



WHO'S LISTENING? FROM CENTRE TO PERIPHERY

Understanding narratives on interethnic sentiment at the
Cambodian border through Facilitative Listening Design

SUYHEANG KRY AND RAYMOND HYMA

EDITED BY MELISSA MARTIN AND KAREN SIMBULAN



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The Listeners of the project “From Centre to Periphery” – Twelve young people chose to listen to their communities using FLD. The diverse group included Khmer, Chinese-Cambodian, Kreung and Bunong Indigenous, Muslim Cambodians, ethnic Vietnamese, and mixed-race participants.

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*The Prek Chhak-Hà Tiên border point –
The most southern crossing between Cambodia and Vietnam.*



PREFACE

SUYHEANG KRY
RAYMOND HYMA

We continue listening and learning from the people around us. One of the lessons learnt over the last year in this second round of Facilitated Listening Design (FLD) is that the terms “insider” and “outsider” used in peacebuilding and conflict transformation are inherently vague. As we continue developing a local approach that focuses on the talent and strength of so-called “insiders”, we realise that we are constantly questioning our assumptions and understanding of our particular role in the process and, more broadly, in the dynamics of the context we seek to explore.

This round of FLD work has been centred on identity. Who are you? Who are we? Who are they? Who am I? Although we entered this work with a focus on ethnic identity, we found that we cannot separate the other aspects that make us who we are. Gender plays a critical role. Women, men, and other gendered identities fundamentally shape how we see the world and how we navigate our lives. Age - and the idea of a shared “generation” - deeply affects our relationship with others and our environment as we see progress and change and watch others develop different understandings of the world around them. Nationality continues to be an influential social construct of how we associate “us” and differentiate from “them” based on the identity cards provided to us by the State or the passport we carry to cross a border. Social class, profession, and simply the community in which we live and to which we belong form part of our unique identity.

In terms of ethnicity, there are of course elements that connect us to others based on race, background, and ancestry. This time, however, we realised that we cannot necessarily consider ourselves insiders simply because we see ourselves as such. We might be citizens of the same country as one of our target communities, but we could be immediately perceived as outsiders the moment we enter and start asking questions. We might be part of the same ethnic group as our neighbour, but we may remain outsiders to their home and private family life. Every layer of our identity affects how we talk to people we consider the same as “us” as well as people we see as “the Other”.

Just as our pilot work in Phnom Penh, this journey along the Cambodian-Vietnamese border has led us to expand our friendships and build stronger relationships with like-minded groups and people. Once again, our friends at Khmer Community Development and Sarus helped us from

the very beginning, connecting with Listeners and communities. The Minority Rights Organization introduced us to complex issues regarding minorities and the border region where they have been working to bring people together and build mutual understanding and respect for years. The Cambodia Indigenous Peoples Organization and the Cambodia Indigenous Youth Association expertly guided us in the Indigenous context and opened their doors and contacts, particularly in Mondulkiri and Ratanakiri provinces.

This work could not have happened without the continued and generous support of GIZ Civil Peace Service. GIZ Civil Peace Service in Cambodia has supported FLD work since the beginning and has entrusted us with deploying our methodology while giving us the room to innovate and explore creativity at the same time. Our longtime supporter, the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), has embarked with us on a new initiative stemming from our first round of FLD. Funding our “Empathy Project”, MCC is providing the means for us to continue bringing together our young Listeners and others committed to peacebuilding work through a completely new way by camping outdoors. The Japan Foundation, Bangkok, joined us for our artistic endeavour and generously provided the support to connect us with our friends at the Peace Mask Project to finally bring our approaches together as part of the reflection and transformation stage of the FLD process. Pangea Giving continued to believe in our vision and so graciously provided the funding needed to run the heart of Women Peace Makers through the office and staff, maintaining a pillar of support throughout this and every other project we have implemented over half-a-decade.

We invite you to explore communities living along the Cambodian-Vietnamese border through the voices of residents themselves. Although we have attempted to bring together complex issues and themes discussed by numerous people, we also found an incredible richness in the unique and individual stories that our FLD work has granted us. Understanding both common themes and hearing the stories of others – that may challenge the mainstream – provide us with more knowledge and new perspectives. We can then begin to base our own opinions and perceptions on multiple layers of information that help us to even sometimes stop and begin to question ourselves.



Listeners join the Info-Space Lab – FLD continued to evolve in this round with new activities, including art and media, to supplement the work accomplished by listening to the views and opinions of those we might consider “the Other”.



**INTRODUCTION:
A SECOND TIME
AROUND**



In 2017, prior to this initiative, a grassroots pilot action study was carried out to better understand anti-Vietnamese sentiment in Cambodia's capital, Phnom Penh. Led by the local non-governmental organisation Women Peace Makers (WPM), it was the first implementation of an approach developed locally to involve more insider actors in everyday conflict analysis. This community-based methodology, putting the focus on human interaction and understanding, became known as Facilitative Listening Design (FLD). The initiative began primarily to collect new information about perceptions on this sensitive issue. "Listeners" went out to engage in conversations with everyday residents to better understand their views and opinions towards different groups, or who they began to refer to as "the Other". They managed to reach 135 people among both Khmer and ethnic Vietnamese communities in target areas around the capital. The team launched their findings at the end of 2017 with the publication [Who's Listening? Tackling hard issues with empathy](#). In addition, a practical guide known as [The FLD Handbook](#) was produced to share the process and encourage others to use the approach for other issues and projects requiring systematic listening as a proven conflict transformation tool.

Some findings were not surprising. Aligned with expectations after some initial media and context analysis, Khmer participants often conveyed discomfort, and at times, expressed negative feelings towards ethnic Vietnamese living in Cambodia. History, immigration, social media, and ongoing stereotypes contributed to different levels of anti-Vietnamese sentiment and group mentality that positioned an "us" versus "them" attitude. Many of the negative attitudes centred around immigration issues, territory and land disputes, and perceptions of conflict happening on the border areas between Cambodia and Vietnam.

In that same study, other findings were more unexpected. Ethnic Vietnamese participants overwhelmingly conveyed positive perceptions of their relations with Khmer communities. Many residents told Listeners that there were no specific issues or problems and often expressed appreciation and respect towards them. In many cases, Khmer participants also shared positive stories about their experiences with their ethnic Vietnamese neighbours, customers, and acquaintances. They mentioned numerous "connectors", such as business, studying in the same classes, and everyday interaction in mixed neighbourhoods, as elements that brought them

together. For every negative perception or issue appearing to cause tension or conflict, there seemed to be a countering story of real everyday positive relations - and sometimes even friendship.

One of the more technical surprises revealed in the first project was found in the evolving methodology itself. Nearing the end of the Listener analysis stage, an exciting transformation appeared among team members. Listeners from different ethnic backgrounds began to convey their own changing perceptions from the process and having the opportunity to listen to the other side of an issue they were all familiar with. In both focus groups and individual interviews, Listeners and project staff members shared how their experiences implementing FLD had affected them personally. They mentioned that the process had contributed to challenging their own stereotypes, further critical thinking about how they were perceiving “the Other”, and fostering more empathy towards their counterparts of different ethnicities.

By the end of the dialogue, Listeners and media analysts came back to the team with innovative ideas and suggestions on how to move this work forward. They recommended looking more deeply into the issues, both the negative and positive aspects that came out of the pilot study. They brainstormed new elements to add to a future process, including activities using the natural environment, such as camping, as well as art and dialogue. They committed to future contact as a group, an informal network of sorts, recognising a shared interest in the subject that they had explored from such different perspectives.

This foundational work and process directly led to the findings outlined in this book. From negative perceptions about the border among Khmer and ethnic Vietnamese communities in Phnom Penh, the next team of Listeners and members was developed. This team made the courageous choice to confront the views from the first round head-on. Was the border area as grim as urbanites suspected? Were such problems happening to the same extent that many people in Phnom Penh confided to the first generation of FLD Listeners? With the intention of exploring what had been heard in 2017, the geographic scope of this this second endeavour focused on communities along the border of Vietnam in the provinces of Kandal, Kampot, Mondulakiri, and Ratanakiri. The name chosen for this iteration, *From Centre to Periphery*, distinctly highlights the concerns of

Listeners and team members from the first round. Would the perceptions of those living in the capital reflect the reality of the outer limits of the country?

Reflecting on the transformational aspect of FLD implementation and the excitement built around observing the shift of Listener attitudes, the scope of ethnicity was also expanded. Rather than focus solely on two ethnicities that appeared to have some form of conflict, why not go deeper and explore the vast diversity of Cambodian people, recognising differences just as much as similarities? Painting a picture of Khmer/ethnic Vietnamese relations did not provide a full understanding. Hence the active inclusion of other minority groups such as Cham and Muslims, Indigenous peoples, Khmer Krom, and Chinese Cambodians in addition to Khmer, ethnic Vietnamese, and mixed-race communities.

One of the earlier results of this broader shift to ethnic inclusivity was the appreciation of Cambodia's rich ethnically diverse society. Working together, participants began to see it as a metaphoric mosaic. With many different layers, each has its own character and beauty that adds to an overall patchwork coming together as contemporary Cambodia. This was documented through the voices and stories of the Listeners themselves, leading to the production of a Listener-initiated video called *[A Cambodian Mosaic](#)*. Sharing parts of their personal lives and stories, this video genuinely shows the most valuable and important learnings of this work that evolved into a multi-ethnic collaboration of understanding and teamwork.

Given the Listener-driven desire to shape and build future interventions with ideas of their own during the first pilot project, FLD also evolved significantly in this second iteration. Women Peace Makers added a new programme to experiment with camping and dialogue in nature as an experiential learning approach. Former Listeners, participants, and other youth network members were brought together to camp and discuss issues related to ethnicity, identity, gender, and peacebuilding. In particular, to this round of FLD along the border, recommendations from the first round of Listeners in Phnom Penh inspired a new direction. An artistic approach was integrated as part of the transformational component involving the Listeners themselves. A Japan-based group known as Peace Mask Project was invited at the conclusion to demonstrate its conceptual art practice. Together, fifteen Peace Masks were created with twelve faces of Listeners

and three special guests from Cambodia to highlight the uniqueness of each individual while at the same time celebrate the part of humanity that cannot be divided. The process, exploration, and reflection of this endeavour can be found in another publication called [Hear, Listen. Look, See. Touch, Feel. Using our senses to understand the Other.](#)



Our “Listeners” are the foundation of FLD work. They volunteer their time to learn our methods and bring FLD to their communities. They listen to their neighbours, community members, and even many people they have not had a chance to meet before. They connect us to the voices of residents and everyday people that shape these initiatives and provide us with new narratives and stories.

One such Listener is Chanphol. Ethnically Khmer, Chanphol comes from Kandal, a province that completely surrounds the capital city of Phnom Penh and stretches southwardly to the border of Vietnam. She lives very close to the border, interacting with Khmer and Vietnamese communities daily.

The second daughter to farmer parents, she is now 20 years old and works as a primary school teacher in her village.

Given her occupation, Chanphol was able to gain the confidence of residents in her community with whom she chose to have conversations. Most of her "Sharers" felt very comfortable and revealed many observations and insights with her. Chanphol also credits the FLD approach to creating a safe space for her and the Sharers. Compared to the past when she used to interview others for projects while carrying books and taking notes, she said that the FLD space encouraged frank dialogue. By simply having conversations in such a casual and informal way, people in her community were much more genuine and willing to discuss issues, even sensitive ones, in a deep and meaningful way.



APPROACH & METHODOLOGY

In this round, *From Centre to Periphery*, the Facilitative Listening Design (FLD) approach was adapted from the previous year's initiative in Phnom Penh. The nine FLD steps remained the same. A media analysis was also included to examine coverage of Vietnam and Vietnamese and dangerous speech in both traditional and social media. This time, however, the Info-Space Lab was carried out through two components separating the information analysis from the transformative space and reflection activities. This was done in order to focus more deeply on examining the conversations and information from Sharers and also to incorporate a new artistic approach into the transformative space by bringing in the Peace Mask Project from Japan. Other than the aforementioned changes, the FLD process remained largely the same.

