



Establishment of the Tonle Sap Basin Management Organization

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ADB-CAM Briefing on the Tonle Sap Initiative

6 April 2005
Phnom Penh

Asian Development Bank

The Government's draft Law on Water Resources Management promotes a river basin approach to management of water and related resources, in line with international practice.¹ A basin-wide approach to natural resource management is also integral to the Tonle Sap Basin Strategy.

Water provides a link between all natural resources within a basin and many Government agencies access it. Therefore, while the Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology has a clear mandate for the management of water, it must seek and enjoy the support and cooperation of other ministries, particularly for watershed, groundwater, and water quality management. What is more, the Tonle Sap Lake and Tonle Sap River are strongly influenced by the Mekong River, which provides 55% of the annual inflow to the lake and thereby makes a requirement for international cooperation.

Conditions and trends in water resources planning and management. The Cambodia National Mekong Committee has worked with the Mekong River Commission to commence integrated water resources planning through several programs including the Basin Development Plan Program and the Water Utilization Program. A knowledge base and some capacity for basin management of water and related resources have been created as a result. Additionally, advisory technical assistance to the Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology has led to the adoption of a National Water Policy. These achievements provide a basis for improved management of the Tonle Sap basin.

Planning for development in the Tonle Sap basin is as yet fragmented and generally follows a project approach. But as the use of water and related resources increases, existing difficulties in mediating conflicts between users will intensify. Without effective action, opportunities for production will be lost, and hostility between groups and individuals will escalate.

Local communities are aware of opportunities for improved resource use. They also know the threats to the sustainability of resources. But delegating management to communities, in line with the Government's plans for decentralisation and deconcentration, will increase the need for coordination, accountability, and more clearly defined procedures.

The technical assistance. The goal of this advisory technical assistance is sound management of natural resources and the environment in the Tonle Sap basin. Its purpose is to advance the establishment of improved institutional and organizational arrangements for managing water and related resources.

Two outputs will accomplish this purpose. In short (i) the design of a Tonle Sap Basin Management Organization will be finalized, and (ii) sub-basin institutional structures will be designed. The technical assistance will also outline further advisory technical assistance to build capacity in the recommended management structures. The Tonle Sap Basin Management Organisation will:

- Advise on and coordinate water and related resources management,
- Provide a framework for water and related resources management, and
- Resolve conflicts over related issues.

¹ Water resources are all forms of water on the surface or underground. Related resources are the natural resources that have an intimate connection with water, influencing the quality, volume, and timing of its flow. They include upland forests, wetlands, and agricultural lands in so far as they affect the quality, volume, and timing of water resources.

The organisation will report to the Cambodia National Mekong Committee, which has a membership of 10 ministries and provides the much needed link with the Mekong River Commission.

Establishment of basin management organizations is a long-term endeavor. The requirements are:

- Strong and high-level support,
- Secure long-term funding,
- Institutional arrangements that encourage coordination and accountability in and between all concerned agencies,
- Strong community and resource user participation,
- A good knowledge base for strategy and policy development, and
- Integration of water development and management with other resources.

The technical assistance cannot address all these requirements. Its focus is on institutional structures and the legal support needed by these structures.

... and its accomplishments. This is the second advisory technical assistance that ADB has extended to the Cambodia National Mekong Committee since 2004. We are pleased to report that

- Agreement has been reached on the institutional location and outline structure for the Tonle Sap Basin Management Organization,
- A regulatory framework for water and related resources management has been drafted,
- Consultations have been conducted in provinces, districts, and communes within the Tonle Sap basin and an analysis has been made of the existing arrangements for natural resource and environmental management at the provincial level and below, and
- An initial draft of sub-basin planning and management structures has been prepared.

Major activities planned. Over the next few months, we will

- Make proposals regarding the Tonle Sap Basin Management Organization's mandate, membership, responsibilities, mode of operation, and supporting secretariat and legislation,
- Specify mechanisms for raising public awareness and understanding of the need to manage water and related resources in the Tonle Sap basin, and
- Analyse the sub-basins and propose following advisory technical assistance to establish water management structures there.