

# Enhancing state management in mobilizing resources for the traditional festivals of the Khmer people in the Mekong Delta

M.A. Ly Thi Be Luyen

College of Economics and Law - Tra Vinh University

**Abstract:** *The traditional festivals of the Khmer people in the Mekong Delta form an important part of their spiritual and cultural life, contributing to strengthening national unity and promoting the development of cultural tourism in the region. However, the mobilization and use of resources in state management for these festival activities still face many limitations and do not yet correspond to the potential and value of Khmer festivals. This article focuses on analyzing and assessing the current situation of state management in mobilizing resources for several typical Khmer festivals in the Mekong Delta. It then proposes according solutions to strengthen state management, promote socialization, and enhance the role of the community in preserving, utilizing, and developing the value of traditional Khmer festivals in the context of contemporary international integration.*

**Keywords:** *Resource mobilization; state management; traditional festivals; Khmer people; Mekong Delta.*

## 1. Introduction

In the context of renovation and international integration, the traditional festivals of the Khmer people have increasingly attracted attention in the Mekong Delta as part of localities' strategies for sustainable cultural and tourism development. However, practical realities show that state management of Khmer festivals still faces various shortcomings, particularly in mobilizing, allocating, and using resources. Funding for festival organization still relies mainly on the state budget, while participation from the private sector,

enterprises, and the community remains limited. In addition, the socialization of cultural and festival activities has not been implemented comprehensively and the coordination mechanisms across different levels and sectors lack cohesion and effectiveness. These limitations not only affect the quality of festival organization and the efficiency of state management, but also reduce the potential to utilize and spread the unique cultural, economic, and tourism values of Khmer festivals in the process of sustainable development. Therefore, studying this

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issue is essential in clarifying the role of the State in regulating, orienting, and creating favorable conditions for stakeholders' participation. This study also proposes practical solutions to promote internal resources, strengthen socialization, and link preservation activities with the economic and cultural development of the Mekong Delta region.

## **2. Current situation of resource mobilization in managing the traditional festivals of the Khmer people in the Mekong Delta**

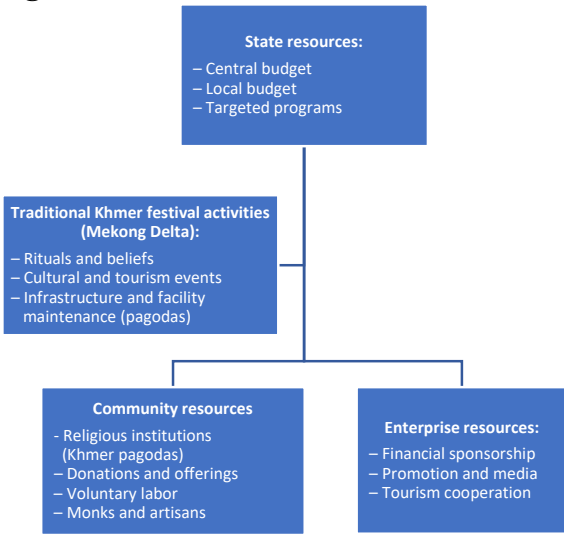
According to the Government's Resolution No. 306/NQ-CP dated 05 October 2025 on the adjustment of the national master plan for the period 2021-2030, with a vision toward 2050, the Mekong Delta currently consists of five provinces and cities - Vinh Long, Dong Thap, An Giang, Ca Mau, and Can Tho - with a total area of more than 36 thousand square kilometers and a population of about 20 million, of which the Khmer residents accounts for approximately one million. The Khmer community possesses a long-standing, rich cultural tradition closely associated with the system of pagodas and Theravada Buddhism, which together form a unique and distinctive cultural identity. Their typical traditional festivals, such as Chol Chnam Thmay (New Year Festival), Sen Dolta (Ancestor Worship Festival), Kathina (Robe Offering Ceremony), and Ok Om Bok (Moon Worship Festival), all hold profound cultural and spiritual values, reflecting the community's spirituality and philosophy of life.

