

មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជា  
Documentation Center of Cambodia

*Voices of Genocide: Justice and Khmer Rouge Famine*  
A Trip to Kamping Pouy Basin, Battambang Province

November 20-22, 2013  
Report<sup>1</sup> by LORN Dalin



*Kamping Pouy Basin in Battambang Province, 2013*

As part of its Witnessing Justice Project “*Voices of Genocide: Justice and the Khmer Rouge Famine*”, the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) conducted its fourth student trip to Kamping Pouy Basin where many Cambodians were put to hard labor, given insufficient food or even executed during the Khmer Rouge regime. There were twelve university students that participated in the trip and they were from various universities in Phnom Penh city. The main purpose of this trip was to promote better understanding among Cambodian younger generations with regards to the history of the Khmer Rouge.

Kamping Pouy Basin is located between two mountains, Phnom Ku or Phnom Ta Ngen and Phnom Kamping Pouy, in Ta Ngen Village, Ta Kream commune, Banon district (in TaNgen and Phnom Sampov district during the Khmer Rouge time), Battambang province, about thirty-five kilometers west of the provincial town. According to the Khmer Rouge government’s administrative system, this Basin was located in Region 3, SouthWest zone. This gigantic civil-engineering project was central to the Khmer Rouge’s plan to irrigate the countryside around Battambang province. Kamping Pouy Basin is six meters long and 1,900 meters wide. During the rainy season the basin can hold up to 110 million cubic meters of

<sup>1</sup> Edited by Tan Sock Keng



*Student interviews Khmer Rouge survivor in Battambang Province, 2013*

water, which is used primarily for agriculture in the surrounding area. The Basin [Kamping Pouy Basin] irrigates rice fields covering thirteen thousand and five-hundred hectares in three districts: Banon, Battambang and ThmarKol. The Basin was started in late 1976 and finished in late 1977 when the Vietnamese soldiers started to arrive. Hundreds of thousands of people were sent to work there, and mostly they were the new people or 17 April people who were sent from Regions 2, 3, and 4. Workers were divided into groups of ten and they were under the supervision of

one unit chief who monitored them directly during working hours. Living condition of workers at the Kamping Pouy Basin was terrible; they had to work both day and night in order to achieve the target. A former worker at the Kamping Pouy Basin named SeurHach living in Phnom Kraper village, Phnom Sampov commune, Banon district claimed that “workers worked from 5am to 11am. Then they would have one hour for lunch and rest. After that they had to continue working from 1pm to 6pm, and then from 7pm to 11pm in case they could not reach the target. Food conditions for workers were not very bad. They at least received rice two times a day even if the soup was not really good”. Tragically, the construction of the Kamping Puoy Reservoir resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of people. Unlike the victims of S-21 and Choeung Ek, most of the deaths on the Kamping Puoy project were caused by malnutrition, disease, overwork or mistreatment. The deaths were, in short, preventable.

Kamping Pouy Basin has now become a popular tourist resort, although it still evokes traumatic memories for many older people. The striking landscape is both beautiful and useful – wooded hills ring the site, shielding visitors from the worst of the rainy season’s deluges, though not from the insistent vendors who accost visitors upon arrival. Visitors can swim and bathe in the cool, still waters, although the dark depths at the lake’s center are a reminder of the lives lost here during the Pol Pot regime (1975-79).

Currently, the Ministry of Water Resource and Meteorology (MOWRAM) includes Kamping Pouy in the Monkol Borey Dam Development Project Area. According to the resettlement plan announced by the government of Cambodia, all affected agricultural and residential land, houses and other fixed structures, crops and trees will be resettled; and all things affecting construction work like agriculture, living livestock breeding, market business, parking and etc will be prohibited. This project takes place from February 1, 2013 to January 21, 2015. Basically, this project aims to supply water for the downstream irrigation area; to produce hydropower energy to address electricity shortage; and to reduce damage to the downstream area by constructing the Ta Haen Dam in the Mongkol Borey River, rehabilitating the Kamping Pouy Dam and building a connection channel to divert flow from the Monkol Borey River to Kamping Pouy.

After the trip, students seemed to have gained more knowledge about Khmer Rouge history and responded differently according to what they had learnt. *Say Solyda*, a graduate student from the Institute of Foreign Language reflected that “I am so grateful that DC-Cam organized and let us, students, to be a part of such beneficial trip. Throughout the trip, I got a chance to meet many interesting people and visited several historical sites. Furthermore, I learned that young people should not underestimate the ability of senior citizens. Although they might be physical weak, their ideas are brilliant just like the three Khmer Rouge survivors who shared their opinions regarding the current situation that we, the younger generation, do not even bother to discuss. Besides, the trip also showed me the advantages of working as a team. During the interviews, there were some necessary questions that I forgot to ask but my partner reminded me of them. I truly believe my interview would not be as good as it is if my partner did not help me. Besides, the DC-Cam Radio Program is crucial especially for the younger generations who need to know about their society history. I would like to say thanks to the organizers for being very thoughtful and giving us such a great trip”. *ImChanboracheat* said, “The three-day trip has given me great and useful experiences and lessons. First of all, during the trip I was able to travel to a province that I had never visited before. I was amazed by the way of life of the people there, the beautiful scenery, and the spectacular architectural styles of the pagoda and temples in the province. Secondly, I have learned the history of how the different sites in the province were used during the Khmer Rouge regime. Particularly, I have learned the history of Kamping Puoy basin, which was constructed during the Khmer Rouge regime, from the elders living in the village. Thirdly, I have learned to conduct interviews as a team as I had to conduct two interviews. The first interview was conducted with a whole group while the second interview was conducted with a team of two members. All in all, the trip was both enjoyable and educational since I could enjoy visiting a new place along with learning the history and conducting the interviews at the same time.”



*Villager reads DC-Cam's Genocide: Who Are The Senior Khmer Rouge Leaders To Be Judged? in Battambang Province, 2013*

Of course, sites remaining from the Khmer Rouge regime, such as the Kamping Pouy Basin, may benefit Cambodia today. However the construction of these sites caused so many people to suffer or even die in the terrible conditions of the time. No one wishes to see such construction any longer. All in all, learning about the past is a valuable experience for the younger generation.

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Team members: Lorn Dalin, Mut Von, Men Pechet, and 12 University Students.

Supported by Office of Global Programs, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL), United States Department of State.