

A film by Kalyanee Mam

# A RIVER CHANGES ក្បែរទីកន្លែង COURSE

## DISCUSSION GUIDE



## ABOUT THE DISCUSSION GUIDE

This guide is designed to assist both novice and seasoned screening organizers in facilitating a pre- and post-screening discussion for *A River Changes Course*. The guide is intended for general audiences as well as teachers working with high school or college level students, and may be used in a variety of courses, including environmental studies, political science, economics, and international studies. Community leaders can also use this guide to facilitate dialogue about the issues raised in the film.

It is our hope that the honest, poignant stories shared will inspire viewers to analyze the challenges that come with development and globalization, and within their respective communities, determine how best to respond to these challenges.

### **This guide contains:**

- **Historical background on Cambodia**
- **Pre-screening and preparatory notes for facilitators**
- **Post-screening discussion questions**
- **Resources for the themes introduced in the film**

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## INTRODUCTION



transferred mostly from subsistence farmers into the hands of industrial agriculture firms.

An estimated 400,000 people have been affected by land disputes since 2003, and government violence against land-grabbing victims is at an all-time high (the most shocking example coming when authorities shot dead a 14-year-old girl during an eviction).

This large-scale transfer of land is facilitated by Cambodia's land concession scheme, in which the government leases private state land to companies that agree to farm it. Occupants rarely receive proper compensation, and many receive no compensation at all.

The Cambodian economy is predominantly agrarian, with agriculture employing more than 73% of its population (Asian Migrant Centre, 2002). Chronic poverty, landlessness, and natural disasters such as droughts and floods are compelling many rural Cambodians to migrate to other rural areas, the urban areas or neighboring countries to seek work. Other push factors include debt payments and a lack of viable livelihood options. The pull factors are the high demand for less skilled laborers in 3D jobs (dangerous, demanding, dirty) in countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, South Korea and Saudi Arabia, as well as the prospect of paid employment and a better life.

Against this backdrop of change and upheaval, award-winning filmmaker Kalyanee Mam returned to her native homeland to document the intimate stories of three families struggling to maintain their traditional ways of life amid rapid development and environmental degradation. Their stories represent the stories of not only countless families in Cambodia, but also the rest of the world as we seek to find balance between conservation and progress.

More than thirty years after the Khmer Rouge, a genocidal regime responsible for the deaths of nearly two million people, fell from power, the majority of Cambodia's people are still struggling to survive. Nearly 70% of the population subsists on less than US\$2 a day, and one in three children under age five are underweight.

The 2011 Corruption Perception Index published by Transparency International ranked Cambodia one of the twenty most corrupt countries in the world, barely beating the Democratic Republic of Congo.

International aid has propped up basic services in Cambodia for over twenty years, and currently provides the equivalent of half the government budget.

Yet Cambodia is rich in timber, minerals and petroleum and over the past 15 years, the government has leased more than 50% of the country's land to private investors.

Today, Cambodia is in the grips of a prolonged land grabbing crisis, a slow-motion calamity that has seen over 2.1 million hectares of land - roughly the total area of Wales -



## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

My first trip to Cambodia was in 1998, only seventeen years after my family fled this war-torn country, and only a few years after the country was beginning to rebuild itself again. I was shocked by much of what I saw – the poverty, desperation, and corruption that plagued the country. But I was also deeply affected by the beauty that surrounded me – the beauty of the landscape, the people, the ancient culture, and the many smiles that greeted me in my journey. What I did not expect was how rapidly the country would change within the next decade.

*It's about taking a look at the people we need to consider now. The people who are impacted immediately by the environmental devastation we're reeking on the planet.*

Large tracts of forests, once home to indigenous tribes in Cambodia, are granted to influential logging companies. The dirt roads, once unsurpassable, are now smooth, shimmering asphalt, easing the transport of freshly cut timber from the virgin woodlands of the northeast to Vietnam.

In the heart of Cambodia, on the Tonle Sap Lake, fishermen who once boasted catching more fish than they could ever eat or sell, now suffer from ever-dwindling catch. Vast swatches of farmland once owned by subsistence farmers are bulldozed and transformed into sugar, rubber, and cassava plantations, the products of which are shipped abroad and not consumed within Cambodia.