The traditional festivals of the Khmer people in the Mekong Delta constitute an essential part of their cultural and spiritual life and, at the same time, serve as a soft resource for promoting cultural tourism and local economic development. These festivals not only express distinct cultural identity but also create spaces for community interaction, strengthen national unity, and serve as a connecting link in the process of cultural integration.

At present, the structure of resource mobilization for traditional Khmer festivals in the Mekong Delta mainly includes three groups: the state budget, community-religious resources, and the private sector-enterprises. Among these, the state budget dominantly funds management activities, security, infrastructure repair, and organization of large-scale events. Community-religious resources contribute significantly to the maintenance of rituals, conservation of traditions, and preservation of cultural spaces. In contrast, private-sector and enterprise resources remain merely limited, mainly through event sponsorship or media support.

*Diagram 1* below shows that the structure of resource mobilization for the traditional festivals of the Khmer people in the Mekong Delta is organized according to a model of three complimenting pillars: the State, the Community, and Enterprises. In this model, *state resources* play a leading role by providing foundational funding through the central budget, local budgets, and targeted programs, mainly serving management tasks, infrastructure repair, and event organization. Community resources, particularly from the network of Khmer pagodas, play an essential role in maintaining rituals, spiritual practices, and traditional cultural activities through contributions of offerings, material donations, voluntary labor, and the participation of monks and artisans. In addition, enterprise resources, though still modest, are increasingly important, contributing financial sponsorship, promotional support, and tourism linkages. The combination of these three resource groups shows that the current mobilization mechanism is diverse, but also indicates the need to improve policies to ensure balance, sustainability, and effective integration of resources in the management of Khmer festivals.

**Diagram 1. Structure of mobilized resources**



*Source:* Compiled by author (2024).

In Soc Trang province, the provincial budget allocates about 2-3 billion VND annually for the organization of the Ok Om Bok Festival - Ghe Ngo Boat Race, of which more than 70% comes from the state budget (Soc Trang Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2024). According to the 2024 report, Tra Vinh province also allocated nearly 4 billion VND (about 60% of the total funding) for the 2024 Culture - Tourism Week and the Ok Om Bok Festival (Tra Vinh Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2024); Vinh Long province spent approximately 3.3 billion VND on non-regular cultural activities (Vinh Long Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2024). In addition, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism regularly provides financial support through the Target Program for Cultural Development for the period 2021-2025 to preserve and promote the value of Khmer festivals in the Mekong Delta (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2021). However, the budget allocation remains project-based, dependent on each locality's annual balancing capacity and short-term

policy priorities, which makes it challenging to sustain and promote Khmer festivals' cultural and spiritual values in a genuinely sustainable manner.

