



# Supporting Local Post-fishery Reform Innovation: Lessons for Multi-stakeholder Dialogue

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## Introduction

With a total annual fish production of 300,000 to 450,000 tonnes and an estimated value of USD100 million, Cambodia's freshwater fishery sector is ranked fourth in total production in Asia but first in per capita production (RGC 2005). The combined value of fisheries production, processing and trade contributed an estimated 7.3 percent of total GDP in 2011 (MEF 2010 cited in Hem 2013), lower than the 12 percent share in 2004 (Hortle *et al.* 2004). Fisheries resources are critical to national food and nutrition security, with fish protein providing an estimated 50–80 percent of total animal protein intake (ADB 2005). The natural resources of the Tonle Sap Lake and its floodplain are vital to the food security, employment and economic welfare of 4.1 million people living in the six provinces bordering the lake.<sup>1</sup>

Cambodia's recent inland fishery reform, instigated at the top level of government, is one of the country's most significant contemporary policy developments. Implemented in two phases, the first took place in 2000-01 with the release of over 56 percent of fishing lots from private control to community access. In early 2012, the second phase culminated in the complete removal of all inland commercial fishing lots, converting them to community fishing grounds or conservation reserves. Despite these significant and welcome strides forward, the reform has not yet yielded immediate and visible livelihood improvement and aquatic resource protection.

The new fisheries policy, effectively allowing broader access to fishing, brings opportunities and poses new challenges for fishing communities and fisheries agencies to develop and implement effective sustainable fisheries governance and regulatory regimes to manage stocks and control fishing. It is important to bear in mind that agriculture has long been a way of life for many local households and as such, farmlands

have gradually expanded and subsumed vast areas of flooded forest fringing the Tonle Sap lake. Examining arising issues through a social lens, dry season rice farmers claim that the latest designation of Community Fisheries (CFi) and conservation areas has overlapped existing farmlands, while CFi members complain about the continued encroachment of dry season rice fields in CFi areas compounded by the lack of proper land use planning. Yet, there has been insufficient research to provide concrete information, especially on how to strike a balance between agricultural development and fishery conservation. It is of vital importance that research studies provide improved information to help to correct ineffective actions and to enable communities to make informed decisions to avert possible conflict of interest between different resource user groups. Also significant is the need to understand the extent to which government policy (e.g. rice export, biodiversity conservation and fisheries reform) and the associated legal frameworks have been adopted in the overlap zone as this is another factor that could be inadvertently contributing to conflict.

In addition, there is a need to develop and implement effective grassroots fisheries management that maintains sustainable resource use and ensures the protection of aquatic resources to meet the needs of those who depend on them for their livelihoods, food and nutrition. Transforming the institutions, including management and marketing systems, that hinder the sustainable and equitable use of common pool resources requires multi-stakeholder participation. The fishery reform broadens communities' access to resources: this should be seen not only as access to utilisation but also to management. Therefore, if the fishery sector is to be managed sustainably, resource users should be encouraged to develop their management and decision-making capacities. Empowering communities to take management roles makes sense. It promotes direct management by local resource users rather than focusing simply on the generation of national

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1 H.E. Dr Nao Thuok, Director General of Fisheries Administration, remarks at the Inception Workshop on Assessing Economic and Welfare Values of Fish in the Lower Mekong Basin, 21 June 2012, Cambodiana Hotel, Phnom Penh

revenue from the sector to cover costs for the deployment of officials to protect the resources.

Learning from local innovations can provide a starting point for addressing the broader policy and institutional challenges of fisheries management in the Tonle Sap region. This brief highlights lessons learned and policy implications from our experience of supporting institutional innovations that nurture diverse multi-stakeholder collaborations.

### Engaging Multiple Stakeholders

Beginning in 2011, WorldFish and its partners embarked on an initiative known as Strengthening Aquatic Resource Governance (STARGO) (Ratner et al. 2013). In Cambodia, the Fisheries Administration (FiA), Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI), Analyzing Development Issues Centre (ADIC), Fisheries Action Coalition Team (FACT) and Help Old Age and Miserable People (HOM) are working in partnership to bring together all key stakeholders in fisheries governance to find common ground to strengthen the resilience of local livelihoods. Together, the partners are exploring and piloting new forms of collaboration in order to support and complement local innovations. The action plan baseline study was implemented in three communities in Kampong Thom province – the floating communes of Phat Sanday and Peam Bang where fishing is the main livelihood, and Kampong Kor commune where people depend mainly on recession rice cultivation along with fishing.

