

Beyond Survival

Engaging communities on coastal and marine management in Stung Hav, Preah Sihanouk, Cambodia



It was a quest to protect the rights of small-scale fishers, a means of survival. Then a property rights and land issue. A project first intended to protect resources and keep land grabbers at bay but has rippled into several activities, which have socioeconomic and environmental consequences. It is the story of a community's continuing attempt to improve people's lives. It is a story of what could be their lasting legacy.

Stung Hav is one of the rural districts in Kampong Som — now Preah Sihanouk — on the northwestern coast of Cambodia. What used to be a quiet fishing district is now fast becoming a busy economic zone, a welcome development for many local businessmen and communities but a source of wariness and conflict among ordinary fishers.

Stung Hav mirrors Cambodia's prevailing condition — a community in desperate need of economic activities but a society grappling to cope with the impact of rapid development. A development that exerts pressure — maybe too much pressure — on the very source of people's livelihood, the sea. While Stung Hav coastal and marine area is only 9,707 hectares — a minute portion in comparison to other provinces — this is a lifeblood to about 75-80 percent artisanal fishers, out of 12,000 individuals in Stung Hav. With the pervasive situation on landlessness, fishing remains to be the primary 'employer' in the District (see **Table 1**). That translates to the livelihood and survival of about 9,500 individuals in Stung Hav.

New settlers from all parts of Cambodia relocate in Stung Hav thinking that fishing would provide them with good livelihood. Fishing is said to be the livelihood of last resort as anyone can fish with only a hook and line for capital. Maybe that was before.

Most of the fishers in Stung Hav share the belief that when there is increased competition and less

catch, bigger boats and more efficient fishing gears would be required to harvest more fish. Some fishers are prompted to borrow money from the local bank or private money lenders, while others sell their properties to "modernize" their fishing gears. Lack of fish begets stronger resolve to get more fish.

As a result, traditional fishers who can not compete with the large-scale fishers suffer from lower fishcatch, indebtedness, and consequently, poverty. There have been indications of a significant reduction in poverty incidence in Sihanoukville from 30 percent in 2004 to 21.5 percent in 2008. But this does not seem plausible when one observes the conditions in Stung Hav.

As in many poverty-stricken districts in Cambodia, the concept of sustainable development can only be realized — or even understood at the local level — if access to food and other basic needs for survival can be addressed.

In a sense, while ICM deals with a plethora of issues and concerns, an integrated approach to coastal management in the district is a practical solution to the most pressing problems of the day — people's survival.

Development practitioners would argue that the pursuit of sustainable development per se is an effort that should be directed towards "enabling" people to go beyond basic survival.

"In areas like this, how can you even start discussing governance if their families don't even know where to get their next meal?", Mr. Prak Visal said. Visal is part of the team that initiated the implementation of Integrated Coastal Management in Sihanoukville in 2000.



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The diminishing fishcatch among the small-scale fishers is a result of the intrusion of commercial fishers in the community fishing boundary. The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), in 2005 observed that the inevitable competition among small- and large-scale fishing vessels often escalate to violent conflicts. At some point in 2005, the number of trawl fishers entering the district numbered 700. From 2004, the Fishery Administration recorded at least one incident per month of border conflict. There was one recorded incident of violent conflict which led to the death of one community member in Stung Hav. It was a wake up call for AFSC to start organizing communities in Stung Hav.

Following a series of discussions in 2006, a collaborative project with the Fishery Community, the Preah Sihanouk ICM Project and the UNDP GEF Small Grants Programme (SGP) was developed to address, the degradation of resources caused by overextraction of coastal and marine resources and the expansion of infrastructure for large-scale industries. The project was later expanded to cover the rehabilitation of the water supply reservoir, access to clean and safe drinking water and waste management. Over a three-year period, there were three separate but mutually reinforcing SGP projects implemented by the community.

This case study documents the experiences of the three projects. It tells of a fishing community's continuing effort to survive amid the challenges of uneven economic development and a changing climate.



Fishing remains to be a primary source of income for about 75-89 percent of the people in Stung Hav.

“In areas like this, how can you convince people to participate in community activities if their families don’t even know where to get their next meal?”

