



អង្គការសហគមន៍ខ្ពែរលើ-រតនគិរី Highlanders Association –Ratanakiri

ទីស្នាក់ការ: ផ្ទះលេខ ៧៨ ភូមិភ្នំ សង្កាត់យក្សឡោម ក្រុងបាស្រឡា ខេត្តរតនគិរី

Office: Street 78 Phnom Village, Sangkat Yeak Loam, Banlung Town, Ratanakiri Province.

Tel: (+855) 017 386 277, 097 390 1266 / Email: haratanakiri@gmail.com

Highlanders Association (HA)

Narrative Report

Reporting Period: January–August 2026

Main Target Area: 10 target villages across 5 districts in Ratanakiri Province

Target Villages: Kampak, Phi, Padol, Sieng Say, Tumpoun Reang Thum, Trak, Samot Loe, Tang Se Mlu, Tiam Loe, and Kanat

1. Executive Summary

From January to August 2026, the Highlanders Association (HA) made steady progress in supporting the rights, participation, self-governance, cultural heritage, and sustainable development of Indigenous communities in Ratanakiri Province. Key focus areas included enhancing community-based natural resource management, preserving Indigenous knowledge and traditional practices, promoting sustainable livelihoods, advancing gender equality and social inclusion, and strengthening organizational capacity.

During the reporting period, HA recorded **4,089 recorded instances of participation across project activities**, with women accounting for approximately **65.5%** of total participation. Key milestones included routine community-based forest monitoring and patrols, completion and handover of a rural water supply infrastructure project in Trak village, scaling up of community seed bank initiatives, operationalization of 16 GBV primary support spaces at the commune level, legal information and support for Indigenous Communal Land Titling (ICLT), and policy engagement and stakeholder dialogue across local, sub-national, national, and international mechanisms.

HA also consolidated strategic partnerships with Indigenous Peoples' Organizations (IPOs), relevant government line ministries, development partners, and civil society alliances. These inter-institutional collaborations strengthened field operations in community-based natural resource management, climate-resilient agroecology,

gender mainstreaming, social accountability, land tenure security, policy engagement and stakeholder dialogue, and organizational capacity development.

1.1 Organizational Context and Strategic Framework (2026–2030)

Under its 2026–2030 Strategic Plan, “**Toem Glang**,” HA operates as an Indigenous-led organization working to support the rights, participation, self-governance, cultural heritage, and sustainable development of Indigenous communities in Ratanakiri Province, including the protection of customary land and natural resource management rights.

HA’s work is organized around 6 main program areas:

Program 1: Support Indigenous People by Language Groups (IPLGs) and Their Initiatives

HA supports Indigenous language groups to strengthen local leadership and community governance, including through the Center of Excellence in Village Governance (CoE_VG) approach and regular coordination meetings.

Program 2: Preserve Indigenous Knowledge and Cultural Rights

HA documents Indigenous knowledge and traditional practices and supports the transfer of knowledge from elders to younger generations.

Program 3: Improve Indigenous Peoples’ Livelihoods

HA promotes climate-resilient agroecology, Indigenous seed conservation, community-managed market gardens, self-help savings groups, and household economic resilience.

Program 4: Participate in Policy Engagement and Stakeholder Dialogue

HA works with partners and civil society networks to engage relevant stakeholders in discussions on land tenure, forestry, protected areas, environmental protection, and free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC).

Program 5: Support Land, Territory, and Resource Rights

HA assists Indigenous communities in achieving land tenure security and exercising customary land and natural resource management rights, including providing legal information and technical support for Indigenous Communal Land Titling (ICLT) processes across target villages.

Program 6: Organizational Capacity Development

HA strengthens internal governance, financial management, staff skills, monitoring systems, and organizational planning.

2. Strategic Partners and Program Alignment

HA's work in 2026 was implemented with support from donors, development partners, government institutions, and civil society networks.

