Cambodia relocates villagers living around the Tonle Sap River

Tonle Sap the largest freshwater lake in Southeast Asia is acknowledged as a World Heritage site. It is one of the world’s most productive inland fishing waters. The surrounding forests and floodplains also play an important role in sustaining this ecological system which supports the livelihoods of over 1.2 million people.

Unfortunately, Cambodia's Tonle Sap Lake is running out of water, underwater ecosystem in the river has been severely damaged and the amount of fish has decreased sharply. This is due to various reasons: illegal fishing practices, medium and large-scale commercial fishing, hydropower dams, deforestation,... and eventually, the relocation of 800 people.

The reasons for this was that five floating villages along the Tonle Sap cause environmental pollution and damage the waterway's ecosystem; in order to have a total control over the region, the government has no option other than removing them completely.

Another justification is the government’s concerns over potential infectious diseases in the water are likely to put the citizens’ health at risk.

Although the local authorities will make sure the new housing locations are supported by appropriate infrastructure to allow the people to make a living from farming and fishing, it is not a long-term solution to environmental crisis in general. Further attention should be diverted to preventing the dire consequences in the first place, not waiting for them to happen and find ways fix.