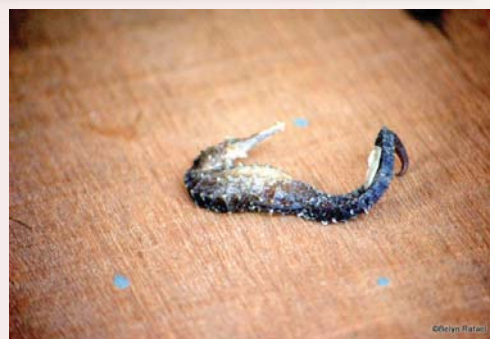
Sihanoukville ICM Demonstration Site

The Municipality of Sihanoukville adopted integrated coastal management (ICM) in June 2000 to promote the sustainable management of coastal and marine resources in the municipality through the issuance of Deka 080. The Sihanoukville Project Management Office (PMO) was created to implement the ICM program, at the same time, the Project Coordinating Committee (PCC), an interagency policy coordinating body composed of key representatives of various local government agencies, was formed to oversee its implementation. A series of ICM capacity development and technical support activities were undertaken by the GEF/UNDP/IMO Regional Programme on Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA).

In 2003, following consultations and discussions, the Sihanoukville Coastal Strategy, which serves as a blueprint for sustainable coastal and marine management, was developed. The Coastal Strategy Implementation Plan (CSIP), which was adopted in 2004, identified three priority issues: Habitat Protection and Management; Tourism Development and Management; and Solid Waste Management. Pilot activities were implemented starting 2005 in Sangkat 4 (solid waste management) and Occheauteal Beach (tourism development and management).

The GEF Small Grants Programme-PEMSEA Joint Communiqué (2007) was developed to promote the participation of community-based organizations, people's organizations and nongovernmental organizations, in SGP and PEMSEA participating countries. The collaboration between SGP and the ICM PMO in Sihanoukville started in 2006, with the approval of the project in Stung Hav. The project aimed to implement the Habitat Protection and Management component of the CSIP.

The PEMSEA-SGP partnership resulted in three community-based projects with a total of US\$ 140,272.5 grant fund and the mobilization of US\$ 110,365 counterpart funding from PEMSEA, local governments and communities.



The use of fine mesh net among trawl fishers in Stung Hav affects the survival of endangered species such as this seahorse.

First things first... getting food on the table

The first SGP-supported project focused on rehabilitating coastal and marine resources. Before 2006, the AFSC worked with Sre Ambel in Koh Kong Province to reduce the encroachment of fishers from Stung Hav. Realizing at that time that a one-way 'empowerment' process would just be a band-aid solution to a bigger issue, the AFSC started working in Stung Hav to engage the 'encroachers' in a dialogue. This was followed by training activities to impart the importance of guarding one's own coastal and marine resources. Reducing pressure also meant discouraging the entry of trawl fishers within the community fishing boundary.

With the help of the Fishery Administration, the community mapped out potential fish refugia¹ near the fishing boundary to monitor the entry of illegal fishers within the community fishing grounds.

Table 1. Employment by sector for Sihanoukville from 1998-2008.

Year	1998	2000	2004	2006	2007	2008
Agriculture	51.90%	50.80%	47.80%	53.20%	50.74%	53.33%
Industry	9.50%	11.40%	13.10%			
Service	38.60%	37.90%	39.10%	20.44%	45.50%	43.59%
Handicraft				0.51%	1.06%	0.90%
Multiple jobs				25.86%	2.69%	2.18%

Artificial reefs made of concrete, measuring 1 x 1 m, were constructed and deployed near the fishing boundary and refugia.²

Aside from being a potential spawning ground for fish species, the artificial reefs serves as a 'fence' to deter commercial fishers. Trawl fishers were not able to enter the refugia as their nets would get caught in the reef. Traditional fishing using a hook and line are allowed within the 30-hectare refugia covered by the artificial reefs.

Months following the installation of the artificial reefs, community members attest that there was significant increase in the fish catch in the surrounding areas, consequently increasing the income among fishers. An SGP evaluation indicated a 25 to 30 percent increase in fishcatch among small-scale fishers per day. This means an increase from 7 to 10 kg compared to the fishcatch in previous years of only 5 to 7 kg for small-scale fishing.



With the help of the Fishery Administration, this map was developed and adopted by the Fishery Community and used as a guide in defining the fishery boundary.