The study employed a process called Collaborating for Resilience (CORE). This approach draws on the Appreciation-Influence-Control (AIC) model, a three-step framework for enabling multi-stakeholder dialogue, analysis and collaborative planning (Ratner and Smith 2013). The three steps are outlined below.

1. *Listening* to deepen understanding of the views of different groups, challenges and opportunities using two questions: What are the possibilities? What are the realities? (Appreciation)
2. *Dialogue* to weigh up the potential costs and benefits of different courses of action, guided by the questions: What are the priorities? Who will support and who will oppose? (Influence)
3. *Choice* where participants identify/make action plan commitments for future collaborative efforts, which also entails two questions: What will you do? Will it achieve the purpose? (Control)

These three stages were used during baseline assessment, dialogue and action planning workshops, subsequent quarterly monitoring visits, and stakeholder meetings.

The CORE process was carefully adapted to suit local circumstances, for example, at stakeholder and commune-level meetings where there was insufficient representation

from the community and/or agencies, or instances where participants were less able to articulate their views or debate with government officials/local authority figures, or when detailed discussions or information were required. Adopting different methods, such as breakout sessions in smaller groups, to elicit information from new sources helped to redress these issues. Talking with key informants and small groups of participants during the afternoon and evening before each session was important in gleaning deeper understanding of the local situation and local people's involvement in multi-actor processes. This also helped to ensure that discussion stayed focussed on key issues within the topic.

### Baseline Assessment, Dialogue and Action Planning

The first commune-level meeting in Phat Sanday was held on 5–7 January 2013 and was attended by community representatives, commune councillors, police and local Fishery officials. Parallel meetings were held in Kampong Kor and Peam Bang communes on 10–12 January 2013. Before each commune meeting, the research team spent a few days in some villages conducting informal household interviews to get a better understanding of the key issues local fishers face and visiting important sites within each commune, including the boundaries of the public fishing grounds and the former fishing lots. These visits helped the team to develop greater and more meaningful community participation during subsequent meetings.

Those that attended the community meetings enjoyed practising the CORE approach. This was possibly the first opportunity they had been given to talk openly about setting community goals or vision and to analyse key issues affecting local natural resources. Although it may take longer and is possibly more demanding, it soon became apparent that some people were able to organise their thoughts and communicate their ideas more clearly using visual aids (for example, drawing) along with discussion. After the first community meeting, we reflected on our approach in light of issues that arose, rearranged the sequence of activities and rephrased some questions. These modifications meant that the next community meeting ran more smoothly.

At the end of each session, the team discussed how to enable participants to share their thoughts more freely and express their commitment. This included the use of Khmer terms and the types of questions participants can use to identify potential obstacles to working towards achieving their goals. Discussion then focussed on how to link those ideas on overcoming obstacles to developing strategies that can support participants in preparing community action plans, and how to identify potential actors who could support the community to implement their action plans and to realise their community goals. Community members then became very enthusiastic about their plans, particularly the goals of expanding the public fishing grounds in Peam Bang and

Phat Sanday communes and resolving conflict between dry-season rice farmers and the community fishery committee in Kampong Kor commune.

### Monitoring and Evaluation

The communities demonstrated flexibility in their response to changing conditions. For example, when a large fishing ground was opened to community access after the reform in 2012, people realised that their community action plan to expand fishing grounds was no longer relevant and instead redirected their efforts towards addressing the least practical regulations governing fishing practices and managing a community-designated fishing ground. In fact, immediately following the introduction of the new rules set out by the government, there was confusion about the types and size of fishing gear permitted, further compounded by the rush to exploit the then de facto open-access. This was a time of rampant illegal fishing, which local communities were expected to help control. With the cancellation of the private fishing lots, communities' responsibilities had now increased significantly yet the concomitant resources to look after the areas assigned to them remained unchanged. Then a proposal emerged from the dialogue between the communities, fisheries agencies and other stakeholders to establish community-based commercial fish production in order to generate revenue to recover the capital costs of community management.

