Complex History, Hopeful Future

The Community Fisheries organizations in Cambodia form a vital framework for collective, rights-based fisheries management that persists and thrives in inland and coastal settings to this day

Flanked by two of the world's largest marine fishing nations—Thailand to the west and Vietnam to the southeast—Cambodia's relatively modest 435-km coastline has not historically been renowned for marine fisheries. However, despite the long-standing dominance of freshwater fisheries across the Cambodian portion of the Mekong River system, marine fisheries have grown considerably, their production increasing from 75,000 tonnes in 2009 to over 212,000 tonnes in 2018, a 180 percent growth in a decade.

This emerging sector reveals a fascinating picture of the social, ecological and political challenges faced by a rapidly developing ocean economy. Very little is known about the social or cultural history of coastal fisheries in Cambodia prior to the 20th century, predominantly due to limited record-keeping during the colonial rule by France that ended in 1953. Up until the 1950s, Cambodia's coastal fisheries were predominantly small-scale, with minimal exports to its immediate neighbours. This is in contrast to other Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand and the Philippines, both of which relied on support from Japan in rapidly industrializing their demersal and pelagic fleets in this period. Mechanized fisheries in Cambodia, in fact, seem to have been tentatively introduced from Thailand in the 1960s as the expansion of their diesel-powered bottom-trawl fleet radiated out across neighbouring waters.

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The civil and political disruption of the 1970s stopped much of this early development in its tracks, with all fishing banned during the Khmer Rouge era (1975-1979). The turmoil of this period saw both urban and rural communities violently displaced and relocated, seemingly eradicating the oral histories and traditions of coastal fishers and communities. In addition to halting the socioeconomic development potential of coastal fisheries—with rice agriculture and peasant farming the principal focus of the regime—this mass upheaval also created a serious 'trust deficit' between and within communities, inhibiting the social cohesion needed to adequately manage common resources.

The end of the Khmer Rouge regime ushered in a 20-year period characterized by a dramatic shift towards community-based management of both freshwater and marine fisheries. This culminated in the radical fishery reform of 2000, when Prime Minister Hun Sen overturned the private ownership or the 'lot' system that previously governed freshwater fisheries.

Vital framework

While this ambitious policy change did not directly affect marine fisheries governance—no coastal areas were under private ownership—it provided the basis for the Community Fisheries organizations, a vital framework for collective, rights-based fisheries management that persists and thrives in

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JEREMY HOLDEN/FFI

Small-scale fishing boats in Koh Rong archipelago, Cambodia. The combination of highspeed fishery industrialization and government-driven promotion of small-scale fisheries has left the country's marine resources in a challenging state

inland and coastal settings to this day. As John Kurien notably observed in a 2017 review of these institutions: "Cambodia is the only country in Asia where, since 2000, there has been a conscious government-driven policy dedicated to the 'small-scale-isation' of the fishery through the creation of Community Fisheries organizations." In parallel to this concerted national recognition of the small-scale sector, Cambodia's industrial marine fisheries also evolved considerably between the 1980s and the early 2000s, particularly the demersal fleet. The Cambodian bottom-trawling fleet more than trebled between the early 1990s and the early 2000s to a high point of nearly 1,600 vessels in 2002, reducing slightly to around 1,450 vessels over the ensuing two decades. (It should be noted that the absence of a functional vessel register or licensing system mean these are estimates.)

A majority of this fleet development was driven by relatively small (or 'baby') trawlers, with 72 per cent of the current trawl fleet under 12 metres in length and none larger than 24 metres. This expansive middle-scale section—it is not quite artisanal but not industrial—of the fleet has posed significant difficulties for sustainable fisheries management in Cambodia. It conflicted with Community Fisheries organizations, thereby slowing the implementation of rights-based marine fishery governance, and posing a management challenge for the design and implementation of a national marine protected area (MPA) network.

The last 30 years have seen not only the rapid exploitation and decline of coastal fisheries in Cambodia, but also the emergence of a socially positive movement to protect the rights of small-scale fishers.

The combination of high-speed fishery industrialization and government-driven promotion of small-scale fisheries has left the country's marine resources in a

challenging state. Several authors have noted likely drastic declines in demersal and pelagic resources across the Gulf of Thailand, although it has also been noted that insufficient catch monitoring may hinder drawing any concrete conclusions at the national level. While Cambodian fisheries law laudably promotes good governance and small-scale fishery inclusivity, it should be noted that 'open access' marine fisheries rights for all Cambodians have left little scope to control expansion, tackle overcapacity or limit environmental degradation.

This disconnect between fishery policy and the reality of resource decline is nowhere more evident than in the 'middle-scale' demersal trawl fisheries. While there are a small number of large trawlers under beneficial foreign ownership, 'middle-scale' vessels are owned by elite Cambodians, who each own between three and five vessels that switch between trawling and swimming crab gillnetting, according to season. Although still categorized as 'small-scale' in the eyes of the government, these vessels are increasing their fishing power, marginalizing the truly local operators and even taking advantage of the associated benefits of this miscategorization (for example, avoiding paying tax due to being considered 'small-scale').

There are multiple accounts of trawlers destroying small-scale fishing gear and physically assaulting small-scale fishers.

As in many Southeast Asian nations like Malaysia and Myanmar, Cambodia has attempted to separate trawling from coastal fishing through an inshore restriction, with trawling nominally banned in waters shallower than 20 metres. However, this seems to have had the principal effect of criminalizing trawl effort and exposing the lack of fisheries enforcement capacity needed to make the restriction effective in practice. The 20-metre depth restriction may also be impractical for fishers to comply with, since many Cambodian vessels lack digital navigation or depth sounding equipment.

While the demersal trawl fishery nominally targets penaeid shrimps, it is likely that widespread declines in these species have driven a less-selective 'trash fish' catch, mostly destined for fishmeal and fish oil factories. A 1999 study of small-scale fisher perceptions of shrimp catch changes in the northernmost Koh Kong province found perceived catch per unit effort reduced by up to 90 percent since the 1960s. These declines have, in turn, led to the collapse of several Cambodian joint shrimp processing ventures as well as caused Cambodia to be outcompeted by the entrenched shrimp export sectors of Vietnam and Thailand.

On a wider, ecosystem level, the minimal regulation of the trawl fleet has had dire consequences. The decline of rich, inshore habitats along the Cambodian coastline has been repeatedly linked to excessive bottom-trawling effort, damaging sensitive seagrass beds in the provinces of Kep and Kampot and even degrading precious coral reef habitats. An interview-based study in 2012 identified bycatch in bottom trawling gear as the principal cause of decline in green and hawksbill sea turtles, considered Endangered and Critically Endangered, respectively. Cambodian seas have historically supported up to five sea turtle species, but only green and hawksbill have been recently sighted; no nesting by any turtle species has been recorded in almost a decade. Declines in globally significant seahorse populations in Cambodian waters, including within MPAs, have also been linked to the trawl fishery.

Destructive trawlers

The resource and ecosystem declines associated with this mid-sized trawl fleet have also had the social consequence of squeezing out truly 'small-scale' marine fisheries, and constantly impeding coastal Community Fisheries institutions. There are multiple accounts of trawlers destroying small-scale fishing gear and physically assaulting small-scale Cambodian fishers. In a 2010 study, conflicts witnessed by two Community Fisheries in Koh Kong province were repeatedly linked to "outsider fishermen using trawl nets" who "never landed the

A new fisheries law

Major revisions are currently underway in the legal framework governing the use of aquatic resources in Cambodia: the country's Fisheries Law, last revised in 2006. The most substantial changes are the requirement for consistent and coherent registration of fishing vessels as well as the inclusion of entirely new provisions relating to monitoring, control and surveillance. While the law will retain the national spatial system of restricting trawling in 'coastal fishing areas', this will now be delimited by a distance from shore measure, as opposed to a depth contour restriction.

fish that they caught in the area to avoid any public criticism".

In a 2020 interview, Chhang, a community fisher in Koh Sdach Archipelago, explained that "the key challenges are [that] illegal fishing is still the same as during the previous time, trawling in the conservation area is still in place [and] fisheries resources are decreasing". Fishery inequity extends further offshore, where the licensing of Vietnamese and Thai trawlers to operate in Cambodian waters (and the minimal catch reporting and potential illegalities associated with these licences) means further value loss for the Community Fisheries sector.

Despite these challenges, the Cambodian government is beginning to develop the partnerships, resources and tools needed to better manage its coastal waters. A sweeping revision of the outdated Fisheries Law of 2006 is underway. The country has recently ratified two important international fisheries treaties: the Port States Measures Agreement (aimed at reducing illegal fishing through better collaboration between nations) and the Straddling Stocks Agreement (aimed at enhancing co-operative management of highly migratory fish species such as tuna).

Funding of US$124 million between 2019 and 2023, through the European Union's CAPFISH programme, has enabled extensive financial and technical support to Cambodia's main fishery regulator, the Fisheries Administration (FiA). In addition to a thorough policy review, these funds will support development of new systems to gather the vital data needed to inform management. For example, the country's first full vessel census concluded in 2020, and plans are in motion to develop a robust catch documentation scheme that encompasses all fisheries sectors. The Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool (SMART)—successfully applied in MPA management in the Koh Rong Archipelago by FiA, supported by Fauna & Flora International (FFI)—will be extended to support co-managed marine enforcement across the whole coastline.

Site-based marine conservation approaches are also being scaled up through new investment by the Blue Action Fund and Arcadia, a charitable fund of Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin, with FFI and a partner consortium implementing a national MPA network across Koh Kong, Preah Sihanouk, Kep and Kampot provinces. Finally, under the structure of a soon-to-be-completed National Plan of Control and Inspection, the FiA will receive desperately needed increases in human resources and marine enforcement assets to put these new policies and data to effective use.

