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NEWSLETTER

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Community livelihoods improvement and natural resources management go hand in hand



A CEBET member being interviewed by a journalist at Koh Samseb. © NTFP-EP

Community Fishery (CFi) group in Stung Treng support their conservation activities via Community Based Ecotourism (CBET)

Community groups, including Community Fishery (CFi), across Cambodia often face financial challenges when implementing their sustainable natural resource management plan. Communities help protect endangered forests, wildlife and fish while ensuring sustainable use of natural resources within their communities, and so have expenses on basic equipment and food when patrolling in forests or rivers. To solve their financial issues, the communities, with support from their partners, and the O Chralang Community Fishery (CFi) have come up with viable initiatives to generate sustainable income locally.

Despite controversy over the development of a community-based ecotourism (CBET) site in the O Chralang village, the management committee of the O Chralang CFi in O Chralang village, O Mreah Commune, Siem Bouk district, Stung Treng Province were able to seek official support from local authority to permit the CFi to develop and manage the ecotourism site to improve their CFi income. Throughout, they were supported by Culture and Environment Preservation Association (CEPA), under the Partnership for the Forestry and Fisheries (PaFF) programme. CBET members were provided with capacity building in communication and negotiation skills, conflict resolution skills, CBET management and hospitality services.



Tents for tourists to stay at night at Koh Samseb. © Sreyrat / WWF-Cambodia



Mr. Kimmao. © NTFP-EP



Tourists taking a boat ride along the Mekong River. © NTFP-EP

Previously, controversy and conflict had arose between the community and a private company when Mr. Thon Kimmao, O Mreah Commune Councilor, and the community members advocated the local authority to accept the CFI's proposal to develop and manage the O Chralang tourism site. After discussion, the local authority agreed to grant the CFI rights to the site.

“*This ecotourism has greatly contributed to the CFI, enabling them to implement their management plan and also serve as their source of income,” said Mr. Kimmao.*”

However, Mr. Kimmao also admitted that the community members still need increased capacity to manage the CBET well.

“In the process of forming this CBET group, we’ve faced many problems but never gave up. I’ve tried to meet and consult with other partners to find solutions, and finally we got it,” echoed Mr. Chan Noeun, Chief of O Chralang CFI management committee. “Here we are united that’s why we are strong. CBET here is our heart. Without it, our CFI would not function well because CBET benefits our CFI management committee and members by easing the implementation of our natural resource management plan.”

Because tourists visit the site only during national holidays, the CBET members could only earn during certain period of time of the year. During the Khmer New Year in April 2019, the CBET generated an income of USD1,024. This income generated from the CBET was divided into five shares: 1) CBET management committee (USD126), 2) CFI management plan implementation (USD40), 3) social activities (USD25), 4) member income (USD360) and 5) expense for CBET services (USD486). Because the CBET is operating on a seasonal basis, the CFI members can also earn an extra income for their households of around USD20 per year.

Collaborative management demonstrates increased efficiency in combating illegal fishing



Mr. Chea Maly speaking at a comune meeting. © CBET

The commune council is the lowest hierarchy of the Cambodian government’s structure. As an independent local administration, it is elected by the villagers in their commune for a 5-year mandate. Once elected, the chief and other councillors will have to achieve a 5-year commune development plan (CDP) through implementation of a commune investment plan (CIP).

Through the CDP and CIP, the commune council can tremendously contribute to the conservation of natural resources in their commune. A good example is in the fisheries resource management and protection of Sangkat Samaki (Samaki commune).

Sangkat Samaki, one of the 34 communes in Stung Treng province which covers four community fishery (CFi) groups along the Mekong River in the Ramsar site, has seen outstanding conservation results through good collaboration.

The Sangkat Samaki council invites CFI members to take part in the monthly commune council meeting and other relevant events, also allowing community members to participate regularly in CDP and CIP process and voice their issues and suggested solutions to sustainable natural resource management.