Identification of the community fishery boundary prior to the deployment of artificial reefs

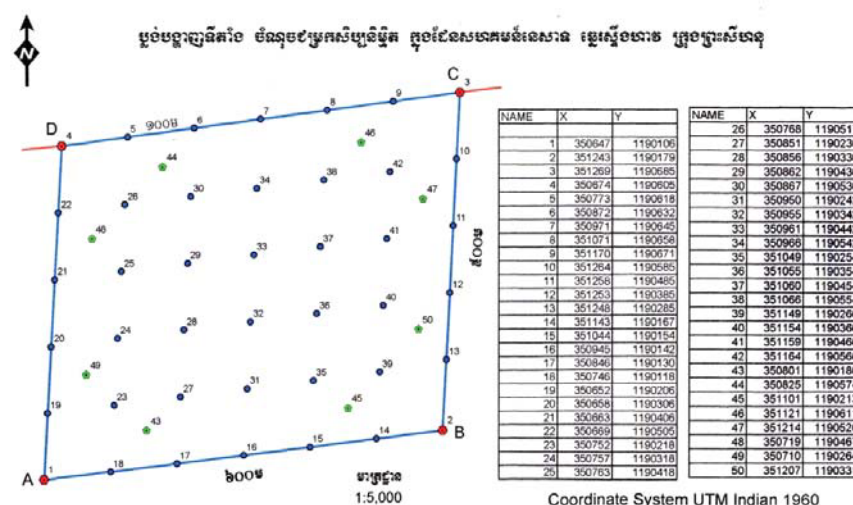
While it is still unclear whether the increase in fishcatch can be attributed solely to the installation of artificial reefs, local fishers believe that the reduction in the entry of trawl fishers has contributed to the observed changes in fishcatch.

The ICM Project Management Office and the Fishery Administration intends to conduct further studies as part of the follow-up activity to monitor the changes in environmental conditions.

The deployment of artificial reefs was complemented by efforts to organize local fishers to monitor fishing activities in Stung Hav. Regular patrolling operations are currently being done by three patrol groups composed of 33 volunteers who take turns in ensuring that large-scale fishing vessels stay out of the district's fishing grounds and illegal fishing activities are halted.



Molded blocks of concrete are left to stand for a month before deployment to avoid any negative effects of concrete on biodiversity.



¹ Refugia is used as a term by the Fishery Administration in Sihanoukville to indicate no-take zones.

² The 50 artificial reefs were left to stand in the open for a month to reduce the potential negative impacts of cement corrosion on marine species. This method was adopted from the artificial reef project in Koh Kong.

Location of the artificial reefs and geographic coordinates (above) will enable communities and the Department of Fishery to monitor the biodiversity changes. Monitoring is done by fishers by observing the volume of fishcatch.

Economic expansion and reclamation

Imagine the patrol group's frustration when, on the resumption of their operations after the Khmer New Year in 2007, they discovered that a 12-hectare mangrove area had been deforested in what was targeted to be the location of a new port.

A company had cleared an estimated total of 89.18 hectares of mangroves in its effort to build a port in the District. The Municipal Government indicated that the company was granted only a permit to conduct an environmental assessment. Instead of doing a study, the company went ahead and cleared portions of the area where the port was targeted to be established.



An estimated 12 hectares of mangroves were cleared in the eve of the Khmer New Year in 2007.



More than 600 stakeholders in Sihanoukville were mobilized for mangrove reforestation in Stung Hav, with the hope of rehabilitating the deforested areas.

Governor Say Hak sent the ICM PMO staff to the site to look into the matter. The issue soon reached the national Ministry of Environment, prompting Senior Minister Mok Mareth and other local officials to visit Stung Hav on 8 June 2007 to inspect the site and conduct dialogues with the fishery community and the development company, Attwood. During Dr. Mok's visit, he called for greater vigilance in protecting the remaining resources in the District and sought cooperation from the Municipal Government to determine the best possible recourse to immediately address the issue.

Subsequent consultations and investigations by the Ministry of Environment and the local government soon followed.

Similar cases in other Provinces in 2005 prompted the Government to establish the Monitoring and Assessing Commission for Suppressing Encroachment into Mangrove Areas and Coastal Reclamation to ensure that this critical resource is protected. Headed by Senior Minister Mok Mareth, the Commission works with various provinces in the country upon receiving news of encroachment and illegal cutting of mangroves.

