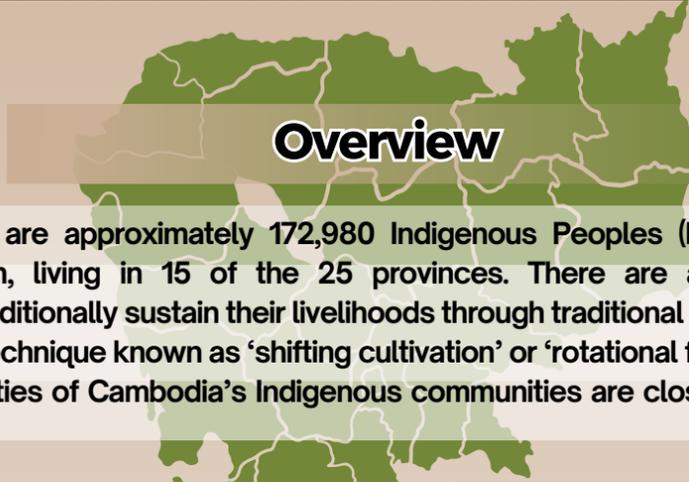


# Access to Collective Land Titles for Indigenous Communities in Cambodia - 2025 Update

## International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples



### Overview

In Cambodia, there are approximately 172,980 Indigenous Peoples (IPs), representing 1.11% of the country's population, living in 15 of the 25 provinces. There are an estimated 488 Indigenous communities who traditionally sustain their livelihoods through traditional agriculture, including cultivating forest land using a technique known as 'shifting cultivation' or 'rotational farming'.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the beliefs, traditions, and identities of Cambodia's Indigenous communities are closely tied to the land, forest and natural resources.<sup>2</sup>

## Legal Frameworks for Obtaining Collective Land Titles (CLTs)



The land rights of IPs are resolutely protected under international laws, which are incorporated into Article 31 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia. Those laws include the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Article 11 of which guarantees the right to adequate housing. Cambodia, which ratified the ICERD in 1983, is obligated to ensure that all people—including indigenous peoples—enjoy this right. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) asserts that IPs “have the right to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired” (Article 26.1), and that “the State shall give legal recognition and protection to these lands, territories and resources” (Article 26.2).<sup>3</sup> Cambodian national laws recognized the collective ownership of indigenous communities over their customary lands, enshrined in the 2001 Land Law and Collective Land Titles (CLTs) introduced in 2009 under Sub-decree 83 but not yet fully aligned with Indigenous practices.

## Barriers to gaining Collective Land Titles (CLTs)

Despite the application process being simplified in 2020 due to issues around its complexity, high cost, and lengthy duration, applying for a CLT still remains a slow process<sup>4</sup>

<b>8.81%</b>	<b>43/488</b>	<b>41,538.32</b>
of Indigenous Communities have received Communal Land Titles (CLTs).	Communities since the process began in 2011.	Hectares of Land Officially Title covered by the issued CLTs.

### The Widening Gap: Reality vs. Government Goals

The government's objective is to issue 10 CLTs per year. From 2011 to 2024 (13 years), the target was 130 CLTs. The actual achievement falls drastically short.<sup>5</sup>



An average of only 3.30% CLTs have been issued per year, far below the official target of 10 per year. No new information on progress was available between July 2024 and July 2025.<sup>4</sup>

## Current Concerns

- **Delays** in granting collective land titles to Indigenous communities demonstrates a **disregard** for their traditional rights to adequate customary land, which are **guaranteed under both international and national laws**.
- The use of the term 'Local Communities' to also generalize 'Indigenous Communities' in the Code on Environment and Natural Resources **limited Indigenous unique rights to customary lands and natural resources**.<sup>7</sup>
- The Code on Environment and Natural Resources also **guarantees fewer types of traditional rights over forest products**, and **undermine** the right to engage in rotational or shifting cultivation.<sup>8</sup>



- Sub-decrees on the expansion of protected areas have overlapped with and reduced land traditionally inhabited and used by Indigenous Peoples.<sup>9</sup>
- The serious restrictions on the implementation of the **REDD+ project** have **hindered** Indigenous Peoples' traditional access to customary **land forest land**.<sup>10</sup>
- The granting of **state forest land** to private companies has been a key barrier and obstacle to the process and procedure of CLT registration and granting.<sup>11</sup>
- Contemplated amendments to the Law on Forestry could also incorporate similar changes, further **weakening Indigenous land rights**.<sup>12</sup>

## Recommendations to the Government of Cambodia

### 1. Accelerate Land Titling

Speed up CLT registration with the objective of issuing, **at the very least**, 10 CLTs per year;



### 2. Strengthen Legal Recognition

Amend the Code on Environment and Natural Resources to include the term 'Indigenous' communities and reaffirm their **exclusive** ownership of Indigenous customary lands and the natural resources therein;

### 3. Remove Land Restrictions

Remove existing restrictions on the size and type of land that can be registered under CLTs, and ensure that CLTs encompass all the traditional farms identified by Indigenous communities;

### 5. State Budget Allocation

The Royal Government of Cambodia should allocate a state budget package to support the process of granting CLTs to Indigenous peoples.

### 4. Halt Harmful Concessions

Cease granting state forest land to private companies in areas where Indigenous Peoples live, **whose traditional livelihoods** are intrinsically tied to the land and forest, in accordance with **international and national law**.

## Sources

1. Report on the Demographic and Socio-Economic Situation of Cambodia's Indigenous Peoples, 2024, pages 12, 26 and 170.
2. CCHR, 'International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples,' August 2023.
3. UN General Assembly, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007
4. CCHR submitted an official letter to the Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction (MLMUPC) requesting updated data and information on CLT granting as of July 2025, but no response has been received.
5. CCHR, 'International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples,' August 2024.
6. CCHR, 'International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples,' August 2024.
7. CCHR, 'International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples,' August 2024.
8. CCHR, 'International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples,' August 2024.
9. Cambodia, 9 August 2024: Expedite Collective Land Titles for Indigenous People Who Risk Losing Their Farmlands, NGOs Urge Government.
10. MONGABAY, 24 July 2024: In Cambodia, Indigenous villagers lose forest & land amid carbon offset project.
11. Cambodia, 9 August 2024: Expedite Collective Land Titles for Indigenous People Who Risk Losing Their Farmlands, NGOs Urge Government.
12. CCHR, 'International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples,' August 2024.



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