CFi groups once requested the Samaki council to help address illegal fishing. The council then implemented an approach to addressing illegal fishing. Organizing village meetings for the investigation of poachers, they used the “accountability boxes” which are safe, confidential letter boxes for villagers to drop their letters with security and confidentiality initiated in a joint work plan developed during a collaborative management workshop by the key stakeholders of the Ramsar site, including Samaki commune council.

“*I can see that CFI management committees are very active in fisheries resources management,” said Mr. Chea Maly, Samaki Commune Chief. “The 35 poachers confessed that they used the illegal fishing gears like electro and dynamite fishing in the Mekong’s protected zones.”*

The collaborative management workshop, facilitated by CEPA under the PaFF programme, was organized in Stung Treng province to improve collaboration among key conservation stakeholders. Involving the CFi groups, rangers, police officials and commune councils, the workshop provided them a platform for identifying challenges, solutions and priorities in their communities, eventually resulting in a joint work plan co-developed by all stakeholders.

The joint work plan was approved and implemented by the Commune Chief, who led in organizing the village meetings to identify poachers in five villages where representatives of local police, the Fisheries Administration Cantonment, the Provincial Department of Environment, CEPA and community discussed ways to effectively curb illegal fishing. As a result of the meeting, 35 poachers were identified and recorded in a commune list for further investigation and actions. All the poachers were reported and confronted by the commune council to halt illegal fishing activities. They were educated and introduced to other alternative livelihoods to illegal fishing that harms many globally endangered fish and aquatic species in the Mekong River.

“
I had the opportunity to listen to the concerns from CFi Management Committees and other stakeholders. After the workshop, I plan to conduct a village meeting to identify poachers by using the accountability boxes.”



Mrs.Khuon Sereimontha planning with community menmbers in Samaki commune. © CBET



CFi members patrolling in the Mekong River near their community. © Sina / WWF-Cambodia



Samros Koh Han prospers with women in the leadership

In the Koh Snaeng commune, O Svay district, the Stung Treng province, where the Somros Koh Han Community-based Ecotourism (CBET) is located, is inhabited by a total population 2,749 people, 1,297 of which are women. Somros Koh Han CBET lies on a unique biodiversity-rich landscape in the middle of the Mekong River’s Ramsar site.

Up to 2016, Samros Koh Han was left idle until when it was revived with the support of NTFP-EP under PaFF programme. NTFP-EP helped facilitate the development of the Samros Koh Han CBET management committee so that the CBET could benefit its community members. Eleven CBET committee members were elected to sustainably manage the CBET operation.

Now, tourists visiting Somros Koh Han can enjoy eco-friendly activities such as boat trips to flooded forests, bird watches of endangered species, fishing and village tours, kayaking, mountain trekking, historical monument visits, beach camping, sunset watching, overnight stays at the community homestay and food tasting of local cuisine.

A 50 year-old mother of three kids, Mrs. Bun Samphan, the Chief of the CBET committee, supervised key tasks in the CBET operation. She informs and coordinates with local authorities about guest visits, also hosting tours while working with CBET members. She ensures accurate records of the tours and facilitates regular monthly meetings with committee members and community members, later joining commune council meetings to update them about the progress of the CBET.

Community members who joined the CBET group increased from 27 people in 2017 to 43 people in 2019. In 2017, the income from providing the CBET services was USD1,879, rising to USD3,688 in 2018 but falling short to USD3,394 in 2019.



Mrs. Samphan presenting about her CBET to visitors. © NTFP-EP

“

I am happy with what I have done. My husband is a huge part of supporting me to do CBET tasks. He helps me both in daily family and business work.”

“We, as a committee, do it from our heart. In the future, we plan to attract more tourists by creating more potential tourism sites in our community forests, providing services such as forest trekking. For the long term vision, I wish to see my CBET attract more tourists, community members earn more income, and natural resources become protected,” added Mrs. Samphan.

Incomes from sustainable harvest of wild honey contribute to natural resources management in Prasat Teuk Khmao

The Prasat Teuk Khmao Community Forestry (CF) group in the Sambo district of Kratie Province depend on their community natural resources for their livelihoods, and so community members feel a strong sense of duty to sustainably protect these natural resources. However, the protection of these natural resources requires the community to have a sustainable budget for implementing the community’s natural resource management plan.

