



Workshop on the Conservation and Wise Use of Wetlands in the Lower Mekong River Basin

Vientiane, Lao PDR, 22 – 24 March 2011



MEKONG WATER DIALOGUES





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Available from:

IUCN ASIA REGIONAL OFFICE

63 Sukhumvit Road Soi 39

Klongton-Nua, Wattana

Bangkok 10110, Thailand

Tel: +66 (2) 662 4029-33

Fax: +66 (2) 662 4387-89

Email:asia@iucn.org

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Lew Young¹ and Robert Mather²

¹Senior Regional Advisor for Asia – Oceania, Ramsar Convention Secretariat, 28 Rue Mauverney, 1196 Gland, Switzerland (email: young@ramsar.org)

²Head, Country Group 1, Asia Regional Office, 63 Sukhumvit Soi 39, Wattana, Bangkok 10110, Thailand (email: robert.mather@iucn.org)

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I. Introduction

In September 2009, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands came into force in Lao PDR meaning that all the countries in the Lower Mekong River Basin were then Contracting Parties to the Convention. This then allowed greater opportunities for cooperation between the governments, relevant organizations and others for the conservation and wise use of wetlands in the basin region.

As a result, the IUCN Mekong Water Dialogues organized a workshop from 21 - 25 March 2011 in Vientiane, Lao PDR. This included a field visit to the Koot Ting wetland in Nong Khai Province of neighbouring Thailand with the overall aim of sharing experiences on best practices in wetland conservation and wise use, as well as to provide updates on the implementation of the Ramsar Convention in each of the respective countries. The workshop was funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, with additional support provided by the Ramsar Secretariat.

The workshop brought together for the first time, the Ramsar Administrative Authorities, Ramsar Site managers, relevant regional NGOs and other wetland experts from the region to share their experiences and best practices for wetland conservation and wise use, and to provide updates on the implementation of the Ramsar Convention in each of the respective countries. The workshop was attended by around 30 participants from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam, as well as China (Appendix 1).

II. Organization of the workshop programme

The field visit was conducted at the start of the workshop (a break with the tradition to place the field visits at the end of a workshop) to allow participants to get to know each other, to learn about real issues of management on the ground, and to discuss and exchange ideas with each other in an informal setting, before going into the workshop proper. The workshop was organized into seven sessions each of which started with a number of short presentations on the session theme before participants were divided into small groups where they could use their experience to discuss and develop the theme in more detail and where possible, generate recommendations for best practices on that theme.

The session themes were:

- Working with local communities;
- Management planning process;
- Wetland habitat management and monitoring;
- CEPA and tourism programs;
- National inventory of wetlands and their values;
- National regulations, guidelines and mechanisms; and
- Opportunities for national and regional cooperation.

This document is a report on the results of the workshop.

III. Session 1: Working with local communities

Background

Wetlands can provide a wide range of benefits and resources to the human communities who live in or close to the site and who often have settled there for many generations. Over time, these people would have built up a strong sense of attachment to the area, as well as detailed knowledge and understanding about the site and the most appropriate ways for managing it.

It is therefore essential to involve the local community in any wetland project, to allow them to see the additional benefits that the project provides, so as to ensure the long-term success of the project. The benefits that the project may bring include improvements to local income generation, improved access to and management of the wetland resources, such as water, food, etc. If the local community and government have a strong sense of ownership of the project from the start, then the chances that they will continue with the management activities initiated under the project, even after the project itself has ended, are greatly increased.

Presentations



WWF experience with fisheries co-management, Lao PDR

Presented by Vick Cowling

Results from WWF's fisheries co-management project in the Sekong River Basin showed that the main source of dietary protein of the poorer sector of the community was from the wild fish in the Sekong River. Therefore if there were any adverse impacts on the fisheries, then this sector of the community would be hardest hit.

Furthermore, the fisheries in the Sekong River Basin accounted for some 7% of the total for Lao PDR, emphasizing its importance and the need for proper management. The project therefore aimed to work with the communities, especially women, to develop fishery regulations and local fish conservation zones (FCZs). These community-led agreements have now all been approved by local (District) government and the next step is to develop a monitoring process to better understand the real impacts of this approach.



Pilot schemes for community participation in resource use of wetlands at Tram Chim National Park, Viet Nam

Presented by Nguyễn Văn Hùng

Tram Chim National Park has initiated a pilot scheme to work with the community to ensure the sustainable use of the site's resources, e.g. fisheries (fish, eels), grasses, vegetables (water lily, spinach) and firewood. The reserve is also working with the community to survey and demarcate the boundary of the park.

Beung Kiat Ngong Wetland Management, Lao PDR

Presented by Khamphay Luanglath and Vilavong Vannalath

The presentations outlined the steps taken to carry out participatory planning to successfully work with the local community in managing the resources at Beung Kiat Ngong (BKN). During the early stages of the work, IUCN organised a study visit for local community representatives and local government officials to visit the WWF Community Based Wetlands Management Project in Nong Khai, North-eastern Thailand. The approach subsequently taken in BKN, was therefore very similar to the approach taken in the WWF project in Nong Khai, and included:



- Understanding the issues at the site, e.g. key stakeholders, threats and conflicts in land-uses, and raising awareness of the wetland by:
 - involving local officials and village leaders;
 - conducting study tours to neighboring wetlands;
 - emphasizing the value of wetlands and ways to protect them;
 - collecting data on socio-economy and land use;
 - understand the community's customary laws and identify ways to strengthen them; and
 - understanding the local fishery practices.
- Developing regulations for the sustainable use of the wetland and its resources by:
 - understanding the community's customary laws and build on them to develop more effective regulation;
 - investigating how the local regulations fit into national laws;
 - circulating the new regulations to the villages and other stakeholders to ensure that they will not impact or generate conflicts with local livelihoods; and
 - continuing to review and revise the new regulations until agreement is reached with all the community.

However, a long-term issue facing the site is that of long-term population growth that needs to be addressed together with the community.

