of Chy Ta Pich Mountain. As the villagers were digging up the pit to collect skulls and the remains, they turned back and hit the cadres who stood close to them. Seeing this same tragedy, the commune chief postponed this project. The skulls and bones were kept in a stupa at Wat Phnom pagoda. Today only a small number of bones remain in the stupa.

The living condition of the people in the commune was really poor. Immediately arriving in the village, people ate whatever they could find. Pheang was luckier, for he found the KR rice storehouse from which he could get as much rice as he wished. He also shared this rice with the villagers who were unable to find anything to eat. Business and commercial exchange did not exist at this time, and people lived by farming, planting vegetables, and raising animals. Some people who still had gold and silver crossed the border to Vietnam to bargain for clothes and other goods necessary for daily living. Sometimes two families lived together in one house.

Currently, there are a few challenges that the commune council is dealing with. The long dry season does not allow the villagers to produce enough rice for the families. The local authority plans to dig up a canal to bring water from the creek to the rice fields. Besides this, land conflicts and domestic violence are also challenges in the commune.

Kiri Vong is one of the remote districts of Cambodia. It is close to the Vietnamese border. It was called district 109 of region 13 under the administration of the Southwest zone with Ta Mok as a zone secretary. According to Socheat Nhean, who did extensive research on the "Chain of Command and Sociopolitical Structure of the Southwest Zone," district 109 was led by Tith, a brother-in-law of Ta Mok. All village and commune chiefs were not selected from Kiri Vong district; some were from Tramkok district, which was Ta Mok's homeland.<sup>1</sup>

## **Activities of the forum**

### **1. Opening remarks**

Mr. Pong Rasy Pheng started the forum by thanking the commune chief, Mr. Kong Pheang, and the school principal, Mr. Men Sangha, for inviting villagers, teachers, and students to participate in the forum. He also thanked the monks for allowing DC-Cam to use the pagoda meeting hall as a place for the forum. Mr. Pheng thanked the participants for taking time out of their Sunday to attend the forum. He informed the audience of the forum aim of distributing the textbook *A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)* and discussing its content. He informed participants that the textbook has been accepted by the Ministry of Education as mandatory reading for all secondary and university students nationwide. Notwithstanding the need to educate youth, old people can also read the

---

<sup>1</sup> Socheat Nhean's Master Thesis "Democratic Kampuchea: Chain of Command and Sociopolitical Structure of the Southwest Zone," 2010. For more information, please visit [http://www.dccam.org/Tribunal/Analysis/pdf/Chain\\_of\\_Command.pdf](http://www.dccam.org/Tribunal/Analysis/pdf/Chain_of_Command.pdf).

textbook to enhance their knowledge and understanding on KR history. He encouraged the students to actively participate in the discussion, and he urged the villagers to help the students answer the questions as they related to their experiences during the KR regime.

After these opening remarks, the commune chief, Mr. Kong Pheang, gave his welcome remarks to all participants, and he thanked DC-Cam for choosing Kampaeng commune as a location to conduct the public education forum. He said the forum is very important to disseminate information related to the KR to the villagers, especially the



**Villagers reading the Textbook *A History of Democratic Kampuchea***

younger generations. He encouraged the villagers who lived through the KR period to share their experiences to the students who were born after the regime. The commune chief stated that the students have only heard about the KR, and they generally have no idea of what this time period was like or how people suffered. At the end of his welcoming remarks, he announced the formal opening of the forum.

After the remarks by the commune chief, Mr. Pheng talked about the program of the forum, which would be conducted from 8:30 to 11:30 AM. He divided the students into six big groups, and each group selected a leader to lead the group in completing the pre-survey. The team members assisted the villagers who did not know how to read and write to complete the survey. Participants spent about thirty minutes to complete the pre-survey. Next, the team distributed copies of the textbook to all participants.