Tenure protection

The last 30 years have seen not only the rapid exploitation and decline of coastal fisheries in Cambodia, but also the emergence of a socially positive movement to protect the rights of small-scale fishers. Through harmonizing major changes in the national fishing sector with the emerging MPA network and established small-scale tenure protection, future decades will hopefully see significant progress towards equitably governed Cambodian small-scale fisheries and gradual signs of a recovering marine environment.

For more

Fishing disarmed
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From Individual Rights to Community Commons
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Banding Together
https://www.icsf.net/images/samudra/pdf/english/issue_78/4336_art_Samudra%20Report%20No%2078%20Banding%20Together%20by%20Nick%20Beresford.pdf

Fauna & Flora International
https://www.fauna-flora.org/

A Ripple Effect

The post-COVID-19 lockdowns did not just hit fishing operations and markets in Cambodia but also resulted in nutritional insecurity for the most vulnerable small-scale fishers

By April 2021 Cambodia had recorded more than 2,500 cases of COVID-19 and 16 deaths. The government closed schools, discouraged mass gatherings and restricted travel from severely affected countries. The lockdowns impaired two major sectors of the country's economy: the garment industry and tourism.

Ms Lo, a grocery shop owner, felt this first-hand. Her husband and sons are fishermen and boatmen for tourists; the family owns a fuel shop, too. The family's income decreased by 50 per cent during the pandemic. "Not many tourists coming to our village. We have adequate food, but it is not really a nutritious diet. We borrow money from microfinance institutions in order to support our livelihood and to continue fishing," she says.

Lo's story is not an exception. Tourism, garment manufacturing and construction contributed to more than 70 per cent of Cambodia's economic growth and was responsible for 38.5 per cent of total employment in 2019, says the World Bank's 2020 data. Research shows that the pandemic has pushed many Cambodians into poverty, with an estimated 390,000 Cambodians losing jobs this year alone. The Ministry of Tourism says the loss of revenue in the tourism sector was around US$3 bn in 2020, with a decline of about 50-70 per cent in foreign and local visitors. In Siem Reap, tourist arrivals contracted by 45.6 per cent in the month of April 2020.

The ripples of this downturn were felt, in turn, in the national economy. Before the pandemic, Ms Nang worked at a garment factory in Phnom Penh that has now shut down. With no options and no income, she travelled back to her husband's home town, Kampong Thom, to assist him: "He works on the family rice farm, supplementing his income with construction work and fishing."

The slowdown and restrictions took away the jobs of over 100,000 Cambodian workers in neighbouring Thailand. The returnees went from being earning members of their households to a liability, another mouth to feed at a time of privation.

Fisheries constitute a large part of Cambodia's economy, contributing between 8-12 per cent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). Over 6 mn Cambodians—45.5 per cent of the population—work in fishing and related activities; more than half of these are women. It is ironical that they cannot find fishing work after relocating to their home communities.

The slowdown and restrictions took away the jobs of over 100,000 Cambodian workers in neighbouring Thailand.

The sector is divided into small-scale (or family) fisheries, middle-scale and large-scale (or commercial) fisheries, based on the type, number and size of fishing gear, as defined by government bodies. It is subject to specific regulations concerning gear, fishing grounds and timing.

Export decline

Almost 30 per cent of the country's population finds livelihood in small-scale fisheries. The country's fish exports have steadily declined over the years, partly due to an increase in domestic demand and partly due to a decline in fishing yields. The pandemic has hit the prices and demand for fish.

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Focus group discussions with Cambodian women. Small fish traders, predominantly women, were unable to negotiate prices, and do not have access to electricity and enough water to store fish

There are no restrictions on fishing activities, markets, mobility of fishers and traders. Yet the sector is undergoing a major churn, as revealed in focus group discussions (FGDs) in the inland fisheries of Kampong Thom and Siem Reap provinces and in the coastal areas of the Koh Kong province.

The increasing prices hit sales, leading to fishers questioning their effort and input.

A fisherman in Siem Reap pointed out how the drop in fish prices was not uniform across all categories; some types did worse than others. "I observed changes in retail prices [at the local market]," he said. The price of fish like snakehead had halved, he said.

A woman in Koh Kong drew attention to a steep rise in prices of certain fish after the drastic drop during the pandemic. The increasing prices hit sales, leading to fishers questioning their effort and input. The more they fished, the higher the loss! "Our fish catch dropped by 50 per cent," said a fisherman during an FGD at Koh Kong village. What's driven down sales further is the rumour that the coronavirus lives in fish.

Consequences of government interventions

The Cambodian government launched a 'cash transfer programme' to help poor people, identified as IDPoor and holding an Equity Card. It covered about 560,000 families, with Rural IDPoor households received assistance equal to US$20 each. This first-of-its-kind social protection scheme rolled out in June-July 2020. The government has set aside US$125 mn for this.

Despite its quick implementation, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) noted that women were mostly unaware of the scheme. Furthermore, small fish traders, predominantly women, were highly vulnerable due to the downturn. Forced to absorb most of the loss due to a drop in the retail price, these traders were hit the hardest. Many are unable to negotiate prices, and do not have access

to electricity and enough water to store fish. Their consumers—low-income households—have been suffering themselves, reducing consumption.

The government banned fish exports in April 2020 for the sake of food security. This has contributed further to falling prices, with larger fishers forced to sell in the domestic market. Small-scale fishers now compete with larger fishers for the fish consumed by better-off families. When it comes to the cheaper fish consumed by low-income households, they have to compete with cheaper imported fish.

Yet this flux of demand and prices has not affected imports of cultured fish from Thailand and Vietnam. Import of seafood products from Vietnam increased from US$47.7 mn in 2019 to US$52.8 mn in 2020. A woman at an FGD in Kampon Thom said that these fish are sold at lower prices because they are not valued much in the Cambodian market. The demand for the cheaper fish has grown during the downturn. Farmed catfish from Vietnam is sold at US$0.78 per kg, while the domestic catfish fetches US$1.3 per kg. To counter this discrepancy, the government suspended imports of catfish from Vietnam in January 2021.

Market crises

The crises in the market for domestic fish do not extend to 'rice fish' (like catfish, caught in rice fields). Households pay extra for rice fish, which is valued highly in Cambodia for its flavour and health benefits. Men in Kampong Thom observed that rice fish prices increased more than 15 per cent during the pandemic.

What makes the situation worse for small-scale fishers is that they cannot compensate for declining margins by increasing volumes. Fish catch has been decreasing in Cambodia for the last few years due to overfishing, pollution, water shortage, climate change and a loss of fish spawning areas (because of coastal area development for non-fish purposes such as tourism and industry).

An FGD with fishermen in Koh Kong revealed that a large number of people left unemployed by the downturn due to pandemic are turning to fishing. "Before the COVID-19 crisis, we would get a catch of 30 kg a day on average," said a woman at the Siem Rep FGD. "During the crisis, this reduced to 20 kg a day." While the daily catch has reduced, the number of fishers and fishworkers has not.

At the same time, decreasing incomes have forced fishers into other jobs to make ends meet. Before the pandemic, Ms Heng, the wife of a soldier, used to run a small shop selling fish products. Her business suffered a 20-30 per cent reduction due to the pandemic. She started working as a waste picker in her coastal village to supplement her income and provide for her family. "Even though we earn less than before, my family still has enough to eat," she said.

When it comes to the cheaper fish consumed by low-income households, they have to compete with cheaper imported fish.

While food has remained available, it is worth asking: what is its nutritional value? Heng admitted that what they eat now doesn't really constitute a nutritious diet. While the price of fish has gone down, the price of vegetables and meat has risen, making it difficult for fishers to buy other foods by selling their own produce, fish. Fishers say that they are now eating whatever they can find in the community—fish they catch and vegetables they plant. Many say they eat fewer vegetables and more fish now, skewing the nutritional balance.

Catching a break

Fishing, a source of livelihood for a majority of Cambodians, has suffered in a big way during the pandemic. There is an increased pressure on fishing resources; the workforce is increasing; and the demand for their products is steadily decreasing. The decline in fish catch also threatens the food security of Cambodia's poor, who depend significantly on the product, not just for income but also for personal consumption. While the prices of most foods in the market have risen, fish prices have—for the most part—steadily declined.

SOKMOLY UON

Floating house on Tonle Sap Lake, Cambodia. What makes the situation worse for small-scale fishers is that they cannot compensate for declining margins by increasing volumes

Economic disparity

Although small-scale fishing has played an important role in meeting the nutritional needs of the poor, trends show that the pandemic has impacted the poor more severely than the better-off. It has hit women traders more than fishers themselves. And small-scale domestic fishers have been hit harder than fish importers. This is an economic disparity the country will have to counter quickly. If it does not, it will suffer the consequences for a long time.

...small-scale fishing has played an important role in meeting the nutritional needs of the poor, trends show that the pandemic has impacted the poor more severely...

For more

Fish Counts –Increasing the visibility of small-scale fisheries (SSFs) in Cambodia's national planning
https://pubs.iied.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/migrate/16671IIED.pdf

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From Individual Rights to Community Commons

Cambodia's community fisheries initiative is the most extensive and well-developed system of community fisheries in the world

"The current fishery rights system in Cambodia is the most extensive and well-developed system of community fisheries in the world", said the European Union (EU) Representative to Cambodia at the FAO/UN User Rights 2015 Conference held in Siem Reap, Cambodia.

Defining tenurial boundaries and proving rights in an aquatic milieu is a daunting task. This is further confounded when dealing with a dynamic land-water interface marked by significant seasonal fluctuations. Yet, taking advantage of its overriding tenure over all such terrains, the state reserves the right of granting tenure with differential bundles of rights to individuals or riparian communities to access and manage such fuzzy interfaces.