To alleviate the burden of community members who patrol the forests and for important community meetings specified in their management plan, Prasat Teuk Khmao CF and the NTFP-EP created “Prasat Teuk Khmao Wild Honey Collection Group” in February 2018. In cooperation with local authorities and Kratie Forestry Administration Cantonment under the Partnership for Forestry and Fisheries (PaFF), they provided capacity training and other support to help generate additional income for the community with wild honey collection.

At least 5 percent of the group’s annual net profit is allocated for sustainable management of the forests in Prasat Teuk Khmao CF. In 2019, the group collected 2,473 kg of wild honey from its 35 members and generated a total annual income of USD30,018, with a net profit of USD8,452. From the net profit, USD422 was contributed to Prasat Teuk Khmao CF group. Each of the wild honey collection members earned an average annual income of around USD616 in that year. To increase income for its members and contribute more to natural resource conservation, the group is now looking for ways to improve harvesting practices and market linkage.

To increase the budget for the natural resource management plan, the CF committee decided to use the contribution budget from the wild honey collection group as a deposit to their “community savings group” for annual interest.



The wild honey hive in the forest of Prasat Teuk Khmao Community. © NTFP-EP



Mr. Ya Smak. © NTFP-EP

Mr. Ya Smak, the 40-year-old Chief of Prasat Teuk Khmao CF and a management committee member of the wild honey collection, assured that the honey collection group provided many benefits to the members, for example, with capacity building on sustainable honey harvesting protocol (eg. using white smoke, taking only 80 percent of the honeycomb, practicing sanitation for collecting, processing and storing).

“*I think working collectively is really useful because the wild honey collection group offers an acceptable price to its members.*”

Empowering local women in community credit scheme Leadership

The community forestry (CF) credit scheme was established in 2014 to help communities to be able to generate their budget from community loan interest, which are used to implement activities in their natural resource management plans. In 2016, the CF credit scheme was initiated in Kratie Province through the facilitation of RECOFTC in cooperation with the Kratie Forestry Administration Cantonment, local authorities, partner NGOs and target communities under the support of the Partnership for Forestry and Fisheries (PaFF) programme. RECOFTC and its partners supported the establishment of 10 CF credit groups. The Khsach Leav CF credit group, established in 2018, is one of them.

Mrs. Choup Saroeurn, a mother of four, is the Chief of the Khsach Leav CF credit group in Sambo District of Kratie Province. Back in February 2019, Mrs. Saroeurn was about to resign from her position as the Chief of the CF credit, only three months after she assumed the role because one member of the CF group failed to pay interest for two months.

RECOFTC also helped to facilitate a meeting with all the CF credit groups and members in Kratie province, including the member who refused to pay interest in Khsach leav village and the local authority. Saroeurn used this opportunity to convince the community members that the credit scheme was beneficial for them and different from previous models.

“The money I manage from the credit scheme is not my own money, it belongs to everyone and is the only source of income that we can generate to protect our forests, so if we take this money, it means we are taking each other’s money” said Saroeurn. Saroeurn’s leadership inspired members who attended the meeting, after understandig the importance of the credit scheme for implementing natural resource management and for community benefit, the member promised to pay off to the credit scheme.



Mrs. Saroeurn working with community members to document CF credit forms. © RECOFTC

The CF credit first started with a seed fund of only USD1,000 as a capital to run the scheme. In December 2019, the capital increased to USD2,170, from which USD19.35 of interest each month was contributed to the implementation of the sustainable natural resource management plan.

“
It was like a dream. I had already prepared the resignation letter. But now I have gained more confidence and will commit to fulfilling this work to succeed more in the future.”

Koh Samseb community-based ecotourism

On a cool January morning, we woke up to the sounds of chirping birds and flowing river. We were at a tourist destination, but not one like you'd see in any guidebook or travel show. Between the rocks and sand banks of Cambodia's Mekong River, we sat down with the woman who brought together people and nature with ecotourism.

