



IFREDI in Context

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The Tonle Sap supports a very high biodiversity, some of which is globally significant, and its fisheries provide up to 80% of the protein intake of Cambodia's growing population. The flooded areas also offer breeding grounds and refuge areas for fish that migrate to the Mekong River. They provide, thereby, a regionally vital resource.

But, population and development pressures are taking their toll and consumptive use of the lake's resources is intense. Threats include (i) over-exploitation of fisheries and wildlife resources, (ii) dry season encroachment and land clearance of the flooded forest; and (iii) degradation of native vegetation in watersheds. These threats place the lake's ecosystem and the population that depends on it at risk.

In response, the Government established the Tonle Sap Biosphere Reserve in February 2001 as a focal point of environmental management. ADB has concluded that sustainable management and conservation of natural resources and biodiversity should be considered from the perspective of the basin feeding the lake. Last year, it extended a loan and supporting technical assistance for the Tonle Sap Environmental Management Project. Now, ADB's Country Strategy and Program, 2004–2006 envisages a two-pronged framework for economic growth for countrywide poverty reduction in the medium to long term and, notably, improved access for poverty reduction in the Tonle Sap region in the short to medium term.

Never has the Tonle Sap been called upon to supply so much to so many. The number and diversity of issues is overwhelming and solutions are elusive. But, the critical elements of progress are:

- A clear, basin-wide vision
- Social and environmental justice
- Sustainable livelihoods

By concentrating scarce resources for efficiency and impact, ADB aims to provide direction in the Tonle Sap region: each building block in the suite of loan and technical assistance projects that comprise ADB's Tonle Sap Initiative represents a significant and positive contribution to more effective basin management; each offers possibilities for cooperation with local, provincial, and national stakeholders to balance ever-increasing demands on the lake's resources; and each encourages continuity, gives confidence to stakeholders, and offers opportunities to adapt to resolve present and future issues. Concentration of resources can also catalyze bilateral and multilateral efforts.

The overarching goal of ADB's Tonle Sap Initiative is to reduce poverty. Toward this goal, over a 10-year horizon, ADB plans to locate interventions to foster, promote, and facilitate (i) pro-poor economic growth; (ii) access and opportunities for poor people; and (iii) management of natural resources and the environment.

This is the context in which IFREDI finds itself. It has a role to play. Fisheries research can work to (i) make fish more affordable; (ii) add to the diversification of fisheries; (iii) generate employment and income for fishers; (iv) create alternative livelihoods; (v) conserve and rebuild fish stocks; (vi) provide policy advice on management arrangements for aquatic resources; and (vii) buttress community efforts to manage aquatic resources and protect biodiversity. Building the capacity of IFREDI offers opportunities in each of these priority areas. We will hear, over the next two days, how the WorldFish Center will assist this endeavor.