

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE COMPLETION REPORT ^a

Division: MKAE

TA No. and Name TA 5822-REG: Protection and Management of Critical Wetlands in the Lower Mekong Basin			Amount Approved: \$1,650,000		
			Revised Amount: -		
Executing Agencies: Asian Development Bank	Source of Funding: Japan Special Fund/ Government of Finland		TA Amount Undisbursed \$79,262.23	TA Amount Utilized \$1,560,737.77	
			Completion Date		
Approval 22 December 1998	Date Signing NA	Fielding of Consultants 29 November 1999	Original 31 December 2001	Actual 30 April 2003	
			Closing Date		
			Original 31 December 2001	Actual 31 December 2003 ^b	
<p>Description</p> <p>The TA supported the development of ADB's strategy to promote regional cooperation and ensure the sustainability of the lower Mekong River Basin by focusing on two wetland areas of critical importance to the lower Mekong river basin: Tonle Sap great lake (Cambodia) and Siphandon wetlands (Lao PDR). The Tonle Sap wetlands are part of a unique hydrological and ecological system that provides significant economic and environmental benefits to Cambodia and other parts of the Greater Mekong Subregion. The Tonle Sap hydrological system supports one of the most important freshwater fisheries of Southeast Asia and is critical to the preservation of its biodiversity. However, human population pressures and increase in human activities (including degradation of the flooded forest area, agricultural encroachment, over fishing and hunting), place this unique wetland area under threat. Siphandon wetlands are important for migratory fish in the Mekong River and are a habitat for many fish species, water fowl, and other wetland flora and fauna, many of which are endangered due to development pressures.</p> <p>Objectives and Scope</p> <p>The overall objective of the TA was to contribute to the protection and preservation of the unique wetland environment and flooded forests of the lower Mekong River Basin by (i) developing sustainable management systems for renewable natural resources and agricultural production systems; and (ii) improving the understanding of the relationship between hydrology, wetland biodiversity, and productivity. The immediate objective was to prepare detailed proposals for investment projects focusing on supporting community-based integrated management of fisheries, forestry, and agricultural resources in the inundation zone of Tonle Sap and Siphandon.</p> <p>Key components included (i) feasibility studies of potential investment projects at Tonle Sap and Siphandon; (ii) review of relevant previous and ongoing projects in the two areas; (iii) detailed analysis of institutional and policy setting in each area, including capacity building and training needs of the proposed executing agencies for the investment projects; (iv) review of fisheries laws, regulations and policies and preparation of a proposal to ensure sustainable management of fishing concessions and fish sanctuaries in Tonle Sap; (v) trials to reestablish the flooded forests in unused areas in Tonle Sap; (vi) trials to control the noxious weed <i>mimosa pigra</i> in Tonle Sap; (vii) small-scale pilot program in Cambodia to raise ducks as an alternative to collecting eggs and chicks of migratory fowl; (viii) support for fish spawning and migration studies; (ix) monitoring of water pollution in floating villages of Tonle Sap and riparian communities, and preparation of a proposal to mitigate pollution, particularly during the dry season; (x) preparation of basic infrastructure designs for the key ports in Tonle Sap; (xi) preparation of an initial environment examination and social assessment for the investment projects; (xii) analyses of the policies and management systems governing the use of wetland resources between Lao PDR and Cambodia; (xiii) promotion of a dialogue between riparian communities on either side of the border on cooperative management of shared resources; and (xiv) development of community-based wetland resources management systems in Cambodian riparian communities, comparable with those in Lao PDR.</p> <p>Evaluation of Inputs</p> <p>This was the second regional TA for GMS to include preparation of feasibility studies for investment projects in Laos and Cambodia.^c The TA was designed to be resource efficient and had the intention of supporting a set of complementary activities such as institutional and policy analyses, technical studies, pilot activities, and promotion of cross-border cooperation. At the same time, as noted in project processing, the design was highly complex. In retrospect, the TA was</p>					

^a This TA Completion Report is based on desk review and meetings with key staff familiar with the TA.

^b Majority of the TA services have been completed. To this end, this TCR has been prepared per PAI 6.08. Balance of the TA will be utilized to strengthen the consultant's final output by 31 December 2003.