Young village women are forced to migrate from the countryside to the factories of Phnom Penh to help their families make ends meet and pay off mounting debt. As I witnessed these changes, I wondered how they are affecting people's lives and the rich country that I had first fallen in love with ten years before.

While making the film, Khieu, Sari, and Sav Samourn impressed me most with their strength and conviction to determine their own destiny and future. One of my most treasured clips from the film is at the end, when Sav Samourn puts on her hat and gazes into the future with a look of fierceness and determination. The companies may come, the forests may be cut down, but her life and the lives of her children will always endure. It is this tenacity, the same tenacity that ensured the survival of so many families during the Khmer Rouge period, including my own, that gives me hope for Cambodia's future.

This is a decisive moment for Cambodia. And so it is also a decisive moment for the world. How do we find balance? How do we advance and develop without destroying ourselves in the process?

By delving deeply into the lives of families directly affected by development and globalization, we hope this film, *A River Changes Course*, will invite viewers not to draw simple conclusions, but to ask questions that demand thoughtful answers and action.

**Kalyanee Mam**



## ABOUT THE FILM

**“We’ve worked so hard on this land,” says Sav Samourn. “And now they’ve come to destroy it all. Sooner or later it will all be gone.”**

*Winner of the World Cinema Grand Jury Prize: Documentary at the 2013 Sundance Film Festival, **A River Changes Course** is an 83-minute documentary by Director/Producer Kalyanee Mam, who returns to her native homeland to capture the stories of three families living in Cambodia as they strive to maintain their traditional ways of life amid rapid development and environmental degradation.*

Deep in the jungle, **Sav Samourn** struggles as large companies encroach and “progress” claims the life-giving forests. She discovers there is little room for wild animals, ghosts —and the home she has always known.

In a fishing hamlet, **Sari Math** must quit school to help support his family. But as the fish catch dwindles, Sari and his family find their livelihood threatened.

In a village, **Khieu Mok** must leave to seek work in a Phnom Penh garment factory to help pay her family’s debts. But city life proves no better, and Khieu struggles between her need to stay and send money home and her duty to be with her loved ones.

From Cambodia’s forests to its rivers, from its idyllic rice fields to the capital’s pulsing heart, forces of radical change are transforming the landscape of the country--and the dreams of its people.

From Executive Producer Youk Chhang:

*This documentary adds to the conversation on Cambodia’s post-conflict identity. We must not allow our struggle to reconcile with our past to cloud our awareness and commitment to confronting the challenges of the present and future.*

*Cambodia experienced horrors that continue to haunt us today. But remembering, questioning, and teaching the past does not mean we have to be defined by it. We have already lived a genocide and we continue to live it in our history books, stories, and classrooms. These forums serve an essential role in affirming truth, memory, and reconciliation, but we cannot and we will not be Khmer Rouge victims for the rest of our lives. Globalization proves that Cambodia cannot dwell on its past. The conversation must move forward.*



## THE CAST



### SARI MATH

The great Tonle Sap River in central Cambodia is home to a diversity of fish and wildlife. And the floating village on the river is home for Sari and his family, who depend on fishing for a living. As the eldest boy in a family of six children, Sari was forced to quit school at the age of 14 to help support his family. But life on the river has changed rapidly. Due to large fishing concessions, large fish traps, and the rise of illegal fishing, the catch is diminishing and Sari and his family are struggling to catch

even enough fish to survive. As Sari stands on his boat facing the horizon, Sari wonders in what direction the future will take him.

### SAV SAMOURN

In the remote and mountainous jungles of northeast Cambodia, Sav Samourn and her family live in a thatched hut perched on a hill surrounded by cashew orchards, golden rice fields, and thick, dense forest. She belongs to one of 24 indigenous groups that remain in Cambodia and that depend on the land and forest for their food and livelihood. All around her, she witnesses the encroachment of large companies and the slashing and clearing of forests. Sav Samourn discovers she is no longer afraid of wild animals and ghosts that once roamed the forests she calls home. Now, she is afraid of people.



### KHIEU MOK

In a small village outside the capital city of Phnom Penh, Khieu and her mother bring in their annual rice harvest. To help make ends meet, she and her family must borrow money to buy land and a water buffalo. And to pay back their mounting debt, Khieu prepares to join the truckloads of young people who have already left the village to find work in garment factories in Phnom Penh. But in the bustling city, Khieu soon realizes that her life and the lives of all factory girls are divided



in half, between their duty to send money home to the village, and their duty to be there with their families. As she awaits the ferry that will bring her back home again, Khieu reflects on how she and her family will survive away from the city.



## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed to accompany screenings of *A River Changes Course*. It is appropriate for teachers working with high-school or college-level students, and may be used in a variety of courses, including environmental studies, political science, economics, and international studies. It can also be used by community leaders to facilitate both pre- and post-screening dialogue about the issues raised in the film.

The guide provides historical information about Cambodia and the contexts in which the film's narratives take place, expanded profiles of the three young Cambodians whose lives we follow, and instructional tips and resources for teachers, presenters and facilitators. Perhaps most importantly, it outlines major themes and sample questions designed to stimulate discussion and reflection by audience members both in Cambodia and around the globe. A list of websites and other relevant resources is included at the end of the guide, for those who might want to further research the issues. It is our hope that the honest, poignant stories shared will inspire viewers to analyze the challenges that come with development and globalization, and within their respective communities, determine how best to respond to these challenges.

## PRE-SCREENING CHECKLIST

*Hosting a screening of A River Changes Course can be a very rewarding way to generate awareness about the issues raised in the film. Because you will have a limited amount of time for the screening, it is helpful to start with a clear idea of what you want to accomplish - Who do you want to attend? What is your goal in showing the film? Be sure to give yourself enough time to plan and promote the screening. To make the set-up process as smooth as possible for you, we put together a list of things to consider and confirm before the day of the screening. Good luck!*

### WHERE

- Where will the screening be held? Is there a fee for use of the venue?
- Is the location central for those you plan to invite?
- Is public transportation and/or parking available?
- Is the venue wheelchair accessible? Is an interpreter available?
- What is the maximum capacity of the room?

### WHO

- Who is the contact person for the screening event, and how can s/he be reached?
- Who was invited to the event? How many people have RSVP'd?
- Will any of the film's crew be attending?
- Who will handle registration/sign-up, welcoming VIPs, facilitating discussion, etc.?
- Who will introduce the film? What information does s/he need?
- Who is responsible for handling the DVD, DVD player, projector, sound system, etc.?

### WHEN

- How far in advance do you have to reserve the venue?
- What time will the screening begin and end?

### WHAT

- What types of tables, chairs, or other pieces of furniture are available at the screening venue?
- Will seating be assigned or open? Will you need VIP seating?
- Is the equipment to be used in good working order?
- Are the acoustics adequate so everyone can hear the sound?
- If this is a large venue, will you need microphones for the introduction and discussion?
- Will there be a fee to attend the screening?
- What refreshments will be served?

## PRE-SCREENING INTRODUCTION

The amount and type of pre-screening discussion you have will depend upon who is in the audience, how much audience members know about Cambodian history and culture, how much information they already have about the film, and how much time you have. For all audiences, provide general information about the film, including by whom it was produced and directed, and when it first premiered. You may mention some of the awards the film has received, and be sure to introduce any of the film's crew members who may be in attendance. Thank the organizers and any who have contributed to making the screening possible (owner of venue, those who provided refreshments, etc.).

### SAMPLE INTRODUCTION:

***Hello, my name is [name] and it is a pleasure to be here at [name of venue].  
I'd like to thank [name of organizer] for making this event possible, and to  
thank all of you for attending this special screening of  
A River Changes Course.***

## PRE-SCREENING DISCUSSION

The objectives of the pre-screening discussion are to:

- *Provide information about the film;*
- *Gauge the audience's knowledge of, and attitudes towards, the issues raised in the film;*
- *Engage audience members in an open exchange of thoughts and expectations;*
- *Cultivate receptivity to the film's themes and content; and*
- *Prime the audience for the post-screening discussion.*

You may choose to use a map to illustrate the location where each of the stories takes place, and/or briefly review the historical timeline of Cambodia. Inform the audience that there will be a post-screening discussion during which they will have an opportunity to share their thoughts.

**Preface the film itself with the following key points about *A River Changes Course*:**

- Directed and produced by award-winning filmmaker, Kalyanee Mam;
- Premiered at the 2013 Sundance Film Festival, where it was awarded the World Cinema Grand Jury Prize for Documentary and has since won numerous other awards;
- Examines the threat of displacement and environmental destruction that results from deforestation and land-grabbing in Cambodia;
- Exposes the threat to Cambodia's waterways and fisheries and the lives of the families dependent on water and fishing for their livelihood;
- Offers an opportunity to witness the challenges of women forced to migrate from the countryside to the city in search of work in garment and other factories; and
- Speaks to the universal struggle to balance development and progress with the preservation of human dignity.