...in 2000, a bold initiative in Cambodia became a trail-blazer when individual rights were replaced with community rights ...

In Cambodia, the tenure rights were initially given to individuals. This system held for many centuries. But in 2000, a bold initiative in Cambodia became a trail-blazer when individual rights were replaced with community rights in this regard. This article very briefly narrates this unique case of top-down creation of community fisheries in an inland fishery in Cambodia, provides a brief evaluation of the current status and indicates the likely trajectory into the future.

Cambodia's vast aquatic milieu is part of the larger Mekong River Basin and its fertile floodplains. At the heart of this area is the Tonle Sap Lake – the largest freshwater lake in Southeast Asia and the most productive and bio-diverse freshwater zone in the world. The Tonle Sap River flows out from the Lake and joins the Mekong at Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia. During the peak flooding season, from June to September, the seasonal monsoon causes the Mekong and its tributaries to spill out of their channels. The flooding is so heavy that the flow of Tonle Sap River is reversed back into the lake, inundating huge areas of forest and grassland across the country. When this happens, the Tonle Sap – now designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve – grows from about 2,500 sq km to cover over 16,000 sq km, or about 7 per cent of Cambodia's land area. Tonle Sap teems with fish that nourishes Cambodia's population, making them the world's largest consumers of inland fish.

Licences auctioned

In 1873 the French Protectorate introduced tenure rights to the most productive parts of the Lake by auctioning licences to individuals to erect fish enclosures called 'fishing lots' over vast areas of the lake.

The Tonle Sap was also mute witness to the genocide of the Pol Pot regime in the 1970s. The populations around the Lake were uprooted and scattered far and wide to realize his dream of making a communist state, based exclusively on a rice-growing proletariat subsisting on state welfare. Many Vietnamese fishers and Khmer

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FAO/A.K. KIMOTO

A fisherman casting a net from the banks of the Tonle Sap River, Cambodia. The direction of events in Cambodia in the immediate future will reveal which way the dice is loaded for CFi and the riparian communities

farmers who were educated and fishing lot owners were killed for fear that they would rise against the state. Fishing came to a standstill.

The vicious regime of Pol Pot was defeated in 1978. Cambodia slowly returned to the democratic mainstream in 1993 but only after over a decade of 'socialist' rule. The fishing lots gradually reappeared and their auctioning by the state was revived as it did form a sizeable revenue of the state – between US$ 2 and 3 mn per annum. Fishing lot owners became a rich and privileged group. Many former military men also got involved. They jealously protected the lots from ingress by the large displaced Khmer peasant population who settled around the Lake after Pol Pot. Conflict over access to fish became endemic. Many deaths were reported among riparian communities as a result.

This situation was altered drastically in October, 2000. Cambodia's Prime Minister made the unexpected announcement cancelling half of all fishing lot licences of a few hundred powerful individuals. He turned over the rights of access to thousands of poor rural families to harvest the fishery resources for food and livelihood. It was action which yielded important political rewards for the Prime Minister in the next elections in 2003.

This was a state-sponsored aquarian reform backed by the highest level of legal protection with the pronouncement of a Sub-Decree. The Fisheries Administration (FiA) was asked to start a Community Fisheries Development Office to assist the riparian communities set up new community fisheries institutions (CFi for short). Civil society organizations and international development partners were encouraged to help.

Meanwhile, spurred by the new freedom to access the resources, many communities, sometimes with the help of NGOs, initiated the process of creating new CFi. They submit to the local Fisheries Administration a 'petition of interest' signed by interested members and enclose a hand-drawn map of the proposed area of their commons, usually composed of a dynamic land-water terrain. The Administration investigates the claim, conducts a needs assessment with the petitioners, arranges for a rough check of the boundaries and gives a tentative approval or rejection notice in 30 days. If approval is obtained, the

Fisheries Administration sets out to disseminate to the interested members their rights and responsibilities as spelt out in the sub-decree.

To obtain formal recognition of their CFi from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forest and Fisheries, the CFi must do the following: With the assistance of the Administration, the members form a general assembly. This assembly initiates a democratic process to decide on a name for their CFi, frame their objectives, internal rules and regulations and also elect a managing CFi Committee from among the members. A list of names of all members and the Committee is prepared. To produce an accredited map, the CFi area is physically mapped together with the Administration and neighbouring communities to hedge against potential future boundary disputes. The local administration, competent NGOs and technical agencies often help with financial support and mapping skills. The use of orthophoto mapping technology, with assistance from international development agencies, has been widely reported. Large cement boundary markers are placed at points which are perennially under water.

Some of the best functioning CFi are marked by the greater participation of women in them.

Once formally registered with the Ministry, a CFi has the exclusive use and management rights to the fishery domain within their mapped jurisdiction for an officially recognized period of three years, which is renewable. Fishing in the CFi is strictly meant for subsistence and only very small-scale nets and traps are legally permitted. Consequently, the risk of overfishing is minimal in this salubrious and highly productive ecosystem. Each CFi is required to prepare their own management plan to chart out how they will utilize and conserve their common domain and its resources. This plan includes a careful inventory of the different ecosystems in the area; listing of the fish species diversity and seasonal patterns; the total fishing assets available with the members and a rough assessment of the sustainable resource yields which can be harvested. All the commoners of the CFi are duty-bound to protect their commons from harm. Formal patrolling groups composed of members are active in all CFi.

An assessment made in 2012 – of the 450 CFi established by then – demonstrated that the aquarian reforms resulted in a much wider distribution of the benefits gained from the teeming fishery resources of the Lake and also the other riverine and marine areas brought under the CFi regime.

Leading the list of benefits was the greater quantities of fish consumed by the rural population – particularly the children. Secondly, the use of the small cash incomes from sale of fish contributed to family expenditures such as children's school books; minor health costs and minor repair of homes; purchase of rice in the lean season and such like. For the rural communities such small but crucial expenses make significant differences in their lives. Knowing that all this comes from resources over which they have collective control is a great source of empowerment.

Democracy

There have also been tangible improvements in the local ecosystem through the collective efforts of the CFi members to protect the flooded forests; plant mangroves; stop destructive fishing and other conservation measures. The structured role of women in the CFi committees provided new avenues to gradually bring in more gender equality in the communities. Some of the best functioning CFi are marked by a greater participation of women in them.

The governance of their CFi has thrown up new leaders; reinforced the merits of collective action and made a significant dent in the 'trust deficit' which prevailed due to periods of conflict and war. But there are also many challenges to overcome. These include, importantly, the bane of illegal fishing and the conflicts arising

from it. There are dispute settlement procedures and graded sanctions in place, but the will of the community often pales before the might of the powerful. Another issue of concern is the 'restrictive' definition of the organization as a 'fishery' institution when the clear majority of the community only fish for consumption but depend on agriculture and other service sector activities for their main livelihood. Noting the small but significant nutritional, economic and social benefits which widely accrued to the communities from his earlier policy pronouncements, the Prime Minister completed his reforms in 2012 by taking over the remaining half of the fishing lots. Some were converted into exclusive conservation zones in the Lake, in his words, "to protect the lake's pressured wild fisheries on which tens of thousands of subsistence fishermen rely."

Today (2018) there are over 500 CFi in Cambodia. The majority are around the Tonle Sap Lake. Their common area covers over 850,000 ha spread across 19 of the 25 provinces of the country. There are 188,000 members, of whom over 61,000 are women. Not all the CFi in Cambodia function as 'lively commons'. Many remain 'empty shells' for lack of leadership and timely support from civil society and development partners. The framework for a modern commons and the rich experience of thousands of commoners collaborating over the last 18 years is already a huge corpus of social capital which can be tapped with the right facilitation and support.

In conclusion, it can be said that fish is an integral part of Cambodia's aquatic ecosystem, an indispensible component of its people's food intake and an essential part of Khmer cultural identity. As long that this remains true, there will be a role for CFi in Cambodia, where community-based collective action to sustain and manage aquatic ecosystems is the basis for equitable benefits to individual members. But the current reality is that there are already threats to the ecosystem, changes in food habits and new competing elements entering the cultural realm.

The greatest of these threats relate to the assault on the ecosystem: the conversion of flood plains to agriculture; the damage to the flooded forests; the destruction of mangrove swamps and mudflats; the reduction of river flow due to erection of barriers and construction of dams; and the use of illegal fishing gear and destructive fishing methods. Much of this assault on nature is undertaken with the patronage of powerful economic interests, often with political backing. If CFi are to survive in this situation, they will have to take more affirmative collective action to guard their domain and the resources within it.

CFi

CFi were created in 2000 in a particular socio-political context which existed in Cambodia during that period. The rewards from the reforms which created CFi were reaped both by the riparian communities and those at the helm of political affairs that heralded the reforms into existence. As long as this convergence of interests continues, CFi in Cambodia have a future.

However, empowering CFi to become vibrant democratic people's organizations, living up to the narrative of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (the SSF Guidelines) and guaranteeing a bright future for the aquatic ecosystems, fishery resources and the members of riparian communities, will depend on many factors.

These include: the genuine commitment to democracy and concern for the livelihoods of the rural poor on the part of the political establishment; a strong belief in the viability of CFi on the part of the Fisheries Administration; the co-ordinated support of civil society organizations to promote self-reliance of the CFi; and the emergence of more committed leaders and enthusiastic young membership within the CFi .

The direction of events in Cambodia in the immediate future will reveal which way the dice is loaded for CFi and the riparian communities.

