



Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem Project



Report of the
**ICSF-BOBLME Training programme on
Exposure visit to Cambodia**
17-20 March 2014 • Cambodia

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Acronyms used

BOBLME	Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem
CF	Community Fisheries
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICSF	International Collective in Support of Fishworkers
NAG	Network Activities Group
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
USD	United States Dollar

1. Introduction

ICSF along with the Fisheries Administration (FiA), Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Government of Cambodia, organized a study visit to Cambodia for six people from Myanmar, from 17-20 March 2014.

Four of them were from the fishing community from the Ayeyarwaddy region, one person was with a government official and one person was from Network Activities Group (NAG) who also aided in translating to and from Burmese. In addition, one person from ICSF was also present.

2. Objective

The study visit was a follow up to the BOBLME-supported workshop, 'Enhancing Capacities of Fishing Communities for Resource Management', that was held in Patheingyi Township, Ayeyarwaddy Region in Myanmar. The workshop was conducted in November 2013 by ICSF in collaboration with NAG. The study visit participants from Myanmar had also participated in the workshop. A FiA official had also participated in the Patheingyi workshop. The fishing community in Myanmar had expressed an interest in taking forward their understanding about the fisheries management practices in Cambodia.

It is also important to note that prior to this exposure trip, the Myanmar government had organized a similar one for the members of Parliament (Parliamentarians) to visit Cambodia, to get a better understanding of the fisheries management. There was also visit made by Cambodian Fisheries Administration (FiA) officials around the same time as ICSF-BOBLME exposure trip to Myanmar.

3. Report of the visit

On the 17th, the group met with FiA officials who shared an overview of the fisheries reform process in Cambodia. After visiting FiA in Phnom Penh, the visitors travelled to Kampong Speu province on the coast. Here the group visited the Trapaeng Sangke community fisheries. From Kampong Speu, the group returned to Phnom Penh for a night before heading out to Siem Reap. In Siem Reap, two community fisheries on the Tonle Sap were visited-Kampong Phluk and Kandaek. Throughout the study visit, the group were accompanied by one or more officials from FiA. They were Mr Ly Vuthy, Ms Keo Sovathepheap and Mr Wath. FiA officials ensured that all arrangements were made and that the trip went smoothly. In addition, they were always at hand to share information, answer questions and aid communication with the community.

At each place we met the head of the community fisheries and from 5 to 10 members, including 2-4 women. However getting participation from many people, especially the women, was difficult. Though the FiA officials tried to get everyone to talk, many were shy and preferred to have the headman speak on their behalf. Occasionally one or two of the others spoke.

4. Community Fisheries (CF) in Cambodia

Inland fisheries is valued at about one billion USD, contributing 8 to 10 per cent of the GDP. The average per capita consumption of fish in the country is 60 to 66 kg. Most fishers in Cambodia are small-scale fishers and number around 1 million (full-time). Women, in addition to fishing, also are active in maintaining gears, sorting fish, processing and marketing.

Cambodian fisheries were categorised into large scale (fishing lots, bag nets), medium-scale and small scale, before the reforms were initiated. With the reforms in 2000, fishing lots were cancelled, medium scale fisheries were curtailed (they were not allowed to operate in inland waters) and small-scale fisheries were converted into community fisheries. Essentially, people from one or more villages form community fisheries, and are allotted a fishing area to manage sustainably. Prior to the reforms, large areas of the Tonle Sap and other water bodies were auctioned as fishing lots resulting with skewed access to resources and leading to conflicts. To support the reforms, the fisheries law was amended in 2006 to provide a legal principle for community fisheries establishment. Since 2000, 516 CFs have been formed, of which 29 are coastal.

The extent of the CF's area is decided by administrative divisions and not by the population of the CF or by the potential fisheries resources in the area.

4.1. Management

The community fisheries is managed by an elected committee which also maps the fishing area (this requires approval from 6 levels of government-from the commune to the ministry of agriculture), and creates a management plan. The CF also patrols the conservation area where fishing is banned, raises awareness on community fishing, sustainable fisheries etc. While CF members are allowed to use, sell, exchange etc. resources from the fishing area, they do not own the fishing areas. Each CF patrols their fishing area and conservation area to ensure fishers are complying with the regulations under the fisheries law. Patrolling is done in collaboration with the local FiA office and police as the CF does not have the power to arrest violators or to seize gear. The coastal CF in Trapaeng Sangke said they had to get a permission letter from the commune each time they patrolled. Each CF sets aside a certain area for conservation; the extent and location is decided again with the help of the FiA. In the rest of the fishing area, small-scale fishing can be done at any time by members, non-members (from these villages) as well as outsiders. Fish being an important source of nutrition and livelihood to many small-scale fishers has meant that excluding people is not an option. However, all fishers using the area must follow the CF's rules.

The CF committee meets monthly. Also the commune council's (local government body) regular meeting which deals with larger commune issues also has the CF committee attending ensuring collaboration between these two bodies. The CF committee is not paid a salary; it is voluntary.

The government continues to work with the community, support capacity building programmes, registering CFs, helping CFs raise funds through partners, patrolling the fishing area with the CF, resolving conflicts etc.

In Kampong Phluk, in addition to the fishing area and conservation area, 48 ha have been designated as a tourism area. Plus they are looking into aquaculture options (*Pangasius* most likely).