## ABOUT CAMBODIA

**FULL NAME:** Kingdom of Cambodia

**POPULATION:** 15.2 million (July 2013 estimate)

**CAPITAL:** Phnom Penh

**AREA:** 181,035 km<sup>2</sup>;  
(Land: 176,515 km<sup>2</sup>; Water: 4,520 km<sup>2</sup>)

**MAJOR LANGUAGES:** Khmer (official), French, English

**MAJOR RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS:**  
Theravada Buddhism (official), 93%; Islam, 3.5%;  
other, 3.5%

**LIFE EXPECTANCY:** Male: 61 years; Female: 66 years

**MAIN EXPORTS:** Garments (clothing, shoes); timber,  
fisheries products, rubber

**GNI PER CAPITA:** USD \$650

Source: U.S. Department of State



## HISTORICAL TIMELINE

- |      |   |      |  |
|------|---|------|--|
| 1970 | Approximately 70% of Cambodia is covered by dense forest.   | 2005 | Tribunal to try Khmer Rouge leaders gets green light from UN after years of debate.  |
| 1975 | Cambodia falls under the control of the communist Khmer Rouge regime. Approximately 1.7 million Cambodians die from overwork, disease, starvation, torture, or execution between 1975 and 1979. | 2007 | Cambodia's forest cover drops to 3.1%.   |
| 1979 | Vietnamese soldiers overthrow the Khmer Rouge. But civil war continues.   | 2007 | Most senior surviving Khmer Rouge member, Nuon Chea - "Brother Number Two" - is arrested and charged with crimes against humanity.                               |
| 1986 | Construction of the first dam on the Mekong River begins in China.  | 2012 | Thousands of Cambodians living on and around Boeung Kak Lake in Phnom Penh are forcibly evicted.   |
| 1991 | A peace agreement is signed in Paris. A United Nations transitional authority (UNTAC) facilitates a national election.  | 2012 | Outspoken environmental activist Chut Vuthy is shot dead in a confrontation with police while travelling in a threatened forest region in southwestern Cambodia. |
| 1993 | Kingdom of Cambodia reestablished, ushering in a wave of investment in Cambodia by international businesses.  | 2012 | Former King Norodom Sihanouk dies at age 89.   |
| 1994 | First garment factories are built in Phnom Penh, with investment from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia and Singapore.  | 2012 | Cambodian Government approves the controversial Lower Sesan 2 hydroelectric dam project on a tributary of the Mekong.  |
| 1999 | Cambodia gains access to U.S. garment market through textile compact/trade agreement.   | 2013 | Ceiling of Taiwanese factory in Phnom Penh collapses, killing 2 and injuring 7.  |
| 2004 | Death of Chea Vichea, leader of the Free Trade Workers Union of the Kingdom of Cambodia.  | 2013 | Garment workers for a Singaporean company in Phnom Penh strike, demanding higher pay; 720 workers are terminated.  |

Sources: BBC News Asia, Cambodia Profile; World Fisheries Organization; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; Global Witness

## LAND

### *Displacement*

Throughout Cambodia, land disputes and forced displacement have affected hundreds of thousands of people, particularly within the past decade. In the capital of Phnom Penh, more than 4,000 families living in communities on and around *Boeung Kak*, a large lake in the north-central area of the city, were forcibly driven out of their homes and asked to relocate to a desolate area more than 20 kilometers away. If they refused, they watched as their homes were literally destroyed by bulldozers, and then, homeless, were left to fend for themselves.

Unbeknownst to them, in 2007, the Cambodian government had granted a private development firm a 99-year lease on a 133-hectare area covering the lake and the nine surrounding villages. The firm, owned by a high-ranking official and backed by significant Chinese investment, began filling in the lake with sand in 2008 and has since begun construction of a planned complex of exclusive shops, apartments and villas. According to Cambodian human rights monitor LICADHO, such leases now account for 3.9 million hectares, or 21.5 per cent of Cambodia.