Key partnerships included:

- **IPAF:** Grant support for the rights of Indigenous Peoples, documentation of Indigenous knowledge and traditional practices, and community-led development initiatives. The project cycle concludes at the end of September 2026.
- **REDAA:** Community-based natural resource management, sustainable livelihoods, traditional agriculture, and community resilience.
- **SISIP / CARE / ACCESS 2 / DFAT:** Gender equality, GBV prevention, response, and referral, community accountability, and disability inclusion.
- **Partners Asia and other networks:** Cooperation with AIPP, CIPA, NADR, CCC, NGO Forum, Indigenous language-based networks in Ratanakiri, and other Indigenous Peoples' Organizations and civil society partners.

These partnerships allowed HA to combine Indigenous knowledge and traditional practices with technical support, training, stakeholder engagement, and resource sharing across civil society and government channels.

3. Community Engagement and Outreach

HA maintained active engagement with communities throughout the reporting period.

January–March 2026

HA recorded **1,733 recorded instances of participation across project activities**, disaggregated as follows:

- IPAF: 217 participants
- REDAA: 392 participants
- SISIP/CARE: 1,124 participants, with women representing 63.3%

April–June 2026

HA recorded **1,366 recorded instances of participation across project activities** through core project interventions, including:

- Crop and seed strategy workshops: 77 participants, 40.3% women
- Forest patrols: 159 participants, 31.4% women
- GBV prevention, response, and referral (SISIP): 779 participants, 71.2% women
- Wild food and community garden activities: 210 participants, 56.2% women

- Water system management: 142 participants, 50.7% women

July–August 2026

HA recorded **990 recorded instances of participation across project activities**, disaggregated by donor project:

- REDAA: 210 participants, 50% women
- IPAF: 196 participants, 65.5% women
- SISIP/CARE: 567 participants, 65.3% women
- Disability health assessments: 17 participants, 17.6% women

Overall Engagement

Cumulative monitoring data from January to August 2026 indicates a total reach of **4,089 recorded instances of participation across project activities**, with female representation maintained at **65.5%**.

Participation was particularly strong in activities related to GBV prevention, response, and referral, rural water supply management, Indigenous seed conservation, community gardens, and sustainable livelihoods.

4. Land, Forest Protection and Sustainable Management, and Water Infrastructure

4.1 Forest Conservation and Community Patrols

HA supported community forest patrols, monitoring, and forest protection and sustainable management activities across five districts. These initiatives focused on preserving ecologically, culturally, and spiritually significant sites, including:

- **Tuok Yeang Waterfall Ecotourism Area:** 34 hectares, including 11 hectares of core conservation area.
- **Halim Lake Area:** 12 hectares.
- **Phnom Patot Sacred Forest:** 50 hectares. The area also hosted a traditional Brao rain-requesting ceremony in June 2026.
- **Padol Village Forest Areas:** Manyal (9 hectares), Yasal (6 hectares), and O Chi (7 hectares).
- **Phi Village Sacred Forest (Phnom Kwak):** 30 hectares were surveyed and boundary-mapped on August 26, 2026, with CIPO–CIWA and IRAM, as part of a larger 220–hectare forest area.

Community forest patrols assisted Indigenous communities in monitoring illegal logging, mitigating wildfire risks associated with wild honey collection, and addressing land boundary concerns through coordination with relevant authorities.

4.2 Community Water System in Trak Village

With support from REDAA, HA completed and handed over a community water system in Trak village on June 18–19, 2026.

The system includes:

- A **19-meter-deep well**
- An **8-meter elevated water storage tank**
- Capacity of approximately **20–60 cubic meters per day**
- Water allocation for domestic supply and smallholder agricultural irrigation

HA also supported the establishment and training of a **Community Water Management Committee** to oversee operation, maintenance, and management of the system.

5. Indigenous Knowledge and Traditional Practices, Indigenous Seeds, and Agroecology

5.1 Traditional Seed Banks and Crop Preservation

HA monitored and expanded traditional seed banks across all 10 target villages. Preserved crops include native corn, pumpkin, beans, taro, traditional rice varieties, and chili.

