



# Improving the Regulatory and Management Framework for Inland Fisheries

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The Tonle Sap's unique hydrological cycle and the vast areas of seasonally flooded low forest and shrubs that it creates result in a very high biodiversity of fish, reptiles, birds, and mammals, and engenders exceptionally productive fisheries. Indeed, the lake's fisheries directly support more than one million people and provide the single largest source of protein for Cambodia's young and increasing population. The flooded areas provide the breeding grounds and refuges for fish that subsequently migrate to the Mekong River, providing thereby a regionally vital resource. For these reasons, the lake was nominated as a biosphere reserve in October 1997 under the Man and the Biosphere Program of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. Its catchments include large areas that have also been designated as being of globally important biodiversity, as well as offering potential for the storage of water for irrigation, domestic consumption, and hydropower.

As you all know, the Tonle Sap is under severe pressure and consumptive use of its resources is intense. Never has the Tonle Sap been called upon to supply so much to so many. Yet, the threats to its ecosystem are manifold: they include over-exploitation of fisheries and wildlife resources; and dry season encroachment and land clearance of the flooded forest. Degradation of the natural vegetation of the watersheds is destroying natural habitats and also results in a deterioration of water and soil quality and increased siltation rates. And so, despite the inherent richness of the lake, most indicators of poverty in the basin are even more negative than those that characterize the national population as a whole, or indeed other rural areas of Cambodia. The destruction of the natural resources of the basin is an issue not only of national importance but also has serious transboundary environmental implications. Hence the challenge is to achieve the right balance between production and preservation.

In view of that, ADB is formulating a Tonle Sap basin strategy to form the basis for setting priorities and planning assistance in the Tonle Sap basin over the next 5–10 years. In the Tonle Sap basin, ADB's 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 strategy is based on three underpinning principles (i) sustainable livelihoods, (ii) social justice, and (iii) a basin-wide approach. The strategy focuses on two core areas (i) rural development and the environment, including of course inland fisheries, and (ii) human development. In respect of rural development and the environment, including inland fisheries, it aims to expand the knowledge base on which the sustainable utilization and preservation of the basin depends; address ways in which the livelihoods of the communities can be enhanced; improve catchment management; and strengthen the regulatory and management framework and institutional structures at local and national levels that are needed to support development.

Implementation of the strategy would 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 ADB's resources can also catalyze bilateral and other multilateral endeavors.

This is the broader context in which this important advisory technical assistance is located. Immediately, the technical assistance is associated with the Tonle Sap Environmental Management project, approved in November 2002, which aims 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. DOF, as we all know, is the executing agency for the project. It is therefore tasked with major responsibilities.

The technical assistance was approved to improve the regulatory and management framework for inland fisheries, with special attention to the subdecree on community fisheries. There is an urgent need to provide a sound legal basis for inland fisheries, especially inland. Several subdecrees have been prepared. But their existing drafts have been criticized and need to be reviewed for relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, and equity. The absence of a fisheries management plan for the Tonle Sap has also hampered progress since such plans, besides providing a policy and technical framework and incorporating principles for ecosystem management, normally complement and influence the regulatory framework in a dynamic and adaptive manner. We are all know what is at stake.

FAO has been appointed by direct selection to assist DOF in improving the regulatory and management framework for inland fisheries. We will hear today exactly how it will extend its advice over the next few months. And so, let me remind you that our purpose today is to (i) examine FAO's recent accomplishments under the TA, (ii) resolve difficulties, if any, that impede achievement of the TA's outputs, and (ii) finalize the work plan and discuss implementation arrangements for the remainder of the TA. I look forward to our discussions and, above all, to our decisions. Again, we all know what is at stake.