RECRUITMENT

This time, the objective was to expand the ethnic diversity of Listeners (people that go out and collect information through engaging in conversations) and Sharers (people that volunteer to speak with Listeners and share their thoughts, opinions, and stories). The project team relied heavily on networks through other organisations working on ethnic issues and in the communities along border areas. Twelve Listeners were recruited mainly from NGOs with deep roots in their communities. Though many were based in the capital, most came from the target communities where FLD took place, often returning home to connect with Sharers. They were able to speak the language common to the community in which they had a personal cultural understanding. This significantly contributed to the initiative and provided essential expertise and insight to project team members and the core FLD implementation team. Two media analysts were also recruited from Phnom Penh. Both media analysts also contributed to the FLD analysis, joining the FLD Info-Space Lab and later going through the data verification process.

TOOL CUSTOMISATION

FLD recording tools were generally kept in the same format, provided in Khmer language, which was the language the Listeners felt most comfortable carrying out written documentation. Once again, it was decided that verbal rather than written consent would be asked for so that Listeners could freely move around border areas and avoid paperwork

that could make Sharers nervous. Conversation inquiries, providing general guide questions to help facilitate conversations when needed, were developed together as a group during the Coaching and Training Lab. They were tailored to each ethnic group using the expertise and knowledge of the Listeners regarding their own communities and linguistic nuances.

COACHING AND TRAINING LAB

The first gathering of the team provided an opportunity for everyone to meet and learn more about the project and the concept behind *From Centre to Periphery*. The lab took place in a mixed Khmer and ethnic Vietnamese community in Phnom Penh. The group spent three days at a resort where they were able to swim, relax, and build relationships together as they trained and planned for fieldwork. Standard FLD coaching and training activities were used to prepare the Listeners. They also carried out trial conversations at Wat Champa, one of the communities that was included in the first project and is home to a diverse population. There they spoke with Khmer and ethnic Vietnamese residents, practising their FLD conversation skills, and recording in pairs to later share with the group. Reconnecting with these communities was beneficial for everyone and also provided more context to the project and the issues to be explored.

CONVERSATIONS IN THE FIELD

Immediately following the coaching and training lab, Listeners went back to their communities and initiated conversations with a range of Sharers, aiming to reach the demographic targets they developed earlier. Pairs of Listener kept in contact with a project coordinator in Phnom Penh who provided advice and helped them to stay on track over the month they worked to connect with people. Listeners explored different communities in towns and villages within their target areas and spoke to a diverse range of people in the four provinces.

MEDIA ANALYSIS

Both traditional and social media were analysed. For traditional media sources, one analyst stayed up-to-date on the news by reading newspapers in print and online as well as listening to the radio. Articles which discussed or mentioned Vietnam, Vietnamese, and border issues were recorded and

coded. For social media, another analyst focused on Facebook, collecting posts based on the same criteria as well as making note of commentary posted by social media users. In addition, the Dangerous Speech Framework was used to rate samples of social media postings and categorise them in levels to judge their potential to negatively impact perceptions or lead to hostile actions among readers.

INFO-SPACE LAB

After just a month in the field, Listeners and the FLD team first reconnected at a natural retreat located in a rural area in Kandal province. The twelve Listeners, two media analysts, and the coordination team spent three days working intensely to introduce, discuss, and analyse the content that had been heard during the conversations. Each pair of Listeners presented their key themes that they had heard directly from the communities. Each group representing an ethnic community eventually voted on the frequency they heard these themes, leading to four structured lists that are presented in the findings of this book.

The transformative and reflection component of the Info-Space Lab was held separately during this round of FLD and culminated with an artistic workshop and exhibition. A group of the *From Centre to Periphery* Listeners connected with a group of the previous year's Listeners in Phnom Penh. They engaged in the production of "Peace Masks", facilitated by a Japan-based group that introduced their own conceptual art approach used for conflict transformation and peacebuilding in other areas of the world. Along with special Cambodian guests and participation from the general public, 15 Peace Masks were created around dialogue and discussion on identity and ethnicity. A public exhibition concluded the Info-Space Lab with the Peace Mask collection displayed, accompanied by personal accounts from a number of Listeners and special guests who had experienced the process.

INFORMATION VERIFICATION AND SNAPSHOT ANALYSIS

The analysis of conversations was an intensive six-month process conducted by a team team of six members. The detailed notes of the Info-Space Lab along with the Listener-developed key theme lists from each ethnic community were used as an initial base. Posters made by the

Listeners for group presentation and notes going back to questions from the conversation inquiries were also incorporated. Most importantly, all recorded information from the conversations, including daily journals and conversation logs, were read and coded by a Khmer-speaking team. Key details from these tools were coded principally under the themes that had been identified by the Listeners during the Info-Space Lab. Other information was also highlighted and additional details were categorised.



WHO'S LISTENING?

A LISTENER RECONNECTS
WITH HIS COMMUNITY
THROUGH FLD

Kabil is an Indigenous person, from the Kreung community of Ratanakiri. Now 24 years old, Kabil is the second child of four from a farming family. His older brother graduated from a veterinarian academy, his sister is pursuing a bachelor's degree in history, and his youngest brother is in the final year at high school in his hometown. Kabil has already graduated from a university in Phnom Penh after studying law. He is now pursuing a second degree in administration.

With such a high level of education, Kabil felt it was a natural fit to join the team and learn more about FLD as a research and communication methodology. He says that FLD has even helped him reconnect with his community in Ratanakiri after many years away during his studies. Kabil has continued using FLD since the project. Collaborating with other organisations, he has used it to speak with villagers during his fieldwork. He feels FLD helps people to learn more about how others think and better understand patterns across different groups. Kabil says that FLD contributes to his work, studies, and even daily life in terms of communication with others.



Pepper in the Kampot market - One pair of Listeners decided to do some of their FLD conversations at the local market in Kampot, 40km from the border which was the furthest project site from the borderline. Sharers there tended to hold more negative views of relations with ethnic Vietnamese and of the border, similarly reflecting many of the opinions expressed in Phnom Penh one year prior. It is possible that those living further away with less exposure and interaction to border communities see a stronger differentiation between “us” and “them”.



CONTEXT & BACKGROUND

CONTEXT OF THE BORDER¹

In the aftermath of the French colonisation of Indochina, one of the most persistent colonial legacies came from the contentious unresolved territorial claims from newly independent states and their neighbours.² Cambodia was no exception. Located in the centre of the Mekong Region in Southeast Asia, Cambodia was emerging from over 90 years of colonisation, having gained its independence in 1953. Yet, border issues have remained an irritant, even at present.

The border has been a geographically constructed source of tension in the bilateral relations between Cambodia and its neighbouring countries, namely Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam, at one point or another. Cambodia and Vietnam share the longest land border to the east, and this has resulted in a long and contentious history characterised by hostility and mistrust, pre-dating the French colonial period. Throughout the history of the two nations, beyond their formal diplomatic relations established in 1967, land and maritime border disputes have been controversial and sensitive, particularly in the scope of domestic Cambodian politics.

While Cambodia was under the French protectorate, Vietnam became a colony, and later under the rule of French Indochina in 1887. In 1939, the French Administrator employed the administrative “Brévié Line” to divide the island administration between Cochin-China and Cambodia. The islands to the north of the line were to be administered by Cambodia whilst Cochin-China would take the islands to the south, including the island of Koh Trah (Khmer language) or Phú Quốc (Vietnamese language).³ Despite repeated claims from Cambodia over the sovereignty of Cochin-China, also known as the Lower Mekong Delta or Kampuchea Krom, the French instead ceded it to South Vietnam’s Emperor, Bảo Đại, on June 4, 1949. This move was largely seen as a wartime strategy to turn a colonial war into a civil conflict between South and North Vietnam.⁴ Fearing the continued loss of territory, Cambodia adopted the Brévié Line as the maritime boundary by depositing the map with the United Nations in 1964. This was rejected by South Vietnam resulting in a diplomatic breakdown. North Vietnam, on the contrary, recognised Cambodia’s sovereignty claims but two years later reneged after seeing more advantage in having access to the sea lanes around the islands.⁵

The start of the 1970s saw further controversy over maritime claims and oil exploitation between both countries in which ownership of Phú Quốc (Koh Tral) became the driving factor.⁶ In May 1975, an armed clash broke out on both the common land border and the islands between the new Democratic Kampuchea regime and Vietnam. Even following high-level meetings, negotiations failed, leading to armed clashes again in 1977. Diplomatic relations eventually ended by December of the same year at the height of the infamous Khmer Rouge rule.⁷

Following the end of the brutal genocide period in Cambodia, border negotiations resumed through the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) with the signing of three agreements in the 1980s, namely, *The 1982 Treaty on Historical Waters*, *The Treaty on the Principles of Land Boundary Settlement and the Convention on the Status of the Boundary* in 1983, and *The 1985 Treaty on the Delimitation of State Border*.⁸ The treaties recognised the Brévié Line as the dividing line for island sovereignty but not as the maritime boundary.⁹ This period also saw a significant influx of ethnic Vietnamese migration into Cambodia, including both returnees who had fled during the genocide period, as well as newcomers. This movement of people deeply concerned Cambodian people, based on perceptions of a historic ambition of Vietnamese expansion.

The status of these treaties was continually uncertain in the 1990s during a change in the political leadership of Cambodia after the United Nations-sponsored election in 1993.¹⁰ The border and the presence of ethnic Vietnamese living in Cambodia were, at the time, the most sensitive topics of discussion between the two countries. During this same period, the Khmer Rouge continued to cling to power in some parts of the country. They took a more extreme approach in a targeted attack killing 130 ethnic Vietnamese, injuring 75, and abducting even more people in the run up to the national election.¹¹ A Joint Border Commission was created in January 1999, followed by the signing of the Supplementary Treaty to the 1985 Treaty on the Delimitation of the State Border in 2005. Soon after, the Vietnam-Cambodia Joint Committee on Land Border Demarcation and Marker Planting was established. An agreement on the demarcation of the remaining area of the land boundary was signed in April 2011.

Despite such developments, the border issue between Cambodia and Vietnam is seen beyond technical and often politicised. It has become

a key issue in political campaigns over the last decade and has stirred emotions on all sides. Even though almost 84% of the land border has been demarcated since April 2017¹², the maritime boundary has yet to be determined. Border issues will therefore continue to be a sensitive topic easily triggering nationalistic sentiment and division. On the other hand, it seems that economics can sometimes surpass tensions and connect cross-border interactions. Since 1994, the bilateral trade and investment cooperation between Cambodia and Vietnam has continued to increase. Currently, Vietnam is ranked as the fifth largest investor in Cambodia after China, South Korea, the European Union and Malaysia.¹³ From USD 812 million in 2011 to USD 2.5 billion in 2012, and from USD 3 billion in 2013 to USD 3.1 billion by August 2014,¹⁴ the two countries continue to foster a growing economic relationship. Total Vietnamese investment is projected to reach USD 5 billion by 2020, which would make Vietnam one of the top investors in the country.¹⁵ Despite the huge trade volume, however, imports from Vietnam amounted to more than double the amount of Cambodia's exports. A trade deficit continues to grow, accounting for a much larger number of Vietnamese products reaching Cambodia than vice versa.

The ongoing nation-wide narrative of lost territory continues to affect how Cambodians not only view neighbouring Vietnam, but also how they view ethnic Vietnamese living inside Cambodia. Such feelings of lost territory in the past have strongly shaped negative sentiment affecting how Khmer and other ethnic groups in Cambodia relate to ethnic Vietnamese living in the country today. This long-standing negative sentiment with deep historical layers is further sustained by changing geopolitics and domestic political, social, and economic dynamics at the national level. All these factors continue to contribute to adverse perceptions of the border that remain deeply rooted in the mainstream Cambodia public.