Discussions

Local people are very concerned with the socio-economic issues in and around their site, it is critical to maintain effective and open communication with them. Participation and co-management by the community is also an extremely important approach but is not often done. More time is needed to share experiences on approaches for community participation, and the government needs to make more effort to support local people. Wetlands are food, water and future for the local people.

Challenges and best practices for working with local communities

Challenges	Best practices
Lack of community concern about the project and confidence in the lead organization because of their past	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The local communities and government needs to be involved from the beginning of the project and they need to be aware of the values that the wetland provides.• The project team need to understand local culture and indigenous knowledge, traditional customs and laws, and livelihood practices.

<p>failures.</p> <p>It is taking a long time for the community to understand and support the project.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure transparency and accountability at all stages of the project, and involve local communities in the project as earlier as possible, e.g. from the design stage. • Identify the value of the wetland by participatory research. • Develop a community based awareness and education programme. • Use appropriate communication material/tools, e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure involvement of all stakeholders and sectors (e.g. ethnic groups, age groups, and sex) because each group may be using resources in a different way and each have different knowledge of the resources. If necessary, hold separate discussion with some of the stakeholder groups, e.g. women. Employ female project staff. - Take into account time of day when holding discussions because of the work load of the stakeholders. - The project team, especially scientists, need to talk the same language as the local people in discussions. - Ensure that discussion sessions with the community are conducted in a way that locals can understand the discussion as some stakeholders may not be literate. This may be overcome by using visual and not just written communication means. • Develop materials, e.g. leaflets, signboards, with photographs. • Set up a multi-stakeholder project committee, involving members from other sector, e.g. finance, law and legislation. • Develop local school curriculum so that it incorporates conservation issues into each subject (e.g. mathematic, language, etc.). • Organize study tours and exchanges so that experience can be shared with other groups or communities.
<p>Decision making in the community is too top down. Local communities have limited power of decision making.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to pro-actively involve local people using a bottom up approach. • Build local ownership through involvement in project planning, study tours, participation in research and site monitoring.
<p>Customary law is often overlooked</p>	<p>Consider cultural and indigenous knowledge and laws, e.g. on natural resources management, and incorporate these into legislation if appropriate.</p>
<p>Conflict over land use and resources</p>	<p>Site zoning and demarcation which should be done early in the project.</p>
<p>Poverty</p>	<p>Develop alternative income generation methods and sustainable financing mechanism, e.g. through tourism, improve agriculture practices e.g. bio-products. Identify value chain.</p>
<p>Lack of local technical capacity</p>	<p>Enhance local capacity of wetlands management, e.g. by providing training/coaching.</p>
<p>A lack of i) continuity and ii) funding after the project has ended.</p>	<p>i) Establish institutions with clear roles and responsibilities and ii) raise awareness of local authority/government who will allocate budget to continue the activities that the project has initiated.</p>

IV. Session 2: Management Planning Process

Background

Planning is an important process that is at the core of the management of any protected area and going through the planning process will allow the managers (whether government officials or community leaders) to develop, implement and adapt the management that is carried out. Although the physical output of the process is the production of a management plan, the planning process is, however, continuous and does not end there. The plan needs resources for implementation, there is a need to have an appropriate monitoring programme to assess the effectiveness of the management, and to have a broad-based management committee established to oversee the management and to agree to make adaptive changes to the management if required.

Presentations

Review of the Conservation of the Tonle Sap Biosphere Reserve (Core Areas), Cambodia *Presented by Long Kheng*

A conservation project at the Tonle Sap Biosphere Reserve (TSBR) was described which aimed to:

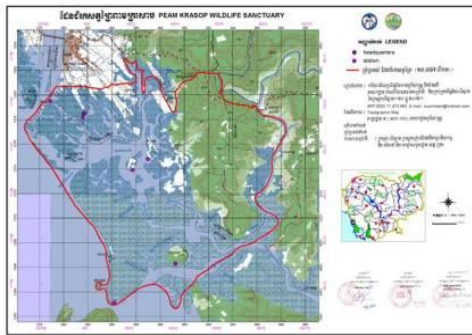
- Enhance the capacity for management of biodiversity in the core areas;
- Develop systems for monitoring and management of biodiversity, and;
- Promote awareness, education, and outreach on biodiversity conservation in the TSBR.



This was carried out by i) establishing community protected areas in the core zone of the reserve, ii) demarcating the boundary of the core area, iii) carrying out patrols and law enforcement, iv) monitoring waterbirds, v) conducting environmental and community education and awareness programmes, vi) implementing livelihood support programme, and vii) establishing ecotourism programmes.

The overall project was successful in taking a bottom-up approach to reduce/stop the key threats and build the capacity of the conservation team.

Tonle Sap also has a management plan which follows national guidelines, and which was drafted by the government together with the local stakeholders. The Ministry of Agriculture, Environment and Forestry have meetings with the local community, as well as with the commune, before meetings are held on the provincial and then national government level.



Protected Area Zoning Under the Protected Area Law and Formalizing Community Management of appropriate zones of Peam Krasop Wildlife Sanctuary, Cambodia

Presented by Kimsreng Kong

Peam Krasop Wildlife Sanctuary protects part of one of the most important mangrove areas in Cambodia. The site also supports some 9,000 people who depend on the site's ecological services to sustain their fisheries-based livelihood.

A 2008 update to the Protected Areas Law of Cambodia provides the basis for zoning of protected areas, including the designation of a core zone, and a community-use zone. IUCN conducted an 18 month community consultation process together with advocacy at the commune, provincial and national level, to design the first ever zoning scheme under the revised law.

Under the project, meetings were held with stakeholders at all levels to understand the importance and value of different parts of the sanctuary, the distribution of endangered species, and patterns of local resource use. From these discussions, a resource zoning system was designed for the area and is now being submitted to the national government for consideration. (Note: subsequent to this workshop, in August 2011 Hun Sen, the Prime Minister of Cambodia, signed a decree to approve this first ever zoning scheme).