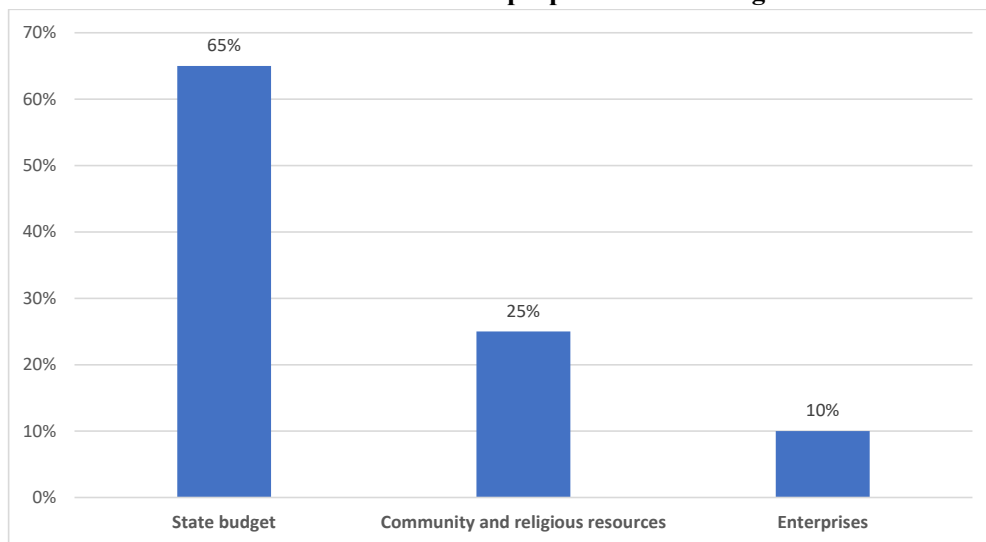
*The second source of resources* comes from contributions by pagodas and the community, including both financial and human resources. Khmer pagodas are the primary venues for organizing most traditional festivals: in Soc Trang province, nearly 90% of Khmer festivals are held at pagodas, typically at Doi Pagoda, Kh'leang Pagoda, and Serey Kandal Pagoda. Funding for the organization is mainly raised through donations, contributions from Buddhist followers and benefactors, and voluntary labor from residents to set up stages, decorate spaces, and prepare ceremonial offerings. In Tra Vinh, pagodas such as Ang Pagoda and Hang Pagoda serve as cultural and spiritual centers of the community, where residents contribute cash, agricultural produce, food, or direct support for logistical services during the Sen Dolta Festival. These community resources significantly reduce pressure on the local

budget and reflect strong communal solidarity; however, most pagodas do not yet have unified guidelines on the management, accounting, and disclosure of contributions. Some localities have piloted the “Community Mobilization and Supervision Committees” model to record and coordinate resources, but further regulations from state management agencies are needed to ensure transparency and effectiveness.

*The third source of resources* comes from the private sector and enterprises, initially mobilized through sponsorships, advertising, or service provision during festivals. In Soc Trang province, the locality established the Sponsorship Mobilization Subcommittee for

the 6<sup>th</sup> Mekong Delta Ok Om Bok - Ghe Ngo Boat Race Festival and the 1<sup>st</sup> Soc Trang Culture, Sports and Tourism Week in 2024. Participants include organizations, individuals, and businesses that provide financial sponsorship, promotional activities, and event support. This helps state management agencies supplement resources for festival organization while businesses gain opportunities to promote their brands. However, certain companies are still hesitant to participate due to financial constraints, limited time, and, particularly, because local incentives and encouragement policies are not yet sufficiently attractive to firmly engage the private sector in festival-related activities.

**Chart 1. Proportion of resource mobilization for traditional festivals of the Khmer people in the Mekong Delta in 2024**



*Source:* Compiled by author (2024).

*Chart 1* shows that the structure of resources still leans heavily toward the state budget. With a 65% share, public funding plays a dominant role in providing the financial resources to organize festivals, maintain infrastructure, and implement cultural and spiritual activities. Community and religious resources account for about 25%, reflecting the critical role of the Khmer pagoda system, Buddhist followers, artisans, and residents in

maintaining rituals, contributing offerings, and providing voluntary labor. Meanwhile, the business sector contributes only 10%, indicating that the private-sector socialization remains highly limited and has not matched the region’s cultural and tourism development potential. This resource structure reflects the current heavy reliance on the state budget, while also suggesting the need for improved policies to increase business participation and

better harness community resources in the coming time.

In practice, the capacity to mobilize resources for Khmer festivals has expanded over the past few years as regional tourism has recovered. According to statistics, the Mekong Delta welcomed about 52.2 million tourist arrivals in 2024, with plenty of traditional Khmer festivals becoming key highlights of the region's cultural tourism offerings. Tra Vinh province alone received more than 3.8 million visitors, including 75,786 international tourists (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2025). In Soc Trang, the 2024 Ok Om Bok Festival combined with the Ghe Ngo boat race attracted hundreds of thousands of visitors, becoming a regional cultural-tourism event and creating favorable conditions for mobilizing sponsorships and developing Khmer cultural tourism products. These figures demonstrate the significant potential of socialized resources through tourism and the value of local cultural branding, while also showing the considerable dependence on public funding and traditional community-based resources.