### *Environmental Destruction*

As the majority of the population lives in rural areas, Cambodians depend upon the land for their very existence. Unfortunately, much of Cambodia's natural environment and resources are threatened by land concessions for development, deforestation, excessive mineral extraction, and unsustainable agribusiness as well as natural disasters.

According to the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, Cambodia has one of the worst deforestation rates in the world. Cambodia's primary rainforest decreased from more than 70 percent in 1970 to 3.1 percent in 2007, due in large part to illegal logging, and forest and related wildlife resources continue to decline.

A large majority of the indigenous population in Cambodia live in the four northeastern provinces of Ratanakiri, Mondolkiri, Stung Treng, and Kratie, where what is left of the forests remains. Millions of hectares of land under the traditional control of indigenous communities in these provinces have been given away by the government as concessions to individuals and commercial companies.





## FILMING SAV SAMOURN'S STORY



The spirit forest is the religious foundation of the community. Rules of land management and access are partially decided by forest spirits, called *neak ta*, along with the local knowledge of indigenous people. Sacrifices and ceremonies are performed for the *neak ta* at all stages of the agriculture cycle—before burning a field, during planting, and at harvest.

Asia Indigenous  
People's Pact, 2013

*Sav Samourn is Jarai, one of 24 indigenous groups with a distinct language and culture living in Cambodia today and dependent solely on the land and forests for their food and livelihood. Sav Samourn and her family have no access to electricity, markets, or even education. Our visit was the first time she and her family had ever seen a camera, let alone one that captured moving pictures.*

*The film opens with one of Sav Samourn's daughters, Cha, chopping sugar cane. I remember vividly the day we captured this scene. We followed Cha down a steep hill into a wooded area enclosed by forests of banana trees and sugar cane. As this little girl grasped the sugar cane in her hand and began chopping, I was mesmerized. I had never in my life seen an eight year old child so strong, adept, and precise. As she chopped, she stared once into the eyes of the camera, and I knew she was neither looking at me, nor at the camera. She was peering into the souls of all of us.*

## WATER

The Mekong River is among the longest in the world, coursing 4,800 km from the Tibetan plateau through six nations to its delta in Vietnam and Cambodia. The Mekong is very rich with freshwater fisheries producing 2.6 million tons annually, valued at approximately \$2.5 billion USD. About 86% of Cambodia's territory (156,000 km<sup>2</sup>) is included in the Mekong basin (Country Environmental Profile, 2012).

Furthermore, the Tonle Sap Lake and River system, linked to the Mekong at Phnom Penh via one of its tributaries, also supports millions of Cambodians. Toward the end of the monsoon season, the Mekong becomes so full that it actually forces the Tonle Sap river to reverse its course and flow into the Tonle Sap Lake, which more than doubles in size and forms a natural reservoir.

The importance of water and fishing is carved into the walls of many ancient Khmer monuments,

including Angkor Thom. A study by the World Fish Center found that for inhabitants of the five provinces bordering the Tonle Sap Lake (Siem Reap, Battambang, Pursat, Kampong Chhnang and Kampong Thom), “all households in these areas engage in diverse income generating and livelihood activities, including fishing, fish processing, fish marketing, fish culture, farming, daily labor and firewood collection, regardless of their primary occupation” (2006). The alluvial floodplains created by the ebb and flow of the Tonle Sap are ideally suited to wet-rice agriculture.

Fish constitutes about 82 percent of the animal protein intake for Cambodian households, and most of it comes from freshwater fisheries.  
-Mekong River Commission

In sum, what happens to the aquatic ecosystems of Cambodia inextricably affects the majority of her people.





## FILMING SARI'S STORY



*Sari and his family live in a small floating village on the river. The very first time I met Sari, he was only 14 years old. I was immediately enamored by his precocity, his expressiveness, and good nature. He took us to their local floating mosque, picked up a Koran, and immediately began chanting a verse. We spent the rest of the day visiting his home and then riding a boat towards the edge of the lake in search of water hyacinth blossoms. We never found the blossoms, but along the way Sari told us the story of his family, his dreams of going to school, getting a good job, and providing for his family.*

*"Our son, Sari, went to plant cassava for the Chinese. He's been gone a month now. He went to help relieve the family burden. As his parents, we forced him to go. He really didn't want to go. But we forced him because he needs to help make money."*

