Everyday, from sunrise to sunset, they walk in groups of 6 or 7 from the bottom of the mountain to the peak, carrying packages of rice and food, to monitor the community forestry which those living in Prey Khmao village consider a great natural asset.

“We want to protect the forest in this Ta Kheu mountain from illegal logging,” said Mr. Men Nav, 47, the director of Prey Khmao community forestry. “so that many villagers around the province at the end of 2011, Mr Men Nav expressed his concern toward the sustainability of community forestry which covers 196 hectares of land, is to protect the natural resources for villagers, particularly for the children and maternal health. “I was given the task of working with women and helping some of the families said “It is good that the government does mining since many people will benefit through public services such as schools, hospitals, roads and other services.”

We need to use them carefully since we can never get them back, otherwise, we will get a curse from our natural resources.” said Mr. Sambath, referring to mines which take many years to mature. “We need to use them carefully since we can never get them back, otherwise, we will get a curse from our natural resources.”

In March 1995, Ms. Ban Nhong, 53, started working with ICD-Kampot as a volunteer of rice bank committee. While working at DPA, Ms. Ban Nhong applied for membership in the commune council and was elected. At present, 147 families are members of community forestry and were elected.

In 2000, after five years working of with DPA, Ms. Ban Nhong was elected as president of the commune council and was elected. Ms. Ban Nhong could never have imagined working here today. “Before working with DPA, I was only a poor woman knowing nothing about development, and worked in the rice field just to support my family,” said Ms. Ban Nhong, a widow with five children. As a commune council member, she remained working in gender, domestic violence, development, child and maternal health. “I was given the task of working with women and helping some of the families with domestic violence,” said Ms. Ban Nhong. “Now, villagers understand much more about gender so there are many less cases of domestic violence in my village.”

Though Ms Ban Nhong is no longer working with DPA, she still assists with DPA’s work as a member of the commune council.

Prey Khmao community forestry, situated in Prey Khmao village, Sre Knong commune, Chum Kiri district, Kampot province, was created in 2003 after a group of villagers noticed the benefit of community forestry in Pursat province during their visit. The aim of the community forestry, which covers 196 hectares of land, is to protect the natural resources for villagers, particularly for the children and maternal health. “I was given the task of working with women and helping some of the families with domestic violence,” said Ms. Ban Nhong. “Now, villagers understand much more about gender so there are many less cases of domestic violence in my village.”

The official recognition of Prey Khmao community forestry resulted from a collaboration among village leaders, the local authority, and DPA - previously known as CIDSE - which financially and technically supported the process of organizing the community. At present, 147 families are members of community forestry and contribute 100 Reals each month to support these guarding the forests.

Carrying axes and machetes, the guards of the forest, consisting of men and women working together, patrol the forest to watch for any cases of illegal logging. “Since the existence of community forestry, there are not many people logging trees here anymore,” said Mr. Men Nav. “We always inform the local authorities about any transgressions.”

Though Ms Ban Nhong is no longer working with DPA, she still assists with DPA’s work as a member of the commune council.
Everything is for the Children

Lam Yun was sitting in a bed with her daughter who runs a small business in front of her house. Phan Ros, Lam Yun’s husband, was sitting in another bed under their Khmer style wooden house, listening to the radio alone. They all smiled as we approached. Looking at the family from the outside, one would never know what Yun had gone through in her 25 years of married life.

In 1985, Yun was married to Ros who was 4 years older than her. The living standard then was quite bad. “We did farming on small piece of land we owned. We got only one ton of paddy rice each year,” said Yun, 53, who lives in Prek Reusey commune, Luvea Em district, Kandal province.

Ros had a bad liquor habit, and, when drunk, would turn his wrath on Yun. “He hit me very often ever since my kids were small. Sometimes he hit me to the point of unconsciousness,” Yun recounted, wiping away the tear rolling down her cheek. She paused for awhile and continued. “Sometimes I really wanted to commit suicide because of these conflicts. But when I thought about my small kids’ future, I knew I could not do that.”

“My husband always got drunk, and never cared for the children,” Yun added. “My eldest daughter went mad and wanted to kill herself because she could not stand her father’s behaviour. Fortunately, I stopped her,” Yun said and looked at her husband sitting nearby with tear drops.

Ros said that he committed domestic violence because when he drunk, he could not control himself. “I felt sorry for what I did, once I was sober,” said Ros. However, Ros kept drinking wine for more than 20 years.

In mid-2009, Yun found herself in another serious quarrel with her husband. She was beaten unconscious, and her body was covered in bruises. Ros was arrested and asked to sign an agreement saying he would not use domestic violence anymore. Now, Ros never drinks liquor and refrains from domestic violence.

During the celebration, DPA displayed indigenous materials used in daily life, fruit planted by indigenous villages, musical instruments and photographs demonstrating cultural activities of indigenous groups in Ratanakiri, Mondulkiri, and Stung Treng.

Indigenous peoples, making up 5 percent (about 340 million) of the world’s population, are among the poorest of the poor. During the celebration, DPA displayed indigenous materials used in daily life, fruit planted by indigenous villages, musical instruments and photographs demonstrating cultural activities of indigenous groups in Ratanakiri, Mondulkiri, and Stung Treng.

In each of the these provinces, DPA helped construct cultural centers for indigenous groups by collecting traditional materials, musical instruments and photographs of cultural activities. The indigenous villagers were trained in photographic skills to take pictures of their daily activities as well as of cultural and traditional ceremonies.

Miss Keen Khanich, Phnong indigenous photographer from Mondulkiri province, said, “I was so glad to have my photographs of Phnong traditional wedding on display here alongside other indigenous group from other provinces. I will take more photographs to tell others about our culture and tradition.”