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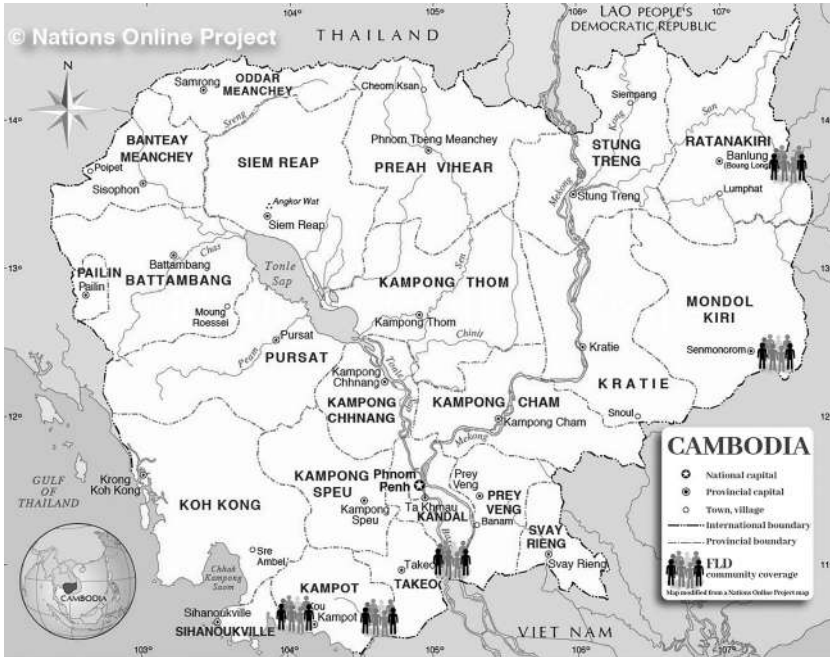


**AREAS
COVERED AND
DEMOGRAPHICS**



TARGET AREA AND PROFILES

FLD work was carried out primarily along border regions in four Cambodian provinces on the eastern side of the country.



KANDAL

Kandal province is located in the southern part of the country with a small section at the very southern tip that directly borders Vietnam. The Kandal Listeners carried out conversations within the Koh Thom district that surrounds the Bassac River which flows down from Cambodia and crosses into Vietnam. They mainly focused on three villages: Prek Chrey, Kna Tang Yu, and Pak Nam which are also very close to the border. This area is characterised as a popular trading area between Cambodia and Vietnam where villagers and business people cross the border to carry out commerce. The population includes Khmer, Vietnamese living in the area often for more than a decade, and a significant population of mixed-race Khmer-Vietnamese. Prek Chrey village, however, is home to a larger majority of Khmer people who often interact with nearby communities of other ethnic groups.

KAMPOT

Kampot is a province in the southwest region of Cambodia that stretches along the seashore of the Gulf of Thailand. It shares over 30km of borderline with Vietnam along the eastern side including a popular border crossing and major gateway into the Vietnamese city of Hà Tiên. Along the eastern side of the province, a river called Prek Tonhon Chas flows down along the border and into Vietnam where it then becomes known as Sông Giang Thành. Winding along the border, the river is the home and workplace to many fishermen, both Cambodian and Vietnamese nationals. With a diverse population province-wide, another significant aspect is the large Cham and Cambodian Muslim population living in villages. Cham and Cambodian Muslims in the area typically work along the river and often fish on boats. Listeners focused their work in dispersed communities. The village of Tropeang Pov at the base of Bokor mountain is quite a distance from the land border with Vietnam but looks out towards the Vietnamese island of Phú Quốc sharing a sea border. Thwi village is also quite far from the border and is located just outside of the provincial capital of Kampot where the majority of residents are business people or work for the government. Lok and Kampong Trach are right on the border with Vietnam where communities have frequent interaction across the border.

MONDULKIRI

Mondulkiri is the largest Cambodian province with the most sparse population in the country. It shares a long border with Vietnam and is the mountainous homeland of many tribes and Indigenous peoples. In fact, the majority of the population in Mondulkiri is Indigenous, mostly from the Bunong tribe. Along with Indigenous peoples, Khmer, ethnic Vietnamese, Chinese, Cham, and Muslim Cambodians live in the province. A large portion of the population, particularly Indigenous peoples, live on subsistence farming. Deforestation, especially due to mining, is a major issue in Mondulkiri as well as land dispossession. Listeners engaged in conversations very close to the Cambodia-Vietnam border in the Dak Dam commune where a wildlife sanctuary stretches along the land border. They focused their FLD work mainly in the villages of Yi Su, Pou Treng, and Pou Tang and were able to access a vast diversity of ethnic groups in the area.

RATANAKIRI

At the very northeastern tip of Cambodia lies Ratanakiri province bordering both Laos and Vietnam. One of the poorest provinces in the country, many small villages spread out across its large geographic size with residents depending on subsistence agriculture. Over half of the population are Indigenous peoples coming from tribes such as Tampuan, Jarai, Kreung, Brou, Kachok, and Kavet. About a third of the population is Khmer and the next largest group is made up of ethnic Lao. Other minority groups include Cham and Muslim Cambodians, Chinese, and Vietnamese. Listeners mainly explored villages throughout the Ou Ya Dav district directly on the border with Vietnam. They mostly focused on FLD conversations with Indigenous peoples from the Jarai and Kreung groups due to their access to those communities. Two of the Listeners also returned to Ratanakiri and had more informal conversations with ethnic Vietnamese people outside of the FLD approach.

THE LISTENERS AND ANALYSTS

In total, 14 team members joined as participants in this round of FLD along the border. Most were students, NGO staff, or working in education. Twelve Listeners made up the core fieldwork team. They mainly implemented FLD in their own communities, though in some cases, explored further away. Two additional team members joined to carry out a simultaneous media analysis during the same period and accompanied the Listeners through the FLD implementation. They “listened” to the Listeners, took notes, and grounded much of what was heard in the field through continual media analysis.

Of the 14, there were eight females and six males. Among the Listeners, two identified as fully ethnic Khmer. Two shared they were half Khmer and half ethnic Vietnamese. One differentiated herself as mixed Khmer Krom (originally from Vietnam) and Vietnamese. Two recognised themselves as Cambodian Muslim, or more specifically as “Khmer Islam”. Two Indigenous from Ratanakiri came from the Kreung community. From Mondulkiri, one Indigenous Bunong and one mixed Bunong-Vietnamese also joined. Both the media analysts identified themselves as Chinese Cambodian.

THE SHARERS

The Listeners were able to reach Sharers in four provinces on the border from all walks of life.

Who are the Sharers?



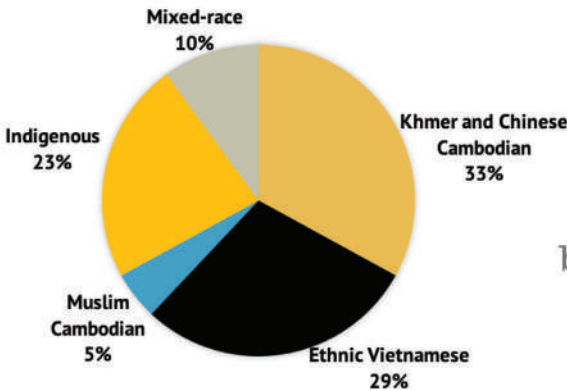
111 Sharers in total

Sex & gender



Age range

From 14 to 80 years old



Ethnic background

Languages spoken in conversations

Khmer	66.5%
Mixed Khmer and Vietnamese	10%
Vietnamese	4.5%
Indigenous language	4.5%
Mixed Indigenous language and Khmer	1%
Not reported	13.5%



A traditional Bunong Indigenous house – Listeners in Mondulkiri talked with many Bunong Sharers in the Dak Dam area just a few kilometres from the Cambodia-Vietnam border.



**KHMER &
CHINESE
CAMBODIANS**

Khmer, and sometimes Chinese Cambodians, were included in all four provinces. They represent the considerable demographic majority with a strong sense of a homogeneous group identity. Their views are generally considered representative of a large portion of the Cambodian population. In this project, however, the Khmer and Chinese Cambodian Sharers who engaged with Listeners tended to live more intermingled with other ethnic populations because they were specifically sought out along the border areas with Vietnam.

Most of the Khmer and Chinese Cambodians included in this study engage with ethnic Vietnamese living in Cambodia or Vietnamese nationals crossing over the border for business or visits to relatives. The views presented in this report likely represent the views of Khmer and Chinese Cambodians who regularly interact and live with ethnic Vietnamese. Their perceptions of ethnic Vietnamese as “Other” are expected to differ from those who have limited or no interaction with ethnic Vietnamese.

For the most part, Khmer and Chinese Cambodian Sharers were conscious of negative sentiment towards ethnic Vietnamese. Many took the conversation space to share personal thoughts and perceptions they held based on their experiences, as well as some specific concerns surrounding ethnic relations. However, there was an overall desire for peaceful relations. Many shared personal stories to demonstrate that communities along the border have been positively living side-by-side both in past and present.

MOST HEARD THEMES

1. Business among different ethnic groups normalise relations.
2. Import product quality issues are the most concerning.

3. We have close relations with Vietnamese communities along the border.
4. Vietnamese residents that do well in Cambodia are those that have been in the country for a long time, particularly those who arrived before the Khmer Rouge regime.
5. There is nothing anyone can really do about tensions that arise, it is in the hands of the government.
6. Nobody wants to see problems in the future.
7. Our diverse communities along the Cambodian-Vietnamese border get along together.
8. History, territorial issues and cultural values are the main reasons that cause tension or bad feelings towards the Vietnamese.
9. Although we see the words “youn” and “Vietnamese” are the same, we understand that using “youn” is generally unacceptable.
10. People in the city, and in particular the youth, receive most information through media.
11. There are many underlying worries about issues with ethnic Vietnamese.

BUSINESS INTERACTIONS AS THE FOUNDATION FOR INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Khmer and Chinese Cambodian Sharers all along the border overwhelming brought up positive business relations with ethnic Vietnamese as the main basis for their interactions. Many, in fact, perceived business as a key connector linking the two communities. To illustrate this point, Sharers cited instances of fishing, land rentals, farming, and engaging in import/export activities together. Most Sharers who have daily transactions with ethnic Vietnamese mentioned inter-personal relationships (friendships, family-like relationships) developing from business interactions. These Sharers also mentioned shared experiences when they attended festivals and celebrations in each other's communities, as further strengthening the connection ensuing from these business relationships.

វាគឺជាប្រយោជន៍ដល់ប្រជាជនក្នុងតំបន់
 តាមរយៈការនាំចូលផលិតផលពីប្រទេស
 ប្រទេសក្រៅប្រទេសខ្មែរ ដូចជា អាហារូបត្ថម្ភ ។

“ We don't need to worry so much,
 but we are concerned about snacks
 and other products imported from
 Vietnam. I am afraid they may add
 chemicals. ”

A 30 YEAR-OLD WOMAN WORKING AND LIVING
 IN KAMPOT AS A SEAMSTRESS

SALE OF PERCEIVED DANGEROUS GOODS AFFECTS TRUST BETWEEN COMMUNITIES

There was some concern regarding the quality of products coming into Cambodia across the border with Vietnam. Listeners mentioned that Vietnamese products in Cambodia past the expiry date of their shelf-life bothered many. Some Khmer Sharers said they worried about chemical additives or poisonous elements in things like snacks, cakes, or other food items. There were even a few Sharers who thought that toxic fruits and vegetables were being exported from Vietnam to Cambodia intentionally to weaken Khmer. They tended to blame unregulated trade and those trading the products that eventually ended up on the shelves of Khmer-run shops and stores. This specific issue has the effect of heightening Khmer suspicion of ethnic Vietnamese residents and affects overall perceptions of people, quality of Vietnamese products, and relations across the border.

