

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE COMPLETION REPORT¹

Division: SEAE

TA No., Country, and Name			Amount Approved: \$250,000	
TA4283-CAM: Participatory Poverty Assessment of the Tonle Sap			Revised Amount: \$425,000	
Executing Agency: Ministry of Planning		Source of Funding: Poverty Reduction Cooperation Fund (PRF)	Amount Undisbursed: \$25,353.95	Amount Utilized: \$399,646.05
TA Approval Date: 18 December 2003	TA Signing Date: 12 April 2004	Fielding of First Consultant: 3 September 2004	TA Completion Date Original: 31 March 2005	Actual: 31 May 2008
			Account Closing Date Original: 31 March 2005	Actual: 25 February 2009
Description				
<p>The Tonle Sap covers 250,000 to 300,000 hectares (ha) during the dry season, and is the largest freshwater lake in Southeast Asia. Owing to a unique hydrological phenomenon, the Tonle Sap River, which drains the lake, reverses its flow during the wet season, when the Mekong River flows into the lake, inundating 1.0–1.6 million ha for several months of the year. The extensive wetlands born of this cycle are home to an enormous biodiversity of fish, reptile, bird, mammal, and plant species. With fisheries that are among the world's richest, the Tonle Sap directly and indirectly meets the livelihood needs of at least 15% of the population, and the nutrition needs of about 80%, particularly the poor. But the very richness of its resources also makes the Tonle Sap a site of growing conflict, often violent. Growing population pressure, inequality of access to resources and conflicts over rights, severe poverty, and ethnic discrimination place the lake, and the people it supports, at risk.</p> <p>The Tonle Sap was designated as a multiple-use protected area by royal decree in 1993 and has received growing international attention. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared it a biosphere reserve in 2001 in recognition of its international and national significance. The Government has seen the need to manage the environment around the Tonle Sap in a sustainable way. Its poverty reduction partnership agreement with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has focused ADB's poverty reduction efforts on the lake in view of its environmental significance and its critical role in environmental conservation and management and in poverty reduction. Despite their rich resource base, poverty is fairly high in the six surrounding provinces, home to most of those who depend on the lake for survival. ADB's Country Strategy and Program Update (CSPU) (2004–2006) lays down a basic approach to poverty reduction around the lake. The Tonle Sap strategy launched by ADB in 2005 sets out a plan for ADB to partner with the Government, nongovernment organizations (NGOs), and communities in support of pro-poor economic growth, broader access to assets, and management of natural resources and the environment. As a first step, a reliable base of knowledge on the sustainable use and preservation of natural resources, the nature of poverty, and sustainable ways of reducing poverty had to be developed.</p> <p>Gender inequality and social exclusion based on ethnicity are major challenges for poverty reduction and social development in and around the Tonle Sap. Women head up to 25% of all households and are made vulnerable by the lack of adult labor, high dependency, lack of education, lack of livelihood options, dual workloads, low social status, and limited decision-making opportunities. Ethnic minorities, including Vietnamese born and living in Cambodia and to a lesser extent the Khmer Islam or Cham, lack equal access to resources, structures, and processes, as well as opportunities to improve their livelihoods. The Tonle Sap strategy must remedy the serious dearth of knowledge on specific aspects of poverty and vulnerability around Tonle Sap. Participatory poverty research allows people to be heard on urgent issues and thus influence policy makers. The technical assistance (TA) was aimed at reducing the gap in reliable information on poverty and exclusion around the lake.</p>				

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Economic and social surveys provide quantitative estimates of poverty. The household socioeconomic surveys carried out by the National Institute of Statistics (NIS) make available much-needed statistical information about living standards and the extent of poverty. A range of demographic and socioeconomic information—about household characteristics and composition, income and expenditure, education and literacy, health and nutrition, crime and safety, labor force, and consumer prices—is collected. Intercensal surveys and specific surveys are undertaken from time to time. But the quality and comparability of data collected have been questioned.

Besides quantitative data, the Government and external funding agencies underscore the need to gather and analyze qualitative data and to further deepen participatory research into poverty. The first participatory poverty assessment (PPA) in Cambodia, which took place in 2000 with ADB assistance, informed the poverty reduction policies arising from the Second Socio-Economic Plan (SEDP II).