Beung Khong Long, Thailand

Presented by Chao Moolsiri,

As the four year WWF project was entering its final year, a process was begun to draft a five year management plan for the sites. This would rely on contributions from local government budgets to enable local communities to continue implementing management activities at the sites after the WWF project has been completed. A number of steps were involved in developing the plan. These included:

- Identifying a wide range of key stakeholders who should be involved in drafting the plan. It was felt that the plan would have more chance of success if a wider group was involved in its development;
- Identifying the conservation management objectives for the site, as well as the challenges facing the achievement of those objectives;
- Determining the amount and quality of water that needs to be available to the wetland;
- Maintaining the population of indigenous fish species and waterbirds at the site;
- Drafting clear statements as to who would have responsibility for which areas of work;
- Developing a budget for the activities that would be implemented under the plan and ideally, would include a budget allocation contribution from the local government;
- Producing a programme for participatory monitoring of the management plan; and Appointing provincial authorities as chair for the management committee that would oversee its implementation to ensure that the management plans will be implemented

Land use zoning at Beung Kiat Ngong, Lao PDR

Presented by Khamphay Luanglath

Land use zoning was developed at Beung Kiat Ngong over a 12 month period by working with the local communities and local government, based on customary law and zoning practices. Zones were divided into those that were fully protected or seasonally protected, and those that were protected for some species only or where certain activities were prohibited. It was noted that site boundary markers are very important for the local community. As a result, money should be available for zoning demarcation.

Discussions

Representatives from each of the Mekong Basin countries were asked about the management planning tools that were in place for Ramsar Sites in their countries.

China: Five-years ago, the Chinese government drafted a Wetland Master Conservation Plan that focused on western China, e.g. Tibetan and Guizhou Plateau and the Mongolian Plateau. This area is the source of 11 international rivers. This Plan established the National Plateau Wetland Research Center three years ago.

In 2007, three Ramsar Sites were listed along the upper Mekong River, at Bitahai, Lashahai and Naphai, this area also has 19 national nature reserves. From 2005-2015, China invested 9 billion RMB into wetland conservation and planning, including activities such as development of conservation areas, infrastructure, and capacity building.

Cambodia: Existing Ramsar sites are either stand alone sites (eg Stung Treng) or are part of larger biosphere reserves, or Wildlife Sanctuaries. The Stung Treng Ramsar site for example has no management plan. IUCN is planning to support the development of a National Wetlands Strategy for Cambodia.

Lao PDR: Nearly all wetland sites in Lao PDR have local community involvement and it is important to develop co-management plans, and land-use zoning plans for each of these sites.

Thailand: Most of Thailand's Ramsar sites are part of another form of protected area – either a national park or a non-hunting area, and so in theory are managed as part of the overall management plan of that protected area. However there is a major issue in that Thailand's National Parks Law prohibits any form of resource use inside the park, whereas Ramsar is based on the philosophy of "wise use" It is therefore difficult to see how the same area can be effectively managed under these two very different approaches. Three Ramsar sites are outside of any protected area - Goot Ting, Don Hoi Lort, and Krabi Estuary. There are also a vast number of nationally important and locally important wetlands throughout the country, which are still effectively open-access, and have no clear legal and regulatory basis for their management.

Vietnam: The two existing Ramsar Sites are both within protected areas (similar situation to Thailand) and the site management plans are called 'Investment Plans' which are not legal instruments. There is a planning institute that produces these plans. (Note: subsequent to this workshop, IUCN has assisted the Vietnamese government in the successful nomination of Ba Be as Vietnam's third Ramsar site, and is preparing the nomination of Tram Chim as the fourth)

Key points:

If the management plan produced for a site is to be effective then it should be able to:

- Help resolve both internal and external conflicts by encouraging communication between managers and stakeholders, and within and between sites and organisations;
- Ensure the effectiveness and continuity of management;
- Be used to demonstrate that management is appropriate, i.e. effective and efficient; and
- Be used to bid for resources, e.g. funding.

V. Session 3: Wetland habitat management and monitoring

Background

For any tasks such as the conservation management of a species or a site, such as a wetland, there will always be the need for monitoring. This is so that the site manager can have an assessment of the success of the management being carried out. In the case of wetland sites, the aim of management is often to ensure that the natural resources are being used 'wisely' and that this is contributing to the health, livelihood and sustainable development of the local community. As a result, monitoring at a wetland site has to cover a range of parameters, from social, economic and to the ecological level.

Presentations



Wetland and Biodiversity Conservation on the Lancang-Mekong River, China

Presented by Prof. Yang Yuming

Yunnan Province is the source of four large international rivers (including the Mekong) and two large national rivers, i.e. the Yangtse and Yellow Rivers. In the upper Mekong River, China has 19 national and provincial nature reserves.

There are 38 natural lakes in Yunnan Province, with half belonging to the watershed of the Mekong River. In 2012, China will update the National Wetland Action Plan which will focus on plateau wetlands, rivers, marshes, etc.



Establishing Sustainable Management at Key Wetlands for Sarus Crane in the Cambodian Lower Mekong, Cambodia

Presented by Robert van Zalinge

The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) has initiated a three year project to conserve Boeung Prek Lapouv (BPL) and Kampong Trach (KT) as representative wetland types in the lower Mekong floodplain, and for non-breeding populations of Sarus Cranes. The project aims to increase community involvement in the management of the sites; build the capacity of the site staff; improve the conservation of the biodiversity; improve water management at the sites; and implement a monitoring programme and to develop a long-term funding mechanism for the site.

Discussion

The discussions focused mainly on site monitoring and examples were taken from Beung Kiat Ngong (Lao PDR), Tonle Sap (Cambodia) and Xuan Thuy (Viet Nam).

Why do we need to monitor?

