



ADB's Approach to Natural Resource Management in the Tonle Sap Basin

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This presentation looks at how ADB's approach to management of water, land, and biotic resources in the Tonle Sap basin is being effected from the perspective of the basin as a whole. It invites comment on how much this approach can help Cambodia to strengthen its capacity to manage natural resources in an integrated fashion over the next 5 years and what other supportive actions need to be taken.

The Tonle Sap basin, defined as the catchment area of the Tonle Sap River at its confluence with the Mekong River, has an area of 85,000 km², of which 80,000 km² lie within Cambodia. It covers around 44% of the country's total area and is by far the largest of the Mekong River's sub-basins. It is an environmental hotspot of regional and worldwide importance; it is a major source of protein for the people of the lower Mekong basin; it is the means of livelihood for nearly a third of Cambodia's young and rapidly growing population.

In July 2003, in response to the myriad growing threats that face the Tonle Sap, the Asian Development Bank formulated the Tonle Sap Basin Strategy. Based on ADB's overarching goal, the strategy aims to reduce poverty through the three development objectives of pro-poor, sustainable economic growth, improved access to assets, and better management of natural resources and the environment. It is guided by three principles: sustainable livelihoods, social justice, and a basin-wide approach.

In conformity with the latter principle, which gives expression to transboundary environmental concerns in the Greater Mekong Subregion, the Tonle Sap Basin Strategy marks the introduction of basin-level strategic planning in Cambodia. It recognizes that infrastructure development and natural resource management must be considered from the perspective of the basin as a whole. This requires an integrated, cross-sectoral, and multi-disciplinary framework that promotes understanding and awareness of the interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental factors and facilitates effective interagency cooperation. Therefore, ADB is helping Cambodia to develop a Tonle Sap Basin Management Organization and has instituted a series of technical assistance projects for this purpose.

However, the Tonle Sap Basin Strategy concedes that basin and sub-basin management organizations are only part of the broad approach needed to meet the three development objectives to which reference has already been made. This approach encompasses the following important tactics:¹

Institutional, policy, and regulatory framework. Strengthening and creating organizations can only be effective if the latter operate within an appropriate institutional, policy, and regulatory framework. And so support is being given to the development of this, for example in respect of the fisheries law, its associated sub-decrees, and the formulation of long-term natural resource management plans. These would need to harmonize with the ongoing development of the water law, its associated sub-decrees, and implementing rules.

Knowledge management. Knowledge is fundamental to progress. And so the acquisition of knowledge through research and studies is being integrated with loan and technical assistance projects

¹ Strategy is the overall effect one wishes to create; tactics are the method by which one wishes to achieve this effect.

for most effectively sharing that knowledge in ways that are appropriate to the needs and capacities of all stakeholders within the Tonle Sap.

Stakeholder enablement. The relevant stakeholders have to be enabled to achieve their conservation or utilization objectives by making accessible the financial, infrastructural, or organizational support that they need. This is being facilitated through carefully targeted loans and technical assistance projects.

Geographical phasing. The Tonle Sap basin must be treated holistically; but it is impossible to tackle every threat and meet every opportunity at the same time. Our tactic has been one of geographical phasing, meaning that we have opted to begin at the heart of the basin with support to the environmental management objectives of the three core zones, before moving progressively through the buffer zone with an emphasis on the fishing communities, then to the transition area with its potential for enhanced agricultural production, and finally through to the watersheds with the absolute imperative for their protection while affording the means of livelihood to those living in their upland areas. It is envisaged that this cycle will need to go through a number of iterations and geographical phasing therefore incorporates advance piloting of interventions.

Funding modalities. Funding modalities are being applied that suit the specific objectives of each intervention. These may, where appropriate, be used to support development of the institutional, policy, and regulatory framework, and focus on process rather than pre-packaged projects. Program, sector, and project lending—or a combination thereof—are supported judiciously in time and space by project preparatory technical assistance and a wide variety of advisory and small-scale technical assistance projects.

Partnerships. As evidenced by ADB's support to this workshop, partnerships constitute a crucial tactical element to the achievement of the three development objectives of the Tonle Sap Basin Strategy. Employing this tactic does not just recognize the financial imperative of sourcing funds from as many donors as possible; it also ensures that donors are harmonized in their approach to meeting the needs of the Tonle Sap and that resources other than finance are deployed most effectively, be these the skills of supporting implementation agencies or the engagement of the most relevant elements of civil society.

And so ADB's approach to natural resource management in the Tonle Sap basin, while it assigns due importance to the development of efficient, effective, and relevant basin and sub-basin management organizations, does so through tactics that also pursue:

- Development of the institutional, policy and regulatory framework,
- Acquisition and dissemination of knowledge,
- Enablement of stakeholders,
- Geographical phasing of interventions,
- Judicious use of different funding modalities, and
- Forging of partnerships