ADB, the World Bank, and other donors have been working with the Government to undertake the next generation of PPAs, which are region-specific. For the Tonle Sap PPA, they agree that a common methodological framework is needed. This PPA has been closely linked with the work of NIS and the Poverty Monitoring and Analysis Technical Unit. The end users of the TA outputs would be the Government; donors, particularly the World Bank and ADB; NGOs; and the Tonle Sap communities.

Expected Impact, Outcome, and Outputs

The design of this advisory TA proved to be highly relevant. The TA helped build an authoritative base of knowledge on poverty in the project area. A micro-level perspective on poor people's experiences with poverty and their response to it was developed, shedding light on the nature of poverty and vulnerability, the impact of macro policies on local institutions, and processes that either include or exclude the poor—men, women, children, and ethnic minorities—from development. The study helped in the development of sustainable poverty reduction strategies based on a better understanding among policy makers of what the poor need. The outputs delivered were the following: (i) a synthesis of all studies on poverty in the region as well as reports and documents that use participatory and qualitative methods to assess the perceptions of the poor; (ii) a comprehensive participatory and qualitative report on the perspectives of the poor on poverty in the Tonle Sap basin; (iii) a handbook on methodology; (iv) commune reports and audiovisual materials in Khmer for easy access and use by commune councils in local planning; (v) workshop reports; (vi) outputs for the Tonle Sap website; and (vii) a published report. The TA results are foreseen to help in prioritizing and designing future ADB projects.

Delivery of Inputs and Conduct of Activities

The TA design was well formulated. It was participatory and had inputs from the Government, research institutes, development partners, and civil society. The World Bank collaborated with ADB in the design, with a view to complementarity of methods, inputs, and outputs on PPAs supported by these organizations.

The terms of reference were well articulated and responsive to the needs of the TA. The consultant, Cambodia Development Research Institute (CDRI), did exceedingly well, particularly in the long process of field work, data inputting, analysis, and writing. The problems that were encountered pertained to (i) CDRI's being excessively stretched for human resources because of commitments to other research projects alongside, (ii) frequent changes in personnel, and (iii) the inadequacy of the budget for translation such that supplementary budgetary requests had to be submitted to PRF.

The Ministry of Planning (MoP), the executing agency for the TA, satisfactorily facilitated cooperation between NIS and consultant CDRI.

ADB technical and administrative supervision of the TA was satisfactory. Review missions were held twice a year, and included field stays in the research sites, participation in stakeholder workshops, and guidance during the writing-up phase. Project completion was delayed by the complexity of analysis, on the one hand, and also by changes in personnel and CDRI's overcommitment of human resources.

Evaluation of Outputs and Achievement of Outcome

Project activities were implemented efficiently in relation to resources and inputs utilized.

The research results were written up in a final volume, *We Are Living with Poverty All the Time*, which was published by CDRI. This final report has been very well received by the donor and academic communities, as well as by the Government and civil society in Cambodia. It provides an authoritative database for poverty measurement in the

Tonle Sap region and has certainly contributed to establishing participatory research as a valid research methodology in Cambodia poverty research. Through the report, people's participation has been popularized as a way of understanding the nature of poverty and the views of stakeholders, among government agencies like NIS, which are entrusted with poverty assessments. A micro-level perspective on poor people's experiences with poverty and vulnerability in the communities around the lake has been built up. The report has been translated into Khmer and widely circulated to provincial governments and district agencies, setting a firm baseline for future poverty assessments. The outputs of the field research have also been made available to the communities themselves for their continued use in community development and monitoring of outcomes.

Training provided under the TA was found to be highly useful by NIS staff, provincial and district administrations, and research staff. Government staff and civil society working at the grassroots were brought up to date through stakeholder workshops in the provincial and district centers.

Overall Assessment and Rating

The project is rated as highly satisfactory. The TA was highly successful in building up an authoritative database on poverty in the Tonle Sap region, using participatory methods.

Major Lessons

The implementation of the TA showed the importance of seeing to it that no major changes in consultant personnel occur during TA implementation, and that the research institution does not overcommit itself in ways that can adversely affect the TA.

Recommendations and Follow-Up Actions

The final report of the TA should be used as a baseline for the design of ADB-assisted projects.

ADB should circulate the final report widely among all stakeholders in the Greater Mekong Subregion through its resident missions as well as through its website.

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