

Project Update: May 2011

1. Geography of study area

The project site is the lower section of the Mekong River, situated in Stung Treng province, one of Cambodia's most remote and poorest provinces, approximately 481 km northeast of Cambodia. Stung Treng covers 11,092 km², sharing borders with Lao PDR to the north, Ratanakiri province to the east, Mondulakiri province to the south and Kratie, Preah Vihear and Kampong Thom to the west. The various habitats include rivers, small islands, rapids and deep pools which play a significant role in providing many goods and services to local livelihoods such as food, medicines and household cash income. However, these aquatic resources are increasingly under pressure posed by both natural and anthropogenic factors, affecting the livelihoods of local people dependent on those resources.

The Rufford-funded project site is entirely located in the Ramsar Site, where most of local villagers are heavily reliant on the Mekong's wetlands for their food needs and income generation for the sustainable livelihoods. Local people's main occupations in the study area are agriculture and fishing, reliant on seasonal rice cultivation and fishing activities in the Mekong River. Local people collect aquatic resources from the river and adjacent water bodies which play integral parts in their collective livelihoods. However, a wide range of development activities are posing increasing threats to these resources of the wetlands. The project will make a partial contribution to the improvement of local people's livelihoods through its small-scale fish culture.

2. Occupation

According to provincial data book (2009), the number of families whose primary occupations are rice farming is 16,581, accounting for 80% and followed by 422 families whose primary activities are growing long-term crops, representing 2%. Most of rural people in this province depend heavily on rainy season rice cultivation for their livelihoods and income generation. Furthermore, families whose primary occupations are reliant on short-term crops and fishing activities for their livelihoods have 295 and 215, respectively. Apart from these, there are also several families whose main occupations are directly involved in vegetable growing, livestock rearing and the collection of non-timber forest products.

3. Objective

The specific objective of community consultation was to inform local fishers of the new Rufford-funded integrated small-scale fish culture and vegetable production project and to identify local fishers who are interested in it.

4. Duration and Participants

The consultation was held in a small Buddhist pagoda on 14 May 2011 with the active participation of:

1. Thmey community fisheries committee
2. Samaki commune chief
3. Thmey village chief
4. 35 local full-time and part-time fishermen

5. Results

First of all, Lou Vanny introduced to local fishers about the new small-scale fish culture and vegetable production project lasting for over the period of 1 year from May 2011 to May 2012. The special objective of the project is to make a partial contribution to the improvement of local fishing community by promoting the combination of small-scale fish culture in ponds and plastic bags and vegetable production.

Mrs. Samaki, the commune chief, said that it was a special opportunity for all local fishers to focus on the fish culture rather than single heavy dependence on the natural fish species. Small-scale fish culture with vegetable production will reduce the pressure on the deteriorating aquatic resources, especially fish. She encouraged all the participants to think about the alternative livelihood activities because it can ensure food safety and increase household cash income if the fish culture has been properly conducted.

Thmey community fisheries committee chief said that small-scale fish culture is relatively new in this area. He expressed his impression that if small-scale fish culture takes shape in this area, it will be good because for the time being local people rely heavily on the collection of the natural fish. Through the project, he thought that local people's livelihoods will be partially improved.

A representative of local fishers expressed his willingness to culture fish species. They will culture fish species if they have culture technique and fish seeds provided by any NGOs or the provincial FiA. They also added that they want to see the fish culture occur in their villages because it can contribute to reducing local people's heavy dependence on the natural fishing from the Mekong. By so doing, it will lead to the betterment of the aquatic resources, thereby improving the livelihoods of local people.

Finally, 10 local fishers were selected to be offered fish culture techniques. They will be brought to make a field visit in upcoming months to a successful family-scale fish culture place where they can see real practice. Afterwards, fish expertise officers from the Stung Treng provincial fisheries administration and relevant NGOs will be asked to provide the selected local fishers with fish culture techniques with project fish booklets distributed to them.

6. Conclusion

Some local people in this area expressed their attention to Rufford-funded project. They said that the project can make a partial contribution to the improved livelihoods. However, a small number of local fishers have been selected for its first-phase implementation to ensure the success of small project.