Alongside these achievements, the resource mobilization in managing Khmer festivals in the Mekong Delta still reveals several limitations. *First*, the resource structure remains imbalanced, heavily dependent on the state budget and voluntary contributions, while mechanisms to attract participation from businesses and the private sector are not yet sufficiently appealing. *Second*, management capacity and financial transparency at the grassroots level remain limited, especially in managing, using, and disclosing donations and sponsorships. *Third*, the public-private coordination model in cultural management has not yet been clearly institutionalized, lacking mechanisms for distributing responsibilities and benefits among the State, the community, and

enterprises. *Fourth*, the rapid development of service activities during festivals poses a risk of commercialization, which may undermine the solemnity and traditional cultural values of Khmer festivals if not promptly regulated by competent authorities.

Overall, the resource mobilization for managing the traditional festivals of the Khmer people in the Mekong Delta is showing positive signs of improvement. The State continues to play a leading role in regulating and ensuring basic financial resources, while socialized resources from the community and businesses are being gradually expanded. However, to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of this process, it is necessary to refine institutions further, strengthen grassroots management capacity, enhance financial transparency, and develop mechanisms to encourage public-private cooperation. This will help further leverage the cultural, economic, and tourism potential of Khmer festivals, contributing to the sustainable development of the Mekong Delta region in the coming period.

### **3. Solutions to strengthen state management in mobilizing resources for the traditional festivals of the Khmer people in the Mekong Delta**

The Communist Party of Vietnam affirms that culture is “the spiritual foundation of society, both the goal and the driving force of sustainable national development,” in which the culture of ethnic minorities, including Khmer culture, constitutes an essential component of the unified yet diverse Vietnamese culture. Resolution No. 33-NQ/TW dated 09 June 2014 of the 11<sup>th</sup> Party Central Committee states that cultural development is the cause of the entire people, led by the Party, managed by the State, and with the people as the main subjects of creation and enjoyment; at the same time, it emphasizes the need to diversify investment



sources and encourage the socialization of cultural activities. This viewpoint establishes the ideological foundation for mobilizing comprehensive resources to preserve and promote the value of the Khmer people's traditional festivals.

The Vietnam Cultural Development Strategy to 2030, issued under Decision No. 1909/QĐ-TTg dated 12 November 2021 of the Prime Minister affirms that cultural development must be placed on par with economic and socio-political development, and simultaneously requires mobilization and effective use of all societal resources to develop culture in association with tourism development, the green economy, and international integration. Accordingly, mobilizing resources for Khmer festivals not only preserves intangible cultural heritage but also serves as a driving force for promoting tourism and economic development, thereby improving the material and spiritual well-being of the Khmer community in the Mekong Delta.

Thus, the Party and State share a consistent orientation toward maximizing resource mobilization from the State, the community, and enterprises for cultural development, while placing the Khmer people at the center - both as the preserver and organizer of festivals and as beneficiaries. Based on the assessment of the current situation and limitations in resource mobilization for managing Khmer traditional festivals, this article proposes several solutions to enhance the State's regulatory role, encourage active participation from the community and enterprises, and ensure the sustainability of preserving and promoting ethnic cultural values. The leading solutions include:

*First*, improve institutions, mechanisms, and policies on mobilizing and using resources. It is necessary to promptly complete the legal framework for the management and dissemination of festival activities, particularly

for the traditional festivals of the Khmer people and those held in the Mekong Delta region in general. The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, in coordination with the Ministry of Finance and local authorities, should develop specific guidelines on the procedures for mobilizing, receiving, using, and disclosing financial resources for festivals, including donations, sponsorships, and voluntary contributions. In addition, preferential policies on taxation, credit access, or promotional support should be introduced for enterprises that sponsor events, invest in infrastructure, or develop cultural-tourism products associated with festivals. Institutionalizing public-private partnership models in the field of culture and festivals is a key solution to attracting off-budget resources while ensuring the harmonization of interests among the State, the community, and enterprises. The State should also consider issuing a separate legal document to regulate the management of financial resources, donations, sponsorships, and socialization for traditional festivals. It should prioritize budget allocation to support provinces with a large Khmer population through targeted programs in culture, tourism, and sustainable poverty reduction.