၀၀ ပြောပြပါစာအုပ်အဖွဲ့အစည်းများ
 ဗဟုသုတ : စိတ်ကောင်း စေတနာရှိသူများ
 ဖော်ပြချက်များ အားဖြင့် အားပေးပေးရမည်
 ကြိုဆိုပါသည်။

“ Our communication is good. I’ve
 played soccer with them and
 joined many fun events with those
 Vietnamese kids. ”

AN 18 YEAR-OLD FEMALE STUDENT
 FROM KANDAL PROVINCE

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS ON THE BORDER ARE GENERALLY POSITIVE

Khmer and Chinese Cambodians living along the border generally shared positive experiences of coexistence with ethnic Vietnamese communities. Many described their communities as having very good communication with each other, fostering mutual understanding. Sharers described their Vietnamese friends as being similar to brothers and sisters who helped each other in times of crisis or need. Sharers referred to experiences of communal celebrations, including weddings and holidays, which further strengthened relationships. Other common experiences, such as playing sports together, were cited as connecting Khmer and Vietnamese communities. Close business and work relationships were again cited as the basis for creating friendships. Marriages between Khmer and Vietnamese were also cited as events that connected communities.

DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN LONGTIME VIETNAMESE RESIDENTS AND NEW ARRIVALS

Sharers differentiated between the ethnic Vietnamese Cambodians who had been residing in the country over the long term with those they considered as new arrivals. In particular, Khmer Sharers distinguished Vietnamese who had moved to the country prior to the Khmer Rouge regime as being better able to adapt and live in modern Cambodia. Although Khmer Sharers often referred to everyone with any Vietnamese blood as “Vietnamese” or “youn”, they generally directed feelings of fear or anger towards those they considered as newcomers, or those that have migrated over the last few years mainly for economic reasons and have not integrated into Khmer culture or learnt the language. This was seen as rather logical to the Sharers because of the obvious language barrier as well as more visible cultural and social markers, such as behaviours or manners, underpinning the perception of them as “the Other”.

ចម្លើយឱ្យអាជ្ញាធរ និង ឧត្តមស្នងការនគរបាលកម្ពុជា
 ឱ្យបានដឹងពីសំណើ: ការចូលចូលរៀនសូត្រ
 នៃកម្មវិធី)
 (៤

“ I want the authorities in the village
 and at the border to strictly
 implement the law concerning the
 flow of Vietnamese people into
 Cambodian territory. ”

A 28 YEAR-OLD KHMER WOMAN WHO WORKS
 AS A SELLER IN RATANAKIRI

NATIONAL AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR UPHOLDING LAW AND ORDER

The majority of Khmer and Chinese Cambodians living along the border felt there was not much residents could do to resolve existing negative perceptions of other ethnic groups in their areas. Sharers emphasised the importance of border and migration regulations, often citing the government's crucial role in ensuring proper implementation of border regulations so migrants staying in Cambodia without proper documentation could be deported. Sharers mentioned the obligation of both the national government and local authorities, including law enforcement, to uphold the law.

FLD implementation took place in the initial months of 2018, a period leading up to the Cambodia National Assembly election slated for 29 July. Some cited the perceived danger that ethnic issues could be politicised, particularly in light of the upcoming election, as a major threat to security that could lead to violent conflict or even war, if not properly addressed. These fears were often connected to memories of tensions and cases of communal conflict related to the 2013 election as well as prior elections in the country.

ខ្ញុំរត់មានការព្រួយបារម្ភចំពោះ ។ ទៅថ្ងៃខាង
 មុខ ខ្ញុំគិតថាទំនាក់ទំនងនឹងល្អឡើយ
 គ្រប់គ្រងសង្គមនិងសេដ្ឋកិច្ចបាន គឺ គ្រូស្រាវជ្រាវល្អឡើយ
 លើក្រសួងសុខាភិបាល ។

“ I don't have any concerns. In the future, I think relations will get better. All I can do myself is be a good citizen in my own community. ”

A 65 YEAR-OLD CHINESE CAMBODIAN NURSE
 IN KANDAL PROVINCE

RESIDENTS ARE HOPEFUL IN THE FACE OF UNCERTAINTY

Though Sharers could not be certain that ethnic relations would get better or worse, they expressed hope for a better future. Some Sharers acknowledged general public understanding about the fundamentals of peace, and that education would contribute greatly to improving relations between ethnic groups. Most people also acknowledged their own contribution to the situation - by being law abiding citizens, good neighbours, and respected members of their community.

ប្រពន្ធបង្ហាញប្រាប់ស្រីខ្មែរ
 គេគេរោគគេ យើងគេរោគយើង
 គេប្រើប្រាស់យើង យើងប្រើ
 របស់គេ ។

“ There is no problem at the border at all.
 They live their own lives and we live ours.
 We buy their products, and they buy ours. ”

A 42 YEAR-OLD KHMER WOMAN WHO SELLS SUGARCANE JUICE IN KAMPOT

គ្រប់គ្រងការប្រតិបត្តិការ មិនមាន
 អ្វីស្របគ្នាទេ គ្រប់គ្នា មានការសំរាប់
 រស់នៅ គ្រប់គ្នា គេមិនស្អប់យើង
 យើងមិនស្អប់គេ ។

“ In everyday communication, it’s friendly.
 They don’t hate us and we don’t hate them. ”

A 67 YEAR-OLD KHMER WOMAN WHO FARMS NEAR THE BORDER IN KANDAL PROVINCE

WE ACTUALLY ARE GETTING ALONG

Several Khmer Sharers saw ethnic relations along the border positively, illustrating how harmony can be found in a diverse society. Again, many mentioned trade and business as important connectors between communities. Some said that they felt Cambodia and Vietnam are similar, and based on daily interactions, Khmer and Vietnamese can converse as friends.



**ACCESS TO QUALITY,
AFFORDABLE CROSS-BORDER
HEALTH SERVICES HELPS TO
BRING HARMONY**

In a small multi-ethnic village along the border in Kandal province known as Prek Chrey, Khmer, ethnic Vietnamese, Chinese and mixed-race residents live peacefully together. Two local Listeners who reside in this village provided many examples of positive inter-ethnic relations. The Listeners cite healthcare as one of the factors that bring people together. Prek Chrey lacks adequate health facilities so most residents have to cross the border into Vietnam to use their clinics and hospitals when they get sick. Many Khmer residents say that they often avail of free or very reasonably priced health services in Vietnam, which they appreciate and consider an advantage of having good cross-border relations. Even some Sharers who expressed skepticism on other issues acknowledged being well-treated and appreciating the accessibility and affordability of health services in Vietnam.

ប្រជាជនខ្មែរ នៅប្រទេសកម្ពុជា
 នៅតែជឿជាក់ថា វៀតណាម នឹងចូលមក
 វាយយកប្រទេសយើង ។

“ Khmer people still hold onto the
 belief that Vietnamese will invade
 Cambodia because of our history. ”

A 19 YEAR-OLD MALE STUDENT IN KANDAL

HISTORICAL EVENTS, TERRITORIAL ISSUES, AND CULTURE ARE CITED AS SOURCES OF CONFLICT

Khmer and Chinese Cambodians openly acknowledged how historical narratives continue to shape negative perceptions and contribute to discriminatory attitudes towards ethnic Vietnamese residents. Previous historical events drive fears of another Vietnamese invasion, promoting suspicion of ethnic Vietnamese.

Perceptions of territorial incursions and immigration concerns trigger negative feelings among Khmer residents in the area. Perceived cultural differences, or perceptions of dissimilar attitudes and behaviour, also caused Khmer residents to voice complaints. Some said that ethnic Vietnamese spoke too loudly, while others expressed discomfort with perceived Vietnamese argumentativeness.

ថ្ងៃប្រាកដថា ពេញចិត្តនឹង ជីវិត
 រស់នៅ នៃ ពាក្យ “យួន” ទេ ប៉ុន្តែ
 ខ្ញុំ គិត ថា វា មាន ន័យ ថា ជា អ្នក ក
 ស្រាប់ មិន ល្អ ។

“ I am not sure about the deeper
 meaning of the word ‘youn’, but I
 think it means looking down
 on others. ”

A 21 YEAR-OLD CHINESE CAMBODIAN WOMAN
 WHO FARMS IN KANDAL PROVINCE

USE OF "YOUN" TO REFER TO ETHNIC VIETNAMESE IS PROVOCATIVE

Most Khmer and Cambodian Chinese Sharers understood the word "youn" to be the local and informal way to refer to ethnic Vietnamese people living in Cambodia and in Vietnam. Nevertheless, many, if not most, also acknowledged the negative connotations associated with "youn". Some noted that it could be used in a derogatory way. Others perceived the term as being unacceptable in some situations. Many recognised that ethnic Vietnamese living in Cambodia disliked being called "youn" and expressed understanding that it could be interpreted as an insult.

បញ្ហាដែលខ្ញុំដឹងដាក់សាបអារម្មណ៍
 ចោលដល់ប្រាសាទ ឬគ្រប់
 យ៉ាង ក៏គ្រោងបង្កើតជម្លោះ
 រវាងខ្មែរ ខ្មែរ ។

“ The only thing I can't get out of my head are the problems I saw on Facebook and YouTube where Vietnamese are doing bad things to Khmer people both directly and indirectly. ”

A 22 YEAR-OLD KHMER FEMALE UNIVERSITY STUDENT AT THE KAMPOT MARKET

URBAN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ARE HEAVILY INFLUENCED BY MEDIA

Khmer, Indigenous, Muslim Cambodians, and ethnic Vietnamese Sharers frequently referenced different news sources that influenced their opinions and perceptions. Young Khmer Sharers, particularly those between the ages of 17 - 27 years old, often mentioned information that they obtained from the news. Many specifically talked about Facebook or the internet, which they cited as the source of much of their information. Those living in densely populated cities near the border were also more likely to mention media as the source of their information.

Most young people that referenced the news, Facebook, or the internet brought up issues that were negatively associated with ethnic Vietnamese such as land invasion, political campaigning, and Vietnamese maltreatment of Khmer. Khmer Sharers translated these news stories into negative sentiment towards Vietnamese, with some concluding that they hated Vietnamese or that Vietnamese needed to be deported from Cambodia.

Other Sharers had more critical interpretations of these stories, recognising how the media was being utilised to stir up more negative sentiment towards Vietnamese. These Sharers recognised that the media narratives did not accurately reflect the state of relations between Khmer and ethnic Vietnamese communities that were living in close proximity to one another.

ខ្ញុំមាន ការព្រួយបារម្ភ ខ្លះៗ អំពី កំណើន
 គោល ជំនឿ របស់ ខ្មែរ (យុវជន)
 របស់ មានបញ្ហា ជាមួយ ភ្នាក់ងារ ខ្មែរ
 ចំពោះ ប្រទេស) ។ ការ រីក រាយ រាលដាល
 នៃ អំពើ ហិង្សា ប្រឆាំង បញ្ហា
 ភ្នាក់ ខ្មែរ ក៏ មាន ច្រើន ។ បញ្ហា ដីធ្លី
 រវាង ខ្មែរ ទៅ ជាប់ ជាមួយ បញ្ហា ដីធ្លី
 រវាង ខ្មែរ ក៏ មាន ច្រើន ។ បញ្ហា ដីធ្លី
 រវាង ខ្មែរ ក៏ មាន ច្រើន ។ បញ្ហា ដីធ្លី
 រវាង ខ្មែរ ក៏ មាន ច្រើន ។

“ I have some concerns but I can't tell what will happen in the future. I'm afraid that my descendants might have problems with Vietnam about land issues. In the future, there must be some problems between Khmer and Vietnamese. ”

AN ELDERLY KHMER WOMAN WHO FARMS IN KANDAL PROVINCE

CONCERN ABOUT THE FUTURE OF CAMBODIA-VIETNAMESE RELATIONS

Across the board, whether they held generally positive or negative opinions about ethnic Vietnamese living on the border, Khmer and Chinese Cambodian Sharers expressed an overwhelming apprehension about the future of Cambodian-Vietnamese relations.

Sharers raised land issues and future territorial incursions, or the threat of Vietnamese taking Cambodian land as one of the recurring themes. This is likely associated with a historical narrative of Vietnamese incremental aggressive expansionism into Khmer territory.