## **2. Participants' views on KR history**

Before giving the presentation on Chapter 5 of the textbook, Mr. Khamboly Dy, the textbook author, led a preliminary discussion with participants on the overall points of KR history. Mr. Dy asked if participants knew the name "Democratic Kampuchea." Some villagers knew this name, but young students were not familiar with it. Mr. Dy explained that "Democratic Kampuchea" is the official name of the KR, which was commonly known and used by the population at that time.

Then he asked what years comprised the KR period. One student stood up and answered "The KR regime was from 1975 to 1979."

Mr. Dy asked, "Who knows KR history the most?" Students seemed to be reluctant to answer this question. Mr. Dy explained that the villagers who lived through the KR period and who were sitting near them knew the KR history the most because they directly experienced the suffering and witnessed the horrible events at that time. He mentioned

that "What I write in this textbook is the entire picture of the KR history from the creation of the party, life in the KR period, and the fall of the KR." But the details of each event resonate in almost every family and in every single village of Cambodia. If students want to learn more about KR history, in addition to the textbook they just received, they can interview their elders who live with them every day.

Then, Mr. Dy connected the discussion on the locale to the textbook. He mentioned that Takeo province was under the administrative control of the Southwest zone which was supervised by Ta Mok (a zone secretary). Apart from this, Mr. Dy talked about the killing pit near the foot of Chy Ta Pich Mountain in Kampaeng commune. The bones and skulls from this pit were dug up and preserved in Wat Phnom pagoda where the forum was conducted. He said that some skulls in the stupa can be the participants' relatives. He urged participants, especially students, to seriously study the history of their commune as part of the lessons for their future life and career and to participate in the genocide prevention campaign.

Mr. Dy asked if any villagers wanted to share their experiences during the KR period to students.

**Hoam Sophal:** A villager Mr. Hoam Sophal came to the front to share his story. He said he lived through the Pol Pot regime and used to be a teacher teaching about the Pol Pot



A monk reading *A History of Democratic Kampuchea*

regime in the 1980s. During the KR regime, the cadres had "big rights." They could kill anyone they wanted to. People worked a lot but received less food. They forced people to work, regardless of sickness. Unable to hide their identity any longer, many residents from Phnom Penh were killed. Some people dug the holes for their own grave before they were killed.

**Hea Ngorn:** A villager from Kampaeng commune encouraged all participants to attentively listen to the forum and consider it seriously since what is being discussed in the forum is accurate and was exactly what he experienced. He said that the students in the forum as well as others elsewhere did not come across the KR period for three years, eight months and twenty days, so they did not know about the suffering at that time. During the KR period, young children were asked to collect cow dung to make fertilizer. They were not allowed to study language. He witnessed the KR killing eight monks

who were accused of betraying the revolution. He urged young students to read the history textbook distributed to them. He said, "This is the real story, not a folktale. Please try to study it in order to rebuild the country and lead the country away from the Pol Pot's path."

**Oam Rim:** A villager from Kampaeng commune described her bitter and painful experiences during the KR. Her family was evacuated to Pursat province, where four of her children were taken away and died of disease. People from the Eastern zone were evacuated to Pursat and killed en mass. Since she is disabled, the KR allowed her to take care of the rice fields by chasing birds. She did not have enough to eat. Oam Rim still remembered the KR song that encouraged the people to focus all their efforts into producing rice. Rim sang that song for the participants.

### 3. Presentation on the textbook by Mr. Prak Keodara

Mr. Prak gave the presentation on Chapter 5: Administrative Division of Democratic Kampuchea. He asked all participants to turn the book to page 28 in order to start the presentation and discussion.

Mr. Prak introduced the objectives of his presentation, which aimed at allowing

participants to be able to describe the administrative division of DK, comparing the differences between one zone and region to the others, and analyzing how it is different from today's geographical divisions. He also linked the discussion of chapter 5 to Kiri Vong district which was named district 109 during the KR period.