- To inform the management team whether management objectives (e.g. sustainable development of the community, biodiversity and site conservation) are being met;
- Provide updated information on socio-economic indicators, e.g. livelihood, income, population;
- To assess the status of natural resources, e.g. fish harvesting, diversity of aquatic animals, medical plants etc. after management interventions;
- Provide updated information on the level of existing and potential threats, e.g. fire, illegal fishing, expansion of cultivated areas; and
- To assess the implementation and success of regulations and efficiency of enforcement.

What to monitor?

The monitoring programme should cover a wide a range of parameters as possible bearing in mind the human and financial resources available. The parameters to be monitored would include:

- Socio-economic indicators, e.g. harvested fish, crabs, shrimps and clams through interviews with local people); awareness of the local community about the site;
- Biological, e.g. wildlife such as mangroves, fish and birds (using a variety of techniques, e.g. stationary platform, boat and air). Such monitoring can contribute to a regional programmes, e.g. monitoring birds as part of the Asian Waterfowl Census;
- Economic factors, e.g. visitors numbers (questionnaire);
- Climate, e.g. rainfall, temperature;
- Physical, e.g. water quality, water level change; and
- Threats from within the site as well as from outside.

Regardless of the parameters being monitored, it is important to conduct the monitoring on a regular and cyclical basis. As a result, sustainable financing to support the monitoring work must be available.

Who should conduct the monitoring?

- One method that has been found to be successful is to work with local communities to identify the specific parameters for monitoring which they consider important, and then seek volunteers from amongst them to help with the monitoring. This will then help to build up the sense of cooperation and trust;
- The volunteers would have to be trained before they can begin the monitoring work and as a result, it is important that the training and materials provided are in the local language so that it can be more easily understood; and
- After the monitoring data has been collected and analysed, it is also important to provide feedback to the community so that they can see the trends in the parameters being measured.

How will the data being used?

- It will be entered into a database to update the baseline information about the site and which is accessible to the local community, site management staff, government officials, experts, researchers, etc.
- If the monitoring shows that the management tasks are not achieving the desired results, then the consideration should be made to adapt the management measures; and
- Monitoring at a site is often carried out by different agencies and it is therefore important to coordinate with the other agencies to try and share the data collected.

VI. Session 4: CEPA and tourism programs

Background

Communication, education, participation and awareness (CEPA) should form a key part of any programme or activity concerned with the conservation and wise use of wetlands. This is because CEPA programmes will help people understand the values of wetlands so that they are motivated to become advocates for wetlands conservation and wise use, with the eventual aim that they act and become involved in relevant policy formulation, planning and management.

Tourism is an area where visitors can learn more about the value of, and the challenges facing the wetland that they are visiting. In addition, wetland site managers also consider tourism as a means to generate income for the long-term conservation of the site. As a result, this session focused on these two issues, CEPA and tourism, and to bring out the issues and best practices associated with them in the Lower Mekong Basin.

Presentations

Prek Toal Ecotourism, Cambodia

Presented by Long Kheng

- Prek Toal is located within the core area of the Tonle Sap Biosphere Reserve and supports probably the largest water-bird colony in Southeast Asia. The site lies close to Angkor Wat which receives some 2 million visitors annually, some of whom will also visit Tonle Sap and Prek Toal;
- Since 2007, the number of tourists to Tonle Sap has declined from some 2,300 people to less than 1,000 in 2010, probably due to the global economic crisis and political instability in neighbouring Thailand. However, the number of local visitors has been increasing. In 2011, the price for overseas tourists to visit Peak Toal has increased from USD40 to USD50 per person, or USD70 total for two people. Local visitors are not charged. Local boats are now used to take visitors around the site instead of using large speedboats;
- There are some 5,000 people living around Prek Toal whose livelihood is mainly supported by fishing. The government has initiated a 'Livelihood Support Programme' that has established a handicraft shop (benefitting 29 families) and 10 home-stays for visitors. Twenty villagers are also employed as rangers and tour guides for visitors to the bird colony. For the community, the government authority at Peak Toal has provided floating gardens and houses, motorboats and paddleboats for the poorer families;
- In interviews with 49 local people about how they viewed the tourism programme, 67% said that it helped their community by providing employment and an alternative income, thus helping to improve their livelihoods. The remaining 33% did not know or did not answer;
- When the tour operators were asked whether they allocated any of their revenue for the benefit of the site (e.g. in promoting conservation, awareness building or supporting the local community), 58% said they had no plans to do so, 34% said that they had done so, and 8% did not answer.
- Of the income from tourism, 9% went to conservation activities, 2% to environmental education and local staff salaries, 3% for government tax or duty, 24% for operation cost and the remaining income went to 'other expenses'.
- The community around Prek Toal are supportive of further promoting the tourism programme since some of them benefitted by providing transportation services, accommodation, or selling food and souvenirs. However, there were concerns about the possible disturbance caused by the increasing number of tourists, especially if their numbers were to increase in future;
- Overall, the results showed that the benefits from tourism are not equally distributed, with much more accruing to the tour operators rather than benefitting the local communities or for the conservation of the site. Even then, the small number of tourists presently visiting Prek Toal is insufficient to meet the cost of conservation, environmental education and community development.



Promoting CEPA amongst the local community at Beung Khong Long, Thailand

Presented by Chao Moolsiri,

Using the experience that WWF had gained through their project at Beung Khong Long, the key points for successful local community involvement includes:

- Ensuring the participation of the local communities in activities, e.g. 'Tai Baan' – participatory action research projects. Local people often have detailed knowledge about the management of their resources but may not understand the reason behind those practices. So it is important for them to work with scientists to understand the background. This can be done for example, by allowing them to work with fisheries experts, such as in marking the boundary of fishery conservation areas etc. Such learning is similar to an 'osmosis process', allowing the local participants to learn without even knowing that they are learning. Participation by the local community also helps build trust and understanding;
- Peer to Peer communication is a very important part of the learning process amongst local communities;
- Study tours are also an important CEPA tool;
- Many villages have a loudspeaker or community radio station which broadcast information and these are being used to broadcast information about wetlands; and
- Use opportunities such as World Wetland Day, to organize awareness raising activities. Such activities are increasing in size and involving wider groups of stakeholders, e.g. traditional boxing events, women making food out of local wetland material, other water activities. They are also a once a year opportunity to allow everyone to get together.