For more

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Community Fisheries Organizations of Cambodia: Sharing processes, results and lessons learned in the context of the implementation of the SSF Guidelines

Banding Together

By uniting to fight land grab by business interests, members of the Preynub II Community Fishery in Cambodia have set an example for other communities

It's early Tuesday morning, and along a dike that separates the mangrove forest from the fish nursery habitat, Ream Mosavy is collecting blue shell mussels. For generations, his community has harvested mussels here, a means to their very survival. But in 2016, a powerful business person grabbed 45 ha of the community's land, threatening the community's food supply. Approximately 45 ha of the mangrove forest were encroached upon by the entrepreneur who wanted to convert the land into a coconut plantation. "Our community depends largely on natural resources—fishing and forests—for our daily needs, and we don't have to spend a lot of money on purchasing food items. If the forest is no more, we would find it extremely difficult to survive," says Mosavy, Chief of the Preynub II Community Fishery.

There are signs too that within the government there is recognition that strong communities bring both better protection of the environment and stronger economic growth.

Mosavy knew if the community did not act soon, they would lose their land. So they organized a campaign to regain control of it. First, a formal complaint was filed with support from the Fisheries Administration. In a sign of internal solidarity, all community members stood up against the entrepreneur and either signed or put their thumbprint on the complaint.

Preynub, as a registered Community Fishery, has legal documents endorsed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries that include a clear defined boundary, and internal rules and regulations to manage resources on its common property. This status put Preynub in a relatively stronger position to exercise its community's rights in excluding outsiders. To counter the powerful vested interests that were responsible for the encroachment, Preynub used the mass media to focus on the issue. They reached out to television channels and provided information on the encroachment. Their story received widespread news coverage, and attracted the attention of provincial and national authorities.

The Provincial Governor quickly called for an investigation that led to the community being granted back its land, with a commitment of no further attempts at encroachment. "It's because of this dependence (for food) that our community makes special efforts to take care of our resources," Mosavy says. "We are able to not only manage our resources, but, if required, we can also mobilize collective efforts to stop encroachment of our forest land from external commercial interests." The Preynub II Community Fishery is responsible for managing an area of 4,500 ha, which comprise 650 ha of mangrove forest. Its prized location, close to rich resources and along the national highway, provides it with easy access to natural resources, local markets and public services.

Alternative livelihood

The Cambodia REDD+ Programme, supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (REDD = United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries) and the Forest Carbon Partnership

*This article is by **Nick Beresford** (communications.kh@undp.org), Country Director, United Nations Development Programme, Cambodia*

UNDP / CAMBODIA

Villagers with blood cockles collected from the sea. Preynub's success shows that empowered local communities can protect their resources and property

Facilities, in collaboration with the Fisheries Administration, supports Preynub's efforts to reduce deforestation and forest degradation. The programme enhances the capacity of local communities and authorities to address forest encroachment through awareness raising, patrolling activities, reporting and documentation. In addition, new and alternative livelihood opportunities such as ecotourism provide an incentive for communities to protect resources.

There are signs too that within the government there is recognition that strong communities bring both better protection of the environment and stronger economic growth. The draft Environmental Codes, championed by the Minister of Environment, Say Samal, give wide-ranging powers to the local government and local communities. The codes also provide a new direction in sustainable development, and a radical transfer of powers to local councils and communities. Preynub's success in regaining its land proves that empowered local communities that band together and work with the local authorities can protect their resources and property. It can serve as an important lesson for other communities facing similar situations.

For more

http://www.fao.org/3/a-i7206e.pdf
Community Fisheries Organizations of Cambodia: Sharing processes, results and lessons learned in the context of the implementation of the SSF Guidelines by John Kurien

http://www.kh.undp.org/
UNDP in Cambodia

Towards a Modern Commons

The Community Fisheries organizations in Cambodia possess the basic framework and principles to be considered good examples of a created 'modern commons'

SAMUDRA Report has featured many articles about the origins and functioning of the Community Fisheries (CFi) organizations of Cambodia (see 'For more' below). This article focuses on a recent scoping study, undertaken in August 2015, which sought to ascertain if the CFi in Cambodia have the essential characteristics and attributes necessary to be considered organizations that are utilizing and governing riparian 'commons'.

What are 'commons'? To arrive at an answer to this question, we will need to first have an understanding of what constitutes a 'commons'. The first matter in this regard is to do away with the connotation of 'commons' as being some archaic form of tenure which was prevalent in Europe in medieval times, pertaining to agriculture and livestock activities of poor peasants which was usurped by feudal lords through what came to be known as the 'enclosure movement' to create forms of private property.

The other, more recent, academic association of 'commons' is with the much-quoted article written by Garrett Hardin in 1968 titled *The Tragedy of the Commons*. In it, Hardin considers the 'commons' to be a form of tenure where access to the resources therein is 'open to all' and thus inevitably leads to its depletion or destruction.

The historic association of commons being merely a form of tenure of ancient times, and the association of commons as a form of tenure which permits access to all, are both incorrect.

So what then do we mean or understand today when referring to a 'commons'? Is it about the nature of particular things or resources—such as fish in the sea, forests, public parks, urban residential complexes, the telecommunication spectrum, outer space, Antarctica, and so forth? Is it about the way human governance of these resources/realms should be organized—for example, by a like-minded group, a neighbourhood community or a committee of interested nations?

In our understanding, commons, while they are about certain resources and ways of governance, are more appropriately visualized as the intrinsic combination of (i) a resource, (ii) a community utilizing it and (iii) a set of social rules and norms regarding use, misuse and management.

The historic association of commons being merely a form of tenure of ancient times, and the association of commons as a form of tenure which permits access to all, are both incorrect.

Principles of the Commons

There have been a whole series of investigations and a large body of analysis regarding the different types of commons, which, even today, function very successfully in various places around the world. The concept of 'commons' is also making headway into new realms such as software development, academic publications, music and the like.

One name which stands out when we refer to modern-day commons is that of the late Elinor Ostrom, the only woman Nobel Laureate in Economics. Ostrom spent a lifetime showing that

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BOX :

OSTROM'S EIGHT PRINCIPLES FOUND IN WELL-FUNCTIONING COMMONS

1. Clearly defined group boundaries.
2. Rules governing use of common goods matching with local needs and conditions.
3. Those affected by the rules can participate in modifying the rules.
4. Rule-making rights of community members are respected by outside authorities.
5. A system is available, developed and carried out by community members, for monitoring members' behaviour.
6. Graduated sanctions are used for rule violators.
7. Accessible, low-cost means for dispute resolution are made available.
8. Responsibility for governing the common resource in nested tiers is built up from the lowest level up to the entire interconnected system.

when it comes to the managing of natural resources, there are tenure options between State ownership and management on the one hand, and market-oriented, privatized ownership on the other. It was her mission to valorize the examples around the world where groups of people and cogent communities organized themselves to effectively and efficiently manage common resources sustainably.

From the thousands of examples, Ostrom developed several organizing principles which lie at the heart of successful commons (see Box).

Principles of the Commons and Community Fisheries

In order to ascertain if Cambodia's CFi qualify as an example of a 'modern commons', we conducted both structured interviews using a questionnaire, and non-structured conversations with representatives from thirteen CFi across the country. We tried to ascertain from them which principles of the commons were present in their organization and which were absent. This sample was not selected on the basis of any planned, purposive, stratified or scientific random manner. Therefore, there is no claim to a *priori* representativeness of the sample.

On completion of the interviews, we requested two key functionaries of the Fisheries Administration to use their intimate knowledge of the history of each of these CFi to assess and arrange the thirteen according to their overall performance.

The key criteria they used to make this grouping were:

- well-recognized functioning of CFi Committees,
- active member participation in activities such as conservation, use of resources for livelihood alternatives, mobilization of savings and funds,
- the involvement of women, and
- good feedback about the CFi from the concerned Provincial Fishery Officers.

Among the thirteen organizations, only three were considered to be well-functioning and three were considered to be poorly functioning, with the remaining seven lying on the spectrum in between.

Here are our findings:

(a) Boundaries

On the issue of clear demarcation of boundaries, we note that all thirteen CFis have attended to this task; eight of them have put up markers and nine have official maps. Variations exist with regard to the extent of awareness among the members about the boundaries. Only two claim that all their members are aware of the boundaries. It is interesting to note that these are the two CFi with the smallest area (115 and 337 ha) in our sample.

(b) Rule Making

Nine of the CFi claim that they have devised new rules primarily with regard to the procedures and norms (how to do, how to share the benefits, and so on) for activities which will have a bearing on the social and economic aspects of the members.

All of them state that the rules match local needs and conditions. This rule making is often premised on local, customary practices which are socially negotiated and may not be formalized in any written form.

(c) Participation in Rule Making

In the current context, these internal rules are usually made primarily by the CFi Committee, sometimes with the participation of a few active members. For example, rules on dealing with illegal fishing would be made with the participation of members of the patrolling groups. Among the nine CFi which have devised new rules, only two say that all their members were involved in the process. In seven of them it was the Committee and a few members who were actively involved.

Making rules is the easier task; getting members to follow them is more difficult. In four of the nine CFi it is claimed that 'most' of the members follow the new rules as well as the existing CFi rules. In three it is said that 'some' follow the rules. Only two of the well-functioning CFi make the claim that 'all' members follow the new rules made.

(d) Respect for Rule Making

The extent to which outsiders (non-members) respect the rules is a good measure of the respect and the standing which a CFi has in the larger society. Six of the nine which made rules claim that most of the outsiders respect these rules. Presumably, this relates to rules which affect the outsiders too—such as boundaries and issues relating to illegal fishing. Four of them state that only a 'few' outsiders respect these rules.

(e) Monitoring Behaviour

In eleven of the CFi, there is a system for monitoring the behaviour of members. Much of this relates to the issue of illegal fishing. It is the Committee, along with members of the patrolling groups, who are involved in the monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) activities. In one—the smallest in terms of membership (108) and area (115 ha)—all the members are involved in MCS activities.