Then, Mr. Prak divided **Mr. Keodara Prak giving a presentation on *A History of Democratic Kampuchea*** participants into six groups: two groups of villagers and four groups of students. Each group was responsible for reading one section from the textbook, discussing that section, and taking notes on the five most important points from their readings.

- Group one reads and discusses on Eastern zone;
- Group two works on Southwest zone;
- Group three works on North zone;
- Group four works on Northwest zone;
- Group five works on West zone; and
- Group six works on Northeast zone.

Participants spent between seven to ten minutes to read and discuss their respective

topics. After reading, a representative from each group shared their knowledge on each reading point. After each representative shared their thoughts, Mr. Prak briefly summarized each point. He said that *"During DK regime, Cambodia was divided into six zones and 32 regions in 1976. The zones included East, Southwest, North, Northwest, West and Northeast zones. A zone was a combination of two or more provinces or covering parts of provinces. The KR named each district and province with code numbers."*

After the summary, Mr. Prak asked some comprehensive questions to gauge the understanding of participants. He encouraged all participants to participate in answering the questions in order to share their knowledge with all. He asked, "Why did the KR name each zone and region with a code number?"

A villager stood up and answered "Pol Pot used code numbers in order to preserve the secrecy." Another villager named Ngim said, "The code numbers were used because it was easy for the KR leaders to lead the country."

Mr. Prak: What are the differences between administrative divisions in DK and that of the present regime?

A male villager answered, "The KR used code numbers to name the provinces and districts while the present regime uses names such as Takeo province or Kiri Vong district."

Another male villager shared his thoughts. He mentioned, "The KR regime and the present one are like the difference between the land and the sky. People could not find even rice to eat during Pol Pot's regime. In Samdech Hun Sen's regime, a lot of schools and hospitals have been built.

Mr. Prak: Were the KR administrative divisions easier than the present division?

A male villager answered, "The present regime is much easier than that of the Pol Pot [regime]. The present regime uses real names for the provinces while Pol Pot used code numbers in order to hide the identify from the enemies."

At the end of the discussion, Mr. Kong Pheang, the commune chief, contributed some of his thoughts to the forum as he listened to the discussions on the three questions Mr. Prak raised above. The commune chief mentioned *"The Pol Pot-Ieng Sary cliques led the country differently from anyone else in the world. Cambodia has never*



**Students discussing Chapter 5 of the textbook**



*experienced such leadership in the KR – [a leadership] who erased all national heritage of the country. The low-ranking cadres did not know much about the administrative division of the country during the KR regime, but today, even ordinary citizens, know that Cambodia is divided into twenty-four provinces."*

Mr. Men Sangha, the school principal, also contributed to the forum. As he lived through the regime, he wanted to elaborate the differences between KR regime and the present one. He said, *"In terms of economics, people were forced to work on the rice field day and night and carry water and soil to build dams and canals. How was the eating? People received only watery rice soup two times per day. If we found anything else to eat, we would face great danger if we were caught. Regarding education, the KR used the word 'education representatives.' Children were educated under the shadow of the trees and were taught only the A, B, Cs. Small children were asked to cut grass and collect cow dung to produce fertilizer. The DK principle was to instill political education into the illiterate, who would easily follow Pol Pot. In terms of health sector, at that time, only commune chiefs, group chiefs, and unit chiefs were healthy. I myself ate crab with tree leaves. There was no scientific medicine but only rabbit dung medicine. The cadres in the villages could do everything as they wished. They put people to spy on one another and kill each other. Brothers killed brothers. As for religion, Wat Phnom pagoda was completely destroyed. Only a library which the KR used as their office survived the regime. Marriage was conducted in mass ceremony, forty couples per time. There was no religious ceremony. The KR is the detective regime. Today's forum is to learn about what happened at that time in order to avoid these tragedies in the future."*

Mr. Dy thanked the school principal for his critical analysis of the KR regime. The school principal had touched upon many important aspects of KR history including education, health care, religion, tradition, security, and daily life. Mr. Dy told the participants to read Chapter 7 of the textbook if they wanted to learn more about what the school principal had just mentioned.

