

# Aid Dependence in Cambodia: How Foreign Assistance Undermines Democracy

*Sophal Ear*

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**Sophal Ear : Aid Dependence in Cambodia: How Foreign Assistance Undermines Democracy** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Aid Dependence in Cambodia: How Foreign Assistance Undermines Democracy:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. An Invaluable Contribution to Understanding A Complicated Country By Debra Carney Using clear prose and vivid, meticulously researched case studies and examples, Dr. Sophal Ear analyzes a modern conundrum: why has Cambodia, despite being the recipient of massive amounts of foreign aid,

continued to languish near the bottom of so many measures of social and institutional development? Readers of this book will understand, along with much else, the disincentives for many rural Cambodians to cooperate with the Western response to halting bird flu and will learn about agricultural initiatives that worked-- and those that didn't-- and why. Dr. Ear's contention that the government should levy taxes to insure accountability (at present, foreign aid takes the place of taxes and most Cambodians have little influence with their entrenched, often corrupt, government officials) is compelling. Dr. Ear argues the overarching thesis of his book persuasively: foreign aid has often undermined and stymied true democratic reform in Cambodia. And, despite the best intentions of those who send this aid, Cambodia may not be well-served by much of it. Debra Carney, 2009 Fulbright Senior Specialist to the National Institute of Education, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

International intervention liberated Cambodia from pariah state status in the early 1990s and laid the foundations for more peaceful, representative rule. Yet the country's social indicators and the integrity of its political institutions declined precipitously within a few short years, and inequality grew dramatically. Conducting an unflinching investigation into the case of Cambodia, Sophal Ear uncovers the pernicious effects of aid dependence and its perversion of democracy. International intervention and foreign aid resulted in higher infant and child mortality rates in Cambodia in the 1990s and unprecedented corruption by the mid-2000s. Similarly, in example after example, Ear finds that the more aid dependent the country, the more distorted its incentives to develop sustainably. Contrasting Cambodia's twin economic engines, tourism and clothing, with its livestock sector and internal handling of the avian flu epidemic, he showcases the international community's role in preventing Cambodia from owning its national development. A postconflict state unable to refuse aid, Cambodia is rife with trial-and-error donor experiments and their unintended consequences, such as bad governance and poor domestic and tax revenue performance—a major factor curbing sustainable, nationally owned growth. By outlining the terms through which countries can achieve better ownership of their development, Ear offers a way forward for governments on the brink of collapse, despite ongoing dependence on foreign intervention and aid.

Using cross-national statistical evidence and his immense knowledge of Cambodian society, Sophal Ear has produced an important book on the perverse effects of development aid on governance. If this could be the starting point from which future discussions began, there would be a much greater chance of outsiders truly helping poor countries to develop. (James Robinson, Harvard University) Sophal Ear's *Aid Dependence in Cambodia* is both passionate and level-headed. Inspired by his family's history and based on extensive field interviews and careful case studies, it offers a sustained criticism of how aid policies have contributed to dependence and helped undermine fragile democracies. There are valuable lessons here for all countries attempting to build peace and development with international assistance. (Michael Doyle, Columbia University) Khmer Rouge survivor Sophal Ear is uniquely qualified to address the issue of aid and dependence in developing countries. Much more than academic criticism, *Aid Dependence in Cambodia* also charts a path for Cambodian reform. Although it is highly unlikely, Cambodian leaders would be wise to heed Ear's advice. (Peter Maguire, author of *Facing Death in Cambodia*)...offers valuable lessons not just for policy-makers working on Cambodia but also for other countries emerging from conflict or upheaval. (Sebastian Strangio *Asia Times*) Sophal Ear's work stands out for its social science rigour, its cohesion, as well as its probing quality, offering a new standard of scholarship on aid dependence not only applicable to the Cambodia case but easily replicable around the developing world. (Geoffrey C. Gunn *Asian Affairs*) An important and timely contribution to the field. It raises awareness around Cambodia, and sheds light on what is otherwise widespread apathy and complacency. (Peter Tan Keo *The Diplomat*) [Ear's] concise study provides valuable insights into the role of Official Development Assistance (ODA) in promoting governance in post-conflict societies. (D. Gordon Longmuir *Pacific Affairs*)... Sophal Ear's logical, yet personal account of the impact that international foreign aid has on Cambodia, the country of his birth, should cause the entire aid community to reflect inwardly. (*Small Wars Journal*) A pungent, grounded contribution... (*International Journal of Asian Studies*) An excellent introduction to the literature on development on the region (and globally)... Everyone hoping to do some good in Cambodia ought to read this book... (*Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*) About the Author Sophal Ear is an assistant professor of national security affairs at the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School, where he teaches courses on postconflict reconstruction and political economy. Previously, he worked for the World Bank and the United Nations. A graduate of Princeton University and the University of California, Berkeley, he arrived in the United States from France as a Cambodian refugee at the age of ten.