Under Cambodian Investment Law, an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) should be done prior to establishment infrastructures. Results are supposed to be used by local authorities or national governments to decide whether or not to issue permits. However, for projects above US\$ 2 million, the national government is responsible for final approval, in consultation with the local authorities.

"But we don't know what happened. The port was still constructed, and now, more reclamation activities are happening," says a member of the Community Fishery.

The clearing of the vast tracks of mangrove area did not discourage the communities from participating in mangrove rehabilitation efforts. On 18 July 2007, about 600 community members from local schools, temples, local government agencies and community-based organizations joined forces to rehabilitate some 18 hectares of mangrove areas in an area separate from where the land was deforested.

But fishes don't come easy, the problem is (still) no money

Another component of the SGP project was the parallel efforts to create supplemental income sources for families and to meet the basic food requirements among fishing families in the districts.

Two types of micro-credit projects were initiated in 2006. The first one was a savings group comprised of 142 individual members; 92 were women.

Ms. Ouk Samol said that the savings groups are "self-regulating," that is, the lending and repayment schemes are set and monitored by the members themselves. This increases trust among members and reduces possibility of delinquent payment.

The savings group was provided with US\$ 200 start up capital and each member takes a turn in borrowing funds, depending on their savings. From an original 3,000 riel per month (US\$ 10.75) at the start of the project in 2006, the savings of members increased to 10,000 riel a month in 2008. Providing access to credit gave families the option to market their fishery products outside the community, with more competitive prices.



Fish drying is a major source of livelihood for many families in Stung Hav.

"Before, there was only one family in our group who had enough capital to sell prawns in Phnom Penh. We could not afford the start up capital for storage and transportation costs. Now there are three families (in our group) doing that," says Ms. Ouk Samol.

Women members interviewed said that the savings groups serve as social insurance and 'security' among members as it provides access to credit for families who have limited access to formal lending institutions due to restrictive requirements. Tapping on women's capacity for livelihood projects reduces the impacts of economic "shocks" suffered by families who are mainly reliant on fishing as a primary source of income.

Ms. Ouk Samol said, "we do not have to wait for our husbands to provide us with money for some of the family needs."

"We used to borrow from the local bank but it takes a long time for loans to be processed. Many families also cannot borrow since the banks require collateral. Since many of us here do not have land titles, we are not able to easily borrow money from them."

In an interview with fishers in the first quarter of 2009, fishing families said that fishery productivity in Stung Hav is not the main cause of indebtedness and poverty among fishers, but the uncompetitive price among middlemen. Without access to credit, fishers are forced to borrow money from middlemen with a guarantee to sell their fishcatch, which is used to pay off the debt. But the fishcatch usually fetches a lower price.

"People do not have any choice, they have to sell to the middlemen because we are so far from the market and it costs a lot just to go Sihanoukville."



Enabling women to earn income increases potential for children's education.

Revolving Fund

Another livelihood management scheme established was a revolving fund for 20 member families. The families were provided with a start up fund of US\$ 75 each, payable in seven months, which was used in various livelihood activities including small-scale aquaculture, poultry production and planting of cash crops.

Providing capital was also complemented with several livelihood trainings to ensure the effective use of funds. **Table 2** indicates the several community-based trainings done in the 3-year implementation period.

One of the beneficiaries of the project is Mr. Keb Meanphal who was able to set up a small aquaculture farm. A fish cage is usually set up near the houses with a depth of 3 meters and fish species are released starting November. Fishes are then fed with trash fish being caught from the sea. It is estimated that after three months, the families can harvest up to 80 kg of fish. Harvesting can be done twice for the next six to eight months. This, he said, translates to additional income of 2,000,000 riel for the family. But Mr. Meanphal is one of the lucky ones.

One of the problems encountered in the revolving fund was that many families went into poultry raising and vegetable production, among others, which are prone to weather fluctuations and water availability. Some families in this group were unable to pay their loans on time because of poor produce. The relatively lower repayment rate was also due to less stringent monitoring measures. Compared to the savings group, which is internally controlled by the members, only one member, who was unable to monitor all livelihood projects done by the families, collected the repayment.