#### **4. Questions and answers sessions**

After the presentation and discussions on Chapter 5, Mr. Dy led the Q&A session with the participants.

*1. Sophat from Han Tea village, Kampaeng commune: Why did Pol Pot create a regime that killed so many people?*

Mr. Dy emphasized that this question has been a question for many Cambodian people, even those who came across the KR period. Why did the KR kill people? Why did the KR force people to overwork and live separately from their families? Why did the KR endorse these policies? Who created and implemented these policies? What did they want to achieve? Mr. Dy said that there have been a number of political interpretations on the reasons why the KR killed so many people between 1975 and 1979. Mr. Dy answered that the KR leaders, especially Pol Pot, believed that Cambodian society for thousands of years had been occupied by corruption, exploitation, and injustice. Poor peasants in the countryside were exploited and taken advantage of by government officials and the rich. Therefore, Pol Pot wanted to create Cambodia into the most modern socialist country in the world – a country which had no social classes, a country in which all people lived, worked, and shared each other's pleasure equally. He wanted to establish an independent country that did not depend on any single foreign country. He believed that depending on

foreign countries only allowed them to integrate unpleasant cultures into Cambodia which would create exploitation and disorientation. The KR leaders believed that dancing, singing, working in air-conditioned rooms, and studying at schools or universities did not help in producing rice. They were regarded as a complete waste of time. The KR wanted all people to leave the cities and go down to the countryside to work on the rice fields. Moreover, rice production did not depend on machines or chemical fertilizer. The KR did not believe in Buddha, God, superstitions or ghosts. The rice cultivation depended totally on human forces. People had to work on dam and canal constructions to bring water for the rice fields. The KR did not depend on nature. For them, rice was everything. This was one reason why the KR evacuated people from the cities to the countryside, which resulted in a number of deaths.



Student filling in post-forum survey

Moreover, the KR wanted all people to have a strong stance. To achieve this, they disciplined people by forcing them to work on the rice cultivation and dam construction for many hours per day. After work, people had to attend daily life meetings in which they would be asked to self-criticize and expose themselves to public criticism. The KR took

these actions in order to strengthen the people's

stance along the lines of the KR revolution. Those were unable to adapt to these new lines were considered to be bad elements and would be discarded. Mr. Dy said that these are the reasons why so many people were killed during the KR regime.

2. *Khun Sreylin, a student from Sok An Phnom Lower Secondary School:* People produced a lot of rice per year. Where did the KR take the rice to?

"People throughout the country worked on the rice fields altogether. Even monks were asked to disrobe and work on rice production. Where did the KR take the rice to?" Mr. Dy answered that rice production did not meet the quotas assigned by the party center. However, the cadres in the regions and cooperatives dared not report the failure of rice yield to the party center for fear of execution. They sent as much rice as possible according to the quotas and left the people on the ground to go hungry. One part of the rice was sent to the border to feed the soldiers who were fighting with Vietnam. The second part was sent abroad to places such as China in exchange for weapons. The small part that remained was kept to feed the population. This was the reason why one can of rice was cooked for about thirty people and people starved.

3. *A male teacher from Sok An Phnom Lower Secondary School:* Where did the KR come from?

Mr. Dy explained that the answer to this question is in Chapter 2 of the textbook. He briefly answered that the communist movements in Cambodia drew their roots from the French colonial period. There were many Cambodian nationalist movements who sought assistance from Thailand and Vietnam in order to liberate Cambodia from French colonialism. These movements later formed into a communist party called the Khmer People's Revolutionary Party led by Son Ngoc Minh supported by North Vietnam. The party later became the Communist Party of Kampuchea led by Pol Pot. This group, who led the revolution to its victory over the American-backed Lon Nol government in 1975, was called the KR.