4.2. Income

In Trapaeng Sangke, some CF members raise mangroves seedlings (for which they are paid) and these are used in their mangrove restoration project. Seedlings are also sold to other CFs. Another source of income for CFs is tourism. In the three CFs visited, boats have been obtained (private or community-owned; through FAO or other support) which take tourists out on the Tonle Sap. Members who work on the CF's boat are paid a percentage and 20 per cent goes to the community fisheries' fund. This money used for patrolling, revolving fund, development, emergencies, admin, and miscellaneous. People we spoke to estimated that before the reforms, they earned US\$1.5 per day from fishing but now it has increased to \$10 per day.

In Kampong Phluk CF (on the Tonle Sap, in Siem Reap province), in addition to boats, a restaurant has been set up with private investment. The community manage the restaurant and employees are from the community. The management of the restaurant, we were told, is rotated between the villages that comprise the CF.

In Trapaeng Sangke, the community members are not full-time fishers; some are farmers, others are involved in salt productions, and livestock rearing. Yet others travel to Siem Reap for work.

4.3. Markets

Other than for their own consumption, fishers sell to middlemen who come daily to the village. Some fishers prefer to sell the fish directly at the market in Kampot or at the local market. The price per kg ranges from 5000 to 16,000 riel¹ depending on the species. The difference in price between middlemen and selling in the local market is about 1000 riel per kg.

4.4. Membership

The creation of a CF in a village(s) does not automatically make all adults in the village a member of the CF. Those wanting to become a member must pay an annual fee of 500 riel in Kampong Phluk CF. However, this rule is rarely followed. However, CF members who we met said, non-members and outsiders can also fish in the community fishing area. This is seen as necessary on humanitarian grounds as most of those fishing are poor. Anyone who fishes in the community's fishing area must follow all regulations. When asked what then, was the advantage of being a member, Kampong Phluk CF members said that sometimes members who break rules are given a little more leeway. And that in some CFs, outsiders have to pay a fee.

4.5. Impact of CF

While it was said that fishers are catching more fish (up from 1.5 to 3.5 kg/day/fisher in the wet season) and thus earning more (in addition other sources of income like tourism have developed), there is no data to support this claim. It was pointed out that the CF itself does not have the resources to monitor catch data or to estimate the status of fishery resources. As the community in Kandaek noted, it is impossible to track outsiders who come to fish.

The Kandaek community noted that illegal fishing is a problem-dynamite, small mesh nets, electrocution and poison (herbal, not chemical).

4.6. Issues which cropped up

Finance: The community fisheries programmes are not self-sufficient financially. They go from project to project in terms of support. While some of the communities are exploring tourism options-boat rides, restaurants etc.-they do not seem enough financially. In fact, in all the communities they mentioned that through several projects, they have learnt to write proposals. When we visited Trapaeng Sangke, a local NGO was conducting a two day training programme in making trinkets to sell to tourists-and supplementary income plan.

Markets: Connectivity to markets is bad causing fishers to sell to middlemen.

Limited powers and resources: Don't have the power to arrest or take any action. Require government intervention. If a fisher is seen breaking the law (fishing in the conservation area for example), the patrol unit calls FiA at province level. Often the fisher runs, abandoning his gear. The FiA has to okay the seizure of such gear. The police and FiA decide action to be taken on erring fishers. FiA does not have manpower to handle these issues by themselves so they work with local law and order.

Capacity building: Education levels are low. Participation among members varies.

¹ 1 USD=4000 riel

Research: Lack of system and funds for follow up research on impact of the programme.

Collaboration between Myanmar and Cambodia: The Burmese seemed very interested in how the legal system is set up to support CFs as well as the administrative aspects. They shared that the legal set up in Myanmar currently is not amenable to such a community fisheries system and since each region has its own laws, it makes things more complicated. Some collaboration already seems underway as Vuthy had just returned from Rakhine state in Myanmar; he said the government there had been very interested in Cambodia's community fisheries and had indicated they would like to interact further with the FiA on this. So there are inter-governmental discussions already underway.

The NAG representative felt that it was useful in terms of understanding how fisheries management can be done—closed and open season, gear restriction, species restriction and fish conservation areas. In addition, the group, he says, were able to see what a CF is about beyond the definition on paper (A co-management system arrangement between the government and group of local people). It was heartening to note the support the Cambodian government is extending to communities and how they are able to effectively collaborate on fishing ground boundary demarcation, patrolling and problem solving.

However such model in Myanmar will be difficult to implement directly. Unlike Cambodia, in Myanmar, the government continues to control and auction fishing lots. Other challenges include a lack of budget, limited capacity of fisher communities, and the poor collaboration between the government and fisheries communities till date.

5. Way forward

In addition to visit of the Myanmar fishers to Cambodia, government officials from Myanmar also visited to learn about Cambodia's community fisheries. FiA officials have participated several times in workshops in Myanmar-in Ayeyarwaddy and in Rakhine Regions. Policy level meetings have been held in Ayeyarwaddy delta and Rakhine.

Rakhine region is in the process of developing its fresh water fishery law. With inputs from the exposure visit and interactions between government officials of Myanmar and Cambodia, it has been decided to devote more time and space for co-management in the fishery law process. The fisheries law of Cambodia has been translated into Burmese as an aid to drafting the law. In addition, Ayeyarwaddy Region also decided to develop a related fisheries law where they will emphasis on co-management component (Ayeyarwaddy already has fresh water fishery law since 2012). Ayeyarwaddy Regional Minister has requested NAG to assist in selecting fresh water fishery areas to pilot the co-management processes.



Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand are working together through the Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem (BOBLME) Project to lay the foundations for a coordinated programme of action designed to better the lives of the coastal populations through improved regional management of the Bay of Bengal environment and its fisheries.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is the implementing agency for the BOBLME Project.

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For more information, please visit www.boblme.org



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