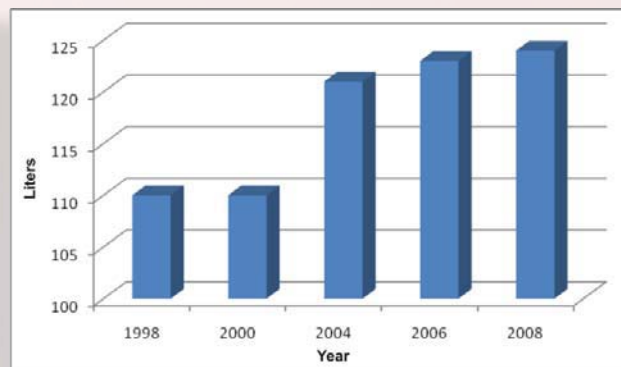
In sum, was it a success? Community members attest that the project is successful in providing additional income to fishing families and reducing reliance on fishing as a primary source of income.

Then we look at the bigger picture: From saltwater to freshwater management

In the course of implementing the Stung Hav project, there were several realizations that led the Project Management Team to include freshwater issues into ICM implementation.

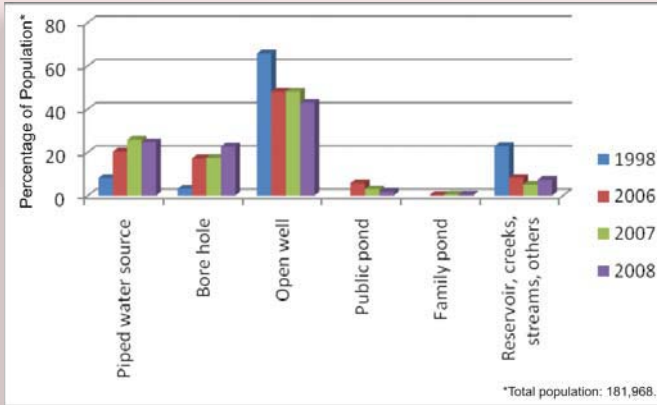
While start-up capital was provided to families for supplemental livelihood activities, poor water supply resulted in higher expenditures among families. Mr. Ly Seng, Deputy Director of the Ministry of Industry, Mines and Energy said that the cost of water was around US\$ 0.26-0.40 per m³ in 2000, but increased to about US\$ 0.38-0.50 in 2008. Despite the increasing price of water, the per capita water use significantly increased. From 110 L in 1998, per capita consumption in 2008 was 124 L as shown in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1. Water use per capita from 1998-2008 (Department of Industry, Mines and Energy).



Mr. Um Dang, a community member, said small businesses in Stung Hav spend around US\$ 34 a month for water supply alone. In Tomnop Rolok, dry wells became a year-round problem, unlike in previous years where water levels were lower only in summer. Up to 2008, wells were still the predominant source of water among the 36,415 families (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Access to water sources in Sihanoukville (Department of Planning, 1998-2008).



The low water supply, or empty wells, implied that livelihood options among families were also 'drying up'.

Women community members said that the dry wells meant they needed to go farther to fetch water for their families. From fishery resource management and improving livelihood opportunities, the Community Fishery embarked on the rehabilitation of a 5.9 ha water reservoir. It was a challenging task as neither the Community Fishery nor the ICM Project Management Office had the expertise to set up infrastructure such as this.

The rehabilitation of the freshwater reservoir was intended to:

1. abate the impact of climate change on water levels and recharge the dried wells in the surrounding area;
2. provide a water source for supplemental livelihood activities, particularly agricultural production; and
3. prevent the possibility of land grabbing and encroachment as the reservoir was public property.

Several negotiations, dialogues and discussions among the Project Management Staff, the District officials and settlers in the surrounding area were conducted prior to the implementation.

"Many people doubted our decision to work on this (reservoir) project," says Mr. Visal. Even at the early stage of the project, people were already starting to question the viability of the initiative.

"There were all sorts of discouraging comments and hurdles that we faced when we were starting the project," he added.

So what made them do it?

"We are not engineers or experts in building these types of projects. But if we don't start doing this, people could start claiming portions of the reservoir area and it will eventually become a private property."

If that happens, the issue of water supply would never be solved.



Reclamation due to expansion of local industries and businesses is a common, yet painful sight among communities.

Dig it!