4. *Sam Sothy, a student from Sok An Phnom Lower Secondary School: Who were the KR leaders? Are they still alive today?*

Mr. Dy: The KR leaders include Pol Pot (Party Secretary), Nuon Chea (Deputy Party Secretary), Ieng Sary, Khieu Samphan, Ieng Therith, Ta Mok, Son Sen, Ke Pauk. These people were members of the Central Committee of the Party and also members of the DK government. For instance, Ieng Sary was member of the Party Central Committee and First Deputy Prime Minister in charge of foreign affairs. Vorn Vet was second Deputy Prime Minister in charge of economics, and Son Sen was third Deputy Prime Minister in charge of national defense. These people created the national policies, which led to a lot of killings throughout the country. The KR leaders who are still alive today are now being detained in the prison of the KR Tribunal. These leaders include: Khieu Samphan, Ieng Sary, Ieng Therith and Nuon Chea. Mr. Dy informed the audience that if the participants wanted to know more about the KR leaders who are still alive they could refer to the booklet on Case 002.

5. *Ung Chenda, a student from Sok An Phnom Lower Secondary School: During the genocidal regime, people did not trust each other. People lived and had to take care of themselves. Why didn't people trust each other? Why didn't a brother believe his brother?*

A villager, Nr. Ngim, helped answer the questions. He mentioned that there were a number of people but they did not dare to talk to or inform each other because the leaders were dictators; they killed people without consideration. People were frightened even of their words without using guns. Even though a person broke one spoon, he or she would be accused of being an enemy and taken away for execution.

### **Outcomes and impacts**

*Information dissemination:* Not many NGOs or government agencies come to Kampaeng commune to conduct forums or public education, especially education on the KR history. Participants felt delighted that DC-Cam came to this remote area and brought along a number of publications related to the KR regime for the villagers. For this reason, we noticed that the number of villagers was almost equal to the number of students.

*Magazine:* Kampaeng commune office receives DC-Cam's magazine *Search for the Truth* regularly. Arriving at the house of the commune chief, we saw the magazine. The commune chief informed us his commune office receives this magazine regularly and that he always distributes copies of the magazine to the village chiefs according to the number

of copies he receives from the district. The school principal and several other villagers living nearby borrow the magazine from the commune chief because they are interested in topics related to the KR.

*Killing pit:* Chy Ta Pich killing site is an unknown site that DC-Cam's mapping project has not discovered. In the future, the mapping project may want to locate the site in order to update the killing map and the number of pits and mass graves in the KR.

*Impression from a provincial teacher:* Ros Chanthan is a provincial teacher from Takeo province. She helped the team contact the Kampaeng commune chief for the preparation of the forum. Having dinner with her, Chanthan said that she has started using the textbook in her class. According to her, the students are interested in the textbook but they do not have enough copies. She encourages her students to borrow the book from the library to read. Chanthan said that there are a number of copies in library stock. Believing that it is more useful to share with students for their study, she distributes extra copies to her students.



**Mr. Pong Rasy Pheng interviewing a villager**

On a separate issue, Mr. Dy discussed the challenges that Chanthan faced during the commune teacher training in Pursat in which Chanthan was one of the provincial teachers who acted as trainers. She mentioned that although she was a trainer, she learned a lot from the Pursat training. She learned from both other trainers and trainees alike. The trainers provided many

examples and the trainees who practiced teaching in the afternoon. According to her observation, she believes that the program for teaching training is too congested, which means there is not enough time to clearly explain each method in the Teacher's Guidebook. She suggested that more time be provided to each method presentation. In addition, trainers should recall the methods in the previous day before starting the new day.

*Textbook distribution:* At the forum, Mr. Men Sangha, Sok An Phnom School Principal, came to Mr. Dy and said that he was happy to have his students attend the forum. His school received over a hundred copies of the textbook when DC-Cam launched the textbook distribution in 2008. The distribution ceremony was conducted in Chea Sim Takeo High School in the provincial town, and Mr. Sangha attended this ceremony. He said that his students did not have enough copies to study. Therefore, this forum provided not only knowledge but also more copies of the textbook. More importantly, the school

principal told the team that he has instructed his teachers to integrate parts of the textbook into their daily teaching of such subjects as history, geography, Khmer studies, culture, art, and citizen morality.