Khsach Khpous Island was selected as a camping site by Koh Samseb Community-Based Ecotourism (CBET) management committee. Ms. Thida Horn, one of the Koh Samseb CBET members, started to provide her services in May 2019. Surrounded by the rich biodiversity and amazing wildlife, the Mekong Flooded Forest is fascinating to any visitor.

“

Tourists come by boat and discover the Mekong. They can watch the beautiful sunset here, have dinner together, watch the stars and then sleep in tents on the island.”

Before launching Koh Samseb CBET, Thida's journey wasn't always easy. Born in Kampong Cham province, she worked in agriculture for a period of time, before deciding to leave her hometown to move to the capital where she began working as a cook for a Chinese company. Unfortunately, she got injured and was no longer able to work, forcing her to leave Phnom Penh and return home unemployed.



Ms.Thida cooking food for tourists on Koh Samseb. © Sreyrat / WWF-Cambodia

Back at her village, she quickly learned about Community-Based Ecotourism from her husband who was a member of a CBET. When she heard about the potential of ecotourism in the region, she immediately decided to meet with NTFP-EP, a partner of WWF in implementing PaFF programme.

Thida built her homestay with the support of NTFP-EP and WWF. In a joint collaboration, WWF, NTFP-EP and the Kratie Provincial Department of Tourism gave support for the management structure, capacity building and the promotion of the CBET.

Her ecotourism business is now sustainably operating, allowing her to benefit from an increased income security. Since its launch, there have been a total of 302 tourists who have stayed at her accommodation. Thida and her family live in Khsach Leav village in O Krieng commune in Kratie province and enjoy working with tourists. She says that she wouldn't go back to Phnom Penh and her old job for anything.

“

I am glad to work with ecotourism. My livelihood has improved a lot and I can now provide for my two children who are studying in Phnom Penh.”

Thida has also observed the positive impacts of ecotourism on environmental protection. She says that thanks to ecotourism, she has noticed a significant decline in illegal fishing activities in the area.

“*Poachers and illegal fishermen are scared to be denounced as there are more and more [tourists] coming. We told them we would condemn them if they keep doing illegal activities here. I am very happy to protect nature.*”

Ecotourism also has a positive ripple effect on the community. On the island and around her homestay, there is no waste or plastic left behind. The whole area is cleaned and left as if no humans have stepped foot on it. Thida noticed that people from her village have begun to pick up litter around their houses and to keep the village clean.

With the collective behavioral change happening, this story brings a lot of hope. As local communities begin generating extra income by sustainably managing natural resources around them, it is evident they also become more and more aware of the benefits of a healthy ecosystem. Since May 2008, WWF, in collaboration with NTFFP-EP and the Kratie Provincial Department of Tourism, have been working closely with people like Thida to bring livelihoods improvement and income generation for the local communities while protecting the Mekong’s incredible nature.



Food on Koh Samseb. © Sreyrat / WWF-Cambodia



The homestay initiative on Khsach Khpous Island was made possible through the partnership between NTFFP-EP (with the financial support from SDC under PaFF phase II, 2017-2021) and WWF (with the financial support from the Swedish Postcode Lottery under Healthy People Healthy Place project, Sep 2017-Aug 2020).

Pots for cooking food on Koh Samseb. © Sreyrat / WWF-Cambodia

From logger to sustainable chicken farmer

For the first time ever, Mr. Tu Te, who lives in Laeot village, Kratie Province, felt safe and happy at home. He now stays at home, feeding and taking care of his chickens. Back then, before this pivotal point of his life, Mr. Tu Te was working in the forest almost every day felling trees and cutting timber close to Prek Prasab Wildlife Sanctuary, where a protected area was designated in October 2018. Mr. Tu Te used to be a charcoal seller, working under fear and a lot of pressure. With or without his knowledge, his activities were illegal and damaging the natural resources of the area.

