



Organizing Communities for Natural Resource Management

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In 2000, the Government implemented a major fisheries sector reform by releasing 56% of the commercial fishing lots to local fishing communities bordering the Tonle Sap Lake. The commercial fishing lots were released in response to growing tensions between commercial lot operators and neighboring communities. The results of the reform have been mixed. The good intentions of giving the local communities full access to important fishing grounds has in many instances led to open access, increased competition amongst fishers, and resource depletion. What is more, the reform was implemented so swiftly that the Department of Fisheries and other agencies are still struggling to keep up with the necessary agenda. Fundamentally, the reform created a management vacuum that remains to be filled.

Successful and sustainable community fisheries and natural resource management depends on:

- Clear national policies and strategies for community fisheries and community-based natural resource management,
- A legal framework that is firmly anchored in national policies and strategies for community fisheries and natural resource management,
- Clear resource user rights and obligations, anchored in national policies and the legal framework,
- Clear mechanisms, and workable systems and procedures for conflict resolution and law enforcement,
- Transparency, good governance, and strong interagency collaboration, and
- Monitoring and evaluation that incorporate learning and feed-back into national policies and strategies.

These factors of success are all addressed under the *Tonle Sap Environmental Management Project*.

The Tonle Sap Environmental Management Project. The outputs of the *Tonle Sap Environmental Management Project* that relate to the Department of Fisheries lead in the main to organizing communities for natural resource management in the Tonle Sap Biosphere Reserve. To that end, the Project provides for:

- Institutional strengthening of the provincial fisheries offices in Siem Reap, Battambang, Pursat, Kompong Chhnang, and Kompong Thom and implementing a training program for staff of relevant provincial agencies,
- Empowering communities to benefit from community fisheries and community-based natural resource management,
 - Capacity building of commune councils and appropriate village level organizations for community fisheries and natural resource management,
 - Conduct community organization for community fisheries and community based natural resource management,
 - Review boundaries and describe community resource use rights and obligations,

- Encourage formulation of community fisheries and natural resource management plans, and
- Conducting independent progress audits.
- Evaluate technical packages in support of sustainable livelihoods,
 - Survey previous and ongoing livelihoods approaches, and
 - Select improved technical packages for replication or further development.

These activities were preceded by advisory technical assistance provided by ADB under the Project. The technical assistance, which was completed in May last year, made recommendations to strengthen the regulatory framework governing the management and administration of community fisheries and community-based natural resource management.¹

Accomplishments so far. Implementation of project components started immediately after the loan was declared effective in early 2003. Initial efforts focused on establishing the project implementation office within the Department of Fisheries, the provincial project implementation units, and mobilizing the necessary manpower. From mid-2003, attention moved to rehabilitating provincial offices, equipping them with new furniture, office and transportation facilities. Aerial photography of the Tonle Sap Biosphere Reserve has also been completed and digital copies of orthophotomap material will be freely available to all organizations and entities working in the Tonle Sap Biosphere Reserve. Maps also help local people to locate their own resources and management needs.

The challenges ahead. With the support of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the Project will over the next three years build sustainable capacity and capability to:

- Improve the application and rule of law in fisheries and natural resource management in the Tonle Sap Biosphere Reserve,
- Work to reduce the incidence of conflicts, violations, and illegal fishing and natural resource use activities,
- Improve the delivery of services needed by all levels of society and the administration for the sustainable management and administration of habitats and natural resources, and
- Increase the productivity and the social and economic utility of habitats and natural resources for the benefits of local communities in the Tonle Sap basin and for the Cambodian people at large.

¹ The technical assistance also made recommendations to strengthen the management framework for inland fisheries.