CEPA & tourism programmes at Don Hoi Lot, Thailand

Presented by Wanlop Preechamart

- This presentation showed how the Don Hoi Lot Ramsar Site was conserved through the initiative of the local people whose livelihood was dependent on the harvesting and trade in the Razor clam, *Solen regularis* which is famous at the site;
- From there being some 65 clams/m² in 1997, the density declined to just 1 clam/m² in 2008 due to threats such as pollution, overharvesting and encroachment into the mudflat by local restaurants;
- As a result, two local people formed 'The Don Hoi Lot Conservation Group' in 2009 to conserve the site and the clams through awareness raising and community involvement. These activities included monitoring the status of Don Hoi Lot, and organizing study tours to other communities to exchange experiences regarding the management of natural resources. Through the knowledge gained from these tours, the group developed their own conservation activities which included:
 - Organizing a range of training courses and CEPA activities, especially during traditional ceremonies and holidays, to raise community awareness about the function and values of wetland ecosystems;
 - Conducting a campaign to remove solid waste from the mangrove forest;
 - Re-introducing fish resources; and planting mangrove;
- The Don Hoi Lot Conservation Group was thus able to turn the crisis into an opportunity, raising the awareness of local people and enabling more community participation in the conservation and restoration of the site.





CEPA and the Ramsar Convention

Presented by Lew Young

CEPA is a long-term process aimed at motivating people and providing them with the tools and information so that they can act for the conservation and wise use of wetlands. Many people see CEPA as focusing on students and the young and whilst this is important, it is also important to raise the awareness and motivate the whole community, from decision makers, the business sector, general public, and to the community.

Each Ramsar Contracting Party should appoint a government and a NGO CEPA Focal Point to implement the Ramsar CEPA programme within the country. There are dedicated pages on the Ramsar website with tools and information to support those conducting wetland CEPA programmes.

Discussions (CEPA)

Challenges in conducting CEPA activities at the level of the local community:

- Since the community consists of many groups of stakeholders, it is vital to understand the local people in order to achieve your CEPA objectives. Do not use your own point of view as an outsider and impose it on the community. Eventually, if the objectives are achieved, the result is like seeing the tip of an iceberg. You do not see the amount of effort that has gone on before;
- The ultimate aim of the CEPA programme must be to develop real participation from the local community in site conservation activities;
- Whilst there are some general principles for conducting CEPA activities, the issues associated with each site and each group of stakeholders will be different.

Who are the target audiences?

- CEPA programmes should be targeted at all levels of the community and for all stakeholders, e.g. decision makers, local authorities, private businesses, local media, researchers, water user group, fishery groups, schools, youth, gender, village militia, traditional knowledge holders, etc;
- Monks and local (clan) elders can often play an important role in promoting the importance of wetland amongst the community.

What are the means to communicate to the audience?

- Schools – develop local curricula, nature trails, environmental education centres;
- Production and distribution of materials such as comics, posters, leaflets and brochures, as well as organize activities such as drama (role play), local events (e.g. contest), local festivals, etc;
- Use the range of electronic and print media;
- Through radio broadcasts and announcements (e.g. in some villages);
- Utilize national events such as World Wetland Day (WWD).
- Through specially arranged meetings which may be informal (e.g. lunches, dinners), or formal (e.g. workshops, training, or seminars sessions);

- Through regular meetings where an item on wetland can be inserted into agenda; and
- Organize study tours for the key stakeholders or encourage their participation in wetland activities, e.g. in the site monitoring programme.

What are the messages that can be used?

- Whatever the message, soft advocacy must be used in spreading it;
- In addition, the message also has to be clear in how wetland conservation and wise use will benefit the individual in the audience (i.e. 'what's in it for me?');
- Key themes in the message would include: knowledge and understanding of wetlands, their uses and values, threats and the steps needed to improve their management, conservation and wise use; and
- The Water Onion (*Crinum thaianum*) is an endemic and threatened species in Thailand that was recently discovered in a 1.60 hectare (10 *rai*) area of ground. As a result, the government local NGOs and IUCN are working to conserve the species by raising awareness, including the organization of a 'Water Onion Festival' in October.

Discussions (tourism)

Why should tourism be developed at a site?

- If properly managed, it could provide additional income for local people and thus improve local livelihoods. The income could also be used for the conservation of the site;
- In this way, tourism would also build local capacity and pride, connect the community to the world, and raise awareness about the value of the site.

What are the best practices and steps for developing tourism at the site?

- Determine if there is community interest in tourism. Is it what the community wants?
- Conduct a feasibility assessment on the proposed tourism programme;
- Ensure that the tourism programme is owned, managed and implemented by the local community, e.g. the tourist facilities should be locally owned (e.g. guesthouses, home stays, restaurants etc);
- Protect local culture and traditions, promote culture\local products;
- Develop local agreement, guidelines (e.g. benefit sharing);
- Prepare ecotourism business plan, including marketing, tour operator etc;
- Zone the site for tourism;
- The funds brought in from the programme should be managed by the community;
- Conduct capacity building programme for the community, staff, tour operators, guides etc;
- Establish a local information/education centre for the tourists and that CEPA material about the value of the site and a code of conduct is available to the tourists; and
- The price of guided tours could be linked to whether the tourists are able to see the target species(s). For example, at the Wildlife Conservation Society's project in Nam-Et Phou Loei (Lao PDR), visitors pay 5,000,000 kip if they see a tiger but only 18,000 kip if they see a tiger footprint. Similarly, for a guided bird-watching trip in Cambodia, visitors pay US\$30 if they see all the target species but only US\$10 if they do not see anything. Such a system would also encourage the local community to conserve the target species for conservation.

