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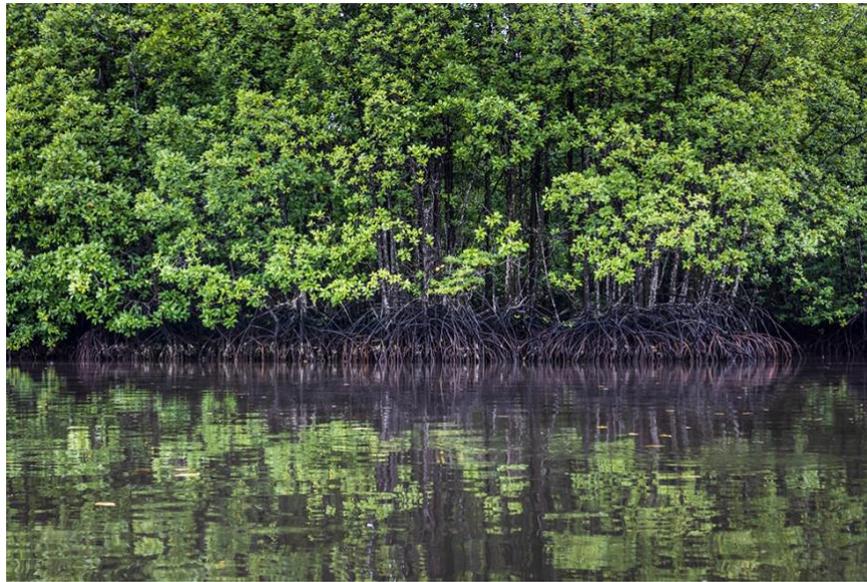


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CSEAS Commentary #48 / Sept 2025

Mangroves in Cambodia: Nature's Climate Shield and Economic Potential

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Cambodia's coastline stretches 440 kilometers across Koh Kong, Kampot, Kep, and Sihanoukville provinces. As of 2024, along this strip line are about [58,800](#) hectares of mangrove forest, a fraction of Cambodia's total forest cover of more than eight million hectares. Yet their ecological and economic value far outweighs their modest footprint. Mangroves are simultaneously a natural defense system, a carbon sink, a biodiversity hotspot, and a potential driver of ecotourism. Despite these contributions, they have been under pressure for decades. [Between 1989 and 2017](#), roughly 40 percent of Cambodia's mangroves—around 36,000 hectares—were cleared. Without stronger protection and

integration into national policy, Cambodia risks losing one of its most effective defenses against climate change.

Mangroves as Climate Infrastructure

Mangrove is a multifunctional plant that is a shield from natural disaster and at the same time a mitigation against climate change. Windstorms and large waves can be reduced by over [50%](#) just by passing through a mangrove forest; this provides the mainland with a natural barrier against severe flooding. By using its roots, letting the water flow in and out naturally, which in the meantime stabilizes sediment to prevent soil erosion, and strengthens the ecosystem.

Another function of its flexible roots is trapping carbon dioxide through the process known as carbon sequestration, which is the process in which the mangrove roots trap CO₂ in their roots ([approximately 12.3 kg per year](#)), storing it away from the atmosphere and climate change for millennia to come. This process is also known as blue carbon, like its counterpart, green carbon, happening on land. By absorbing huge amounts of CO₂ per mangrove tress is able to produce enough oxygen for [four people](#).

Biodiversity and Livelihoods

The mangrove forest is home to at least [700 different species](#), and scientists believe there are more, with a wide array of organisms living on land and in the water, and frequent sightings of migratory birds taking shelter there as well. The mangrove forest transforms into a safe haven in which those organisms can grow and shelter with the protection of the surrounding environment.

As for the people living in the area, the mangrove forest supports the livelihood of millions of Cambodians by supplying fish, tourism, and coastal protection. In recent years, the mangrove forest coastline has been estimated to support more than [100,000 fishermen](#) and their families. For reference, in [Peam Krasaop Wildlife Sanctuary](#) located in Koh Kong, there are 350 households whose fishing livelihood is heavily dependent on mangrove forests.

Eco-Tourism Potential

With various communities living within the mangrove forest, those communities have become a perfect destination for ecotourism. In Kampot, [Trapaeng Sangkhae](#) Mangrove Community is a perfect example of how a fishing village transforms into a mangrove ecotourism hotspot in Cambodia. In 2009, supported by [Action Aid](#), which is an international NGO partnering with the EU, we saw the needs in protecting and preserving Cambodia's mangrove forest by working with our government to safeguard mangrove

forest and provide the people in the community with training on hospitality and hygiene standards. By 2014, this community was transformed into an eco-tourism hotspot for both locals and foreign tourists, where it has received tens of thousands of tourists annually. Those touristic activities involve planting and seeding the mangrove trees and enjoying boat-riding and sightseeing around the mangrove forest areas. In the meantime, other mangrove ecotourism destinations are thriving as well, such as Phum Thmey in Kep and Peam Krasop Wildlife Sanctuary in Koh Kong, just to name a few. They are also growing in number of visitors as awareness spreads.

Challenges and Pressures

Despite their importance, Cambodia's mangroves continue to face threats. For years, [private landowners cleared mangrove forests](#) to make way for resorts, shrimp farms, and real estate projects. Although the government has since criminalized the clearing of mangroves as protected habitats, enforcement often arrived too late. [Damage](#) has already been done, with fisheries and community resources depleted. In response, the Royal Government of Cambodia, alongside the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Interior, has implemented [policy and legislation](#) to strengthen the mechanisms against mangrove deforestation and at the same time protect and restore the mangrove forest.

Efforts to restore mangroves have gathered momentum in recent years. Local communities, youth volunteers, schools, and NGOs have been replanting saplings in degraded areas. National awareness campaigns, such as the ["Peace Mangrove Festival,"](#) have promoted conservation. Yet these initiatives, while commendable, remain fragmented and small compared to the scale of the loss.

Policy Integration and Strategic Vision

According to [Cambodia Climate Change Strategic Plan 2024-2033](#), one of the strategic priorities is to promote the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions that is in line with the [Long-Term Carbon Neutral Development Strategy](#), outlining the pathways to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. The key initiatives include continuing the implementation of the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) Strategy, reforming of the forestry sector through reforestation and afforestation, and accelerating tree-planting campaigns. Which is why, to meet our strategic plan, we need to prioritize the initiative that gives the best return on investment. In this case, the mangrove forest should be one of the priorities, as it is not only beneficial in combating climate change, but it also has a proven track record of economic benefits to local communities and the tourism industry as well.

Protecting Cambodia's mangrove forest is not only for the environmental and economic benefits that reside there, but also a way of life, because it not only protects our

livelihoods, but it is also home to other living creatures living on the same planet we call home.

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The author gratefully acknowledges peer review and constructive feedback from Lim Chhay and Long Sovitou.

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