INSIGHT BRIEF

COMMUNITY FISHERY AND MANGROVE MANAGEMENT IN CAMBODIA

Executive Summary

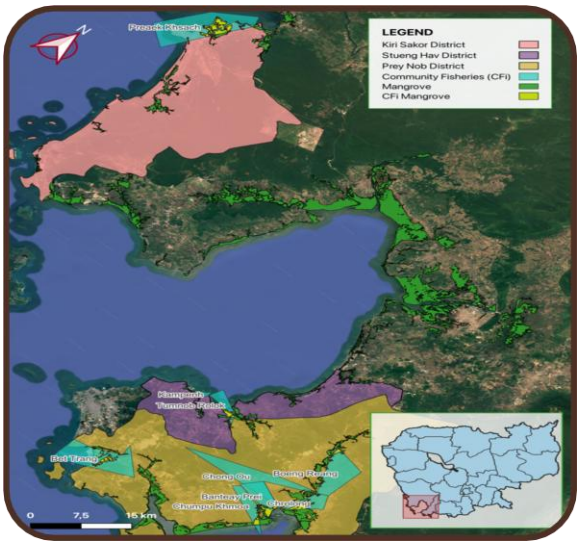
Landesa conducted an assessment to **evaluate mangrove forest dynamics across nine Community Fisheries** (CFis) in coastal Cambodia, comparing them to broader district trends from 2010 to 2024, using 2010 as the baseline given CFis registration and demarcation year. **Mangrove forests within CFis** governed under the Fisheries Law (2006) and CFi Sub-decrees, via management agreements with the Fisheries Administration (now called the General Directorate of Fisheries), **exhibit lower annual mangrove loss rates at approximately two-thirds of surrounding areas** (0.3% vs. 0.44%), an observation consistent with improved forest management practices under structured community oversight. Key findings **suggest** that **active CFi committees and formal state land registration of CFi areas with clearly delineated boundaries are fundamental pillars** under this community-oriented framework.

Community Fishery (Registration Date)	District	Province
Chrolong (10-Sep-2010)	Prey Nob	Preah Sihanouk
Boeng Reang (10-Sep-2010)	Prey Nob	Preah Sihanouk
Chong Ou (10-Sep-2010)	Prey Nob	Preah Sihanouk
Banteay Prei (10-Sep-2010)	Prey Nob	Preah Sihanouk
Chumpu Khmoa (10-Sep-2010)	Prey Nob	Preah Sihanouk
Bet Trang (10-Sep-2010)	Prey Nob	Preah Sihanouk
Kampenh (10-Sep-2010)	Stueng Hav	Preah Sihanouk
Tumnob Rolok (10-Sep-2010)	Stueng Hav	Preah Sihanouk
Preaek Khsach (10-Sep-2010)	Kiri Sakor	Koh Kong

Landesa, through its **Coastal Livelihoods and Mangroves Program**, is strengthening coastal land tenure rights in the Bay of Bengal, Southeast Asia, and Africa. In **Cambodia**, Landesa is engaged in a multi-stakeholder collaborative effort to **strengthen tenure rights for CFis**. Enhanced CFi tenure security and co-management aim to support and sustain the health of mangrove ecosystems while enhancing natural resource-based livelihood security.

Assessment Approach

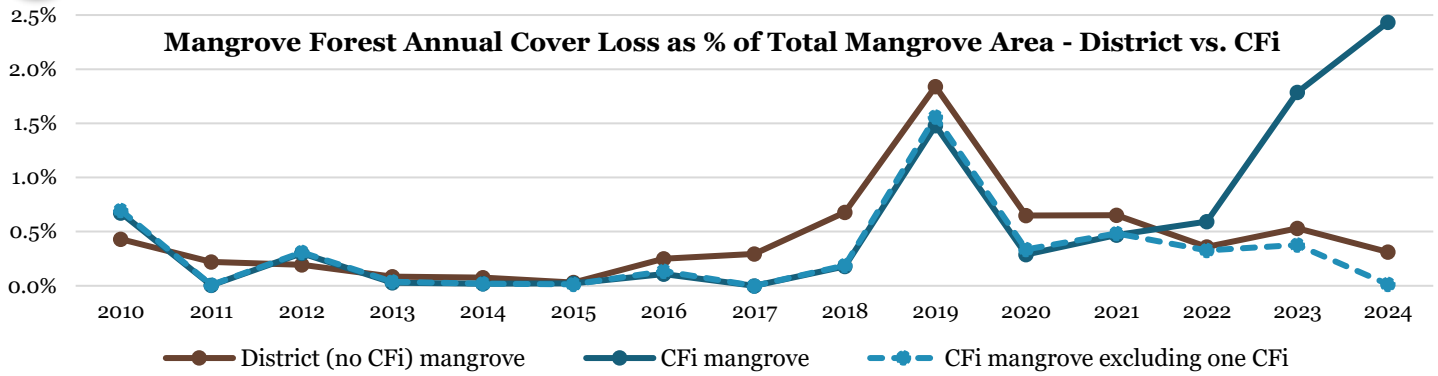
To conduct a comparative analysis of historical trends, a **14-year longitudinal assessment** was carried out across **nine** Community Fisheries in coastal Cambodia. The assessment selected these nine mangrove-containing CFis registered in 2010 with demarcated boundaries available from the Fisheries Administration (FiA) dataset published by Open Development Cambodia (dataset reference date: November 1, 2011; modified date: April 12, 2024). The analysis **compared mangrove forest cover dynamics between these CFis and surrounding mangrove areas operating under mixed tenure frameworks** (i.e., land designated as State Public Land or unassigned coastal zones, areas under FiA or Ministry of Environment oversight, and CFis lacking geographic boundary coordinates) within their respective districts, **using remote sensing data** from the Restor platform and Global Mangrove Watch. The assessment has also **incorporated insights from direct engagement with CFis** (e.g., meetings, phone interviews, and field consultations), providing additional evidence to support the findings presented in this brief.