The PMO and the community fishery started the first phase of reservoir rehabilitation in September 2007 with the reconstruction of the water gate and bridge, which were destroyed in 1997. Digging of shallow portions of the reservoir followed to increase water retention capacity. Within four months, the bridge was constructed and the reservoir could hold 40,550 m³ of water.



Photos above show the construction of the reservoir in 2007, 2008 and 2009. The reservoir can now contain about 40,550 m³ of water.



Families are now able to put up their vegetable gardens near the reservoir.

The effort at establishing a small reservoir was complemented with the provision of ceramic water purifiers through the Women's Savings Group to reduce household expenses in buying purified water for drinking and ensure access to safe drinking water for the family. Around 280 families availed of the ceramic water purifiers. Information and communication campaigns were also conducted to orient the families on the importance of safe drinking water.

The Women's Savings Group also benefited from purifiers, which were sold to families with a US\$ 2-markup for every purifier. The earnings went to the savings fund to augment capital and to cover the daily expenses in selling the purifier.

Communities planted about 380 trees in the surrounding area to prevent soil erosion that would reduce the reservoir's water holding capacity. Local fish species were released and communities were informed that only hook and line method were allowed in the reservoir. An information campaign was also done to impart the importance of the reservoir among families in Stung Hav.

In February 2009, during formal launching of the reservoir, Governor Sbond Sarath called for community cooperation to protect the resources — from coastal and marine resources to freshwater resources. The ribbon cutting ceremony was followed by tree planting and release of fish species.

Capacity development: From 'getting things done' to 'getting there'

Stung Hav's experience in the implementation of these projects was not without problems. Social fragmentation rooted on poverty was a major roadblock to 'getting things done'. Development projects are different, however, in that communities are considered to be agents of change rather than mere manpower to 'get things done'.

But perhaps the process of 'getting things' done is a the first step towards moving people from apathy to awareness.

"It is difficult for us to get people to participate in the activities because of limited awareness," says Sally, an ICM PMO staff.

"People have a hard time understanding technical matters so we took them out to the field to observe. For the livelihood projects and management, we did training on a one-on-one basis. It was also hard for us in the beginning because this was the first time for us to work with the community."

In the succeeding years, the PMO took on a more active role in guiding the community in the process. Other partner NGOs, such as AFSC and STAR Kampchea, among others, provided support by serving as facilitators through community-based trainings (see **Table 2**). For instance, the AFSC assisted in organizing the Community Fishery and enabling members to understand the legal process for enforcement.

Capacity-development activities follow a certain progression from providing the basic skills on livelihood management to getting them involved in broader community mobilization. Trainings in the first stage of implementation included practical approaches to livelihood, enforcement of local regulations on fishery, protection of resources and providing the basic competence on organizational management.

The second stage capacity development focused on getting the Community Fishery to address equally-important issues of water supply. Training activities were more on reservoir rehabilitation and management as well as the benefits of access to safe drinking water.

From these efforts, the third stage of capacity development was geared towards management of the reservoir and promoting a broader community awareness on waste management.

Sally admits that it is not only the community members who learn in the process. These capacity development activities and closer interaction with community also gave the PMO more confidence in providing guidance to the community.

"How can we help them if we don't understand their situation?," she expressed, relating their experience from consultations

Table 2. List of Capacity-development Activities.

Name of training/capacity development	Number of Participants
Study tour to Kong Kong Province on eco-tourism and mangrove reforestation	13
Training for resource persons on mangrove planting	40
Training for women's savings group and self-help group on livelihood management	35
Study tour to Kampong Cham Province on mushroom culture and other livelihood initiatives	9
Follow up training on mushroom culture for community members	45
Dissemination and training on fishery law , patrolling and surveillance operations	120
Dissemination and training on the use of the water purifiers and the importance of utilization of clean water among people, local government units and students	330
Training on community-based solid waste management in three communities	65
Training on solid waste management and sanitation among teachers and students	60
Training on guidance of reservoir management and utilization among the patrol group	12
Information dissemination and training on reservoir management and utilization among families living in the surrounding area	50
Training on livelihood initiatives such as vegetable planting and small-scale aquaculture	25 families

during project development to implementation, transition from basic organizational management, to the more difficult task of convincing people to change their behavior.

