

Meeting on the Tonle Sap Initiative

31 March 2005

11:00 am – 12:00 nn

Room 6452 South

List of Participants:

From ADB:

Olivier D. Serrat, Senior Project Economist (Natural Resources), MKAE
Suzanne M. Nazal, Civil Society Cooperation Officer, NGOC

From NGO Forum on ADB (Forum)

Pen Raing Sey - FACT
Hoeuen Honey - FACT

Meeting Summary:

1. Mr. Serrat explained that:

- Cambodia is at a crossroads in its development as it moves from a postconflict situation towards a more normal development paradigm. However, recent relatively robust growth has not led to a significant reduction in poverty, and achieving many of Cambodia's Millennium Development Goals will be difficult. The priorities and strategies identified in the Government's Rectangular Strategy aim to address this, and ADB's Country and Strategy Program 2005–2009 was developed in support.
- Cambodia's economy depends heavily on the unique ecosystem of the Tonle Sap basin, which is itself an important subset of the Mekong basin. Yet, despite the natural and ecological wealth of the Tonle Sap basin, it is one of the poorest regions of Cambodia. The population growth rate is rapid, the population is young, and social indicators low. Competing pressures on natural resources have put the entire basin at risk of overexploitation.
- ADB's Tonle Sap Basin Strategy has been formulated in support of the Country Strategy and Program and forms the basis for setting priorities and planning assistance in the Tonle Sap basin over the next 5–10 years. In the Tonle Sap basin, the development objectives are to foster, promote, and facilitate (i) pro-poor, sustainable economic growth, (ii) access to assets, and (iii) management of natural resources and the environment.
- The Tonle Sap Initiative is a partnership of organizations and people working to meet the poverty and environment challenges of the Tonle Sap. The Tonle Sap Initiative was instituted to ensure that opportunities are realized and that constraints are overcome. The major prospect is realization of the productive potential of the Tonle Sap and preservation of its unique natural resources. Its exact opposite is failure to resolve conflicting demands on the latter in ways that best meet objectives. The driving factors that may take the partnership either way relate in particular to (i) the basin-wide approach, partnerships, and commitment. Against this background, the Therefore, for practical reasons, ADB's approach encompasses the following important tactics: (i) geographical phasing of interventions, (ii) development of the

- institutional, policy and regulatory framework, (iii) acquisition and dissemination of knowledge, (iv) enablement of stakeholders, and (v) forging of partnerships.
- Implementation of the Tonle Sap Basin Strategy will afford a significant and positive contribution to more effective basin management; offer possibilities for cooperation with local, provincial, and national stakeholders to balance ever-increasing demands on the lake's resources; and encourage continuity, give confidence to stakeholders, and present opportunities to resolve current and future challenges. This concentration of resources will also catalyze other bilateral and multilateral endeavors.
 - At the request of the Government, ADB has decided not to proceed with loan fact-finding for Chong Kneas Environmental Improvement. The Government could, of course, address social and environmental concerns at the location on its own.
 - Component 2 of the Tonle Sap Environmental Management aims to organize communities for natural resource management in the Tonle Sap Biosphere Reserve. Its implementation has suffered delay due to protracted negotiations between the Department of Fisheries and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. But component 2 is now underway. During implementation, opportunities will exist for NGOs. Interested NGOs should study the project documents, all of which are posted on the ADB website.
2. On corruption, Mr. Serrat explained that ADB's tight review and disbursement processes actively discourage, when they do not eliminate, such activities. Under component 2 of the Tonle Sap Environmental Management, an independent organization will be engaged to conduct annual audits of progress.
 3. On the issue that the general public is not familiar with the Tonle Sap Initiative, Mr. Serrat showed examples of information materials on the Tonle Sap Initiative. All have been widely available in soft and hard copies for some time, several of which in Khmer language. All of them are available on the ADB website. He reminded FACT that he had, on two occasions, spoken to fisher communities in Phnom Penh at FACT's request.¹ He had also briefed journalists.² There had been other instances, within and outside Cambodia. He was also about to brief the Council of Ministers on the Tonle Sap Initiative and provided FACT with the agenda for the briefing.³

¹ The Tonle Sap Initiative and Civil Society (Phnom Penh, March 2003, March 2004).

² Independent Journalism Forum (Phnom Penh, June 2004).

³ ADB-CAM Briefing on the Tonle Sap Initiative (Phnom Penh, April 2005).