NYRO TUM

Family-scale fishing in Community Fisheries, Cambodia. For CFi which are largely 'empty shell commons' to become 'lively commons' requires greater stimulation of the self-organization process among the membership

(f) Sanctions for Rule Breaking

In all except the three poorly functioning CFi, there are well laid out, graded sanctions for rule breaking. Again, these are rules relating primarily to illegal fishing.

Initially a person who is apprehended for illegal fishing is given advice about the ill effects of what he is doing, and requested not to continue such activities. He is made to sign an undertaking with the CFi to that effect. A second offence attracts a fine and possibly confiscation/ destruction of the gear used. The third offence is reported with details to the provincial Fisheries Administration and the local law-enforcing authorities who will take their own course of action. The fourth offence attracts arrest by the police or military, on the advice of the Fisheries Administration, and the offender has to appear before a court. Some fisheries officers have been conferred the power to issue warrants for arrest.

The fact that illegal activity is so pervasive makes the potential for conflicts a permanent feature of the system.

Of the ten CFi that claimed to have graded sanctions, only eight state that implementation is effective. This only implies that action is being taken according to the laid out procedures and norms. In most cases, this does not imply that the problem gets solved—particularly with regard to illegal fishing.

(g) Systems of Conflict Resolution

That conflict is common and perhaps endemic in this dynamic land–water ecosystem is acknowledged by all the thirteen CFi. The fact that illegal activity is so pervasive makes the potential for conflicts a permanent feature of the system. However, conflicts are not restricted to issues of illegal fishing alone.

Since members are dealing with several other resources in their designated area—for example, the flooded rice-growing area, the flooded forests—differential and competing claims over the various common-pool resources are inevitable. There are also conflicts which arise among members on a variety of organizational issues. The presence of conflict in a commons is, therefore, not a matter of surprise.

We also note that seven of the CFi state that conflicts are settled quickly and effectively. Speed is of the essence in conflict resolution, as also negotiations, mediation and efforts to arrive at a consensus without leaving a victor and the vanquished.

Many of the CFi report that when their Committees deal with conflict among members, they call for a meeting in a common area (the office or the pagoda) and hold a dialogue in the presence of local village leaders, and make efforts to counsel the parties concerned, examine the consequences of the conflict, while also going into the causative roots. Illegal fishing by members because of their poverty or sudden household needs is a case in point.

(h) Nested System of Coordination

The management of resources in the CFi is clearly not merely a local issue which can be restricted within their boundary. Where CFi organizations exist in close proximity, the actions/inactions of one clearly affect the other though there may be a time lag before the ill effects (externalities) become evident. Co-operation and co-ordination are evidently required to minimise this.

It is interesting to note that on this issue of the need for co-ordination, there was perfect agreement among all the thirteen CFi in our study.

Currently, the co-ordination is done by the provincial Fisheries Administration. However, this is largely and essentially on a one-to-one basis between a particular CFi and the administration. There is little co-ordination amongst the various CFi organizations although the Sub-Decree of Community Fisheries allows it. All thirteen CFi in the study

agree that far greater co-ordination is needed amongst them.

Not by Principles Alone

Having completed the assessment, in overall conclusion we may say that in the majority of the CFi (10 out of 13) most of the Ostrom principles are present. If we consider the three CFi that were designated as 'well-functioning', they exhibit positive indicators of all the principles, whereas the three 'poorly functioning' ones lack many of the indicators of the eight principles.

Prima facie, given the data available, we may conclude that the CFi of Cambodia possess the basic framework and principles of functioning to be considered good examples of a created 'modern commons'. However, as Peter Linebuagh, one of the important historians and current proponents of commons initiatives points out: "There is no commons without commoning"! 'Commoning' may be considered the participative social attribute of activities and enthusiastic work/labour on the part of the commoners (the members) in making the commons really work. This is what differentiates a commons from other sorts of institutions.

In our sample, we find a fair degree of commoning only in the three well-functioning CFi. In the case of the remaining ten, they merely function as officially constituted organizations with their elected Committees, with the members, to varying degrees, being involved in some sort of patrolling activities to protect their designated common areas from illegal fishing.

Consequently, an organization which may have all (or most of) the principles ascribable to a 'commons institution' need not necessarily be functioning as a 'lively commons'. It can remain as an 'empty shell commons'. For CFi which are largely 'empty shell commons' to become 'lively commons' requires greater stimulation of the self-organization process among the membership. In many, the Committee, and the members, in their turn, keep waiting for the Fisheries Administration, an NGO or other development partners to assist them. There is not much initiative on the part of the Committee to enthuse the membership to take forward any meaningful, collective and beneficial actions using the natural resources which are available to them in their designated areas. In most cases, the members are satisfied with the individual freedom which they have obtained to fish freely all year round using legal small-scale fishing gear.

Therefore, providing the legal framework and governmental support which give a community the right to create a commons is not adequate to make it 'lively'. The commoners involved must also enthusiastically engage in defending those rights and translate them into actionable agenda points for conserving the natural resources and utilizing them for enhancing their livelihood options. Such priorities require astute, energetic and accountable leadership; creating trust among the commoners; forging voluntary collective action to defend the commons; and devising creative strategies to maximize and fairly distribute the material blessings from the commons.

Many of the 500-plus CFi in Cambodia have risen to become sterling examples of well-managed commons. We encountered three in our small sample. However, these are still the exceptions rather than the rule.

Clearly, framework and principles alone are not adequate to give 'life' to an organization. A 'lively commons' is the result of the community of members taking full cognizance of their rights and responsibilities and participating fully in 'commoning'.

On this score, the CFi organisations of Cambodia have a long, arduous voyage ahead. For this, they require technical support from the fisheries administration; financial support from development partners and moral support from civil society.

For more

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Coming Together to Fish

The Community Fisheries system, as practised in the Tonle Sap lake region of Cambodia, is now in need of better management options

The Tonle Sap is the largest freshwater lake in Southeast Asia. It is known for its unique flood pattern, which causes it to expand three to five times in area during the wet season, compared to the dry season. The increase in area causes flooded forests to be formed around the lake, which supports a high biodiversity of fish species. Some of this can be seen reflected in the wall reliefs carved in Bayon, in the world heritage site of the Angkor Wat temple complex.

Cambodian fisheries have developed by adapting to these unique ecosystems. Cambodia now produces approximately 400,000-500,000 tonnes of freshwater fish annually, which comprises 75 per cent of the total fishery production in the country. Around 82 per cent of the animal protein intake of Cambodians comes from fish and fishery products.

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Cambodian inland fisheries are classified into three categories by the fishery law—large- , middle-, and small (family)-scale fishing, based on the purpose, type and size of fishing gears. While large- and middle-scale fishing is for commercial purposes, small-scale fishing is for subsistence. Large-scale fishing is a licensed fishery, based on the auction of demarcated areas called 'fishing lots', which were established in the 1880s. Middle-scale fishing is licensed according to gear. A closed season (from 1 June to 30 September) is observed in Tonle Sap to allow spawning of major fish species for large- and medium-scale fishing. Small-scale fishing is an unrestricted fishery that requires no licences and can be practised throughout the year.

On 16 August 2011, Prime Minister Hun Sen ordered the closure of the 35 fishing lots in Tonle Sap due to rampant illegal fishing activities in the area. According to newspaper reports, the government would consider reopening the fishing lots after three years. The closure took even the Fisheries Administration (FiA) officials and international fishery specialists by surprise.

Prior to the order, a notification letter dated 12 August 2011 states: "Areas have to be re-examined, studied and evaluated properly. Which fishing lots should be abolished? Which should be retained for exploitation? Which should be converted into conservation lots, in order to rehabilitate fish resources?".

On 29 February 2012, *The Phnom Penh Post* newspaper reported that all 35 fishing lots in Tonle Sap were permanently closed. Overnight, a 100-year-old system of fishing lots disappeared from the lake. The fishing lots that were closed were converted into conservation areas and small-scale fishing grounds to be managed by Community Fisheries (CFi).

Fisheries reform

During the first fisheries reform in 2000, 56 per cent (536,000 ha) of the fishing lot areas were released for small-scale fishers to reduce conflicts between the commercial

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fishing lot operators and small-scale fishers. To manage the areas released, the Cambodian government introduced a community-based resource management system in small-scale fishing through the CFi. A CFi is a group of people formed voluntarily to manage and conserve the fisheries resources in the area. The fishing lot areas released were handed over to the CFis nearby as fishing grounds and their management transferred from the previous fishing lot owners. CFi areas offer free and open access and are not exclusive for the members; hence, outsiders, such as neighboring villagers, can also access the area, even as they visit other CFi areas for fishing. However, a CFi can set up its own rules and regulations that will control the entry of non-CFi members into the fishing areas.

A Community Fisheries Development Office was established in 2001 under the Department of Fisheries (now, the FiA) to facilitate and co-ordinate CFis. By 2005, 388 CFis had been established.

During the second reform phase in 2011-2012, an additional 271,126 ha were transferred as CFi areas (177,881 ha) and conservation areas (93,245 ha) in and around Tonle Sap. By March 2015, there were 588 CFis in Cambodia, the majority located around the lake. Since then, recognizing their importance CFis have been developed and supported for the management of sustainable fishing in the area.

Based on interviews with CFis in different areas since 2011, it can be seen that generally, the Prime Minister's order of 16 August 2011 was welcomed by the small-scale fishers because they thought they would have more access to better fishing grounds which they were previously unable to access.

However, in practice, actual access for new areas varied from one CFi to another. Those located close to the former fishing lot areas could get new CFi areas, while communities without any fishing lots did not. Also, the government decision on transferring the areas as fishing grounds or as conservation areas led to differences among the CFis.

