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New Report Urges Better Energy Planning in Cambodia *before* Hydropower Dams are Developed

Chinese investment in Cambodia's hydropower sector is threatening some of the country's most precious ecosystems and the livelihoods of thousands of people, according to a new research report released today. The research report, prepared by International Rivers and the Rivers Coalition in Cambodia, highlights the growing interest in large-scale hydropower dam development by Cambodian decision makers backed mainly by Chinese project developers and financiers.

In April 2006, China announced a US\$600 million aid package to Cambodia, almost half of which financed the Kamchay Dam, Cambodia's first large domestic hydropower project. The project, now under construction by China's largest hydropower developer, Sinohydro Corporation, is located wholly within Bokor National Park and will flood 2,000 hectares of protected forest. A second major hydropower project was approved in 2007 and a further six large dams are known to be presently undergoing feasibility studies, mostly by Chinese companies. Four of these projects are located close to or within the Central Cardamom Protected Forest in Southwest Cambodia. In addition, Chinese investors are pursuing the Sambor Dam on the Mekong mainstream which, if built, would block major fish migrations and could decimate the income of tens of thousands of subsistence and commercial fishers. The Sambor Dam also threatens habitat for the endangered Irrawaddy Dolphin, around which a thriving local tourism industry has grown.

"Cambodia's free flowing rivers and abundant natural resources are invaluable assets, the health of which are vital to the well-being of Cambodia's rural population" said Carl Middleton, Mekong Program Coordinator with International Rivers. "Poorly conceived hydropower development could irreparably damage these resources and undermine Cambodia's sustainable development."

Securing access to reliable, cheap electricity to supply Cambodia's expanding economy is a key challenge faced by the Cambodian Government. The report recommends that Cambodia adopt international best practices in electricity planning, including the findings of the World Commission on Dams, which is widely recognized to be the international gold standard for energy and water planning.

"Cambodia has many choices for meeting our electricity needs including renewable and decentralized energy options that must be explored" said Ngy San, Deputy Executive Director with the NGO Forum on Cambodia. "We are asking the Government to invite the public's participation in the planning process to ensure Cambodia's electricity system is affordable, sustainable and accessible to all."

The report can be downloaded from www.internationalrivers.org/en/southeast-asia/cambodia and www.ngoforum.org.kh.

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