

Peer Review

Review of: "The Bearing of the Less: Fulfilling Carbon Neutrality and the National Political Economy in Virachey National Park, Cambodia"

Saphangthong Thatheva¹

1. Independent researcher

Strengths

- clear, timely topic at the intersection of Indigenous livelihoods, conservation policy, and climate governance.
- introduces a potentially valuable concept ("bearing of the less") to frame political ecology in this context.
- engages multiple actors (Indigenous communities, government agencies, NGOs, investors) and acknowledges power dynamics.

Weaknesses

- terminology remains underdefined in the main text (carbon colonialism, parikthan).
- long, multi-idea paragraphs hinder readability; transitions between description and analysis are weak.
- uneven sourcing and attribution; some claims lack explicit sources or confidence levels.
- limited methodological transparency; no explicit limitations or bias discussion.
- theoretical linking to literature (political ecology, resource mobilization, climate policy) is implicit but could be strengthened.
- no explicit theoretical model or framework; no dedicated policy recommendations section.
- minimal visual aids; recommended tables/figures are absent.

Detailed guidance and suggested edits

1) Define key terms at first use

- Suggested sentence: “Carbon colonialism refers to the transfer of climate-related costs and governance—often mediated by international finance and market mechanisms—onto marginalized communities, while external actors capture most benefits.”

- parikthan: define immediately after the first Khmer term appears.

- Suggested sentence: “Parikthan (Khmer): provincial-level conservation and enforcement authority responsible for park administration and implementation of related orders.”

- Implementation in the glossary

- Add a glossary box near the start:

- Carbon colonialism: definition.

- Parikthan: definition.

- Chamkar: swidden-agriculture plot within protected areas.

- CPA: community protected area.

- ELC: Economic Land Concession.

- VNP: Virachey National Park.

2) Break long paragraphs into shorter and focused ones, targeting 4–6 sentences per paragraph; one main idea per paragraph.

- Example reshaping

- Paragraph on park expansion and governance: one paragraph for policy action, one for the legal/administrative process, one for on-the-ground consequences.

- Paragraph on Indigenous livelihoods: separate paragraph detailing Brao/Kavet subsistence practices and constraints.

- Paragraph on responses: NGO/government/academic reactions in a dedicated paragraph.

- Paragraph on analytical aim: conclude with a transition to theory.

3) Improve transitions between empirical description and analysis; end descriptive paragraphs with analytic transition sentences:

- Example: “These legal and administrative moves appear to constrain Indigenous livelihoods, raising questions about which actors bear the costs of climate governance.”

- Start analytic paragraphs with a clear topic sentence that frames the theoretical lens (political ecology, governance, etc.)

4) Balance voices and attribution for every factual claim; attach an explicit source and note confidence.

- Use a uniform sourcing approach after each claim: (SourceAuthorYear, page or section) or (NGO Report, 2024).

- Include a short “Evidence and Confidence Matrix” (bullet list or table) summarizing:

- Claim → Sources → Confidence (high/medium/low) → Notes

- Ensure NGO statements, government statements, and local voices are clearly demarcated (e.g., “According to MoE documents, ...”, “Indigenous interviewees report...”, “NGO analysis suggests...”) with citations.

5) Add a precise timeline box or timeline figure.

- 2023: Park expansion sub-decree; VNP size from 332,500 ha to 405,766 ha (cite Royal Government of Cambodia, 2023).

- March 2025: Court actions against highlanders; specify dates if available.

- Where exact dates are unavailable, flag as “as reported by X” and indicate data gaps.

6) Acknowledge stance and consider counterpoints; include a brief authorial stance statement in the methodology or introduction.

- Example: “This analysis foregrounds Indigenous perspectives and critical policy readings; it recognizes potential biases in NGO reports and government sources.”

- Present at least one plausible counterpoint (e.g., biodiversity or security rationales cited by MoE) with a citation, and discuss why the authors still find the Indigenous perspective compelling.

7) Add a dedicated limitations section in the Methodology:

- Example: “Limitations: The study focuses on Veunsai and Taveng districts around VNP and relies on interviews, NGO reports, and selected government documents. Findings may not generalize to all border districts or all park contexts. NGO testimony may reflect funding cycles; government documents may reflect policy narratives rather than deliberations.”

8) Map findings to literature

- Explicitly situate findings within political ecology, resource mobilization, and climate policy literatures.

- State what the study confirms (e.g., gravity of coercive conservation), extends (e.g., the specific mechanism “bearing of the less”), or challenges (e.g., assumptions about NGO effectiveness).

- Add a short literature-review bridge before the Findings section that anchors your empirical observations to these literatures.

9) Theoretical model or framework (text or figure) that links mechanisms to outcomes:

- Mechanisms: institutional coercion (policy expansion), legal ambiguity (land rights vs. park boundaries), livelihood disruption (loss of swidden plots).

- Mediators: governance legitimacy, market interests (ELC/Chinese investment), NGO involvement.

- Outcomes: migration pressure, livelihood diversification, resistance strategies.

- If you can't insert a figure, a concise bulleted model in a dedicated subsection is enough.

10) Policy recommendations

- Include a dedicated “Policy implications and recommendations” section with concrete, actionable options:

- Community-based conservation or co-management with explicit FPIC and veto rights over boundary changes.

- Tenure security and formal recognition of community lands inside/outside PAs.

- Transparent, participatory impact assessments prior to boundary changes or land concessions.

- Benefit-sharing arrangements tied to conservation investments.

- Strengthened FPIC processes and inclusive governance mechanisms.

11) Tables, figures, and appendices

- Map: Virachey National Park with Veunsai and Taveng districts.

- Timeline: key dates (2023 sub-decree, 2025 court actions).

- Table: Actors, Roles, Sources, Confidence.

- Appendix: Interview guides, coding framework, anonymized quotes (with consent).

- If data-heavy, provide Appendices with interview protocols, coding scheme and codebook, and summary quotes (with participant consent).

Formatting and language

- Abstract needs editing for clarity and concision
- Original: “This paper examines the ways of life of two groups of Indigenous peoples..”
- Edited: “This paper analyzes the livelihoods of two Indigenous groups living near Virachey National Park and juxtaposes their practices with state-led conservation policies shaped by the financialisation of nature.”
- Introduction transition
- Add a sentence after the first paragraph to anchor the theoretical frame: “This study uses a political-ecology lens to examine how global climate governance intersects with local land-use regimes, often at the expense of marginalized communities.”
- Source attribution sentence
- Add after a claim: “According to the Royal Government of Cambodia (2023), the park expanded from 332,500 ha to 405,766 ha in 2023, which absorbed surrounding farmland.”

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.