The Phat Sanday CFi in Kampong Thom province, for instance, got four new areas after the second fisheries reform. Two were demarcated as residential, pass-through areas, where no fishing was allowed; one area was a conservation area where no activities are allowed; and the other area was separated into two parts, a fishing area and a conservation area. The CFi members complained that though the area expanded it could not be used as fishing grounds. Also, earlier, when the area was controlled by the fishing lot owner, people were able to negotiate to pass through the area, but when it was declared a conservation area, they were forced to take detours.

Opinions, however, differ. For example, in the Kampong Os CFi in the Kampong Chhnang province, the members said they were happy to be able to fish closer to the village than before. When the area was a fishing lot, people were wary of approaching the area for fear of conflicts with the owner.

With larger CFi areas, the responsibilities of management and conservation increase, and could prove to be a burden since they call for increased patrolling activities. CFi members are required to participate in

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Small-scale fishers at Tonle Sap, Cambodia. The closed fishing lots were converted into conservation areas and small-scale fishing grounds managed by CFi

patrolling even if their actual fishing grounds do not necessarily match the CFi area. Patrolling, therefore, calls for extra time and effort.

The frequency of patrolling varied among the CFis, ranging from thrice a week to twice a month, depending on location and size of the conservation and fishing areas, and livelihoods and budget concerns. Apart from human-resource inputs, patrolling requires resources like boats, gasoline and mobile phones.

Though there are non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations supporting the CFi activities, they usually rely on project-based funding since it is difficult for CFis to establish a sustainable self-funding system for patrolling. The lack of exclusive rights to CFi areas is also a disincentive against contributing resources.

With the second phase of fisheries reform, Cambodia has displayed a vision of managing fisheries resources through CFis.

After the second phase of the fisheries policy reforms, which aimed to consolidate sustainable fisheries in the area and support the livelihoods of small-scale fishers, fishing gear restrictions were implemented more strictly than before. From 1987 until 2010, regardless of the development in fishing gear, type and size, restrictions were not updated. During the first reform phase in 2000, medium-scale fishing was exempted from licence fees and it was common for fishers to use medium-scale fishing gears for small-scale fishing, in the absence of regulation.

Once the second phase of reform was implemented, a new list of permissible fishing gears was announced in March 2012, which allowed 49 types fishing gear for the open season and 45 types for the closed season, up from 45 types listed by the 2010 proclamation. Mostly, only small-scale fishing gear was allowed to be used in Tonle Sap.

Many fishers in the Phat Sanday CFi faced a problem since their major fishing gear was *lop lok*, an arrow-shaped bamboo fence contraption with a horizontal cylinder trap. This gear was classified as medium-scale fishing gear in the 2010 proclamation but it was not included in the 2012 list. Over 100 households in the Phat Sanday CFi borrowed between US$2,000 and US$5,000 to invest in fishing gear when they heard that the fishing lot had been regulated and would now be open only for small-scale fishers. Once they realized that *lop lok* was prohibited, they were left stranded. They claim that without using this particular gear, it is difficult to fish in their area. In early 2012, they collected signatures of over 900 households in the CFi and submitted a petition to the National Assembly, after which the government agreed to let them use the gear, provided its length was shorter than 50 m. Finding this inadequate, the fishers have again petitioned for the length regulation to be extended to 300 m. They did so by sending 600 signatures to the provincial governor in late 2012, and then, in 2013, another 600 signatures to the FiA. They hope that the length criterion will be changed to at least 150m.

With the second phase of fisheries reform, Cambodia has displayed a vision of managing fisheries resources through CFis. Work on fisheries legislation and guidelines for small-scale fishing in under way, including ongoing discussions on conservation measures, and conflicts in water use among different sectors.

Family-based fishing

Most small-scale fishing in Cambodia is family-based, with the fishers deciding on the type of gear and when and where to use them. Only with positive incentives can the fishers be expected to get more involved in the CFis. There is an example of a successful community-based commercial fishery in the coastal area of Rayong, Thailand,

MINA HORI

Community Fisheries (CFi) members burning illegal fishing gear. A CFi can set up its own rules and regulations that will control the entry of non-CFi members into the fishing areas

which utilizes the stationary set-net gear. The effort has been supported by the government, and international organizations and researchers. The Rayong fishery has also introduced a co-operative selling system in which half the profits are taken by the community members as salaries, while the remaining profits are saved for the management costs of the set-net.

Such a system could be modified and applied in some parts of Tonle Sap. Not only would it allow for the collection of catch data and cover patrolling costs, it would also enhance awareness among fishers to conserve and manage the resource in their CFi area through control of the number and size of the gear, as well as the fishing effort.

Another option for managing the Tonle Sap fisheries resources is a 'pooling system', which is widely used in Japanese coastal fishing, where members of the group share the profits and costs of fishing operations. The landings of members are pooled and sales proceedings are divided equally among the members. Commonly, groups of fishers with similar interests in specific fishing gears or species are formed. A pooling system could help avoid excessive investment and competition, especially when fishing effort has to be limited. A lower entry barrier at the initial stage could be important, since fishers are not familiar with collaborative fishing.

In Tonle Sap, there are also fishing communities outside CFis, involved in seasonal fishing as migrant fishers. It is, therefore, necessary to maintain the CFi area as non-exclusive to ensure free access to small-scale fishing for these non-CFi fishers. A mechanism to avoid conflicts between CFi and non-CFi fishers is also indispensable. Collection of fishing fees or a subsidy for patrolling could also be explored.

Since factors like location, environmental conditions, fish species, access to markets and traders, and livelihood patterns and needs vary, each CFi needs a unique approach and goal. Considering the lack of a history of collaborative management, more practical examples of fishing regulations and fishery management systems from other parts of the world should be provided to encourage CFi activities. It is clearly time to offer Cambodia's CFis management options alongside consultations of how the communities would like their future to evolve.

For more

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A Community Future

A participatory national-level information gathering and consultative process attempts to develop guidelines for Cambodia's small-scale fisheries

Over the last two years, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has been facilitating a process of developing voluntary guidelines for small-scale fisheries (SSF). As part of this exercise, it was considered appropriate to initiate a few participatory national-level information gathering and consultative processes which would provide insights about the nature of small-scale fisheries in specific country contexts—how they are viewed by policymakers; how they have evolved over time; how they are governed; and what the small-scale fishers themselves think about their sector and its future. One of the countries chosen was Cambodia in Southeast Asia.

Cambodia has a vibrant inland capture fishery, a significant marine fishery and an emerging aquaculture sector. Cambodians are avid fish eaters. In October 2000, in the town of Siem Reap, Prime Minister Samdech Hun Sen made his now famous pronouncement releasing 50 per cent of the individually owned fishing areas in the Tonle Sap Lake, called 'fishing lots', from the control of the influential owners. He promised to grant the released area to the rural communities around the lake. He challenged them to take over the right to fish without fear and also the responsibility of caring for the resources. He surprised the fishing-lot owners, the fisheries administration and the rural communities with this radical action that is now referred to as the Fishery Reform of 2000.

A whole new social engineering experiment had begun in Cambodia. This resulted in giving the fishery a greater community-oriented focus. Many laws and rules were changed and new ones enacted. The first Community Fisheries Development Department in an Asian country was started. The Community Fisheries (CFi) organizations were constituted with a law, called a Sub-Decree. Many governmental and inter-governmental development and aid agencies came forward to help the Fisheries Administration (FiA) of the Royal Government of Cambodia to implement this ambitious programme. Many non-governmental agencies took steps to assist the communities in their collective efforts to gain control over the fishery and other natural resources.

...there are 469 Community Fisheries organizations, with a total membership of about 127,000 spread across Cambodia.

Today (2012) there are 469 CFi organizations, with a total membership of about 127,000 spread across Cambodia. The majority of them (430) are located in the inland fishery around the Tonle Sap Lake and across the banks of the Mekong River. A smaller number (39) have also been formed in the marine sector.

Historical factors

In the context of the above historical events, two factors make Cambodian fisheries particularly relevant for the FAO initiative in

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relation to the development of the SSF Guidelines:

- Cambodia is the only country in Asia where, since 2000, there has been a conscious government policy-driven thrust towards 'small scale-ization' of the fishery through the creation of CFi organizations—a sort of reform from above.
- In an effort to create participation from below, Cambodia has been experimenting with new forms of local-level governance and institutional arrangements which seek to change the erstwhile individual access- and use-rights into community-oriented tenure arrangements.

In an effort to create participation from below, Cambodia has been experimenting with new forms of local-level governance...

Against this background, the project in Cambodia straddled three levels. At the local village level, participatory assessments of the relevance and role of small-scale fisheries were undertaken by discussions with a representative sample of the membership of the CFi organizations across the country. Person-to-person interviews and focus-group discussions were the tools used to gather information and data for what was called an 'appreciative inquiry'. The results of this exercise were then consolidated, presented and discussed thoroughly at three province-level gatherings to raise awareness about the merits of small-scale fisheries, particularly with respect to its role in food security, environmental protection and sustainable livelihoods. The results of these three meetings were then presented at a national consultation with the objective of formulating guidelines for a brighter future for CFi organizations in Cambodia.

One of the main outcomes of the 'appreciative inquiry' was a socioeconomic profile of the membership of the CFi organizations. Men and women, young and old, are members. The educational attainment of the membership is low, and lowest in the coastal region. Though CFi organizations are fish-related, only a quarter of the members identify themselves primarily as 'fishers'. This self-identity, however, does not deter members from undertaking capture fishing, which, after agriculture, is the most important secondary livelihood activity of the members in the wet and dry seasons. Most members own some arable land (on which rice or other crops are grown); they also own the land on which they have built their homes. While the majority own fishing equipment, the number of equipment items per person is very low. Fish-related activity was a vital source of cash income for the members. The estimates made of cash income potentials of the members indicate that they are higher than the estimates of per capita daily income of the population in Cambodia as a whole.