Sharers also raised the narrative of Vietnamese demographic besiegement, based on the perception that the Vietnamese minority in Cambodia have a higher birth rate or through persistent immigration. They also worried that the relationship might worsen due to politics, or if their government or the Vietnamese government closed the border, which could lead to violent conflict between the Khmer and ethnic Vietnamese communities.

These concerns shaped their opinions and contributed to perceptions that might create further barriers between the groups.



Chrey Thum border checkpoint – Prek Chrey is an area stretching along the Cambodia-Vietnam border and is home to many mixed-race families who speak both Khmer and Vietnamese.



**CHAM &
MUSLIM
CAMBODIANS**



Cham and Muslim Cambodians are one of the minorities in Cambodia, making up between 1 to 2% of the population. Cham is often used to refer to several different groups practising Islam in Cambodia. Many, including those who participated in this study, shared that they prefer to be called Khmer Islam. Using “Khmer Islam” highlights both their ethnic and religious identities, consequently affecting how people see themselves in relation to mainstream Khmer and other ethnic minorities.

As a group, the Cham and Muslim Cambodians in the study tended to see ethnic Vietnamese and the situation with Vietnam in comparatively less positive terms than others. There were many sensitivities about the border and migration as well as about water and fishing issues. One contributing factor could be that the study surveyed Cham and Muslim Cambodians living in Kampot province, with many of them living near the market of Kampot city - quite a distance from the border. This distinguishes them from many of the other Sharers, who live and work along the border, and thus have more regular interactions with ethnic Vietnamese. Keeping in mind this difference, these perspectives provide a snapshot of opinions and narratives of populations that may not have much exposure to ethnic Vietnamese communities.

MOST HEARD THEMES

1. We are concerned about the border, especially in terms of regulation along the boundary and the influx of Vietnamese migrants coming into Cambodia.
2. We do have negative experiences with Vietnamese people that affect our opinion and we have also heard many bad stories from others.
3. We also worry about territorial water issues and illegal fishing.

ព្រមទាំងបញ្ជា/ចាំបាច់ខ្លះៗ និង
 ចៀវតាម តាមយើងគ្រប់ ទៅលើ
 ចៀវតាម គ្រប់តំបន់ ឯច្បាប់ក៏ដាច់
 ច្រើនកាល គេចោលវា គ្រប់គ្រង ខ្លះៗ
 ក្នុងខ្មែរ យើង មិនប្រកាន់ អត់ចាត់ ។

“ At the border, when Cambodians enter Vietnam, they have such strict rules and regulations and check us with such scrutiny. But then when they come into Cambodia, it’s so easy and the rules are loose.

”

A 27 YEAR-OLD MUSLIM CAMBODIAN FISHERMAN WHO WAS AT THE KAMPOT LOCAL MARKET

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 ការពិតនៃការប្រែប្រួលនេះ។

“ When we talk about the border, I really don't want to be reminded about the land that was lost in the past as we can't do anything about it now. I used to see them moving the borderline inwards, and steal this part and that part. I want to know the truth and learn the real facts as I don't want them to steal any more of our land.

”

A 22 YEAR-OLD MALE MUSLIM CAMBODIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENT LIVING IN THE CENTER OF KAMPOT TOWN

LAND AND BORDER ISSUES DIVIDE US

The fear of territory loss and uncontrolled Vietnamese immigration into Cambodia was by far the issue that brought out the strongest negative feelings among Cham and Muslim communities from Kampot province towards ethnic Vietnamese. Some Sharers associated the loss of Cambodian land as a historical issue that could no longer be resolved in Cambodia's favour. Another common perception was that the borderline between Cambodia and Vietnam continues to move and encroach into Cambodian territory.

Muslim communities also felt strongly about the perception that Vietnamese nationals are freely crossing over the border into Cambodia, citing the lax immigration regulations or improper implementation of immigration procedures.

Several expressed frustration with what they saw as a double standard - while Vietnamese could easily cross the border into Cambodia, Cambodians have to overcome strict regulations and several barriers when they travel into Vietnam. Many felt that this perceived double standard is a key issue causing tensions between Vietnamese and Cambodians, resulting in negative feelings, including hatred.



**GENDER MATTERS:
LISTENERS ANALYSE WHAT
THEY HEARD FROM
WOMEN AND MEN**

Brought together after doing FLD in their communities, Listeners engaged in different levels of analysis with the information they collected. One of their key conclusions is that men and women think differently about who they perceive as “the Other”.

Some female Listeners felt that the feelings among female Sharers, regardless of ethnicity, displayed far more complexity than the feelings of the male Sharers. They noted that men often dove right into issues about the border or about business. They had immediate

opinions that they quickly shared at an early point in the conversations. In contrast, the female Sharers spoke much more about daily life, family livelihoods, and put emphasis on the importance of living peacefully.

Male Listeners saw the situation differently. They interpreted the female Sharers' opinions as indicative of having little concern about issues involving other ethnic groups, in contrast to the male Sharers who expressed more emotion when talking about these issues. Some felt that housewives, for example, did not really care about ethnic issues, and relied on their husbands for information. Male Listeners did agree that they sensed less animosity towards "the Other" from the females than they did from their male Sharers.

The Listeners' different views on how women and men saw things based on what they heard provided a new layer of analysis. Beyond ethnic identity, it demonstrates how community concerns are very individual and influenced by many factors, including gender.

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 បុកគោ
 ។

“ I used to see them mistreating
 Khmer people when I was working
 on Bokor mountain. ”

A 30 YEAR-OLD MUSLIM CAMBODIAN CONSTRUCTION
 WORKER WORKING AROUND KAMPOT PROVINCE

WE HAVE HAD BAD EXPERIENCES

Several Cham and Muslim Sharers were eager to share personal stories and the experiences of friends and acquaintances to justify their negative feelings towards ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia. These stories contributed to individual and collective narratives that helped to rationalise these negative perceptions. Some spoke of rude or impolite Vietnamese behaviour, while others mentioned negative business or work interactions with ethnic Vietnamese. A construction worker, for example, shared his experience when he worked on a mountain and witnessed Vietnamese workers mistreating the Khmer. This experience coloured his perception of all Vietnamese people in Cambodia. Several Muslim Sharers also mentioned stories they heard from friends or negative accounts they read on social media, like Facebook, which made them angry or caused them to resent Vietnamese in general.



Although anti-Vietnamese sentiment among Cambodian Muslim Sharers was prevalent, our Listeners provided their own stories of transformation that made us hopeful about future relations.

Fatilah is a Cambodian Muslim and was an FLD Listener in Kampot. At the beginning of the initiative, she quite openly shared her negative preconceptions about ethnic Vietnamese people. In her community, she grew up hearing negative stories about the Vietnamese from her family and neighbours. She read news that often portrayed them in a negative way. She admitted that she could not shake off the perception that most Vietnamese people are bad.

Fatilah was shocked to discover over the course of the project that another Listener, Kimleang, is half Vietnamese. They had been longtime friends and Fatilah knew she was originally from Vietnam, but always thought she was fully ethnic Khmer Krom, or the "lower Khmer" who have historically inhabited today's southern part of Vietnam.

During the transformative component of the FLD initiative, Fatilah shared her feelings. "I have known Kimleang for such a long time. We get along very well and I had no idea she was half Vietnamese. That's why I have this sense of shock and confusion since I found out," she conveyed to fellow Listeners in the group.

Fortunately the friendship between Fatilah and Kimleang is stronger than the negative perceptions she had been holding onto. By the end of the initiative, they kept laughing and holding hands, and sharing memories of years of friendship. Fatilah acknowledged that this personal experience opened her heart more and made her think about embracing other people's differences. She told everyone that she will not let generalisations control her thinking, but also reminded us all that nobody is perfect. Like many of the Sharers that spoke with Listeners, Fatilah echoes that there are good and bad people in every group.

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“ I heard from others that youn fishermen kill Muslim Cambodian fishermen on their boats at the border. I want the Fisheries Administration to stop youn from entering Cambodian territory like this.

”

A 35 YEAR-OLD MUSLIM WOMAN WORKING FOR THE GOVERNMENT IN KAMPOT

REAL TENSION BETWEEN OUR COUNTRIES IS HAPPENING ALONG THE WATERWAYS

For fishermen and other residents living on the coast, territorial disputes on the water were of major concern. Some Muslim Cambodians mentioned a purported incident in 2015 that involved the murder of a Cham fisherman. This story remained deeply embedded in the minds of the Cham community in Kampot, where the incident took place. People spoke of rumours that Vietnamese fishermen kill Cham Cambodian and Khmer fishermen. Some fishermen felt resentful that Vietnamese fishermen regularly crossed into Cambodian waters and fished while Cambodian Muslim fishermen were unable to go into Vietnamese waters and reap the same benefit. Such perceptions and feelings caused negative feelings and anger towards the Vietnamese in the Kampot community.



FISHING PROBLEMS BECOME PERSONAL

Fishing is one of the most talked about sources of tensions between the Vietnamese and the Muslim Cambodian communities in Kampot. Samnang, a Cham Listener who carried out FLD conversations in his own community, says that this issue also affects him personally. It was sometimes hard for him to separate his own perception from the Sharers he listened to.

Living in a fishing village, Samnang directly experienced conflict between Muslim Cambodians and Vietnamese fishermen. He says that Vietnamese have much bigger boats than the Cambodians. Sometimes, when Muslim Cambodians and Khmer fishermen put out nets in the sea, a Vietnamese boat passes by and drags all the nets away. He claims this has happened to his own family, when his father's nets were taken ten years ago. His father lost a lot of money and felt helpless because he had no recourse against the Vietnamese fishermen.

For the most part, villagers feel that the Vietnamese fishermen are overpowering the Cambodian fishermen with their big boats and their business-driven mindset. Although Samnang's father gave up fishing years ago, he says that his community still regularly complains about the same issue.



**INDIGENOUS
PEOPLES IN
CAMBODIA**

Just over one percent of the Cambodian population is made up of ethnic Indigenous groups, collectively known as Khmer Loeu, or the Khmer of the highlands. There are an estimated 24 Indigenous groups that live in the country across 15 provinces. Ratanakiri and Mondulkiri are where most of the Indigenous groups reside. Although they are a small minority in Cambodia, Indigenous peoples, largely belonging to the Bunong group, make up approximately 80% of the majority population in Mondulkiri. In Ratanakiri, about half of the population is Indigenous, coming from the Tampuan, Jarai, Kreung, Brou, Kachok and Kavet groups.

Listeners from Mondulkiri and Ratanakiri, from the Bunong and Jarai groups, focused on listening to the Indigenous peoples from the Bunong, Jarai, and Kreung communities, where they had access and spoke the same languages. Despite the wide range of diverse opinions, they also shared many similarities with other ethnic minorities in Cambodia. They conveyed some key concerns and worries with Listeners, particularly about migration and trade. They often talked about cultural differences and based much of their perceptions of ethnic Vietnamese on everyday interactions and personal experiences. On the positive side, many Indigenous Sharers saw business as a strong connector between communities, and across the border as well.

MOST HEARD THEMES

1. We are mostly worried about the influx of Vietnamese immigrants over the border and the products being imported that give rise to illegal business and compete with our own ability to work and carry on with local business.
2. We hold onto our negative view of “them” because of their noisy way of life, bad business practices, history, politics, and border issues.
3. We have had personal experiences with Vietnamese that tarnished our relationship.
4. Business in the more urban areas and along the border run smoothly.

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“ I’m really concerned about business, as we import their cheaper products to sell in the village. I want authorities to solve this as I don’t want youn to enter Cambodia anymore because they bring in expired and low quality products full of chemicals, especially in the food. ”

AN 18 YEAR-OLD JARAI INDIGENOUS MALE STUDENT FROM RATANAKIRI

MIGRATION AND LOW QUALITY IMPORTS ARE OUR KEY CONCERNS

Indigenous groups living along the border in Ratanakiri and Mondulakiri provinces overwhelmingly expressed their fear and concern about border issues. They saw migration and entry into Cambodia as problematic and leading to a potential crisis. Like other communities, they resented that Vietnamese citizens could easily enter Cambodia but Cambodians had a harder time crossing into Vietnam. Some said that was due to Cambodian citizens lacking relevant documents such as passports. Others felt that Vietnamese citizens simply came to Cambodia without having the legally required documents, making their entry illegal.

