

មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជា

GENOCIDE EDUCATION IN CAMBODIA

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

Democratic Kampuchea Textbook Distribution: A Public Education Forum between Teachers, Students and Parents

Chhnok Trou Commune, Boribo District, Kampong Chhnang
Province

September 21, 2011

By Farina So



The participants from Chhnok Trou Commune attend the forum, September 21 2011

To date, DC-Cam has conducted twenty-three genocide education public forums with parents, students and teachers in their respective communities. On September 21, a forum was held for the first time in Chhnok Trou Commune on a floating port in the area and was attended by over 200 participants from two out of the three villages: Chhnok Trou and Kampong Preah Villages, including local authority, hakim, students, and their parents. All DC-Cam staff also made their way to give the

offerings to the monks at Wat Kampong Preah located in Kampong Preah Village, on the eighth day of Pchum Ben.

An Overview of the Site

About one hundred and thirty kilometers away from the Capital, Chhnok Trou is the largest fishing area in Kampong Chhnang Province and one of the largest fishing areas in Cambodia. The



Chhnok Trou Lower Secondary School is flooded during the rainy season

majority of the people fish for a

living, but they also have some other small businesses during the rainy season.

People in this area largely depend on water, a source of life—both for their occupation and daily use. Traditionally these people move their floating houses back and forth depending on the water level. During the dry season, when the Great Lake becomes smaller, the villagers move their houses close to the deep water. However, during the rainy season like this month, they move their houses closer to the main road. According to Sam Rith Pheng, chief of the commune, Chhnok Trou was founded years and years ago, but in the past people lived on floating houses



Kampong Preah Pagoda will be included in the national heritage list in the near future.

temporarily. During the rainy season they moved their houses back to the land. Today, however, most of them live on the water permanently. The older generations came from other places within the province and Kampong Thom Province, but many young people were born here and go to school here as well.

However many children usually drop out of school when they reach the secondary or upper secondary level because they have to help their parents fish. According to the commune chief, there are only eighty students in upper secondary school. When

asked how many could manage to go on for higher education, the commune chief sighed deeply and said there were none.

During the Khmer Rouge (KR), Chhnok Trou and other fishing areas around Tonle Sap Great Lake served as the main fishing areas. Tons and tons of fish were caught and exported to foreign countries such as China and North Korea in exchange for medicine, weapons and other supplies. People living in this area were evacuated to other places such as Kampong Leng, Ponlei Commune, and O-Ral Mountain to do fishing and farming.



Women's temple (Prasath Srei) in Kampong Preah Village, Kampong Chhnang Province

Apparently, the women's temple is nicer and taller than that of the men. According to a legend recalled by the commune chief and villagers nearby, the story of the temples is similar to that of Phnom Bros and Phnom Srei. In the old days, it was women who proposed to men for marriage and paid the dowry. In order to change this custom, both men and women bet on a game, competing in building a temple. Whichever side completed construction first would win. The loser would have to propose and pay the dowry. In this game, women defeated the men because they were patient and did not underestimate their work. Their temple looks bigger and more beautiful than the men's temple. Kampong Preah Pagoda and these temples have been included in the national heritage list.

Living on the water provides advantages and disadvantages. People live near the fishing area and water, but also are exposed to bacteria, especially those living near the shore. Rain and storms usually frighten the residents. These people spend lots of money in rearranging their floating houses every year. Also, they feel isolated from media and information. Some of them have bought a piece of land nearby because they wish to live on the shore when they get old.

This community is diverse. They live with different ethnicities including Khmer, Cham and Vietnamese. Two old pagodas, one mosque, and a church appear above the water. Two old, adorable temples named women's temple (Prasath Srei) and men's

temple (Prasath Bros) built in the seventh century are located in the compound

Brief Description of Forum Activities

The participants came in by boats individually or as a group, some with their small children. It was attended by different ethnic groups such as Khmer, Cham and Vietnamese. Male and female participants were almost equal. Each of them received a copy of the Democratic Kampuchea (DK) textbook, Case 002 booklet, and anti-



The commune chief Sam Rith Pheng opens the forum

genocide slogan poster. They started to read immediately after receiving the informational package. For those who cannot read, they looked at the pictures in the book and talked to their colleagues next to them. At times a few small children made noise prior to the start because they were hungry, so their mothers fed them tofu desserts the Vietnamese sell on the water.

The program began at 9 a.m., a bit later than usual because people were busy with their businesses and the lack of means of transportation. In the opening, Sam Rith Pheng, Chhnok Trou Commune chief, delivered his welcoming speech and opened the forum. He stressed that this was the first time his people joined a forum on the KR regime. "This important event will remind my people about the KR history and open up discussion on their experiences." He encouraged all the participants to talk about it for the sake of history and education. He closed his remarks by appreciating DC-Cam for reaching out to remote areas like his community and providing the people with the opportunity to share their experience with other participants.