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Key Findings



District / CFi	*Total Mangrove Area (hectares)*	*Total tree cover loss / Total Mangrove Area*	*Avg. annual Tree cover loss as % of TMA*
District (no CFi) mangrove	9,010 ha	19.80%	0.44%
CFi mangrove	2,340 ha	25.17%	0.56%
CFi mangrove excluding one CFi	1,937 ha	13.51%	0.30%

Overall, based on the **historical and institutional context** provided by the GDF, when CFis were initially established, their boundaries were relatively broad, covering household settlements, roads, and agricultural areas in addition to fishing grounds and natural resources. This context is essential for understanding the complexity of CFi boundaries and land-use patterns over time, as the drivers contributing to mangrove loss vary across CFi areas and require careful, localized investigation.

When comparing historical trends in mangrove cover loss between CFis and areas outside CFi boundaries, a sharp, unexpected increase in deforestation was observed within CFi mangroves from 2022 to 2024. A deeper investigation revealed that **a single CFi drove this spike**, accounting for 26.8% of total CFi mangrove loss in 2021, 88.4% in 2022, 97.2% in 2023, and 99.8% in 2024. A closer look at this specific CFi revealed a complex history: prior to 2000, over 100 hectares were reportedly transferred to a private stakeholder. Although an attempt to clear a small area of mangrove forest in 2014 was halted by the local community and the Fishery Administration Cantonment, the **CFi committee became inactive from 2020 to 2023**, a period that coincides with a surge in deforestation. Although a new CFi committee was elected and strengthened in 2024, two subsequent letters were issued, allocating approximately 161 hectares for the issuance of land ownership certificates.

From July to September 2026, Landesa conducted a series of district consultation meetings with relevant stakeholders on processes for state land registration for 24 coastal CFis. Observations from these meetings indicated that **land grabbing or reclassification within CFi areas is far less likely to occur once the areas obtain formal state land registration with clearly delineated boundaries**. Additionally, the ongoing registration process provides clearer, more refined boundaries by focusing on fishing grounds, mangroves, and designated areas for community access, management, and protection.

Key Insights

- **Comparative Loss Rates:** Excluding the outlier CFi, which experienced a confirmed CFi committee inactivity from 2020 to 2023, the remaining **CFis exhibit lower mangrove tree cover loss than surrounding areas**. Their losses are **approximately two-thirds** of those in surrounding areas, both cumulatively across the entire assessment duration and on an annual average basis.
- **State Land Reclassification:** The case of the heavily impacted CFi reflects a series of **government decisions to reclassify state public land as state private land**. These sub-decrees reclassify tracts of state public land, including areas affecting **formally established CFis whose management areas, including mangrove areas, have yet to complete the CFi area registration process**, into state private land, which may enable subsequent allocation, transfer, lease or development. Such decisions can create competing land-use pressures for CFi management and mangrove conservation.

The case of a CFi with a temporarily inactive committee, alongside CFis lacking geographic boundary coordinates, suggests that **active CFi committees and formal state land registration of CFi areas with clearly delineated boundaries are fundamental pillars that underpin mangrove forest management** in alignment with Cambodia's Community Fishery objectives. Nevertheless, identifying the specific determinants that drive improved mangrove forest management outcomes warrants further research.

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*Landesa is a member of the **Global Mangrove Alliance,** the **Mangrove Breakthrough**, and part of the **Restor** community*