*Sari's father*

*Two years later, we returned to that same village and began to capture how Sari's life had changed since we first met him. By that time, Sari was 16 years old, had already quit school, and was fishing with his father full time. Sari would row his siblings to school in the morning and spend the entire day fishing with his father in the open waters of the Tonle Sap.*

*When we returned a third time, Sari had left home to work on a cassava plantation.*

## MIGRATION

### *Rural to Urban Migration*

Every day, hundreds of youth from the Cambodian countryside leave their homes for Phnom Penh in search of employment. According to a report by the Ministry of Planning, “the draw of the ‘big city lights’ is alluring for individuals who seek better lives for themselves, but it can also assist their families back in rural areas who may receive remittances that can move them out of poverty” (Ministry of Planning, *Migration in Cambodia: Report of the Cambodia Rural Urban Migration Project* 2012, p. 2). The garment industry continues to be a large-scale employer for Cambodia, with a workforce of over 300,000 workers, and is a major contributor of exports, representing approximately 90% of Cambodia’s total export value. Ninety percent of the workers in the garment industry are women, like Khieu Mok ([www.betterfactories.org](http://www.betterfactories.org)).

### *Across Borders*

Others turn to neighboring countries for employment, primarily as domestic or unskilled

laborers. Often, private recruitment agencies seek out individuals to take to employers in other countries. These agencies can be a legitimate source for employment, but others offer cash and food incentives as “loans” that leave migrants deeply indebted, confine recruits in training centers in Cambodia for months, and intimidate those who try to escape. Once in the destination countries, the workers find themselves at the mercy of not only their recruiting agents, but also their employers, who sometimes overwork them, seize their passports, prevent them from contacting family members, abuse or beat them. Furthermore, some migrants travel independently yet illegally, and thus feel they cannot seek help if they find themselves in trouble or danger. Some migrants are trafficked into sex work.

According to the United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking, the primary destination countries for Cambodian migrant workers are Malaysia for domestic work, Thailand for work in the agribusiness industry, and South Korea for manufacturing, construction, and agriculture.





## FILMING KHIEU'S STORY



*Khieu's story was probably the most challenging story to tell as her life moved back and forth between the countryside and the city. I remember the first evening I was introduced to Khieu and her two sisters, one brother, and one brother-in-law, all five of them living in a small dormitory the size of a walk-in closet.*

*Khieu was working in a shoe factory at the time. She had been working in the same shoe factory for over five years and was beginning to experience pain in her chest and problems with her digestive system. She told me the factory lacked ventilation and she was given no mask to wear to protect her from the noxious fumes.*

*Only a few weeks after I began filming her in her dormitory, Khieu decided she would return home to recover from her illness. Khieu is one of eight children, with a single mother forced to raise her children on her own. Khieu's mother left her husband who abused her, and unusual for a Cambodian woman living in the countryside, took her husband to court, legally divorced him, and demanded her rights to their joint property. But Khieu's mother still got very little from the settlement. They had to start from scratch and buy new land and build a new home. And so, Khieu and her family found themselves in debt. Khieu remained at home in the countryside for six months. But she became restless in the country. There was nothing to do at home. There were no markets, no lights, no electricity, or television. Debt was also weighing heavily on the family and Khieu needed to find work to support her young brothers' education. Khieu eventually left for the city to find work in a garment factory.*

## POST-SCREENING DISCUSSION

### GUIDELINES

*A River Changes Course* is likely to engender a range of thoughts and feelings. It may be helpful to open the post-screening discussion simply by asking audience members whether or not they liked the film, and why or why not. If no one speaks up right away, wait 15 seconds or so. If no one responds, you as the moderator you can start the discussion by briefly sharing something about your own experience with the film. Topics might include your reaction to the film when you first saw it, or what people have

shared with you from other screenings, the latest news about the film, etc. Generally speaking, people become less shy about asking questions or making comments once the discussion is underway.

**A GENTLE REMINDER:** *The moderator should foster an atmosphere in which individuals feel free to present their opinions. However, it never hurts to remind the audience that each person's point of view is valid, and that during the discussion session, you wish to encourage dialogue, but not necessarily debate. A respectful tone is appreciated.*

### GENERAL QUESTIONS

- If you could ask the filmmaker a single question, what would you ask?
- How are the three stories portrayed in the film the same? How are they different?
- Whose story affected you the most? Why?
- Why do you think the stories in *A River Changes Course* are important to tell now?
- If a friend asked you about the film, how would you respond?
- What did you learn from the film?
- Describe a moment in the film that was particularly compelling for you.
- Why did it move you?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### SAV SAMOURN'S STORY

- Sav Samourn lives in a relatively remote area of Ratanakiri. Yet her story might be described as universal. How so?
- What responsibility(ies) do you think the Cambodian government has toward indigenous communities?