The focus-group discussions (FGDs) conducted in each of the CFi organizations were intended for two purposes: to obtain a greater qualitative understanding of the changes that have taken place in their respective local areas over the last decade with respect to the prime objectives of the CFi; and, secondly, to discuss some topical matters and issues of future concern and to elicit views on them. These issues included child labour in fisheries; climate change and the environment; the role of NGOs; and threats to the development of CFi, to mention but a few.

Some of the key points emerging from the FGDs are enumerated below:

The significance of CFi as a people's organization with the significant participation of men, women and youth is beyond doubt.

1. If the prime objective of the 2000 Fishery Reform was to ensure that the rural communities of Cambodia obtain access to fish for food and livelihoods, then this objective has been reasonably

achieved. The 'fishery success' must, however, be viewed against the overwhelming and continued importance of agriculture for the members of the CFi organizations.

2. CFi have shown that people consider conservation to be the key to resource sustainability, and are willing to take concrete actions to achieve it. The role of women in promoting this achievement has been significant.
3. Illegal fishing carried out by individuals with backing from influential persons in society was one of the most important threats to fisheries in Cambodia. CFi Committees suggest that they should have a greater role and facilities in tackling this problem. Women play a crucial role in the moral economy of illegal fishing.
4. The roles of government officers of the Fisheries Administration and the elected members of the Commune Councils have been meaningful in helping to set up, and in the continuing functioning of, CFis. This interaction should be keenly fostered in the future.
5. CFi organizations were a major source for building trust and fostering co-operation in the community. This CFi function may perhaps be even more important than catching fish!
6. Child labour in fishing was, and is, prevalent. Boys are the ones who are involved in fish-related activities. However, in the majority of cases, this was largely to help their parents, and the children were not exploited. Working part-time, they should also be able to go to school.
7. The involvement of women in the CFi has given them a formal status and voice in decisionmaking. They have undertaken actions in the key realms of conservation, education, development and dissemination of information and particularly on the benefits of community co-operation.
8. There have been significant and strongly noticeable changes in weather patterns. Whether these impacts are favourable or adverse depends on the resource activity in question. Flooding, for example, has positive impacts on fish production.
9. Non-governmental assistance has been, and continues to be, important for CFi activities. NGOs provide important support to CFi organizations, which the government cannot provide. However, the role of respected and resourceful persons and organizations within the village also needs to be considered and recognized.
10. Development of human capacity is still one of the key elements required for the CFi to flourish. Developmental efforts must contribute to increasing the participation of members in the affairs of the CFi, to enhance their livelihoods skills, and to ensure effective and efficient CFi management.
11. Keeping records of data and information is important for institutional sustainability. Data to estimate the fish catch of members of the CFi can be generated, if so required.
12. CFi have given people freedom to access resources, which has, in turn, resulted in the reduction of poverty and better resource conservation and management. The tenure rights of the CFi should

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Representatives of Cambodia's Fisheries Administration, civil society, international development agencies and UN organizations, during discussions at the three-day meet

Box

GUIDELINES FOR A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR SMALL-SCALE FISHERIES IN CAMBODIA THROUGH COMMUNITY FISHERIES

These Guidelines have been formulated as the culmination of a series of consultative processes held between October 2011 and February 2012 with a vast cross-section of members of the Community Fisheries (CFi) organizations in Cambodia.

These 20 points have been grouped under four important themes and are considered as the most important guidelines for making a brighter future for small-scale fisheries in Cambodia through the CFi organizations.

1. INTERNAL STRUCTURE

1. Strengthen the capacity and upgrade the general knowledge of CFi members using both the formal and informal education system and adopting both classroom and field-exposure trainings. At the same time, request the Ministry of Education and Youth to include the basic knowledge related to fisheries into the general educational curriculum.
2. Capacity building of the CFi Committee and youth members from the CFi should be undertaken as a priority. The focus of capacity building should be on practical livelihood skills, community organization functions, and fisheries resource conflict resolution strategies.
3. The democratic character of the CFi should be enhanced by conducting fair and simple elections to elect new CFi Committees as and when their mandates expire.
4. Strengthen accountability of the CFi Committee to CFi members. This can be achieved by having regular meetings, ensuring greater transparency in decisionmaking and also undertaking regular monitoring and evaluation of the quality of management and member participation.
5. Open up and encourage the active and effective participation of women and youth in the affairs of the CFi and CFi Committee, particularly in combating child labour in fishing activities.
6. Enable and equip the CFi to directly communicate and make contact with NGOs and other relevant institutions to support CFi activities

2. TENURE AND RIGHTS

7. Establish clear tenure rights for the CFi using the official Area Agreement. There should be emphasis on (i) ensuring good boundary demarcation and (ii) providing effective patrolling and facilities to achieve the same.
8. Encourage local people's participation to abolish illegal fishing activity by designating specific CFi members as patrollers and encouraging local people to provide information on the illegal fishing activities to them.
9. Any development plan or project undertaken in the demarcated fishing area of a CFi should be undertaken only after consultation with CFi members and after making a clear study of the environment impact assessment (EIA) with the participation of CFi members. The benefits of such projects should be shared with the CFi also.
10. Provide a greater physical and legal role to the CFi Committee and Patrolling Teams in stopping, preventing and controlling illegal fishing activities, and support the CFi for appropriate facilities to achieve this.
11. Provide rights to the CFi to collect a fee for giving legal rights to migrants to fish in demarcated CFi areas.

3. ACTIVITIES AND FUNDING

12. The CFi should be transformed from a fishery organization to a livelihood-focused organization, keeping fishery activities as the core focus while undertaking income-generating activities.
13. Create a Community Fisheries Revolving Fund exclusively for the CFi and link borrowing rights of the CFi to their respective performance based on the following criteria: (i) evaluation of their fishery/ecosystem conservation efforts; (ii) effectiveness of their internal functioning and member participation; (iii) their efforts at controlling illegal fishing; and (iv) their efforts for prevention of child labour.
14. Provide financial and other support to establish small enterprise, ecotourism projects and other livelihood initiatives, giving a share for CFi members and, at the same time, reducing the profits of middlemen.
15. Encourage CFi members to pay their annual membership fees regularly.
16. Incorporate CFi plans into the Commune Council Development and Investment Plan, and connect the CFi with the village and commune safety policy.
17. Consider the flooded forest protection initiatives undertaken by CFi for community carbon credits under climate-change schemes.

4. INFORMATION AND NETWORKING

18. Establish a regular data and information-gathering system at the CFi level for fishery catch monitoring, and socioeconomic and ecological biodiversity data collection.
19. Establish a provincial-level CFi network forum to provide good collaboration opportunities for CFis in each province.
20. Disseminate to the CFi, on a regular basis, the laws and regulations related to fisheries, fisheries environment, fish migration, fishing gear, fishing techniques, and climate change that might have impacts on fishing.

be strengthened. Proper demarcation of boundaries and equipment for patrolling are vital to support the CFi. Provision of more credit for investment and expansion of service-sector activities like tourism and fish marketing are important and will result in greater benefits from tenure rights.

13. Migrants should fish in CFi areas only with permission and only using legal fishing gear. Payment of a small fee to the CFi for the right to fish should also be considered.
14. There are several serious threats to sustainable fisheries and to the CFi organizations, which need to be promptly addressed.
15. CFi have helped to alleviate poverty, and taught members the value of conservation and working together. But the major benefits of the CFi have only gone to CFi Committee members.
16. A menu of diverse activities is needed to make the CFi the institution of our dreams. One of the biggest challenges is enhancing leadership capacity.

The overall conclusion from this participatory assessment of CFi organizations in Cambodia is that after a decade of functioning, they have made good beginnings towards becoming true community-based organizations supported by the State and larger civil society.

Success is not unqualified, however. Yet, the information and collective views gathered, provide a basis to state with reasonable confidence that these organizations have made a difference in the lives of the membership in a multiple manner of impacts and achievements. The membership has unfettered access to more fish to eat. They spend more time in fishing-related activity and earn cash income which plays an important role in contributing to their living standards. The co-operation and sense of community between members, which has been fostered by these organizations, have yielded many social benefits. These include: building greater trust; a higher awareness and value placed on conservation; a keen sense of being recognized as a collective; recognition of their weaknesses and lack of capabilities; and the urge and desire to make a better future. These are not mean achievements.

However, what requires close scrutiny is the sustainability of these organizations into the future, if the status quo of 2011 prevails. This calls for honest introspection by the State, civil society and, more importantly, by the members themselves.

The State needs to consider how it can move from being the initiator of these organizations to becoming a facilitator. This role of facilitation needs to be done without undue and overbearing presence. The State and its representatives (primarily the officers of the Fisheries Administration at all levels) must learn how to play the role of partner, not master, in a co-management process for the sustainable management of aquatic resources. The instruments (laws, decrees, etc.) which have given the legal framework for the CFi need to be reviewed and made more flexible and suited to the reality faced by the membership. Most important in this will be to consider how the CFi can become a multi-purpose organization catering to all livelihoods needs of the membership—particularly their agriculture and related interests—and not focus solely on the fishery. Additionally, a greater role for the organization in dealing effectively with the menace of illegal fishing must be seriously considered.

...after a decade of functioning, CFi organizations have made good beginnings towards becoming true community-based organizations...

Capacity building

Civil society needs to continue its support to the CFi organizations and focus on capacity building of the committee and the members. Effort is needed to ensure that the

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Focus-group discussions (FGDs) showed that, after a decade of functioning, community fisheries organizations have helped alleviate poverty

whole membership begins to take ownership of the organization. In this matter, emphasis should be given to stressing the role of persons from the locality—teachers, nurses, religious leaders, educated youth, village elders, etc.—who can play a supportive role to give encouragement and friendly advice to the leadership of the CFi.