*A sense of release:* Ea Norn, Wat Phnom village chief, shared his experiences during the KR period. He said that he wanted to talk about his experiences in the KR regime for a long time but did not know where to talk and in what occasion. Norn thanked the team for allowing him to describe his story to the students. After describing his story, he felt released—like throwing a heavy rock out of his body. On the other hand, learning from the previous challenges, the team paid as much attention to the villagers as they did to the students. This encouraged the villagers to express their voices and gave the villagers a platform for them to share their experiences with the students as Norn did.

*Women's tragedy:* The team learned that most women who participated in the forum are widows. When the team asked them during the pre- and post-surveys whether mass



**Giant Buddha statue on the top of Chy Ta Pich Mountain, the bottom of which is the killing pit in Kampaeng commune**

atrocities happened in DK, most women said, "Yes, because my husband was killed." The team also learned that one organization provided one hundred U.S. dollars to the families who lost one or more family members during the KR. Three women came to Mr. Dy to express their resentment for having not received money.

*Knowledge on DK history:* The team learned that almost all the people who attended the forum, including the KR survivors, did not know the reason for why the KR killed so many people. This suggests that education on KR history in Cambodia is just the beginning. When the team asked the attendees if they knew why the KR killed people, most of them replied, "The KR wanted to kill all the intellectuals and kept only the illiterate who were easy to be indoctrinated [alive]." The answer is not wrong, but it shows the very limited knowledge that both ordinary citizens and Cambodian educators possess.

*Publicity of DC-Cam's Genocide Education Project:* Hearing that DC-Cam was going to conduct the forum on the KR history, villagers, teachers, and students who had received copies of the textbook started to share the textbook from one to another to read. The team had lunch at a villager's house. During lunch, Mr. Dy saw a copy of the textbook; its pages were decayed and almost torn apart. Mr. Dy asked Ms. Raty, daughter of a villager, where

she got the book from. She said she borrowed it from her teacher to read because she heard that we were coming to her village. She finished reading Chapter 2. She admired the way the old photos were collected and preserved. Then she recalled the time when she was studying at school. She remembered how she used to ask her teacher what the communist party was. Her teacher explained, "Communists are a group of soldiers who wanted to topple down the King." She said she believed what her teacher told her. Mr. Dy asked her to read the whole book and find out what the communist KR really were like.

### **Challenges**

**Lack of communication:** The commune chief received information from DC-Cam that a team was going to conduct a public education forum in his commune. He already informed the village chiefs to invite the villagers from the 13 villages to attend the forum. Two days prior to the forum day, the commune chief wanted to confirm our attendance but was not able to find our contact information. The team needs to make sure that the communication channels for conveying information are made known to community authorities and information that is provided to the commune is sufficient and clear.

On this occasion, the team distributed the magazine and the booklet on Case 002 to the participants at the end of the presentation and discussion. Because of this action, participants paid full attention to the presentation on the textbook. Otherwise it is believed they would keep shifting from one book to another with less attention on the content of the forum.

The team discovered that participants were more interested in topics covered in Chapter 7, such as marriage, forced labor, and the suppression of religious practices. This comment does not rule out the importance of Chapter 5. This finding suggests that people are more likely to discuss the topics that have connection to their real life and experiences.

The commune chief was relatively disappointed with the team. According to government protocol, the commune chief who presided over the forum is supposed to officially open and close the forum. At the end of the forum, we did not give the commune chief a chance to express his final remarks. Next time, we should give a few minutes to the commune chief to give his final remarks.

### **Project team members:**

**Khamboly Dy**

**Pong-Rasy Pheng**

**Keodara Prak**

**Sokchamroeun Ly**