Indigenous people complained that when they tried to go to Vietnam, they were intensely questioned by authorities. They were also unhappy that they could not bring their Cambodian motorcycles across the border, while those with automobiles could. They also discussed at length their perception of losing land to Vietnamese who were seen as buying massive tracts of land. In Mondulakiri province, Bunong communities often acknowledged the existence of a long-established ethnic Vietnamese community that had been residing in Cambodia for a long time.

Many Indigenous communities from Mondulakiri and Ratanakiri shared fears about low quality Vietnamese products entering Cambodia with the potential of affecting their health and wellbeing. They mentioned an influx of expired products and those containing high amounts of chemicals. They cited food items as being particularly worrisome. In Ratanakiri, for example, one Sharer thought that Vietnamese coffee was intentionally poisoned while another believed that this was a plan to get indigenous people sick so they would have to cross the border to use Vietnamese hospitals, which would profit from these treatments. Indigenous Sharers often pointed out that they generally do not like products from Vietnam. Several offered alternatives, such as buying locally produced and organic vegetables in Cambodia, particularly those produced in the North-eastern region.

In connection with border movement and trade, Indigenous Sharers raised concerns about having to compete with Vietnamese businesses, or losing jobs to the influx of Vietnamese crossing over the border.

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 ខ្លា ឆ្មៃ តែង: បើ ប្រាក់ គឺ!

“ If we look at our history, we have concerns but we don't know what to do now. ”

A 51 YEAR-OLD KREUNG INDIGENOUS MALE IN RATANAKIRI WHO SELLS CASHEW NUTS

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“ They bring in Vietnamese prostitutes and we're afraid Cambodian men will go crazy for such a sex service and cause conflict in their families because the husbands are going out of the home for it. ”

A 20 YEAR-OLD JARAI INDIGENOUS MALE STUDENT IN RATANAKIRI

OUR HISTORY AND OUR VALUES ARE TOO DIFFERENT

Indigenous Sharers along the border shared complaints that differentiated between “us” and “them” based on perceived cultural differences. Some felt that Vietnamese residents and visitors were stereotypically loud, aggressive, chaotic, and heavy drinkers. Others felt that Vietnamese were clever, better at business, and could take advantage of Indigenous people. One Bunoung Sharer in Mondulkiri noted that the generally more educated Vietnamese could unfairly compete with her less educated community.

Other Sharers cited history as an important factor in shaping perceptions about Vietnamese people, who were seen as always being Cambodia’s historic enemy. This, along with feelings of nationalism, often made them worry about relations between Cambodia and Vietnam, even in today’s contemporary context.

The perceived link between the sex industry and the Vietnamese was another big concern for Indigenous Sharers, especially in Ratanakiri. Many associated prostitution with Vietnamese and blamed the industry for causing conflict within families. Specifically, Sharers saw Vietnamese residents bringing prostitutes directly from Vietnam and often characterised them as the sole coffee shop and brothel industry owners. They viewed this as being contrary to Cambodians’ traditional values.

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“ Sometimes we have good relations,
 but sometimes the Vietnamese
 don't really like us because they
 think we are stupid and easy to
 trick. When they do interact with us,
 it's just for their own benefit. ”

A 24 YEAR-OLD FEMALE JARAI INDIGENOUS SELLER
 FROM RATANAKIRI

OUR PERCEPTIONS ARE BASED ON PERSONAL EXPERIENCE, HISTORY, AND WHAT WE HEAR

Indigenous Sharers in Ratanakiri provided numerous personal experiences to explain why they sometimes held negative views towards Vietnamese. There were strong sensitivities around the perception that Vietnamese underestimated or belittled Indigenous people, and saw them as less clever, or easy to deceive.

Interpretations of history and nationalism also played a role in creating and maintaining divisions between “us” and “them”. Some Kreung and Jarai Sharers in Ratanakiri mentioned perceptions of the Vietnamese as being longstanding historic enemies. They recalled historical narratives vilifying Vietnamese, such as *Tae Ong* or *Master’s Tea*, the 19th Century story of a Vietnamese emperor who captured three Khmer men and killed them by putting them in a boiling cauldron used to make tea water. Some mentioned their understanding of history of a progressive land invasion and a shrinking border. Sharers said that history and their strong sense of nationalism often make them feel dislike, discrimination, and pain when thinking about the Vietnamese.

Based on what they heard from others, Indigenous Sharers in Ratanakiri often supported their negative perceptions of Vietnamese with stories from their friends, acquaintances, or found on social media like Facebook. They brought up issues such as land-grabbing, deforestation, wildlife trade, and environmental degradation. Some, for instance, mentioned a local issue in a declared no-man’s land part of the border. They said that their communities witnessed Vietnamese soldiers digging ponds in this area, despite a bilateral agreement between the Vietnamese and Cambodian governments to prohibit construction in areas where the border has not been officially demarcated. Stories like this caused strong emotional responses from the Sharers.



CHANGING ATTITUDES AMONG LISTENERS THEMSELVES

Sreyneang, one of the Listeners representing the Bunong community in Mondulkiri became a key resource person in the initiative to learn more about Indigenous communities in Cambodia and across the region. She speaks Bunong language daily, works for a local Indigenous NGO, is a member of many Indigenous associations, and even represents Indigenous people around the world in international organisations.

Sreyneang also shared that she was fluent in Vietnamese. In fact, she later told the group that her father is Vietnamese, originally from Hoi An, but had been living in Mondulkiri for most of his life. He had learnt the Bunong and Khmer languages and met her Bunong mother. She said she had always identified as a Bunong first, because she felt so connected with her mother

and her surrounding culture. Over time, however, she has also started recognising that she is Vietnamese too, with many family members in Vietnam that she visits once in a while.

Growing up near the border in Mondulkiri, Sreyneang had been connecting Bunong, Khmer, and Vietnamese people together for most of her life. She was full of stories of cooperation and kinship between peoples and across borders that was not generally reflected in most of the conventional narratives.

During a reflective point of the initiative when Listeners had the opportunity to create Peace Masks and consider their identities, Sreyneang shared a personal insight.

“When I really started listening to people from my communities, I thought it’s time to stop choosing one or the other,” she said.

“And then I asked myself why am I a half? I’m not a half. I have two faces. When I am with my Bunong family, I’m a Bunong. When I am with my Vietnamese family, I’m Vietnamese. It’s about having two identities, not halves.”

នាវតាម្នាក់ៗប្រាប់មកពេលយប់សប្តាហ៍មួយមួយ
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“ The relation between us and them is normal.
 We interact daily, and do business together.
 If we have mangos, coffee beans, and nuts
 available, they come to us to buy it. Likewise,
 we go and buy their products at their markets,
 like seasoning, salt, and sugar... I want to
 see Cambodians have better relations in the
 future and have Vietnamese continue coming
 to buy our Bunong crops like now. ”

A 60 YEAR-OLD BUNONG MAN WHO SPOKE TO LISTENERS
 IN MONDULKIRI BUT HAS BEEN LIVING IN VIETNAM
 SINCE THE 1960s

BUSINESS IS KEY

Indigenous Sharers across Mondulkiri and Ratanakiri emphasised that business was a primary element in the relationship between them and Vietnamese. Day-to-day business and interactions normalised relations and played a crucial role in bringing communities together. Some shared stories about trading products with each other and even inviting Vietnamese business partners to drink together or share in their celebrations. One Bunong farmer in Mondulkiri even said that she felt it was easier to do business with Vietnamese customers than Khmer customers. She said that she liked Vietnamese because they were honest and said Vietnamese and Bunong were friends and had a good relationship.



Making a “Peace Mask” – Upon completing FLD work in their communities, Listeners reunited to explore a conceptual artform allowing them to reflect on identity. After having listened to so many others, they had a chance to look inside of themselves and listen to each other. Their Peace Masks were displayed at an art gallery in Phnom Penh in May 2018.



**VIETNAMESE AND
MIXED-RACE
COMMUNITIES
IN CAMBODIA**

There are approximately 80,000 Vietnamese speakers in Cambodia. This number, however, does not necessarily correspond to the entirety of the ethnic Vietnamese population. Given sensitivities surrounding ethnic Vietnamese living in Cambodia and the corresponding risks of self-identification, as well as the lack of clear criteria for who are ethnic Vietnamese, it is difficult to obtain accurate census data accounting for the ethnic Vietnamese population. They could account for anywhere between 0.42% to about 5% of the Cambodian population.

For this study, the term 'ethnic Vietnamese' is used rather inclusively. It covers those who have lived in Cambodia for both short and long periods, those born in Cambodia, those who self-identify, and those who may have Cambodian citizenship, Vietnamese citizenship, or no citizenship. The term also includes mixed-race Khmer-Vietnamese who sometimes identify as having Chinese ancestry as well. The study has also included those who identify as both Khmer and Vietnamese (biracial, mixed ethnicity, dual identity) in this section to provide their unique perspectives and insight on the ethnic Vietnamese community in Cambodia.

Ethnic Vietnamese Sharers spoke with Listeners in all four provinces: Kandal, Kampot, Mondulakiri, and Ratanakiri. Most were based in communities along the border, sometimes living with other ethnicities, and sometimes in predominantly ethnic Vietnamese communities. Given that Sharers live in a border region with significant human movement, there were instances when the residence of the Sharer was unclear. However, citizenship was not a criteria for Listeners to determine who to speak with, as the primary objective is to present views representing the diversity of the ethnic Vietnamese community in Cambodia.

Most ethnic Vietnamese and mixed-race Sharers overwhelmingly spoke in positive terms about other ethnic communities and their relations with them. They tended to value their relationships with others and saw any potential conflict as a threat to security and stability. Many also took the time to talk about some sensitive issues and opinions that personally affected them.

MOST HEARD THEMES

1. Conflict that would disrupt business must be avoided at all costs.
2. We have normal and peaceful relations with Khmer and other Cambodians through good interaction and friendships.
3. Those of us that have been in Cambodia for a long time have strong relationships with our Khmer friends - it is just that they do not trust the more recent arrivals.
4. We really want to speak, read, and write Khmer fluently.
5. Along the border we are not so concerned about conflict and we just want to continue our peaceful and stable relations among our diverse communities in this area.
6. The word “youn” is strong and negative - we do not like to be called this in Cambodia.

ខ្ញុំគឺ ខ្មែរ ស៊ី ប្រយោជន៍ កម្ពុជា
 ខ្ញុំ មិន យក ការ ជំនាញ ខ្លះ ទេ
 ខ្ញុំ គ្រប់ គ្រាន់ ទាំង ខ្លួន ខ្ញុំ តែ
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“ *Khmer and Vietnamese interact through business. I only focus on my business selling chilli and corn.* ”

A MIXED VIETNAMESE-KHMER MAN LIVING
 IN KANDAL PROVINCE

BUSINESS IS A TOP PRIORITY

Unsurprisingly, business often came out as an important element that connected communities in spite of perceived ethnic differences. Vietnamese originally from Vietnam, ethnic Vietnamese Cambodians, and mixed Vietnamese-Khmer residents were all in agreement that business was a positive connector that needed to be protected. Even when Sharers were talking about different issues, they often raised their daily businesses as a key preoccupation. Some said that selling their vegetables was the only thing they thought about. Others thought that women, in particular, do not get caught up in tension or ethnic issues and prefer to focus on day-to-day business.

Vietnamese Sharers also placed importance on working with Khmer and other groups in Cambodia and hiring them to work on projects. When discussing the potential for conflict or for inter-ethnic problems, they often stressed that avoiding conflict was important to keep business and trade relations strong between the groups.

