



Opportunities and Constraints to the Tonle Sap Initiative

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The Tonle Sap saw the birth of a great civilization. It might yet underpin sustainable and prosperous growth. Its ability to do so, however, is being challenged by the myriad threats to which I referred earlier. The Tonle Sap Initiative was instituted to ensure that opportunities are realized and that constraints are overcome. The major prospect is realization of the productive potential of the Tonle Sap and preservation of its unique natural resources. Its exact opposite is failure to resolve conflicting demands on the latter in ways that best meet objectives. The driving factors that may take us either way relate in particular to:

- The basin-wide approach,
- Partnerships, and
- Commitment.

The basin-wide approach. We all know that there are competing demands on the resources of the Tonle Sap, and that allocation has not always been optimal. By taking a holistic approach to basin management, the Tonle Sap Initiative allows competing demands to be considered within the overall context of sustainable development. For instance, the proposed *Tonle Sap Basin Management Organization* could ensure that decisions are made within a forum in which the interests of all stakeholders are represented. This opportunity could be extended to the development of similar basin and sub-basin levels management structures for other basins in Cambodia. The challenge, however, is continuation of narrow and shortsighted sectoral interests. The *Tonle Sap Basin Management Organization* might be constrained by the domination of a single ministry and might not attract support from and representation by the highest levels of central and provincial government. The chance to optimize use of the basin's natural resources will not be realized if this happens.

Partnerships. By taking a strong partnership approach, the Tonle Sap Initiative affords an opportunity for rationalizing the support of financing agencies, international implementation support agencies, and nongovernment organizations. Again, it needs to be recognized that this has not always been the case with acknowledged instances of overlap and duplication, as well as conflicting demands on the limited resources of the government agencies involved. The Tonle Sap Initiative offers the framework within which that support can be targeted appropriately in the Tonle Sap basin. However, it may also be limited both by the willingness of financing agencies, international implementation support agencies, and nongovernment organizations to harmonize their agendas and by the ability of ADB to provide an adequate level of resources to support this harmonized approach.

Commitment. The Tonle Sap Initiative is firmly grounded in the decision of the Government to place a high priority on preservation of the unique environment of the Tonle Sap and to realize its international responsibilities by declaring the lake a biosphere reserve. The Tonle Sap Initiative can contribute to world heritage. It can also help to preserve the overall ecological balance of the Mekong basin since the Tonle Sap is an extension of the Mekong River. However, the ability of the Tonle Sap Initiative to realize these opportunities is prey to factors within and sometimes external to Cambodia. Within Cambodia, the Government needs to put fully into practice the fundamental tenets of biosphere

reserve zonation: the continued existence of fishing lots in the core areas of the lake is the most extreme example of a failure to turn commitment into practical action. Outside Cambodia, but also within it, continued pressure from built structures that must ultimately impact the environment of the Tonle Sap could seriously frustrate the chance to live from and conserve this unique environment. The Government needs to recognize that the situation is highly complex and that our understanding of the real impacts of changes in flood regimes is inadequate. In consultation with neighboring countries, the Government must promote awareness that all have duty of care over the Tonle Sap.

But let us, with reference to the loan projects and the advisory technical assistance mentioned earlier, look at areas where immediate improvements are required:

The Tonle Sap Environmental Management Project. The major constraints relate to:

- Distrust between some provincial offices of fisheries and community fisheries leaders,
- The continuing lack of a Fisheries Law and associated subdecree on community fisheries,
- Failure to prevent illegal access to community fishing areas, and
- The continuing lack of legislation that prohibits encroachment into the flooded forest.

The Tonle Sap Sustainable Livelihoods Project. The major constraints relate to:

- The continuing lack of a Fisheries Law and associated subdecree on community fisheries, and
- The time it takes the national and provincial treasuries to pay out monies to districts, communes, and villages, thereby impacting planned activities.

Establishment of the Tonle Sap Basin Management Organizations. The major constraints relate to:

- The continuing lack of a Law on Water Resources Management, and
- The increasing use of water for irrigation.

This is difficult but by no means insurmountable agenda that the Council of Ministers could help meet.