^c The other was TA 5771-REG: Poverty Reduction in Remote GMS Watersheds.

overly ambitious, and its complexity may have added to its implementation difficulties. The TA received good support from the implementing agencies in Laos and Cambodia, and from the TA Steering Committee.

Successful TA implementation depended on coordination and cooperation with other development partners that support preservation and management of wetlands, the aim being to benefit from their expertise while minimizing duplication. The main collaborating agencies were the Mekong River Commission (MRC) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). However, the complexity of TA design placed strains on such coordination, as demonstrated by the slow preparation and generally poor quality of the feasibility studies.^d This was exacerbated by UNDP's slow recruitment of consultants, a process which was governed by the time-consuming procedures for accessing PDF-B grant funds from the Global Environment Facility. In a similar manner, the TA consultants were not able to undertake the fish spawning and migration studies in association with MRC.

The TA consultant's technical proposal gave every expectation that the Consultant would be able to meet the requirements of the terms of reference. However, a number of implementation issues arose: (i) staffing and personnel management issues; (ii) coordination difficulties (i.e., with MRC and UNDP); and (iii) communication issues. The Consultant was also expected to work in a consortium with other organizations, but this did not materialize. Overall, the Consultant may have been better prepared, both at its head office and on the ground, for the formidable tasks required of the TA.

Evaluation of Outputs

The TA faced many implementation challenges and the Consultant did not achieve the expected outputs, such as those related to cross border initiatives and piloting activities. Many outputs were delayed, and those submitted were not of an adequate standard. Given the delays and quality issues, the Consultant was requested to focus on the key output of this TA: the feasibility studies. The feasibility studies produced were below ADB standard. Moreover, few of the technical reports were considered to be of adequate professional quality. In the end, the contract period was reduced and new individual consultants were engaged to strengthen the feasibility study reports. Additional staff missions and staff inputs were required to raise the quality of outputs. Outputs not achieved included (i) trials to reestablish flooded forests (determined not needed and natural activities regeneration and protection is the best solution); (ii) trials to control noxious weeds (replaced with desk review); (iii) pilot program to raise ducks (dropped); (iv) initial environment and social assessment (waited for clear definition of Project), and (v) promotion of dialogue with riparian communities.

Following a large staff effort and additional inputs of individual consultants, the TA led to the development of the following pipeline of investment and TA projects in Cambodia: (i) Tonle Sap Environmental Management Project, including an advisory TA (ADTA) for Improving the Regulatory and Management Framework for Inland Fisheries (approved in 2002); (ii) Chong Kneas Environmental Improvement Project, including an ADTA for Capacity Building of the Tonle Sap Harbor Management Authority (2002 PPTA, 2004 loan); (iii) Tonle Sap Sustainable Livelihoods Project (2003 PPTA, 2006 loan); (iv) Capacity Building for Inland Fisheries Research and Development Institute (2003 ADTA); (v) Study of the Influence of Built Structures on the Fisheries of the Tonle Sap (2003 ADTA); (vi) Establishment of the Tonle Sap Basin Management Organization (2003 ADTA); and (vii) Tonle Sap Lowland Stabilization Project (2004 PPTA). The TA activities also provided valuable insights and highlighted the complexity of managing the Tonle Sap biosphere reserve.

Overall Assessment and Rating

The TA did not meet all its objectives and the quality of outputs was not satisfactory. Following a large staff effort and allocation of further resources, the TA led to the development of a major program of studies and investment projects collectively referred to as the Tonle Sap initiative. To this end, the TA is rated partly successful.

Major Lessons Learned

The TA demonstrated the challenges of attempting to implement a wide scope of disparate activities ranging from the broad policy perspective of transboundary management of shared resources to pilot studies within a RETA. Based on the implementation experience, an important lesson is the need for clear guidance and close supervision of TA consultants to ensure adherence to the objectives and schedule of the TA. Greater staff time is needed to supervise TAs of such scope and complexity.

Recommendations and Follow-Up Actions

Extreme caution should be exercised in designing regional TA intended to prepare investment projects. RETAs should be kept simple in terms of implementation arrangements and should not attempt to resolve all of the issues ranging from national policy to piloting of local initiatives. Consultant selection is, as always, a critically important step in the successful implementation of TAs.

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^d Most of the TA consultant's efforts were expended trying to meet the terms of reference for Cambodia, and the consultant's outputs relating to Lao PDR were minimal.