HA also promoted **rotational farming** and the cultivation of useful wild food plants near homes, based on the community principle:

“Bring what is in the forest to cultivate near the home.”

These activities support food security, preservation of Indigenous knowledge and traditional practices, and continued use of locally adapted crop varieties.

5.2 Income-Generating Community Gardens

Community gardens generated income for households and collective community activities.

- **Kampak Village:** 6,900,000 KHR generated from soybean and cassava production.
- **Tang Se Malu Village:** 1,910,000 KHR generated from cassava, sesame, and rice production.

Communities used part of the income to support local road repairs, funeral assistance, forest patrol supplies, and emergency support for vulnerable families.

5.3 Youth and Elder Knowledge Transfer

On July 8 and July 21–27, 2026, HA produced documentary videos documenting the transfer of Indigenous knowledge and traditional practices on seed conservation from village elders to younger generations in Kampak, Trak, Sieng Say, and Phi villages. The activity had a budget of **\$1,242.04**.

On August 14, 2026, HA organized a provincial consultation workshop in Banlung with **63 participants, including 24 women**. Participants included the Deputy Provincial Governor and other relevant stakeholders. The workshop presented research findings and videos documenting traditional seed conservation.

HA also documented stories of Indigenous model farmers, including **Ms. Klan Thaem from Phi village**, to share practical experience with other communities.

6. Gender-Based Violence, Gender Equality, Disability Inclusion, and Safeguarding

6.1 GBV Response and Community Support

HA constructed and formally handed over **16 GBV primary support spaces** to Commune Administrations in Veun Sai and neighboring districts. These facilities enhance survivor-centred, confidential, and accessible support services for community members affected by gender-based violence.

The Veun Sai GBV team managed **seven cases**, including three cases that were fully resolved and four that remained under ongoing case management during the reporting period.

6.2 Capacity Building and Social Accountability

HA strengthened the capacity of **40 Community Accountability Facilitators (CAFs)** (74% women) on Implementation of the Social Accountability Framework (ISAF) standards and Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Sexual Harassment (PSEAH) safeguarding policies.

As part of the SISIP mid-term evaluation, HA interviewed **450 community members from 45 villages across five districts**, with women representing 88.8% of respondents.

6.3 Disability Inclusion

On August 5–6, 2026, HA worked with Exceed Worldwide to provide health screenings, assistive devices, and prosthetic limbs to **17 persons with disabilities**.

HA also advocated for disability identification documents and greater inclusion of people with disabilities in Commune Investment Plans.

6.4 GBV Awareness and Outreach

HA conducted GBV awareness activities in:

- **Nine villages in Koun Mom District**, July 14–24, 2026: 214 participants, including 155 women.
- **Sueng Village**, August 17–18, 2026: 27 participants.

These outreach sessions contributed to strengthening community awareness regarding GBV prevention, response, and referral, survivor-centred support services, and institutional referral pathways.

7. Policy Engagement and Stakeholder Dialogue, Networking, and External Representation

7.1 Land Tenure, Legal Information, and Dispute Resolution

On July 3, 2026, HA entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the National Authority for Alternative Dispute Resolution (NADR) in Phnom Penh to support Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms for land disputes affecting Indigenous communities. The signing ceremony convened 84 key stakeholders, promoting constructive policy engagement and stakeholder dialogue.

HA also supported GPS consultations and boundary mapping to address land boundary concerns involving **Development Project** and the Phi village sacred forest.

In addition, HA provided legal information and support to **199 villagers** regarding communal land registration procedures and relevant land and forestry frameworks.

7.2 National and International Engagement

HA participated in national, regional, and international forums, including:

- GEF-8 in Uzbekistan
- The ICERD mission
- UN Indigenous Peoples' dialogue
- The 6th IKPA Conference in Sabah, Malaysia

On August 10, 2026, HA joined the celebration of the **International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples in Stung Treng**, attended by more than 940 participants. The event focused on promoting the role of Indigenous midwives.