*Second*, strengthen state-level grassroots capacity to mobilize, use, and effectively manage resources for festivals. The effectiveness of resource mobilization largely depends on the capacity of the administrative apparatus and the staff involved in cultural and tourism management. Therefore, training and professional development for commune-level cultural-social officials, especially in areas with large Khmer populations, should be enhanced with a focus on financial planning, cultural project management, social mobilization, and sponsorship management. At the same time, a precise mechanism for coordination among specialized agencies, mass organizations, pagodas, and the

community is needed to manage and allocate festival-related resources. Localities with various Khmer festivals should establish specialized units or intersectoral coordinating committees to advise on, consolidate, and monitor investment resources for festival activities, while also reviewing and developing a comprehensive plan for Khmer festivals to highlight cultural value and tourism potential in avoidance of overlap or excessive commercialization.

The application of information technology and digital transformation in festival management - such as online donation management, electronic licensing, digital promotion, and monitoring of revenues and expenditures - should also be strengthened to ensure transparency and improve financial management efficiency. This is an important solution that helps state management agencies better control resources while enhancing community - and enterprise confidence in festival organization.

*Third*, promote socialization to preserve and enhance traditional festivals. The Party and State have affirmed the policy of socializing cultural activities in various documents, such as Decree No. 69/2008/ND-CP dated 30 May 2008 on socialization in culture, sports, education, and health; Resolution No. 33-NQ/TW dated 09 June 2014 of the Party Central Committee on building and developing Vietnamese culture and people; and the Vietnam Cultural Development Strategy to 2030 under Decision No. 1909/QĐ-TTg. For the traditional festivals of the Khmer people in the Mekong Delta, the socialization process has initially been implemented through mobilizing enterprises and the Khmer Theravada Buddhist community to participate in festival sponsorship and organization; integrating tourism and festivals to attract social resources; and encouraging the participation

of Khmer pagodas, artisans, monks, and local associations in maintaining rituals and customs.

However, the limited results require creation of a more favorable environment to reduce the burden on the state budget and unlock the combined strength of society. Local governments should proactively establish festival support funds and Khmer cultural preservation funds, mobilizing voluntary contributions from organizations, individuals, enterprises, and the Khmer diaspora, while encouraging public-private partnership models in festival organization and cultural tourism development. Enterprises may invest in infrastructure, services, and communication, while the State retains the role of orientation, quality assurance, and safeguarding traditional cultural values. In addition, the role of the Khmer community must be promoted, encouraging residents to participate in monitoring and providing social feedback regarding resource use; establishing mechanisms to acknowledge and honor enterprises with positive contributions; and fostering cooperation among religious institutions, social organizations, enterprises, and state agencies to form distinctive Khmer cultural-tourism value chains in the region.

*Fourth*, promote the role and contributions of the community and Khmer religious institutions. In the cultural life of the Khmer people, the phum and sóc communities, together with Khmer pagodas (Wat), hold a central position in cultural, spiritual, and social activities. Traditional festivals such as Chol Chnam Thmay, Ok Om Bok, or Sen Dolta are closely associated with pagodas and local residential communities. Promoting the role of the community and religious institutions is therefore not only consistent with tradition but also aligned with the State's orientation of building a culture in which the people are the masters and the

community is the foundation. At present, Khmer pagodas and local communities play an essential role in maintaining rituals and in teaching Khmer language, culture, and folk arts. Khmer pagodas serve not only as spiritual institutions but also as environments for cultural and moral education, where monks, Achar, artisans, and elders teach rituals and customs to younger generations.