How to manage the impacts from the tourism?

- Conduct a risk assessment of the tourism programme. Ensure the community are aware of risks and train them on how to manage the risks. This could be done by developing and implementing a community-ecotourism code of conduct, making use of existing tourism guidelines and tool kits;
- Ensure the programme can provide security and safety for the tourists who are visiting.
- Provide waste management plan and facilities;
- Low impact construction, recycling, etc;
- To ensure the number of tourists visiting does not exceed the carrying capacity of the site, a high (but appropriate) price should be charged for tourists. A graduation of prices could also be considered;
- The presentations and discussions showed that many tourism programmes may not bring in as much money or benefits as the community had first hoped, and the programme may even have adverse impacts. This may be partly overcome by enhancing local institutional capacity so that the community can truly take ownership of the site and allow them to be stronger in negotiation and dialogue over issues with management of the site; and
- The issue how site conservation can bring social and economic benefits to the local community is obviously an important one and needs to be further explored. Tourism is one opportunity but there are many others.

VII. Session 5: National inventory of wetlands and their values

Background

Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention recognize the importance of developing a comprehensive national inventory of its wetlands as the vital basis for many of the actions necessary for achieving the wise use of wetlands. These actions include the development of appropriate wetland policy, identification and designation of Ramsar Sites, documentation of wetland losses, and identification of wetlands with potential for restoration. The Convention also encourages the collection and sharing of information for the management of transboundary wetland systems, including those within river basins.

Presentations:



National Inventory of Wetlands, Thailand *Presented by Wanlop Preechamart*

Thailand first began to make an inventory of their wetlands in 1996, and used the same methodology as that for the Asian Wetland Inventory. The inventory work was conducted jointly by the government, NGOs, and local people. From that, the country has developed a list of wetlands of international and national importance of which, at least 25 are peatlands. However, a more recent assessment is showing that the country has already lost some 50% of its wetlands.

Updating the Wetlands Inventory, Lao PDR

Presented by Latsamay Sylavong

Building on the momentum of Lao PDR's accession to the Ramsar Convention, the next step would be to update the 1996 inventory of the wetlands in the country, which identified some 30 wetlands of importance.

A number of these sites would no doubt have now been lost or degraded, and for the ones remaining, information on their current status needs to be collected so that they can be prioritized for conservation. The work in conducting the inventory would be used as a training an opportunity to conduct local, regional and national level workshops to build the capacity of officials.

The work of carrying out the inventory will be supported by MRC, and facilitated by IUCN Lao PDR, working closely with the National Environment Research Institute (NERI) and a team will be set up working in a participatory way so as to ensure ownership by the local, provincial and national governments afterwards.



Economic valuation of Beung Kiat Ngong

Presented by Vilavong Vannalath

A study to calculate the economic value of Beung Kiat Ngong was conducted by interviewing around half of the 1,400 families living at the site, 90% of the interviewees were women. The direct use value of the site was found to be approximately USD 850,000/year. In addition, fishery product provided USD150,000/year and the fodder provided by the site for the elephants that are used in tourism programme was worth another USD20,000/year. These figures were calculated from a simple initial study and did not include the other goods and services that the site provides, e.g. water supply and flood protection. If a more detailed study were to be conducted, then the total economic value of the site would no doubt be much higher.

In discussions, Peter-John Meynell reported that Stung Treng (Cambodia) provided about USD 3,000/person (or household) in terms of all the goods and services whilst Vick Cowling said that That Luang (Lao PDR) provides USD 4.8 million worth of services per annum (USD1,000/ha/yr).

Discussion

- Each country should develop a national wetland inventory, a national wetland strategy, and a management plan for each of their Ramsar Sites;
- Whilst each country would have a designated government agency responsible for the national implementation of the Ramsar Convention, that agency often requires the support of NGOs and other specialists in carrying out the work; and

- In the management planning process, the Ramsar Administrative Authority in the country should try to engage as wide a range of other relevant agencies and organizations as possible. This is important for countries such as Lao PDR where the Administrative Authority may only have responsibility for the Ramsar Sites, but they do not necessarily have the mandate to ensure the wise use of the other wetlands in the country. Such a broad and open approach to management planning would ensure that the full range of views and challenges can be discussed and consensus found to any issues that may arise.

VIII. Session 6: National regulations, guidelines and mechanisms

Background

Wetlands have been identified as one of the key life support systems on the earth, however wetlands and the services and functions that they provide are still being lost at a rate that is faster than for any other ecosystem. Although there are international agreements and conventions (e.g. the Ramsar Convention), that try to halt and reverse this trend, there is also an urgent need for governments to establish and implement wetland policy at the national level. This is despite challenges such as the length of time the process may take as well as scarcity of financial resources or institutional reluctance to changing the usual ways of doing business in government agencies and elsewhere. To be effective, a National Wetland Policy must be wide in scope and not be seen as just for protecting wildlife. Development of such a policy is in fact a “golden opportunity” to promote cooperation and action at many levels.

Presentation

Do we need dedicated Wetlands laws and policies?

Presented by Peter-John Meynall

Using examples from Lao, Pakistan, Uganda and Viet Nam, the need for developing a national policy for the conservation and wise use of wetlands was put forward based on the fact that:

- For some countries, the concept of a ‘wetland’ is still new and their national language may have no specific word for describing this concept, e.g. Lao;
- Many wetlands are not easily accessible and are still being seen as having little economic value. This makes many decision makers believe that converting them to alternative uses would be more beneficial;
- Many stakeholders have different rights, responsibilities and uses for wetlands but many of them are amongst the poorest in the community; and
- Countries often have various laws relating to a different aspect of wetland use but each law is administered by a different agency. There is often no single law for the wise use of wetlands and this then leads to conflicts in the wise use of the wetland. A review of policy is therefore needed. Without a dedicated wetland law, the nation’s wetlands lack adequate protection.



Discussions

A representative from each of the Lower Mekong Basin countries was asked to give a brief update on the status of their national wetland legislation.