HA also worked with CIPA, ICSO, LASED III, and NGO Forum to engage with **13 national ministries** on Indigenous Navigator data, land and debt issues, PESA, and environmental and social standards.

7.3 Staff and Organizational Capacity

From August 18–27, 2026, four HA executive leaders completed intensive training on monitoring and evaluation and KoboToolbox, facilitated by Planet Urgence.

8. Organizational Development and Resource Mobilization

8.1 Governance and Staff Development

HA continued to strengthen its internal management and governance. The organization operates with a **five-member Board of Directors and a five-member Management Team**, supported by regular monthly management meetings and all-staff meetings.

HA also maintained financial controls and prepared for annual external audits to strengthen transparency, accountability, and donor confidence.

Staff development during the reporting period included training and joint learning on:

- Action research and critical thinking
- Grant proposal writing, budgeting, and donor reporting (starting in March 2026)
- Agroecology, agroforestry, wild food plants, seed banks, and traditional farming
- Land, forestry, protected area, and environmental laws
- Digital security and social media advocacy
- Monitoring, evaluation, and learning
- Community governance and leadership

HA also supported the Krung Yung, Tumpoun, and Phoung Wang language networks through coordination meetings and local initiatives.

Community-Based Data Collection Facilitators received training to support community self-monitoring using village profiles and Participatory Mapping and Land Use tools. HA also continued to encourage women and youth to take active roles in local leadership, policy engagement, community-based natural resource management, and local economic development.

8.2 Grant Proposal Development and Resource Mobilization

During 2026, HA expanded its fundraising efforts through both independent and joint proposals.

- **Partners Asia:** HA successfully secured **\$20,000**.
- **TF and WWF:** HA participated in joint submissions with CIPA members. WWF is currently processing support to CIPA, hosted by CIPO, while the TF proposal remains under review.
- **Landesa:** HA submitted proposals three times since March and is awaiting confirmation.
- **IUCN:** HA submitted one proposal and is awaiting a decision.
- **Darwin Initiative and Research Grants:** HA submitted a joint proposal with CORD and MRG and is awaiting a response. HA also submitted two research proposals with CIPL and an independent researcher.
- **MLI / CT Alliance:** A joint proposal was planned, but no progress had been made by the end of August.
- **CEPF and Honnold Foundation:** Proposals submitted to these funding opportunities were unsuccessful.
- **Upcoming:** HA plans to develop and submit two additional proposals in October 2026.

8.3 Policy Development and Institutional Governance

In 2026, HA significantly strengthened its institutional infrastructure and governance frameworks by developing and updating core organizational policies. These policy frameworks establish high standards of safety, gender equity, communication integrity, and operational accountability across all program activities and partnerships:

- **Safeguarding and Protection Policy:** Establishes institutional zero-tolerance approach regarding Child Safeguarding, Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (PSEAH), and abuse. It incorporates survivor-centered reporting channels, referral pathways, and context-appropriate risk mitigation protocols tailored to Indigenous community contexts.
- **Gender Equality, Equity and Inclusion Policy:** Provides an institutional framework to promote gender equality, women's empowerment, protection, and leadership across HA's governance, staffing, and community-level interventions. It includes guidelines for gender-responsive budgeting, capacity building for Indigenous women, and addressing barriers to participation.
- **Communication and Information Management Policy:** Sets clear protocols for official representation, crisis communications, data protection, and digital

security. It emphasizes Indigenous languages, cultural respect, and Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) standards in all public and organizational messaging.

- **Policy on Voluntary Cash Contributions:** Establishes clear guidelines for collecting, managing, and utilizing voluntary contributions. It strictly prohibits involuntary contributions, unrecorded fund collection, falsification of records, or personal misuse, while detailing accountability and disciplinary measures for policy violations.
- **CIPA Travel Policy and HA Policy Manual:** HA has adopted the CIPA travel policy, which will be implemented next year. Additionally, HA is currently in the process of developing the HA Policy manual, which is expected to be completed by the end of this year.