The participants fill out a pre-survey form

In order to measure people's understanding of the KR, a pre-forum survey was distributed to the participants. The questions include participant views on the magnitude of the crimes, reconciliation, vengeance on former perpetrators and genocide education. After the survey was collected, Sayana Ser, forum team leader,

gave an overview of the project and schedule for the day's event. She then taught a chapter on daily life under the KR. For this activity, the participants were divided in six groups, with each consisting of forty participants. Each group was assigned to read and summarize one section from the book, including themes ranging from cooperatives, two classes of people, marriage, child's rights abuse, forced labor, and purges and killings.



Left: A female student presents her group's summary; Right: Kang Phat summarizes a section on marriage

Then a representative of each team, totaling six (three older people and three younger people) came to the front and presented their summaries to the other participants. The crowd gave a big applause to all the presenters and attentively listened to their presentations. The first presenter was a young female student. She made a few main points from the section focused on cooperatives. Another young man proceeded to the next point on new and old people.

Interestingly, the third presenter was an old man named Kang Phat. He is a former KR assistant driver for comrade Chey, Ke Pauk's messenger. Phat now works as assistant to the *achar* at Kanthor Pagoda. Phat gave a very brief remark on marriage during the KR era. He spoke loudly that the KR wedding consisted of between two to one hundred and fifty couples. The crowd laughed and gave him applause. He added the couple could not stay with each other long. They had to work separately, and occasionally met each other. This statement touched on several women's stories presented in the forum.



All the six presenters present their summaries to the attendees

The fourth and the fifth groups summarized the child's rights abuses and forced labor sections. Children were separated from their parents to work in the rice fields from morning till night and they were taught revolutionary lessons under the shade of the trees or in abandoned houses. Adults and old people worked over ten hours a day

with little rations of food. These people had to show that they could follow the KR plan.

Math Yan, age 43, Chhnok Trou resident, presented his group's summary on "purges and killings." He said that the KR killed people regardless of their ethnic backgrounds. Men and women were considered enemies and were killed. Yan also recalled that his father was accused of being a capitalist and was killed. His mother was forced to feed pigs. Yan was drafted into the children's mobile unit. He said every time he refused, his unit chief punished him by squeezing his ears until they bled.

Outcomes and Impacts

Enhance Participants' Understanding on History and Education

Both the distributed documents and discussion are a source of learning and remembrance. The participants opened the DK textbook page by page and spoke to each other about the regime. Their attitude toward history and education has changed. Math Yan and Yim Ye expressed similar views on this aspect. They want their children to learn and understand the history deeply. Ye said, "This forum is essential because it helps educate my children about the regime and opens their eyes on public education."



Participants in Group II Read the Two Classes of People from the DK textbook.

Increase Empathy of Different Ethnic Groups toward Each Other

This forum also encourages people to speak out about their past experiences. While speaking out and by listening to various stories, it increased young generation's empathy toward the survivors. People of different ethnic backgrounds also express their empathy toward each other during the forum.

No Tae's daughter in law never asked her parents about the regime. She was busy with fishing. She said she understands the KR regime from the forum. During an interview, she expressed her empathy toward her parents and Yim Ye, who sobbed while sharing her story in the forum. She even raised a question, "I wonder if all survivors' stories are the same."



Older and younger participants work in small group

Knowing each other suffering and passing this history to the next generation, it will strengthen their relations because they lived through the same regime. It will build mutual understanding toward each other.

Capturer Women's Experience on Forced Marriage

The forum enabled the team to capture four stories of female participants who lived through the regime. This is important as it related to gender based violence. The stories are among many other stories. It is a kind of documentation and a form of justice for the four women. Through their stories, we have a better understanding on the KR policy and their treatment on people. Despite the passage of time, the four women cannot forget what they suffered.

All of these outcome and results contribute to memory preservation, genocide prevention and mutual understanding which serve as a long term impact.

Challenges and Suggested Solutions

The forum encountered several challenges. As it was held on a floating house, both the organizers and participants had some difficulties in coming to the venue. They were busy with Pchum Ben and voter's registration for the upcoming commune election. Also, the large number of participants made the space crowded and a bit hard to manage. In addition, survey session consumed a large portion of time because most of the participants can read little, but cannot write. However, all these challenges were addressed. We delayed the meeting until 9:00 a.m., one hour late to allow people to participate. During the teaching



The participants complete a post-survey form

time, we divided the attendees into six groups and they sit in a circle, thereby enabling them to see each other. Regarding survey, Sok-Kheang, one of the team members, explained them the questions and we asked young participants who had completed their survey to help complete other participants. Interestingly, although those cannot write, they were enthusiastic about the survey and asked for help from the team. This survey encouraged the participants to think and discuss the questions, and worked individually or as a group. It also helped the team compare their understanding prior and after the forum.

In order to improve the forum, a few recommendations should be taken into consideration. More visual and study materials (color paper, white board etc.,) should be put in place for group activities. Number of participants should be narrowed down to between 100 and 150, which is easier to manage. Follow up forum should be made to maintain its success.