Cambodia: There is an outdated (and never really implemented) Wetland Action Plan but no Wetland Policy or Wetland Law. The next step would be to draft a wetland strategy with a working group.

Thailand: The government is considering drafting a Wetland Law but are finding that the work is not simple because the law would need to be very broad covering both freshwater and coastal wetlands.

Vietnam: A law only exists for water resources and does not mention wetlands.

Lao PDR: The situation is similar to Vietnam but they are now considering drafting a Wetland Strategy, then Management Plans for the two Ramsar Sites. After that, the country would consider a developing a Wetland Law.

IX. Session 7: Opportunities for national and regional cooperation

Background

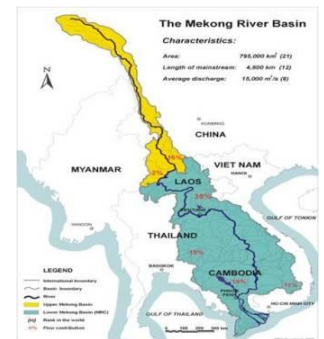
Wetlands and their resources (e.g. fish and waterbirds), are often shared between countries and as a result, one of the 'three pillars' of the Ramsar Conservation calls upon Contracting Parties to cooperate internationally concerning transboundary wetlands, shared wetland systems, shared species, and development projects that may affect wetlands. In the past decade, the Convention has tried to further regional cooperation by the encouraging the establishment of Ramsar Regional Initiatives which aim to be mechanisms to help improve implementation of the Convention in specific geographical regions through international cooperation on wetland-related issues of common concern. Currently, there are some 11 Regional Networks operating as Ramsar Regional Initiatives and of these, two are networks of the countries which share the same river basin. These two Regional Networks are for the Niger River Basin and the La Plata River Basin.

Presentations

Regional coordination mechanism for wetlands in the Mekong Basin under the Ramsar Convention

Presented by Dr. Petra Mutlu,

In recent years, Ramsar Regional Initiatives have been established around the world for Contracting Parties in a particular geographic region to cooperate and ensure the wise use of a shared wetland or wetland resources. This presentation put forward the suggestion of establishing a Ramsar Regional Initiative for the Mekong region that would be a useful mechanism for the Contracting Parties in order to



improve regional cooperation on the implementation of the Ramsar Convention. The benefits of such a mechanism would be to allow:

- Joint formulation of responses and action in response to issues, e.g. infrastructure and climate change;
- Joint planning and consultation on wetland issues which would allow increase management capacity of people in the region; and
- The secretariat would carry out advocacy work; provide technical advice, e.g. on transboundary issues etc.

Opportunities for Cooperation on the National, Regional and International area

Presented by Lew Young

The Ramsar Convention strongly encourages the Administrative Authority in each Contracting Parties to actively engage with other agencies, organization and stakeholders who also play a role in the use and management of wetlands (Res X.3, Changwon Declaration).



The conservation and wise use of wetland is a contribution to the Millennium Development Goals but people working in the development field often talk about 'water' but not 'wetlands'. There is a vital need to bridge this gap and raise awareness that wetlands are essential natural infrastructure that stores, purifies and delivers water, as well as other ecological services. This is especially important in view of the UNCSD 'Rio +20' conference in 2012.

Wetland conservation and wise use can also contribute to achieving many of the Aichi Targets, such as Target 11 which aims to conserve 17% of terrestrial and inland water areas and 10% of marine and coastal areas by 2020. The designation of Ramsar Sites would be a contribution towards this. The Ramsar Secretariat themselves are also working with other relevant organization such as the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity, with whom Ramsar aims to sign an agreement of cooperation.

In discussions, Khampadith Khammiouanheung mentioned that it may be easier to obtain funding (e.g. from GEF) for wetland conservation if it can be linked with other issues, such as climate change, land degradation and biodiversity conservation.

Discussions

What would be the benefits of having a regional coordination mechanism for wetlands in the Mekong Basin?

- Compliment the work of the Mekong River Commission by having a mechanism that is focused on regional networking and cooperation on the conservation and wise use of wetlands, and the implementation of Ramsar and other related conventions;
- Such a mechanism would allow greater sharing of experiences and information for support of national activities but also, would allow for cooperation on transboundary issues. This could then provide the framework for future Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) initiatives; and
- Allow access to more financial and technical support.

Membership

- Discussions were held on whether membership should be opened for both government as well as non-governments agencies and organization but a consensus could not be reached;
- In terms of geographic coverage, it was felt that the mechanism should first only cover the Lower Mekong Basin region but then later, it may be possible to extend the cooperation to other ASEAN countries.

Priorities for action

Policies, guidelines and funding

- To provide a regional platform for discussion and action on the conservation and wise use of wetlands in the Lower Mekong Basin (LMB);
- To build partnerships and engage with other sectors and stakeholders who are also involved with the management and use of wetlands;
- To act as a mechanism for harmonizing the obligations of the different multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and conventions relating to wetlands in the Lower Mekong Region; and
- Seek sustainable financing for regional activities based on national priorities.

CEPA

- Raise greater awareness about wetlands in the LMB and ownership amongst stakeholders, from decision-makers to the local community;
- Develop and share advocacy, education and awareness materials on wetlands in the LMB, as well as case studies and best practise for implementing the Ramsar Convention;
- Capacity building of site manager, policy maker (capacity building component) on the conservation and wise use of wetlands, as well as on the implementation of the Ramsar Convention; and
- Promote local culture/indigenous knowledge on the wise use of wetlands.

Research and monitoring

- Promote research on the value of wetland biodiversity;
- Establish guideline for wetland management;
- Develop tools to monitor the effectiveness of wetland management;
- Conduct inventories and assess the status of wetlands in the LMB so that action can be taken to conserve the areas of priority; and
- Study impact of climate change on wetland.