Mối quan hệ của chúng tôi khá tốt thông qua kinh doanh, buôn bán và thậm chí làm hàng xóm sống cạnh nhau. Tôi chưa bao giờ thấy sự kỳ thị nào. Chính tôi cũng chơi với trẻ em ở Prek Chrey và mọi thứ đều tốt đẹp.

“ Our relationship is good through business, trade, and even living side-by-side as neighbours. I have never seen any discrimination and I personally play with kids in Prek Chrey and it's all good. ”

A 35 YEAR-OLD VIETNAMESE MAN IN KANDAL PROVINCE WHO RENTS OUT SPEAKERS FOR EVENTS IN THE COMMUNITY

Suy nghĩ của tôi về mối quan hệ Khơ Me - Việt Nam là khá quan trọng vì hai quốc gia có mối quan hệ tốt cho tôi qua cho tất cả mọi người.

“ My opinion on the Khmer-Vietnamese relationship is that it is positive because the two nations get along - and that is a good thing for me and everyone else. ”

A 36 YEAR-OLD VIETNAMESE FARMER IN KAMPOT PROVINCE WHO HAS BEEN LIVING IN CAMBODIA FOR TWO YEARS

WE HAVE GOOD RELATIONS WITH KHMER

Vietnamese and mixed Sharers spoke at length of their positive perceptions of other groups in Cambodia, particularly the Khmer. Nearly all Sharers spoke positively about Khmer people and their relationships with them. They considered Vietnamese-Khmer relations on two levels - the national level, relating to state and border relations, and the community level, which focused on the inter-personal and day-to-day interactions.

On the national level, Vietnamese Sharers felt that Vietnam and Cambodia had friendly relations. Some mentioned that trade between the two countries generated mutual respect between the people. Sharers saw positive bilateral state relations as a good thing benefiting everyone. Many also mentioned the physical border between the countries, conveying that they saw that there had not been any issues between the two or that they had never seen or heard about conflict there before.

On the community level, Sharers most frequently mentioned the word “normal” to describe Vietnamese/Khmer relations. Many shared that communication between the groups was good. They again stressed that business relations brought them together, and some even described their relationship as being similar to that of siblings, like family or close friends.

They also described Khmer people positively, with words such as “helpful”, “lawful”, “honest”, “caring”, “easygoing” and “good”. They mentioned attending local celebrations together and having Khmer friends over for meals at their houses or their restaurants. The majority of Vietnamese and mixed Sharers stressed that there was no discrimination between them and Khmer residents in their communities.



ETHNIC VIETNAMESE IN RATANAKIRI SHARE THEIR THOUGHTS

Suy nghĩ của tôi về mối quan hệ Khơ Me - Việt Nam là khả quan bởi vì hai quốc gia có mối quan hệ tốt – đó là một điều tốt cho tôi và cho tất cả mọi người.

I've been living here for 30 years now and I see things as normal. I don't see any arguments and living here is very nice and simple. There's no competition at all compared to Vietnam.

– AN ELDERLY ETHNIC VIETNAMESE WOMAN

During the FLD fieldwork in Ratanakiri, our two Indigenous Listeners found it difficult to access and communicate with ethnic Vietnamese residents. Luckily, one of our Bunong Indigenous Listeners in Mondulkiri also spoke Vietnamese. She

travelled to the northeastern province to connect with members of the ethnic Vietnamese community accompanied by a Kreung Indigenous Listener. They spoke with six ethnic Vietnamese residents in Ratanakiri. Due to time constraints and difficulties in implementing FLD, the Listeners decided to record conversations and transcribe them rather than record their memories of conversations afterwards.

Given that these conversations did not follow FLD methodology, they were not included in the overall analysis. However, the conversations did provide a glimpse into some of the general perceptions and opinions of Vietnamese people living in the Ratanakiri border areas.

Similar to the FLD findings, the six conversations affirmed that ethnic Vietnamese near the Ratanakiri border area saw Khmer and other local ethnic groups in a positive light. Many talked about their businesses, which brought them into contact with the Khmer. Several talked about having normal relations with the Khmer, some of whom considered them to be like their siblings. Some spoke about their affection for Khmer people. The conversations were all positive and mirrored much of what ethnic Vietnamese residents were saying in other provinces.

Ở đây có nhiều người Việt gốc từ miền Nam Việt Nam đã sống ở đây rất lâu. Mối quan hệ với người Khmer tốt và làm ăn thuận lợi. Tết của người Khmer, người Việt Nam cũng tham gia ăn mừng.

“

There are ethnic Vietnamese originally coming from South Vietnam who have been living here for a long time. The relationship with Khmer is good and business goes well. When it is Khmer New Year, Vietnamese also come to celebrate with them.

”

A 34 YEAR-OLD VIETNAMESE SELLER LIVING
IN PREK CHREY KRAV IN KANDAL PROVINCE

LONGTIME RESIDENTS HAVE GAINED THE TRUST OF KHMER

Vietnamese and mixed Sharers saw how relationships between them and Khmer varied depending on the length of time they had been residing in Cambodia. Sharers observed that the ethnic Vietnamese born in Cambodia and Vietnamese who had lived in Cambodia for a long time had cordial and friendly relations with Khmer, and these residents helped one another regardless of their ethnic background. Living in these communities for long periods of time allowed them to gain trust and establish relationships with their Khmer neighbours and nearby communities over time. On the other hand, they felt that Khmer residents often had less trust towards Vietnamese who had recently crossed the border. In their opinion, Khmer viewed these new immigrants with suspicion, thinking they might cheat or take advantage of them.

ខំស្រាវជ្រាវ ខ្លាំង
 ខិត ខំ រៀន ភាសា ខ្មែរ
 ដើម្បី អាច រួម
 ចូល ចំណែក ឱ្យ ប្រសើរ
 ក្នុង ប្រទេស

“ For me, I have to try hard to study
 Khmer in order to contribute
 to easing any tensions in the
 relationship between us and them. ”

A FEMALE VIETNAMESE STUDENT LIVING
 IN KANDAL FOR A LONG TIME

KHMER LANGUAGE IS IMPORTANT

Some Vietnamese residents saw learning the Khmer language as an important connector between them and other communities in Cambodia. This was mentioned most frequently in the Prek Chrey community of Kandal province. Vietnamese Sharers noted how learning to write and speak Khmer well helped them do business more efficiently. They talked about having Khmer ancestors and the importance of holding onto the Khmer language. They also acknowledged that living in Cambodia required fluency in the Khmer language.

*Trong làng của tôi không có
mâu thuẫn giữa người Khơ Me
và người Việt Nam. Không có
chuyện lo lắng về mối quan hệ
Khơ Me - Việt Nam vì hai bên
sống với nhau rất hòa thuận.*

“

*In my village, there is no conflict
between Khmer and Vietnamese.
There is no such concern about
the Khmer-Vietnamese relationship
because both sides live together
and get along very well.*

”

AN ETHNIC VIETNAMESE 61 YEAR-OLD CAMBODIAN
CONSTRUCTION WORKING LIVING
IN KAMPOT OVER 30 YEARS

CONFLICT BETWEEN VIETNAMESE AND KHMER NOT A CONCERN IN BORDER COMMUNITIES

Most Vietnamese and mixed communities along the border felt that relations between them were smooth and there was no real concern about tensions between Vietnamese and Khmer. This was largely due to the relatively positive perceptions they had of the current state of relations and the good inter-communal relations. Though a few Sharers mentioned that there were incidents of mistrust between the groups or uncertainty about future relations, most overwhelmingly expressed they had no concern or worry. They also mentioned their hopes for unity and peace, and happiness for all communities, wherever they lived or whatever race or ethnicity one came from.

Từ "Youn" và từ "Việt Nam" là hoàn toàn khác nhau. "Youn" là chỉ người còn "Việt Nam" là chỉ tên nước. Tôi rất không thích cái tên "Youn" bởi vì nó mang tính miệt thị.

“ The term ‘youn’ and the term ‘Vietnam’ are totally different. Youn refers to the people while Vietnam refers to the country. I don’t really like the word youn because it sounds vulgar. ”

A 67 YEAR-OLD MIXED KHMER KROM AND ETHNIC VIETNAMESE FISHERMAN LIVING IN KAMPOT FOR OVER 40 YEARS

ខ្ញុំច្រើន មិនអើប្រាកដ
 មិនច្រើន មិនអើប្រាកដ
 ០៩

“ I just know I don’t like it when people call me ‘youn’. ”

A MIXED VIETNAMESE-KHMER BUSINESSMAN
 IN KANDAL PROVINCE

PLEASE DO NOT CALL US "YOUN"

Vietnamese Sharers in Cambodia generally disliked the use of the term “youn” as many of them had experience being called this in the past. “Youn” is a term used in Cambodia to refer to Vietnamese. There are ongoing debates about the appropriateness of its use. Some are of the opinion that it is a highly pejorative and discriminatory term, while others argue that it is a recognised part of the Khmer vocabulary and has fallen prey to political correctness.

The Sharers, for the most part, found the word offensive saying that it sounded “harsh” or “vulgar”, especially when Khmer used it to refer to Vietnamese. They expressed feeling discomfort and disappointment when they hear this term and conveyed a strong distaste for what they associated as the underlying negative intention when the term is used. Many shared their preference that Cambodians use “Vietnamese” to refer to Vietnamese people, ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia, or the country of Vietnam.



DEVELOPING DISTASTE FOR THE WORD "YOUN" AWAY FROM THE BORDER

One ethnic Vietnamese man living in Mondulkiri told Listeners that he felt much more comfortable living in Mondulkiri as compared to the capital.

In Mondulkiri, he served pho noodle soup and said he felt loved by Indigenous peoples and Khmer communities. Most of his customers were soldiers and police officers who enjoyed eating his food and talking with him.

When he later moved to Phnom Penh, he had a very different experience. He said that people interacted with him like he was a bad Vietnamese man, calling him "ah youn" and sometimes harassing him at his house.

He explained that his experience in Phnom Penh made him feel very sensitive to the word "youn". After being labelled this way and hearing it used with such a negative tone, he felt it was a sarcastic and rude way to refer to people with Vietnamese roots.



A MEDIA SNAPSHOT IN TIME

Both traditional and social media was analysed over the course of the project. The objective was twofold. Firstly, understanding the media content over the given period provided contextual insight into the mainstream content passing through the public. Secondly, having an overall understanding of media content at the same time as Listeners deployed FLD in their communities provided opportunities to discover if there were connections between media discourse and public attitudes and perceptions.

A large portion of the media content related to Vietnam, Vietnamese, and border issues focused on stories and commentary regarding land issues and losing land to Vietnamese people in one form or another. Politics, history, and stories often focused or mentioned Cambodian land being taken by Vietnamese in both traditional and social media. Comments responding to social media posts were highly critical and often contained discriminatory language towards Vietnamese.

Of the 21 social media posts on Facebook that were analysed, 13 were deemed to reach levels of dangerous speech, according to the Dangerous Speech Framework criteria. The vast majority of social media posts used the word “youn” when referring to Vietnamese. The comments used the word even more often and nearly always in a negative context. Traditional media also provided references to business and trade between Cambodia and Vietnam. Articles on Vietnamese products containing dangerous chemicals making their way into Cambodia were fairly common, with similar narratives given by Sharers during the FLD work. There was also a specific media reference during the FLD fieldwork that emerged in a Kampot community with Muslim Sharers about the tensions between them and Vietnamese fishermen along the river. It was evident that media narratives were connected to views held by Sharers and statements during their conversations.



TOLD THROUGH THE GRAPEVINE

Sometimes stories can be told and retold until they end up being versions that no longer reflect the original story. Our media analysts and Listeners came together to compare a story they heard repeatedly on Facebook and in FLD conversations.

FROM AN FLD CONVERSATION...

Listeners from Kampot retold the story from local villagers that came up in numerous conversations during their FLD fieldwork. They said that five years ago, a confrontation occurred between a Muslim Cambodian and a Vietnamese fishermen at the river nearby. The Muslim Cambodian man was killed during the face-to-face encounter and brought home as a corpse, stirring up deep anti-Vietnamese sentiment in the village and throughout the Muslim Cambodian community in the province.