9. Key Challenges and Risk Management

9.1 Climate and Environmental Risks

Heatwaves and drought affected wild food planting, while unseasonal rainfall in July disrupted crop cycles. Wild honey collection also increased the risk of forest fires.

Response: HA will adjust planting calendars, strengthen community fire management, and promote practices that improve soil and water retention.

9.2 Economic Pressures

Expansion of commercial crops such as cashew, cassava, and soybean has increased the use of chemical pesticides. Income-generating activities, including NTFP collection like mushroom collection and malwa nut collection, also sometimes affected community members' availability for meetings.

Response: HA will continue promoting sustainable agriculture and explore market opportunities for Indigenous products.

9.3 Destruction and Theft

The Phi village seed bank lock and water pipes were damaged, and the engine of a community sawmill was stolen.

Response: HA will strengthen community protection measures and cooperation with local authorities, including through the Safe Village–Commune approach.

9.4 Land Tenure and Boundary Concerns

Land boundary concerns involving the Development Project and neighboring villages remained an issue. Forest patrols were also affected by shortages of fuel and food.

Response: HA and CIPA members will continue GPS boundary mapping, community consultations, legal information and support, policy engagement, and coordination with relevant authorities. HA will maintain ongoing dialogue with relevant government institutions at all levels to support constructive stakeholder engagement.

Risk Management Matrix

Risk Area	Main Challenge	Planned Response
Climate and environment	Drought and wildfire risks	Adjust planting calendars and strengthen community fire management
Community infrastructure	Damage to water pipes and seed bank facilities	Strengthen local protection and cooperation with authorities
Economic pressures	Expansion of commercial monocrops	Promote sustainable agriculture and market opportunities for Indigenous products
Land tenure	ELC boundary concerns	Continue GPS mapping, community consultation, legal information and support, and policy engagement

10. Community Recommendations and Priorities for Q4 2026

Based on community feedback and lessons from implementation, HA will prioritize the following actions during the final quarter of 2026:

- Indigenous Credit Safeguard Framework:** Coordinate with relevant authorities including the National Bank of Cambodia, Microfinance Institutions (MFIs), NGO Forum, and MLI to establish credit protection guidelines, mitigating over-indebtedness risks associated with pledging Indigenous Communal Land Titles (ICLT) as loan collateral.
- Water System Maintenance Fund:** Establish a user-supported maintenance fund for the Trak village water system to help ensure its long-term operation.
- Sacred Forest Recognition:** Engage relevant authorities to advocate for appropriate official recognition of sacred and spiritual forests, separate from the collective land title process, and explore opportunities for collaboration to include Indigenous heritage and knowledge in local education.
- Safeguarding Compliance and Feedback Mechanisms:** Secure formal Board adoption of the Safeguarding Policy and operationalize accessible Community

Feedback and Grievance Redress Mechanisms (FGRM), incorporating digital QR-code reporting channels.

5. **Annual Operational Planning:** Finalize the Annual Operational Plan for 2026–2027 and the SISIP Annual Plan.
6. **Model Village Governance:** Expand community governance practices through cooperation with AIPP, CIPA, and other partners.
7. **Forest Patrols:** Continue monthly community forest patrols and strengthen coordination with relevant authorities through the Safe Village–Commune policy framework.

11. Conclusion

From January to August 2026, HA achieved meaningful progress in strengthening local leadership and community governance, forest protection and sustainable management, preserving Indigenous seeds and Indigenous knowledge and traditional practices, improving rural infrastructure, supporting GBV prevention, response, and referral, promoting disability inclusion, and engaging in policy dialogue regarding land tenure security and natural resource rights.

The results also demonstrate the importance of continued investment in Indigenous-led approaches. Community members, particularly women, elders, youth, and local leaders, played an important role in implementing activities and identifying practical solutions to local challenges.

For the remainder of 2026, HA will focus on consolidating these achievements, strengthening community-led systems, addressing emerging risks, and mobilizing additional resources to sustain and expand successful initiatives.

Reported by:

Sotheara