- Toward the end of the film, Sav Samourn comments that “all the villagers are selling their land to the companies. We’re the only ones who haven’t sold our land and forests [ . . . ] People are selling land all over the place, so we must also sell. We can’t live alone. We can’t beat them.”  
  
What do you think will happen to Sav Samourn and her family? What options might she have?



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)



## SARI'S STORY

- How does Sari's story, and the expectations he has about his life, change during the film?
- How does Sari's story comment on ideas about family relationships and obligations?
- Sari's family is Cham Muslim. Did this surprise you? How does this compare with any ideas you might have had about what a Khmer is (or is not)?
- How do you think the story might differ if Sari's sister were the primary subject?

## KHIEU'S STORY

- What are some of the push and pull factors that lead young Khmer men and women to migrate from rural to rural and rural to urban areas in search of employment?
- Khieu's mother not only wants Khieu to leave the village to get a job and help the family get out of debt, she also wants Khieu to return home, almost as soon as she leaves. What do you think about this seeming incongruity?



## CLOSING

- *Close the event by thanking the audience for their time and participation. Thank the owner of the venue, and any other sponsors of the event.*
- *Collect the sign-in list, and make sure those who may have come in late have signed in.*
- *Request that attendees fill out a survey with feedback about the event.*
- *Be prepared to talk about ways in which those interested in assisting with the various issues introduced in the film can get involved ([www.rally.org](http://www.rally.org)); hand out rally.org postcards.*
- *Point out additional resources listed in the guide, and mention any local resources near the event venue or surrounding neighborhood.*
- *Encourage audience members to spread the word about the film and generate awareness among their families, friends, and colleagues.*

## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

*The questions below are provided for further reflection. They might serve as the basis for a written assignment for a class, such as an essay or article. Students might also conduct additional research on one or more of the issues introduced here.*

### ***Can land be owned?***

While they may have lived in a given area for many years, most Cambodians, such as those in the Boeung Kak communities, do not have formal land titles. Following the 1979 fall of the Khmer Rouge regime, which had abolished all property ownership, individuals and families settled where they could – wherever there was room and shelter. Focused on survival and recovery, few endeavored to acquire formal land titles, and thus have no legal recourse when their rights are threatened. And even for those few who do hold titles, there is no guarantee that they will be honored.

For indigenous communities, the issue of land ownership is even more complex. Some communities have passed down land or the privilege of its use from generation to generation. Other communities are more nomadic, moving from place to place as the situation warrants. When these communities were isolated and their lands relatively inaccessible, there was little need for land titles. As the majority populations have encroached upon indigenous terrain, and demand for the land's resources has increased, however, Cambodia's indigenous people find themselves losing the material base for their livelihoods and unique cultures, and fear for their very survival.

*Can, and should, land be owned? By whom? Who should decide?*

### ***Do we prioritize development over sustainability?***

In an attempt to harness the great power of the Mekong to generate electricity, development ventures — in particular, hydroponic power projects - have constructed numerous dams in the upper Mekong Basin in China. The dams threaten to change the river's ecology by blocking major fish migrations and the movement of fertile sediment carried by the river. Regrettably, the governments of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam have granted numerous companies permission to investigate options for building 12 dams: seven in Laos, two in Cambodia, and two along the Thailand-Laos border ([www.international-rivers.org](http://www.international-rivers.org)). China has plans to construct at least 8 dams on the upper Mekong. Moreover, more than 85 additional dams are proposed to be built on the branches and tributaries of the Mekong. The cumulative effects of these dams will jeopardize livelihoods, water access, health, and food security for millions.

*Should we prioritize development over the sustainability of Southeast Asia's waterways?*

### ***How do we balance conservation and progress?***

Much of the film speaks to the issue of the natural environment and traditional ways of life being destroyed by industrialization and modernization. At one point, however, Khieu states, "In my heart, I really want our village to be like Phnom Penh." What does she mean by this?