Conclusion

The forum concluded at 11:30 a.m. Overall, this one-day forum met its objectives. It informed the participants about genocide education at public school and in community. It also kept the people updated about the KR tribunal. The participants engaged in the forum and discussion. Both victims and former KR cadre shared their experienced with the rest of the participants. The team was able to conduct hundred surveys prior and after the forum. In evaluation, most of the participants suggested the forum hold frequently in their community and elsewhere.

Appendix

Outstanding Theme: Forced Marriage

Forced marriage was the main topic of the discussion for today's event and many people who lived through the period were forced to marry during the KR time. Both men and women were forced by a chief of cooperative to marry, sometimes across ethnic but not outside cooperative. Usually, men had the chance to propose women.

Marriage during the KR, No Tae said, was just for procreation not for a traditional family life because the KR wanted to increase population for their revolution. This kind of coercion affected couples emotionally and physically. Militiamen spied on young couples during the first night and listened whether they made a quarrel. To save their life, the couples pretended they loved each other during the night. Some women lived with their couples until now; however, others did not. A few female participants reported that they were forced to marry men they did not love, and the three ended up with different fates. Nonetheless, some women refused, but were reeducated.

Abdullah No Tae, age 66, Chhnok Trou Village

No Tae was born in Kampong Tralach Krom Village, Kampong Chhnang Province. She came to live and fish in Chhnok Trou during dry season with her parents. She got married in 1969 and has three children. While fishing, the KR came. She was



Abdullah No Tae

evacuated from Chhnok Trou to Po Ma-Reah Village, District 10 where her husband died of disease. A few months later her second and third children died. After these losses in 1978, the KR asked her to marry a Khmer man. His wife was a Vietnamese. She was sent to Vietnam in 1975, but he did not want to go with his wife saying that he did not want to leave his parents in Cambodia. He then was sent to Kampong Chhnang and was spied on. Both of them were forced to marry.

However, No Tae refused saying that her husband had just died very recently and she did not want to remarry. The KR warned her that she was not allowed to speak to any man except her father. Tae refrained

herself from doing so and she could successfully fulfill this requirement. She did not talk to any man even her relative. She told her unit chief (mekang) that if they forced her to marry, she would commit suicide. She was then sent to work in Phnom Kuk. However, this did not mean she was freed. When she was there, the KR still intended to force her to marry the man. Two soldiers armed with two rifles came to take Tae from the place to the wedding ceremony where another 21 couples were prepared for the wedding. However, Tae did not know anything about this because the soldiers merely said that she would be taken to chop trees in the forest. So she was surprised when learning that she would be coupled again. However, this time Tae could not escape. She feared of being killed because she still had a child to take care of.

Two soldiers spied on her and her husband during the night. After living with each other for a few days, they were sent to work separately. Three months later, the Vietnamese came and they were separated again. However, her husband loved her very much; he searched for her after the regime collapsed. Due to this attachment, she accepted him and he converted to Islam. They both have 6 children. Unfortunately, her husband died of disease 10 years ago.

Yim Ye, age 50, Kampong Preah Village

Yim Ye's hometown is in Phat Sanday Village, Phat Sanday Commune, Kampong Svay District, Kampong Thom Province. She came to live in Chhnok Trou in the 1970s and was evacuated to District 10 in Ponlei. Her unit chief forced her to marry her husband in 1977. She did not want to marry yet, but the KR demanded that Ye and eight other women in her group get a husband. Like No Tae, Ye and her husband pretended to be a good couple during the night in order to avoid any kind of punishment. They could stay with each other for overnight, and then were sent to different workforce. She lived with him until 1979. However, he divorced her and married another woman. Yew as later proposed by another man, younger than



Yim Ye

her, her current husband. They have six children.

Ye narrated her experience while her tears falling down. She said that her first husband hurt her emotionally while her second husband hurt her physically. He beats

her. But she considers this as her karma. Yet she quietly lived with second husband without any complaint because she thinks about her children's future.

Khadijah, age 55, Chhnok Trou Village

While No Tae and Yim Ye patiently lived with their couple after the regime, Khadijah did not. She divorced her husband after 1979. He remarried a new wife. They now live in Russey Keo District.

Khadijah was from Kampong Tralach Krom Village, Kampong Chhnang Province. Her husband was her fiancé, but she did not love him. She wanted to get away from him. When the KR came, she escaped from him. However, he took this chance to propose her from the unit chief. Khadijah said she could not refuse because she feared of being punished. So she patiently accepted him. Overnight passed, she tried to escape. She did not meet him when she was sent to work separately. When the Vietnamese came, Khadijah divorced her husband. Like Ye, she was proposed by another man and they now have three children. The couple fishes together in the lake.

Abdullah Yae, age 68, Chhnok Trou Village

However, while the three women above ended up with marriage, Abdullah Yae did not. She refused when her unit chief forced her, so her unit chief punished her by giving her a bunch of work to do. She was made to carry soil from morning till night. However, she eventually could fulfill her duties, so she could get away from this proposal.

Yae was blind after she was hit by a bar of wood ten years ago, but she made her way to come to the forum.

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