



The Tonle Sap Environmental Management Project

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The Tonle Sap Lake is one of the world's most productive inland fisheries, providing essential protein for half of the Cambodian population. Its rich biodiversity of fish, bird, reptile, mammal, and plant species add to the nation's natural capital. Its unique hydrological regime maintains the ecosystem of the lower Mekong basin.

Conditions and trends on the Tonle Sap lake. Yet poverty is endemic, with the highest national incidence found in the provinces that border the lake, and natural resources are at risk. Recent human interactions on the lake are characterized by conflict over access to and use of resources, whether between commercial fishing enterprises and fisher communities, the encroachment of agriculture on the flooded forest, the use of limited water resources for irrigation rather than maintenance of fish breeding locations, or the lack of access to land for poor households. The environmental concern is further exacerbated by ongoing deforestation in the Tonle Sap watershed and increased water-related developments in the upper Mekong basin. There will be a 60% increase in population over the next 20 years and resource use conflicts are expected to increase at community, national, and transboundary levels.

The need for improved management. The optimal solutions to conflict are as yet unexplored. Recognizing the lake's importance, the Government designated the Tonle Sap Lake and surrounding flooded forest as a biosphere reserve under the "Man and the Biosphere Program" of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. Its purpose is written into the Royal Decree that established it, namely, "to contribute to conservation of biological diversity ... and restoration of the . . . environment; to foster sustainable development; and to provide support to projects, education, research and monitoring ... related to ... conservation and sustainable development." The Tonle Sap Biosphere Reserve provides an opportunity to conserve the diversity of plants and animals while meeting the material needs of an increasing number of people, in other words, to integrate conservation of natural resources with their sustainable use.

Project overview. The goal of the *Tonle Sap Environmental Management Project* is sustainable management and conservation of natural resources and biodiversity in the Tonle Sap Basin. Its objective is to enhance systems and develop the capacity for natural resource management coordination and planning, community-based natural resource management, and biodiversity conservation in the Tonle Sap Biosphere Reserve. The Project has three main components. Component 1 aims to strengthen natural resource management coordination and planning and works mainly through the Cambodia National Mekong Committee. It also provides elements for the Ministry of Environment and the Department of Fisheries within the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries. Component 2 aims to organize communities for natural resource management and is implemented by the Department of Fisheries. Component 3 aims to build management capacity for biodiversity conservation and is implemented by the Ministry of Environment. The Project is financed through an ADB loan for \$10.9 million (56% of total project cost), contributions from the Government of Cambodia amounting to \$3.9 million (20% of the total), and grants from the Global Environment Facility and Capacity 2015 via the

United Nations Development Programme, and from ADB itself for \$4.9 million (totaling about 45% of the total).

Accomplishments so far. Though there has been some delay, nearly all consultants and counterpart staff have now mobilized at the national and provincial levels with project implementation offices and project implementation units well setup and equipped. Guidelines for administration, financial management, reporting, and for project monitoring and evaluation have been put into use. Counterpart staff have been active in field work, begun assembling background data and undergoing training in conjunction with the support of Capacity 2015. The policy and strategy work continues to organize discussions and consultations with Government agencies and civil society for development of common policies and coordination mechanisms for the Tonle Sap Biosphere Reserve. The teams working on Component 2 and 3 have just begun preparation of their work plans, development of working arrangement with project implementation offices and project implementation units, and procurement of office and field equipment. Consultant selection for environmental information database and environmental education and awareness contracts is in progress and both will mobilize before June 2005. The Tonle Sap Biosphere Reserve Secretariat has moved to a bigger office, thereby allowing a number of Tonle Sap-related projects to house together for better coordination.

The challenges ahead. In the coming months, a policy coordination mechanism will come into effect and common policies will be identified and tested for the Tonle Sap Biosphere Reserve. The environmental information database and the environmental education and awareness campaign will provide a knowledge base for the Government and the public to improve decision making. Orthophotomapping will be complete, and map outputs will be available for community natural resources planning and biodiversity conservation. The draft Fisheries Law and sub-decree on community fisheries are expected to be adopted in the near future. Component 2 will be well underway, with the project implementation units assisting to strengthen community fisheries with organizational support and resource management planning. The team from the United Nations Development Programme will be supporting the Ministry of Environment to manage and monitor, as well as educate communities.

The Project provides a model of cooperation among several agencies and donors with three interrelated milestones (i) policy coordination, data management, and awareness, (ii) strengthening community-based organizations, and (iii) promoting biodiversity conservation, biodiversity research, and awareness. In summary, the Project will contribute greatly to improving community livelihoods, the nation's economy, and environmental governance on the lake, thereby helping to accomplish the Government's Rectangular Strategy.