
As Phnom Penh is developed as the flagship city of Cambodia, increasingly once uncontested land parcels are subject to land grabs and speculative investment. This has brought to the fore fundamental and persistent inequalities in the country, highlighting the opacity of its land rights institutions. This paper attempts to break-down the reality of the landlessness crisis in Cambodia, unpacking the political, economic and social forces influencing the outcomes of land disputes. Much research has critically analyzed the role and form of popular participation in development. This thesis studies how the normative stance of non-governmental organizations as facilitators of participation in development trajectories translates into support for those excluded by the dominant land rights institutions; those groups vulnerable to unplanned landlessness. What is the potential for non-governmental organizations to optimize such participation to address extreme inequalities in land rights by translating it into citizenship for vulnerable communities? How is this affected by prevailing aid paradigms and state activity? In the Cambodian context, determinants of aid-flows must recognize that failures in the land market are largely due to the state itself, and therefore re-frame their policies to emphasize the role of non-state actors in delivering land security.