



ADB's Tonle Sap Basin Strategy

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Cambodia's main feature, the Tonle Sap basin, extends over nearly 40% of the country's total area. And the main feature of the basin is the Great Lake, which happens to be the largest freshwater lake in Southeast Asia. The Great Lake has defined Cambodian life. It conditions its prospects. Why? Because its incredible biodiversity, allied to that of the watershed, underpins the livelihoods of much of the population. There is more: the lake's importance extends far beyond Cambodia's borders. Fish migrations from the lake help to restock the Mekong River and its tributaries. The lake also helps to control salinity intrusion and to conserve mangroves in the Mekong delta, by acting as a reservoir from which water drains during the dry season. The lake and its watershed are a regionally vital resource. Their biodiversity is of global significance.

You know that the Tonle Sap basin is under severe pressure and that consumptive use of its resources is intense. What is being done? In 1993, a Royal Decree designated the lake as a multiple-use protected area. In 1997, the lake was also nominated as a biosphere reserve. In 2000, a Prime Ministerial decree released 56% of the former fishing lot area to communities. In conjunction with local authorities, they are to manage fisheries sustainably. More recently still, in late 2002, ADB approved the Tonle Sap Environmental Management Project. That project 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.

The Tonle Sap Environmental Management Project focused ADB's attention on the Tonle Sap basin and led, in 2003, to the formulation of a Tonle Sap basin strategy. The 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 principles: they are (i) sustainable livelihoods, (ii) social justice, and (iii) a basin-wide approach. It focuses on two core areas, namely, (i) rural development and the environment, and (ii) human development. The strategy is expected to concentrate about 40% of ADB's operations in Cambodia. This concentration could—in fact does—catalyze other bilateral and multilateral assistance in the basin.

This is the context in which this technical assistance locates itself, in harmony with the strategy's basin-wide approach principle. Natural resources do not recognize administrative boundaries and decisions in one part of a basin can have significant impacts on natural resources elsewhere. Against population and development pressures that threaten to play havoc, it stands to reason that the Tonle Sap basin's natural resources would be best managed through the mechanism of long-term plans developed collaboratively by local, provincial, and national stakeholders. And so if, today, you agree on the model for the Tonle Sap Basin Management Organization, you will have made a historical contribution to sustainable development in Cambodia.