Local authorities need to closely coordinate with Khmer pagodas to organise traditional festivals, communicate culture to younger generations, mobilise residents to adopt civilised lifestyles, and protect the festival environment. At the same time, mechanisms should be developed to support and honour monks, artisans, and Achar as “holders of cultural soul,” providing them with proper conditions both to participate in training and cultural exchange and to contribute their opinions to local cultural policies. In addition, Khmer festivals are not only cultural activities of the Khmer community but also occasions for interaction among the Kinh, Khmer, and Hoa communities, helping strengthen solidarity and build a shared cultural space. Creating conditions for different ethnic groups to participate in festival activities will enhance awareness, strengthen community cohesion, and promote Khmer culture more broadly. Moreover, promoting the role of the community and religious institutions in organising performing arts, media, and festival promotion will help mobilise social resources naturally and sustainably.

*Fifth*, strengthen regional linkages and integrate resource mobilisation with the development of cultural tourism. Provinces with large Khmer populations need to enhance coordination within the Mekong Delta region to build and organise inter-regional festival event chains, such as the Khmer Culture - Tourism Festival or the Mekong Delta Khmer

Culture Week, thereby forming a shared brand to attract investment, sponsorships, and tourists. Linking with travel agencies, tourist destinations, OCOP programs, and national tourism promotion campaigns will help increase revenue and lay the foundation for sustainable reinvestment in festival activities. At the same time, it is necessary to study mechanisms for coordinating inter-regional budgets and sharing investment resources for cultural and tourism infrastructure associated with Khmer festivals, ensuring consistency and effectiveness in the development process. Alongside internal regional linkages, expanding international cooperation, and mobilising support from UNESCO programs, the Asia Foundation, ASEAN cultural funds, and other organisations will significantly contribute to the heritage preservation, artisan training, and worldwide promotion of Khmer festivals.

*Sixth*, ensure cultural orientation and sustainability in resource mobilisation, avoiding the commercialisation of festivals. Strengthening resource mobilisation must go hand in hand with preserving original cultural values, preventing distortion of festivals for purely economic purposes. Management agencies need to establish criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of resource mobilisation in association with cultural preservation goals, traditional education, community solidarity, and sustainable tourism development. Monitoring, inspection, and evaluation of the use of financial, material, and human resources for Khmer festivals should be conducted regularly and transparently, with community participation, socio-political organisations, and the media.

Strengthening resource mobilisation in state management for the traditional festivals of the Khmer people in the Mekong Delta is not only an urgent requirement to ensure funding for the organisation but also a strategic solution to preserve and promote



ethnic cultural values in the context of industrialisation, modernisation, and international integration. The harmonious combination of the State's regulatory role, the community's proactive participation, and enterprises' cooperation will create a solid foundation for the sustainable development of Khmer culture in the new period.

#### 4. Conclusion

The traditional festivals of the Khmer people play a vital role in their cultural and spiritual life and in shaping the cultural identity of the Mekong Delta region. Therefore, mobilizing resources for the management and enhancement of Khmer festivals is not merely a technical financial task but also a strategic requirement closely linked to the goals of cultural heritage preservation, economic and tourism development, and the strengthening of ethnic unity within the region. The achievements gained in recent years show that the efforts of the State, the community, and enterprises have all contributed to maintaining, restoring, and promoting various Khmer festivals as distinctive cultural and tourism products. However, the resource structure remains unbalanced, with a high reliance on the state budget, while socialized resources and enterprise participation remain incommensurate with the existing potential.

In the context of accelerated cultural management reform, sustainable tourism development, and deepened international integration, improving the effectiveness of resource mobilization requires a long-term vision that is consistent across institutions, implementation mechanisms, and local management capacity. Diversifying resources from the State, the community, enterprises, and international cooperation must be closely connected with preserving core cultural values, safeguarding festival cultural spaces, and strengthening the role of the Khmer community as key actors. Only through a

harmonious combination of the State's regulatory role, the endogenous strength of the community, and the engagement of the private sector can the management of Khmer festivals become truly sustainable, thereby contributing to the cultural, economic, and social development of the Mekong Delta in the new period.

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