

Cambodian forest shrinks to only 47pct in last 40 over years

By [New Straits Times](#) - November 27, 2019

CAMBODIA'S forest cover was over 73 per cent in 1975 but it has shrunk to only about 47 per cent last year.

In its Human Development Report Cambodia 2019, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) said deforestation was mainly caused by rising wood demand for construction as well as for use as firewood and charcoal.



According to the Phnom Penh Post, the report said unsustainable developments such as economic land concessions, hydropower and mining projects, and illegal logging, have led to a spiral of degradation for the ecosystem and the people. It said that **15 per cent of the nation's 8.7 million hectares of its forest** were reserved for timber harvesting and offered four recommendations to ensure sustainable forestry management.

The first is the necessity to have accurate and adequate data on forests to formulate an effective management strategy and make timely interventions addressing local conditions. It underlines the need for Cambodia to have a national forest inventory, including field surveys, remote sensing and GIS technology. "A forest resource management information system should be established to supplement the existing National Forest Monitoring System. "The inventory would provide data on the condition of forest resources, including production forest area, species composition, annual allowable cuts, and areas under natural and artificial rehabilitation. "It would also show concessionaires and the forest industry, and market intelligence which included domestic supply and demand trend and price."

The second recommendation is to implement new strategies for managing planted forests and aim to minimise timber losses. "High-quality species such as teak and other local species should be promoted as a priority while low value acacia and eucalyptus can be used as wood fuel supply," it said.

The third is to strategise natural forest management so that the awareness is rooted in communities. Its final recommendation is to promote a comprehensive sustainable forestry management system. This involves training and engagement of the local community, effective law enforcement and building a formal timber legality assurance system.

Meanwhile, Goldman Environmental Prize winner **Ouch Leng** said the report did not raise the real reasons for the forest degradation. "The cause of deforestation is the issuance of economic land concessions to timber companies. We know the cause but we cannot talk about it," he said, adding that most of the illegal timber was transported at night while legal timber was always shipped during the day. "If you cannot tell the truth about the cause of deforestation, you cannot protect the forest. There is no need to plant trees because they will grow if we do not log them," he said.

Ministry of Environment spokesman **Neth Pheaktra** said his ministry had a clear strategic plan to manage and preserve natural resources and biodiversity. He said the ministry was planning a clear use of land which was categorised as the core area, protected area, sustainable use area, and community area. "Our people have to know which areas are protected, which ones are preserved for economic development or for improving [their] livelihoods. "In the next five years, we intend to complete the division for all nature reserves starting from seven protected areas in the Cardamom Mountains, with support from the World Bank," he said.

Source: <https://www.nst.com.my/world/region/2019/11/542639/cambodian-forest-shrinks-only-47pct-last-40-over-years>