Location of secretariat

Different options on how the mechanism could be administered were discussed but there was insufficient time for a consensus to be reached. For example, the secretariat could be completely independent or it could be attached to a NGO or an existing institution, such as with the wetland division under MRC, the AIT in Bangkok, or with the ACB in the Philippines.

Funding

Funding for the operation of the secretariat and the activities of the mechanism could be from the member countries, international funding mechanisms (e.g. GEF) agencies (e.g. GIZ), and environmental conventions (e.g. CBD, Ramsar) and NGOs.

X. Concluding remarks and the way forward

The countries of the Lower Mekong are at a very exciting point in time for Ramsar implementation and a new regional initiative would help build a continuing momentum. All four members are now part of the convention. After many years of having designated only two Ramsar sites, the Government of Viet Nam is now showing renewed interest in developing additional sites. Lao PDR having only recently designated two Ramsar sites is keen to develop national policy and strategy, site management plans, and even a wetlands law, as well as looking forward to designating additional sites. Cambodia needs to address the challenge of identifying support and providing resources for management of existing Ramsar sites, before identifying additional ones. In particular, it appears a strange aberration that with the tens of millions of dollars spent each year on sustainable development in the Mekong River; there is absolutely no investment of any donor assistance to the management of the only protected area of any form on the 2,800km length of the lower Mekong mainstream – namely the Stung Treng Ramsar Site. While continuing to support ongoing areas of wetland work, IUCN, WWF, WWT, MRC Ramsar and others, should make every effort to ensure that this situation in Stung Treng is addressed as a clear priority.

Appendix 1: List of workshop participants

Name	Position	Organisation	Country
Mr. Tep Boonny	Executive Director	Save Cambodia's Wildlife	Cambodia
Mr. Tek Vannara	Program Manager	CEPA	Cambodia
Mr. Long Kheng	Director, Prek Toal Core Area of Tonle Sap Biosphere and Tonle Sap Multiple Use Areas	Ministry of Environment	Cambodia
Mr. Kim Sreng Kong	Senior Programme Officer	IUCN Cambodia	Cambodia
Mr. Robert van Zalinge	Cambodian Lower Mekong Wetlands Project, Technical Advisor	Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust	Cambodia
Ms. Y Lavy	Deputy Director, Department of Wetlands and Coastal Resources	Ministry of Environment	Cambodia
Mr. Nong The Dien	Director	Ba Be National Park	Viet Nam
Mr. Nguyen Viet CACH	Director	Xuan Thuy National Park	Viet Nam
Mr. Nguyen DucTu	Water and Wetlands Coordinator	IUCN	Viet Nam
Mr. Nguyen Van Hung	Director	Tram Chim National Park	Viet Nam
Mr. Sansonthi Boonyothayan	Member of Council	Rajbhat University	Thailand
Mr. Jaroen Bumrungsaksanti	Head of Buengkong Non-hunting Area	Buengkong Non-hunting Area	Thailand
Mr. Chao Moolsiri	Freshwater Coordinator	WWF Thailand (Nongkai)	Thailand
Mr. Theerapat Aditapsatit	Head	Buengkonglong District Government Center	Thailand
Mr. Wanlop Preechamart	Environmental Officer, Biological Diversity Division, Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment	ONEP Thailand	Thailand
Mr. Yanyong Srijaroen,	Head of Freshwater Unit	WWF Greater Mekong	Thailand
Mr. Lew Young	Ramsar Secretariat	IUCN	Switzerland
Dr. Robert Mather	Head, Southeast Asia Group	IUCN	Thailand
Prof. Yang Yuming	Director	National Plateau Wetlands Research Center, Southwest Forestry University	China
Ms. Sonenaly Phanouvong	Deputy Head of SME Promotion Division	Lao Women Union	Laos

Name	Position	Organisation	Country
Mr. Khamphay Luanglath	Deputy Head	Forestry Section, Champasak Province	Laos
Mr. Noukone Siphonphoumy	Ramsar Coordinator	Water Resources and Environment Office, Champasak Province	Laos
Mr. Sinouane Sihalath	Director -	Water Resources and Environment Office, Savannakhet Province	Laos
Mr. Khampadith Khammounheung	Deputy Director General	DoE, WREA	Laos
Ms. Phoungmalay Sorvalith	Technical staff	DoE, WREA	Laos
Mr. Konesavanh Lungrat	Technical staff	DoE, WREA	Laos
Mr Chanthone Pothitay	Deputy Head	DFRC, DoF	Laos
Dr. Sinthavong Viravong	Deputy Director	LARReC, MAF	Laos
Mr. Kongngeun Chounlamountry	Assistant to Director	DWR, WREA	Laos
Mr. Chanthone Naovalath	Manager-Social Mitigation and Special Projects	Lane Xang Minerals Ltd	Laos
Mr. Phoutthasack Souvannasao	Deputy	Investment Promotion Division, MPI	Laos
Mr. Vilavong Vannalath	MWD-Field Coordinator	IUCN Lao	Laos
Ms. Latsamay Sylavong	Country Representative	IUCN	Laos
Mr. Victor Cowling	Freshwater Coordinator	WWF	Laos
Mr. Peter-John Meynell	Freelance Consultant	-	Laos
Ms Petra Schill	MRC-GIZ Cooperation Programme Coordinator	MRC-GIZ	Laos
Ms. Antje Fischer	Technical adviser	MRC-GIZ	Laos
Mr. Jan Burrows	Cocodise site Coordinator	WCS	Laos
Mr. Christoph Muziol	Programme Coordinator	IUCN	Laos
Mr. Phaivanh Phiapalath	Senior Programme Officer	IUCN	Laos
Ms. Charlotte Hicks	Programme Officer	IUCN	Laos



**INTERNATIONAL UNION
FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE**

ASIA REGIONAL OFFICE
63 Sukhumvit Road Soi 39
Klongton-Nua, Wattana
Bangkok 10110, Thailand
Tel: +66 (2) 662 4029-33
Fax: +66 (2) 662 4387-89
Email: asia@iucn.org
www.iucn.org/asia