*How does Khieu's statement challenge our own ideas and assumptions about conservation and progress?*



## RESOURCES

### Indigenous Communities and Land Rights:

Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC): [www.adhoc-cambodia.org](http://www.adhoc-cambodia.org)

CARAM Cambodia: [www.caramcambodia.org](http://www.caramcambodia.org)

Cultural Survival: [www.culturalsurvival.org](http://www.culturalsurvival.org)

Indigenous Community Support Organization (Cambodia): [www.icso.org.kh](http://www.icso.org.kh)

UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues: <http://undesadspd.org/IndigenousPeoples.aspx>

### Deforestation:

Cambodian Centre for Human Rights, [www.cchr.org](http://www.cchr.org)

Code REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation): [www.coderedd.org](http://www.coderedd.org)

Equitable Cambodia: [www.equitablecambodia.org](http://www.equitablecambodia.org)

Global Witness: [www.globalwitness.org](http://www.globalwitness.org)

LICADHO: [www.licadho-cambodia.org](http://www.licadho-cambodia.org)

### Hydrophonic Power/Dams:

International Rivers: [www.internationalrivers.org](http://www.internationalrivers.org)

Oxfam Australia: [www.oxfam.org.au](http://www.oxfam.org.au)

Save the Mekong Coalition: [www.savethemekong.org](http://www.savethemekong.org)

World Wildlife Foundations Mekong Basin Initiative: [www.wwf.panda.org/what\\_we\\_do/footprint/water/dams\\_initiative/](http://www.wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/footprint/water/dams_initiative/)

### Fishing:

Fisheries Action Coalition Team (FACT): [www.fact.org.kh](http://www.fact.org.kh)

Mekong River Commission: [www.mrcmekong.org](http://www.mrcmekong.org)

World Fish Center: [www.worldfish.org](http://www.worldfish.org)

### Migration and Factory Work:

Better Factories Cambodia: [www.betterfactories.org](http://www.betterfactories.org)

Cambodian Women for Peace and Development: [www.cwpd.net](http://www.cwpd.net)

Garment Manufacturers Association of Cambodia, [www.gmac.org](http://www.gmac.org)

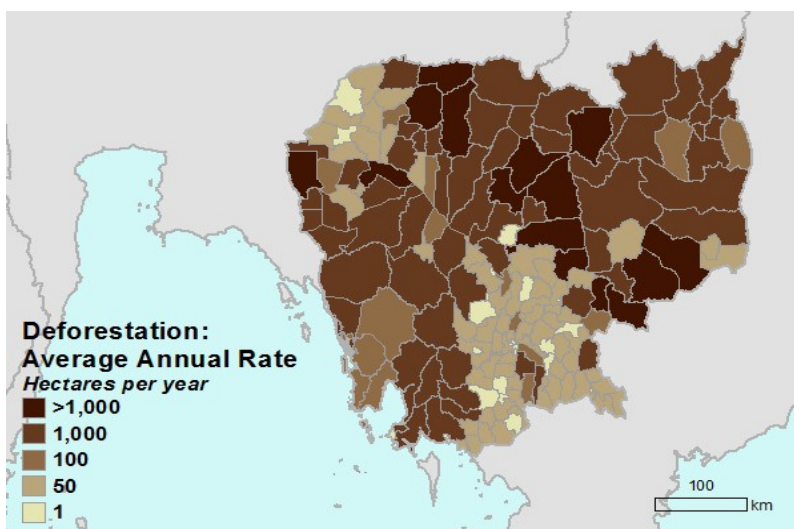


**Left:** Map of dams completed, under construction or proposed along the Mekong River as of 2013.

Source: Mekong River Commission, [www.mrcmekong.org/topics/sustainable-hydropower/](http://www.mrcmekong.org/topics/sustainable-hydropower/)

**Below:** Map of average deforestation in Cambodia per year.

Source: Conservation International, <http://www.conservation.org/how/science/Pages/deforestation-guides-for-commodity-sourcing.aspx>



National deforestation estimates in percent and agricultural statistics are from FAO (2010). Mapped sub-national estimates of the Deforestation Indicator in hectares are indicative only, given the resolution of the data source, and are from CI (2011), derived from the MODIS percent tree-cover change product for 2000 to 2005 (Hansen, et al 2009).

"Today, everyone needs land. They don't care who the land belongs to, they just come and cut down all of the trees."



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