In early 2019, several villagers including Mr. Tu Te were selected by WWF-Cambodia and Forest and Livelihood Organization (FLO) to pilot a chicken farming project. WWF-Cambodia gave them incubators and introduced them to innovative ways to build chicken coops. Alongside, they also received training on how to use and fix the incubators, as well as how to give correct feed, vaccination and medicine to the chickens.

Since then, Mr. Tu Te has been making a living off of chicken meat production and raising chicks for sale. He and his wife are now selling 500 chicks per month, with chick costing 5000 Khmer Riels (USD1.25) each. The couple can earn up to USD250 of net profit each month just from selling chicks, even after deducting expenses from chicken feed, electricity bills, medicine and vaccines.



Chicks at Mr. Tu Te's house. © Laura Dehaene / WWF-Cambodia

It usually takes 21 days from when the egg is laid to when the chicks start hatching, then it takes another 21 days before the chick can be sold in the market. In addition, they began raising pigs, allowing them to generate even more income and properly provide for their three children.

“*I am happy and relieved. I like the business we have started here with my family. I can feel safe for the first time, since this job does not involve all the risks I had previously with my old job. Now I am concentrating on this business and I want to keep working on it to improve our livelihoods.*”

Raising chickens is not as hard as working in the forest and he can split the tasks with his wife. In the morning, they clean the troughs and the coops, monitor the incubators, then feed the chicks and chickens. Mr. Tu Te plans to expand his work in the farm so that he can increase the number of chicks and chickens for sale each month.

Mr. Tu Te has set a good example for local villagers to stop unsustainable exploitation of natural resources around them, and instead embrace alternative sources of income to improve their livelihoods while also helping reduce threats on natural resources in their communities.



Mr. Tu Te feeding his chickens. © Laura Dehaene / WWF-Cambodia



Journalists taking photos and videos of the Mekong River. © NTFP-EP

About PaFF Programme

The Partnership Programme to Support Forestry and Fishery Communities (PaFF) works with local communities and sub-national level institutions to increase the income of local and indigenous communities and households to improve their resilience to economic and natural shocks. By engaging locals with sustainable community-based livelihood approaches, the goal of the programme is to protect their ecosystems and reduce pressure on their communal natural resources.

The PaFF programme, funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the partners' contributions, is implemented by a consortium of four organizations: the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), the Center for People and Forests (RECOFTC), the Non-Timber Forests Products Exchange Programme (NTFP-EP), and the Culture and Environment Preservation Association (CEPA). The four organizations have complementary capacities and experience in the fields of community forestry and fisheries, biodiversity conservation, sustainable landscape management, community livelihoods, community-based natural resource enterprises, and policy dialogue with relevant authorities in Cambodia.



The view along the Mekong River. © SEM Vanna / Thmey Thmey News

PaFF in Numbers

62,863 ha

PaFF implementation covers target communities along the Mekong River, including those living adjacent to the Sambo and Praek Prasab Wildlife Sanctuaries with a total area of 62,863ha.



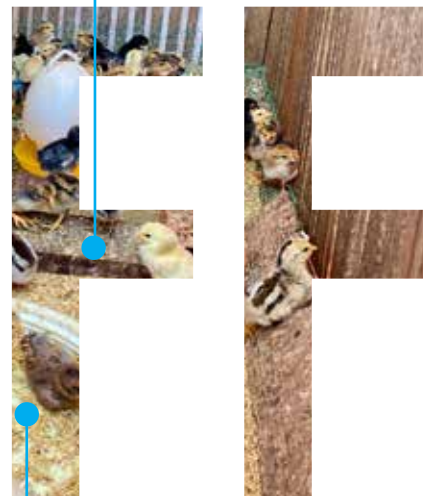
34,397 ha★

PaFF works with a total of 56 community fishery groups covering the fishery area of 34,397ha.

★ as of Dec 2019

182,160 ha★

PaFF works with a total of 53 community forestry groups covering the forest area of 182,160ha.



92

The Irrawaddy dolphin in the Mekong Flooded Forest landscape increased from 80 in 2015 to 92 in 2017, the first increase in 20 years in the history of dolphin survey.