



# The Tonle Sap Sustainable Livelihoods Project

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Despite its rich resources, the Tonle Sap lake provides an inadequate living for most of the inhabitants that live on or around it. The main reasons for this were outlined earlier. But, in terms of livelihoods, one must bear in mind (i) the dependence of people on fishing and fishing-related activities, including processing, and (ii) the shortage of opportunities in agriculture and livestock.

The *Tonle Sap Sustainable Livelihoods Project* nears the end of its preparation prior to loan processing by ADB. It has adopted a livelihoods approach to identify that most livelihoods are based on access to natural capital. Significantly, it has recognized that achieving sustainable livelihoods also hinges on improvements in physical, financial, social, and human capital, as well as in the policies, institutions, and processes that influence access to the latter.

The loan project that, at the request of the Government, ADB will soon process would be consistent with the Government's Rectangular Strategy and, it must be stressed, those approaches that relate to decentralization and deconcentration. For instance, to ensure ownership and involvement, the emphasis would be to have communities themselves identify solutions to their lack of assets and have them implement those solutions. The Project would also provide extensive support to those agents that work most closely to communities. They are provincial and district officials, nongovernment organizations, and other service providers. In the same spirit, the Project would extend financial support in such ways that it grows over time because it is regenerated by the savings of project beneficiaries.

The Project's coherence with this new Government's approaches would be achieved by three prongs. First, it would build the capacity of Government institutions (improving social assets). Then, it would leverage that capacity to add force to community organizations (improving human and social assets). Finally, it would place funds for income generating activities (improving financial assets) and social infrastructure into the hands of the project beneficiaries (improving physical assets).

**Building capacity for project implementation and management.** The first output from the Project would encompass the wider institutional environment of the Tonle Sap to ensure strengthened Government capacity to support livelihoods development. In the main, this would involve strengthening capacity to train others (training of trainers) in the Post Harvest Fisheries Division about to be set up with assistance from the Department for International Development of the United Kingdom, as well as in the Provincial Departments of Rural Development, the Offices of Fisheries, and the Provincial Departments of Women's Affairs. Orientation would also be carried out amongst national and provincial staff on what the Project is trying to achieve and the methodologies to be used. It also means that there must be improved plans, policies, and institutions to support livelihoods, which themselves are based on natural resources. There would be a heavy emphasis on conservation, especially amongst the poor who normally have a short-term horizon, and also on areas of the flooded forest that are not within the domain of community fisheries and fishing lots. Finally, support would be given to increasing public awareness on environmental education as central to the common pursuit of sustainable development in the Tonle Sap region.

**Building the capacities of community organizations.** The second output from the Project would fully support the new Government's approaches by building capacity for commune and village-level development planning. This would involve improving the capacity of village planning groups, commune planning and budgeting groups, and commune council staff.

**Investing in livelihoods and natural resources.** The third and most direct output from the Project would provide opportunities and investments to project beneficiaries. But, it is important that these reduce pressure on natural resources while improving the quality of life of the poorest. To achieve this there would be several steps: these include identifying the activities that livelihoods groups and villages want to carry out; providing training in support of those activities; and providing funds. For direct support to livelihoods, the funds would be channeled through savings and credit groups for onlending to beneficiaries, and to enterprise groups for direct investment in enterprises. It is important that, once activities start, continued training and extension be provided. This is allowed for under the Project. There would also be community investments in social infrastructure, e.g., water supply, local schools, and small-scale village works, and other investments that support implementation of community fisheries management plans. Other investments still would address two important concerns of the Government. One is to improve management of commercial fisheries (using the Inland Fisheries Research and Development Institute and others), including establishing data on fishing effort and fish catch, carrying out pilot projects on open access waters relating to fishing methods and fishing units, and defining better what is sustainable in commercial fisheries. This also includes improved management in tributary waters, especially for migratory species, as well as improved management of fishing lots. A second concern of the Government is to protect existing fish sanctuaries, create new fish sanctuaries in the core areas, and also restock those selected lake species that have a chance of recovery. Related project funding arrangements would be Commune Development Funds, to be established in each commune. Proposals for funding would be approved by the Commune Planning and Budgeting Committees. The Committees would judge the merit and eligibility of proposals against a set of criteria. In addition, funds would be provided for sanctuaries of the Department of Fisheries and for restocking. The Project would also be buttressed by technology grants for agricultural income generating activities, hopefully sourced from the Japanese Fund for Poverty Reduction.

The Project would covers 37 communes and just under 290,000 people. The number of families in the project area is estimated as 55,000. Over 50% would receive direct support in the form of sustainable income improvements. Others would benefit from new social infrastructure whilst community fisheries would be considerably strengthened in their defined roles. The role of the Department of Fisheries in natural resource management would be strengthened through investments in the fish sanctuaries and in fish restocking. Whoever knows the Tonle Sap, its importance to Cambodia, and the particularly difficult living circumstances of those that eke a livelihood from it, should support the Project.