ON SOCIAL MEDIA...

Social media's account of the story tended to further sensationalise the events. In one viral Facebook post,

the account owner claimed that Vietnamese were so brave like crocodiles, that they even dared to kill a Cambodian fisherman inside Cambodian territory right in Kampot province. The shared video of the story had over 3.1 million views and 117,000 shares.

FROM A CONVERSATION WITH A RELATIVE OF THE DECEASED...

Another version of the story came from the mother of the Sharer who had provided the first story to the Listener. The mother claimed to know the real circumstances and retold the incident. She said that "Sak" was the Muslim Cambodian fisherman. He was the father of three children living in a village dependant on fishing. He was known to have a drinking problem. He was drunk very often and even drank when he went out on the boat to fish. Eight years ago when he was out on the water and after drinking heavily, he fell in and drowned. His body was found later but the Cambodian fishermen's boats were too small to bring it back to the village. A Vietnamese fisherman with a large boat was nearby and helped to take the corpse back to the family on the river. The Vietnamese fisherman also attended the funeral and participated in the traditional death ceremony.

Each version of the story had its own perspective and contributed to very different feelings to those who listened to it. The lesson learnt is that no story can be one-sided and it is important to hear more about any situation before making a conclusion.



Samnang comes from a Muslim community in Kampot province. He identifies as “Khmer-Islam”. At 21 years-old, he is pursuing his bachelor’s degree at a university in Kampot and actively participates in a local organisation in his home province. Like many young Cambodians, he gets a lot of his information from social media.

Samnang shares that he learnt a lot about real human communication during the FLD fieldwork. He challenged himself to initiate conversations with strangers at the very beginning, simply going up to people with his partner and starting with small talk to engage with them. He also pushed through his own discomfort at times when talking about sensitive topics, especially when his Sharers conveyed negative feelings towards other ethnic groups. He also learnt how to engage with people who might have very different ideas and opinions from him. Communicating with people face-to-face was quite different from interacting online through social media.

Samnang says he now sees communication as much more than agreeing with like-minded people. Communication also reflects how we interact with people who we might not understand or agree with.



Yak Nang temple in Ratanakiri's Ou Ya Dav district – Listeners in Ratanakiri spoke with Indigenous Kreung and Jarai communities as well as with Khmer and ethnic Vietnamese residents along the border district of Ou Ya Dav.

THE FLD

Using Facilitative Listening Design
For Your Project



BUILDING ON FACILITATIVE LISTENING DESIGN

*A guide to understanding and clarifying
perceptions through the process of listening,
analysis, and design*

FLD continues to evolve both as an information gathering tool and as a peacebuilding and conflict transformation intervention. As we continue to deploy FLD to better understand people who we may perceive as “the Other”, we explore new ways to experiment with the approach and tailor it for each context.

In the *From Centre to Periphery* initiative, geographically and ethnically diverse Listeners came from their communities and listened to people with whom they were most likely already familiar. Many Listeners also had a chance to engage with other ethnic groups in their community. This gave them the chance to listen to somewhat different or new discourse. One Indigenous Listener travelled to another province to listen to what other groups had to say, providing her with some new perspectives and insights that were shared in the Info-Space Lab.

This time, compared to the first round in Phnom Penh, the spotlight was more on inter-ethnic understanding and harmony rather than specific dynamics between groups. With a focus on four ethnic communities representing Khmer, Indigenous peoples, ethnic Vietnamese, and Cham Muslims, it was easier to explore ethnic issues and concerns for all groups. Although the overarching theme was to better understand existing anti-Vietnamese sentiment in border areas, the reality was that a space was provided to share issues of all ethnic groups.

Listening more acutely to ethnic minority groups went further than the theme at hand. With strong representation of minority voices in the FLD team, Listeners learnt just as much from their fellow Listeners as they had from their Sharers. One interesting dynamic that emerged was the space for ethnic minority participants to share and speak about their communities, particularly with their Khmer colleagues, which is the majority group of Cambodia. This space allowed for Khmer Cambodians to learn and hear new stories about their own country, and paved the way for deeper reflection on individual and national identities.

There is certainly potential for further development to create spaces within FLD to amplify the voices of minorities and provide opportunities for mainstream groups to truly listen during the process. Likewise, the inclusion of mainstream groups in FLD not only provides a space for discussing and challenging dominant narratives, but also creates an

opportunity for majority populations to participate and take up new learnings that emerge from the process and share them with their own communities.

The incorporation of an artistic element into the transformational stage was eye-opening. Through creating individual “Peace Masks” to form a collective display, the potential of using art in the FLD cycle was proven to be a highly effective component. Art is creative and can often be a form of indirect communication. Instead of using words, it uses other senses, as was done in the work of *Hear, Listen. Look, See. Touch, Feel*. By ‘feeling’ identity together, many unspoken aspects came out and helped to inform not only the study, but the potential of FLD interventions on the group itself. Recognising that art is powerful, the FLD team also believes that more work needs to be done around using art in the community. Particularly for peace practitioners who may not be artists or well adept in conceptual art processes, it is vital to better understand how to positively use art in peacebuilding and fit into familiar community frameworks, and always incorporating practices that consider a Do No Harm approach.

LOOKING FORWARD TOGETHER

The FLD Story continues to develop as it is deployed. Each initiative contributes to an evolving approach that can adapt to a unique context, to different participants, and to distinct forms of expression. At the core of all FLD activities is listening, an age-old human practice that requires a set of skills to successfully perform. So far, FLD conversations use traditional conversation techniques to gather information and better understand others. Listening to the Listeners goes a step further, providing a space for those who have been listening so hard to have a chance to listen to others in the group, and ultimately to themselves. It is within that space that much potential for transformation, both at the group and individual levels, has been explored.

LISTENING MORE INTUITIVELY THROUGH ART

The artistic intervention applied to this round of FLD recognised another dimension of listening. It has as much to do with what is not being said, but may still be “heard”. Through this initiative, the Peace Mask process was very revealing in demonstrating a full array of senses to express and

understand one another. Focusing the entire transformation stage around a collective art project was powerful. It helped to summarise different feelings, facilitate a group and individual reflection, and provide the opportunity to work together to reach out to the public on important issues with an exciting exhibition.

The FLD team plans to incorporate more artistic elements into FLD programming in hopes to provoke other human senses, along with listening, to engage with others. Together with artists, both international and local, community-based art practices are being collected and adapted for new curriculum design that can be integrated into the FLD process. Visual arts, performance arts, photography, and film and media are all being explored by the FLD team to be included into future rounds of FLD deployment. The team also hopes to study art in conflict transformation through a Do No Harm lens, particularly for non-artists who may be bringing art into peace and conflict work.

WE ASSOCIATE OURSELVES WITH OTHERS

Concluding *From Centre to Periphery* with a conceptual art activity focused on the individual sent a powerful message: To understand “the Other”, you need to understand yourself. Several members of the team as well as participants came together to consider how this message, and other lessons learnt along the way, could be applied to future work.

A major part of defining “oneself” is based on how we see ourselves within a group. The concept of “us” and “them” clearly differentiates which group one considers belonging to, and who makes up the group seen as “the Other”. For this work, the Khmer group forms the majority ethnic group in Cambodia. This contributes to a mainstream culture and well-known narratives that shape society at every level. One question that came up in the group was how can we truly put one group in the shoes of another? How can we help cultivate empathy towards those we see as “the Other”? Is it possible for a majority group to experience the life of a minority?

There are many activities and tools to facilitate simulations of majority/minority dynamics and experiences. However at the end of the day, participants return to their own identities, though with new insight. One idea that emerged was to consider other ethnic Khmer groups who

might be minorities elsewhere. The southern part of Vietnam is home to a significant ethnic Khmer population, well known for continuing to speak the native language and practise traditional culture. In Laos, many Cambodian refugees from the civil war era continue to live near the border region in Khmer communities. The Northeastern part of Thailand is the homeland of well over a million who identify themselves as Northern Khmer, or Thai-Khmer, particularly in the provinces of Surin, Buriram, and Sisaket. More contemporary migrant populations originally from Cambodia also live throughout Thailand, forming minority communities as both permanent and temporary migrant workers. Even in Myanmar, more distant pockets of Khmer culture can be seen in the Mon-Khmer minority groups, such as the Mon, Wa, and Palong who have a shared ancient history and connections with modern day Khmer Cambodians. The team engaged in *From Centre to Periphery* plans to explore the lives of these Khmer-connected minority groups and bring their stories and lives to the Cambodian public in hopes of bringing minority perspectives closer to home.

FACILITATIVE LISTENING DESIGN FOR IDENTITY

Another strong conclusion was the potential for FLD and art to explore identity. The transformative phase of the FLD allowed for a deep individual and collective journey to consider how not only ethnicity, but other layers construct our identity. Gender, disability, religion, social status, among many other facets, form part of our identities, and who we consider as belonging to “us” beyond our purely ethnic group association. Given that FLD provides a private and relatively safe space between the Listeners and the Sharer, there is potential for shared reflection and self-exploration during a conversation. Evidence of this can be seen in the data collected by the Listeners, with insights, perspectives, and even stories throughout the conversation logs and daily journals.

Those involved with *From Centre to Periphery* concluded that some exploration of FLD outside of conflict dynamics or negative sentiment could expand the scope of the approach and maximise the potential that the intimate conversational style provides. There are now plans to adapt FLD for future work on minority and gender issues around shared topics such as identity, violence, and marginalisation. The goal of this work will be to make the space to talk about and listen to a range of perceptions

using FLD as a tool to bring people together and share rather than solely gathering information. This next step falls into line with supporting the development of FLD as much as a transformative intervention within itself as a community-based research methodology.

STORYTELLING AND COUNTER NARRATIVES

One of the strengths identified in FLD has been the potential to gather diverse stories from both Sharers and Listeners. The collective stories are often used for analysis, searching for common themes and experiences that may show evidence of trends or patterns. However, there are always one-off stories that contribute to demonstrating that no single theme is homogenous. Such stories question mainstream narratives and even broader FLD findings. These stories have been used to highlight different views and challenge assumptions.

FLD provides a glimpse into fascinating human stories. The FLD conversation structure allows for stories to emerge, but provides neither the time nor the tools to deeply understand and retell the story more directly from the Sharer. Although this book provides numerous snippets of real human stories that speak to the context in the form of textboxes and one-pagers, each story could certainly expand to form an entire book in itself. Participants in *From Centre to Periphery* recognise that the stories captured from both Sharers and Listeners are one of the most valuable resources resulting from the FLD process. The FLD team believes that more work needs to be done to funnel stories through the process, and to retell them in creative and thought-provoking ways. FLD has the ability to seek out narratives from everyday stories in an initial stage. Another stage should take place to work on curating stories and bringing them to others to continue shedding light on select themes and issues with the aim of changing society for the better and building more tolerant and inclusive communities.

With support from





A year after our first *Who's Listening?* initiative showed that perceptions among residents in Phnom Penh about the border between Cambodia and Vietnam was a major concern, a second group of “Listeners” decided to confront this head-on. What was it about the border that caused such anxiety and emotion for those in faraway Phnom Penh?

Bringing Facilitative Listening Design to four Cambodian provinces bordering Vietnam, a diverse group of Khmer, Indigenous, Cham/Khmer Islam, Chinese-Cambodian, and ethnic Vietnamese went into their own communities to listen and learn.

What they heard does not always match with what had been shared earlier by residents in the capital. Different ethnic groups living side-by-side along the border have complex relations with their ethnic Vietnamese neighbours. Business plays a large role in connecting, but also personal relations tie people together and push them to reconsider preconceived notions and stereotypes towards “the Other”. History, existing narratives, and stories about each other continue to sometimes negatively affect dynamics at the community level.

In the end, we learn from communities along the border that living beside and being exposed to those who we consider different from us can fundamentally reshape how one group sees another.