Non-government organizations (NGOs) that have their base outside the locality should adopt the concept of having resident village community organizers (possibly from among the educated youth in the community) who can animate governance and networking processes within the CFi organizational structures. They can lay the ground for building savings-and-credit schemes which will work on a 'group basis' and cater to the productive purposes of the membership. Provision of new livelihood skills, as well as greater stress on social and developmental village-level activities as a whole, must be considered.

The membership themselves should seize the opportunity to make the CFi a 'live and spirited' organization and take it away from the 'empty shell' status which it may stagnate into if the current trajectory is continued. Women members can play a significant role in making this mid-course correction. There should be simple, free and fair elections conducted at the earliest, so that the true democratic character of the organization is retained. The current committee members should take the initiative for this with the assistance of NGOs and the relevant officers of the fisheries administration at the appropriate level of governance (district, cantonment, etc.).

The above are only suggestions indicative of the broad contours of what needs to be done. Each CFi organization is unique in its local context. Each must, therefore, ultimately have its own plan of action.

If the State, civil society and the membership can work out how they will collectively and individually act to sustain the CFi organization, then there is a bright future for small-scale fisheries in Cambodia. This may be the surest route to ensure protection for the aquatic ecosystems of Cambodia, fish for all Cambodians and decent and dignified livelihoods for millions. Striving to achieve these goals is surely a worthy effort.

Three inter-provincial meetings (termed region-level workshops) were conducted to feed back the analysis of the data and information gathered from the members during the local-level assessment. They were held in Kampong Cham (for the Mekong region) and Kampot (for the marine region) in December 2011 and Pursat (for the Tonle Sap region) in January 2012. It is significant to note that for more than 60 per cent of the participants (representatives from the CFi organizations that participated in the local-level consultation and a few representatives from other CFi organizations which were not part of the sample), this was the first time in a decade that they were gathering together as representatives of their CFi organizations.

Summary presentation

Initially, a consolidated summary presentation was made by the Deputy Director General of Fisheries, giving the highlights of the local-level assessment. The focus was on the results pertaining to the specific region—Tonle Sap, Mekong and

marine—where the workshop was being held.

This methodology provided the occasion for the members to comprehend the manner in which their individual views were aggregated. It also showed them how these consolidated profiles of their socioeconomic status and the views expressed at the focus-group discussions provide material to policymakers for taking future decisions. Participants requested clarifications. They raised doubts about the meaning and implications of some of the conclusions. Where appropriate, corrections were incorporated. The power and significance of participatory assessments became apparent.

The culmination of the three-stage process was a three-day national consultation held in Phnom Penh in February 2012. The consultation was titled "Making a Brighter Future for Small-scale Fisheries through Community Fisheries in Cambodia". It was attended by 159 participants, including representatives of the CFi organizations, the Fisheries Administration, civil society, international development agencies and UN organizations. The main purpose of the workshop was to share the full results of the earlier process and conclusions with a wider cross-section of stakeholders in the fisheries who could comment on the findings and, importantly, contribute to developing some key guidelines for sustainable development of small-scale fisheries in Cambodia through CFi. These national guidelines would then become a contribution to the SSF Guidelines being developed by FAO.

Four processes were adopted in this part of the national consultation. First, the report of the local-level consultations and the three region-level workshops was presented by the Acting Director of the Community Fisheries Development Department (CFDD) of the Fisheries Administration. The CFDD is formally responsible for the activities of the CFi organizations.

Second, there was a period of intense group work where seven groups, made up of representatives from all the various stakeholders in the fishery, discussed the report and formulated suggestions which could make up elements for the guidelines for the future of small-scale fisheries in Cambodia.

Third, a committee, consisting of elected participants from each of the seven groups, discussed and produced a draft of the key elements of the group discussions which were to form the basis for the list of guidelines and recommendations for making a brighter future for small-scale fisheries in Cambodia through CFi.

Fourth, there was a plenary discussion where the draft guidelines were read, discussed and endorsed, point by point. The finalized document (see box) was then approved by the whole plenary.

Following the presentation of these Guidelines at the National Consultation, the State Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forests and Fisheries, who was present at the consultation, officially endorsed them in his official closing speech. Given the complex governance and administrative system in Cambodia, this formal endorsement is a first step towards these guidelines—developed in a participatory manner—being taken up by the government and the Fisheries Administration for implementation.

The main purpose of the workshop was to share the full results of the earlier process and conclusions...

As a first step to making these Guidelines more widely available, the Fisheries Administration will publish them in the next issue of its official journal.

Guidelines created

Though not directly related to the process of creation of these Guidelines, a week after the National

Consultation in February 2012, the Prime Minister of Cambodia announced that the fishing-lot licences in the Tonle Sap Lake would be permanently cancelled and these areas would be reserved as conservation zones "to protect the lake's pressured wild fisheries on which tens of thousands of subsistence fishermen rely".

This decision of the Prime Minister is basically a continuation of the 2000 Fishery Reform process which he set in motion. The future implications of this decision for the CFi organizations are enormous. They will now become the main institutional arrangement, with rights of tenure and access to the fishery resource, which exist in Cambodia. The success of fish harvests from the Tonle Sap Lake and the Mekong River will depend on their initiative and resourcefulness. If the CFi organizations are to meet these expectations, many elements in the Guidelines endorsed above may have to be carefully examined and implemented.

A three-year plan, which focuses on conservation and gives priority to strengthening of the CFi organizations, is on the anvil.

Following the National Consultation, the CFDD also officially transmitted the Khmer version of the report of the local consultations and the Guidelines endorsed at the National Consultation to the Minister in charge of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) and the Deputy Prime Ministers who are responsible for implementing the abolishing of fishing lots.

In April 2012, the government issued two administrative orders. The first was on the implementation of the latest fishing-lot reform. The second was on strengthening and expanding CFi to manage the abolished fishing lots and fish conservation areas, and suppression of illegal fishing activities

Both these orders contain recommendations which have been influenced by the Guidelines. These include the need for capacity building of CFi to enable them to praticipate more fully in the fisheries reform process; encourage greater conservation of flooded forests and mangroves; prevent illegal fishing; and strengthen partnership networking all levels.

In the light of all the above, and, in particular, the abolishing of the fishing lots, the Action Plan for 2012 of the Fisheries Administration is being revised. A three-year plan, which focuses on conservation and gives priority to strengthening of the CFi organizations, is on the anvil.

In the context of the FAO initiative to formulate SSF Guidelines, there are some important insights to be gained from the experience of organizing CFi in Cambodia.

- Initiatives in support of small-scale fisheries that are driven initially by concerns of the State can be turned around into genuine people's initiatives, if participative, appropriate, and well-thought-out development and management initiatives are planned, financed and implemented.
- Long-term and secure rights to resources is a basic requisite, if small-scale fishers are to commit themselves to participative governance and management of the resources and the ecosystem in which it is located.
- Resource conservation is a key factor in the management of small-scale fisheries. Supportive institutional and infrastructure initiatives to aid conservation efforts of the aquatic ecosystem need to be envisioned as a central pillar of management efforts. Conservation must become a passion if it is to succeed.
- Good leadership is the bedrock of successful organizations for small-scale fishers. Few fishers may be born good leaders, but leadership can be cultivated by practice and training. Capacity-building initiatives that focus on developing leaders is an investment which

pays rich dividends for vibrant and sustainable organizations.

- Women's involvement must be central to any effort for small-scale fisheries development and management. Women are a vital social, economic and moral force in small-scale fishing communities, and their participation in development initiatives must become a foundational input as agents for change and not just as an afterthought.
- Management plans for small-scale fisheries should become a central part of any fisheries development programme. These plans need to be developed with a clear and keen understanding of the local natural-resource realities and viable structures for the governance of tenure. The implementation of plans should be participative, with the fishers, the riparian community and the State each setting up key stakes to ensure its success.
- Financial support for a new and ambitious programme for small-scale fisheries development and management must be forthcoming from international donors and financial agencies that have appreciated the role and relevance of small-scale fisheries into the future. More than the size of funds, it is when funding becomes available in the form of partnering initiatives that is most likely to achieve the objectives

The process which has been described in this report was a facilitative initiative of FAO undertaken in close partnership with the Fisheries Administration of the Royal Government of Cambodia and the members of the CFi organizations to evolve a set of participatory guidelines for negotiating a brighter future for small-scale fisheries in Cambodia.

It was the first time since the Fishery Reform of 2000 that such an elaborate exercise was undertaken by the Fisheries Administration to assess the opinions of the members of the CFi about the past, the present and the future. The systematic and large coverage of the fishers, which was attained through the local consultation process, was by itself an important achievement.

This initiative highlighted how CFi—an organizational intervention which was instituted by decrees and administrative orders—has gradually attained the potential of becoming an important local democratic enterprise which can transform the livelihoods of an important section of the rural population of Cambodia. Whether, and how, this will materialize in reality depends on the confluence of many factors like, *inter alia,* secure tenure and rights to resources; good and committed local leadership; proper planning; and adequate and appropriate funding.

It was an important historical conjuncture that this process of assessing the CFi was accompanied by the political decision for total abolishment of the fishing lots system in Cambodia and the consequent opening up of new possibilities for CFi organizations to play a lead role in the inland fisheries sector of Cambodia.

There may be influential opinions and adverse comments about the underlying rationale and top-down decisions which marked the initiation of the Fishery Reform that commenced in 2000. Be that as it may, it points decisively to the pre-eminent role which political process and political will have in supporting a commitment for small-scale fisheries. This is a key 'takeaway' lesson from the Cambodian experience.

For more

www.ilo.org/ipec/Events/National
Consultation on Child Labour in Fisheries

www.fao.org/cofi/24008-0c5031a8f865bdf0baac62c1aac1a031b.pdf
COFI Report on Cambodia Workshop

www.maff.gov.kh/en/
Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Cambodia