Although the community leaders had not been fully engaged in the earlier monitoring and evaluation (M&E) exercise, they took the lead in reviewing their plans, identifying gaps and seeking ways to promote local collaboration during the quarterly monitoring visits. The research team helped to structure their reflections by posing simple, broad questions: What changes have you seen since the last visit by the M&E team? What are the remaining obstacles to your community efforts? These elicited rich stories and stimulated constructive discussions on the best ways for their communities to adapt towards achieving local goals. In turn, these discussions helped the research team to evaluate outcomes concerning reduction in illegal fishing, avoidance of conflict between groups, and improvement in fair and equitable benefit-sharing. It was not difficult to devise a set of indicators for monitoring at community level as the planning and implementation of M&E could be widely discussed, with activity outputs and outcomes designated that were within the communities' abilities and resources.

### What's Next

It was apparent from the Dialogue Workshop in December 2012 that participants were keenly aware of the importance of sustaining collaboration with different stakeholder groups. Even so, it is critical that local institutions and community groups build institutional and technical capacities so that practices such as learning and challenging problems through

questioning, listening and compromise are continued beyond the period of a particular intervention. Capacity building should be geared towards transmitting skills to different groups so that they can analyse their own issues, seek solutions, evaluate alternatives and make decisions for conflict resolution. The same approach can be used to strengthen institutional innovation for dealing with long-term community-based adaptive co-management.

From the same workshop emerged an agreement to pursue the idea of establishing community-based commercial fisheries production, where communities can benefit from harvesting fisheries resources in a way that sustains their fishing grounds and conservation reserves, ensures compliance with and enforcement of the regulations governing fishing in the area, and supports alternative local livelihoods. This management option has received official support through Sub-decree No. 35, dated 5 March 2012, allowing ten community fisheries near the Cambodia-Vietnam border to establish commercial fisheries production (barrage fishing using stationary bamboo fence traps).

The STARGO initiative has committed to fostering positive working relationships among its partners to share responsibility for planning and implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and decision-making. This entails the clarification and possible adjustment of roles that in turn should complement on-going initiatives. This approach of jointly defining complementary responsibilities has not only avoided confusion but has also strengthened long-term collaboration.

### Key Lessons

- Before organising the community meeting, it is important for the team to conduct informal household interviews in order to understand local issues and to visit relevant sites.
- Actively engage all participants in discussion processes, especially on goal setting and perception management, through visual media (drawing) which engender common understanding.
- Actively engage community members in the design and implementation of their own action and monitoring plans.
- Foster a process to design and implement sustainable community-based commercial fishing in all Fishery Administration community fisheries, especially those in the Tonle Sap Lake, in accordance with Sub-decree No. 35.
- Identify specific capacity development needs based on assessment of relevant problems within the jurisdiction of local fisheries management committees.
- Work to establish clear responsibilities and budget allocations between all participating partners, and to ensure everyone's accountability.

## Policy Implication

There is a need to strike a balance between the different approaches and/or tools used to engage local communities in sustainable fisheries management. Academic research and community-based action research such as CORE, which consider community concerns, can make a significant contribution to this. Sustainable fisheries are not only resources for generating economic growth but also support local livelihoods, thereby freeing government from having to provide subsidies. Therefore, improving consumption by empowering communities to manage resources for themselves while the government does not necessarily have to support technical resources should be considered a priority.

## Resources

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### About the DRF

The Development Research Forum (DRF) of Cambodia was established following the All-Partners Forum organised by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada in September 2007. The DRF vision is of a high capacity, professional and vibrant Cambodian development research community. Its goal is to support and strengthen the capacity of the Cambodian development research community. The DRF partnership involves the Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI), Cambodian Economic Association (CEA), Learning Institute (LI), National Institute of Public Health (NIPH), Royal University of Agriculture (RUA), Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP), Supreme National Economic Council (SNEC) and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC).

In DRF Phase II 2012-15, with financial support from IDRC, the partners intend to work together to build research culture and capacity and to share research knowledge through workshops, policy roundtables and symposiums as well as training and online discussion ([www.drfcambodia.net](http://www.drfcambodia.net)) on six research themes: growth and inclusiveness, governance of natural resources, social policy on education, social policy on health, agricultural development, and Cambodia and its region.

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