With the help of local organizations, 14 community-based training activities were conducted over a three-year period.

Reflections from the implementers

“We can still improve on the implementation of the project in Stung Hav, but it’s a good start,” Ms. Ngin Navirak of the UNDP GEF SGP explains. Indeed, while a lot needs to be done, the implementation of the SGP-PEMSEA Project in the District, has catalyzed people into action.

“But of course, as you can see, the community fishery has taken on a more active role in protecting their resources,” she said.

“Without the ICM Office, it is also difficult to reconstruct the reservoir since it involves legal processes regarding the use of the land,” she added.

Organizing communities in Stung Hav to be ‘self-help’ entities stresses the consciousness on a process that builds ownership and responsibility among the stakeholder-beneficiaries. ICM PMO staff facilitated the process — sowing seeds of hope that despite the powerful and unstoppable forces of ‘development’, there are things that can be dealt with to create change.

Way back in 2006, the ICM PMO was at a loss about what to do. People were wary of working with them.

“You can’t blame people if they don’t trust the government,” an NGO member expressed in 2006 during initial consultations to develop the project”.

What reduced the indifference, and to some extent, animosity to the government was subtly underscoring PMO as an office for coastal management, supported by an international organization. The ‘dual’ personality of the PMO reduced animosity of people when they started the project but gave them the legitimacy to deal with land issues in the succeeding stages of the project.

Three years after, there are stories of improved livelihood and welfare among beneficiary-families which can be attributed to the combined effects of resource management, livelihood projects and the improved access to basic resources such as water. While it is still difficult to measure the exact percentage increase in income, the increased economic opportunities, enabled women to increase their savings, up from 1,000 riel weekly to 3,000 riel. This indicates an increase in the disposable income of families, enabling them to set aside a portion for future use. Some members even pointed out that this led to better welfare of the fishing families. Many of the savings group members said that they can now afford basic health and education services for their children. However, further research will need to be done to confirm these observations.

The rehabilitation of the reservoir encouraged fishers to diversify livelihood activities and reduced the cost of agricultural production. Before, community members needed to pay 2,600

“... a lot still needs to be done, but at least, we’re getting people to think in broader terms. I know people are thinking, not only where the next meal is coming from. They are, at least, thinking beyond survival.”

riel/m³ of water. The rehabilitation of the reservoir recharged groundwater in the surrounding wells, significantly reducing the reliance to local water suppliers.

Community members attested that the establishment of the reservoir reduced the time for women and children, usually left at home, to access water for the family.

The reservoir also created a recreational space for communities, enabling interaction among community members. This provided opportunities for small-scale business activities. To date, there are about 10 families who have set up small stores near the reservoir.

“Compared to other projects, what we have done in Stung Hav is only a small effort,” says Mr. Visal. “But at least, it’s better than just sitting and waiting.”

“Before, while we had plans, these were not implemented — people could not understand us if we told them the importance of resource protection.”

“Now, they are happy to work with us because they see a lot of benefit. And they are also happy to have community activities, unlike before, when everyone did their own thing and they never cared,” he said.

While many development projects remain detached from the issues of the day, the ICM implementation in Stung Hav is based on grounded realities and actions that first focus on the basic issues of food security and livelihood.

Learning from these experiences, the 2nd cycle ICM implementation in Preah Sihanouk will scale up useful experiences in Stung Hav to benefit other communities in the Province.

With some optimism, Mr. Visal states, “(that) a lot still needs to be done, but at least, we’re getting people to think in broader terms. I know people are thinking, not only where their next meal is coming from. **They are, at least, thinking beyond survival.**”

Prepared by Belyn Rafael, PEMSEA; Sally Nay and Prak Visal, Sihanoukville PMO.

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For comments and suggestions, please contact:

Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA)
P.O. Box 2502, Quezon City 1165 Philippines
Tel.: (+63 2) 929 2992; Fax: (+63 2) 926 9721
Email: info@pemsea.org;
www.pemsea.org

For more information on the Sihanoukville ICM Programme, please contact:

Sihanoukville Integrated Coastal Management (ICM) site, Project Management Office
Preah Sihanouk Province, Street Vithei Krong Mondol 3 Sangkat 3
Sihanoukville Municipality, Cambodia
Phone/Fax: (855) 34 933 996
Email: visalpmo@yahoo.com