

SOCIAL INCLUSION IN WATER SNAPSHOTS



LAO PDR and CAMBODIA | Mekong Integrated Water Resources Management Program



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CONTEXT

The Mekong is one of the largest rivers of the world, flowing all the way from China to Vietnam. The basin is shared by six countries, China and Myanmar in the Upper Mekong Basin, and Lao PDR, Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia in the Lower Mekong Basin (LMB).¹ Almost 70 million inhabitants of the LMB are poor in economic terms and rely directly or indirectly on the natural resources of the Mekong River for their livelihoods and food security. To address poverty, ensure food security, and economic development of the region, LMB countries have committed to the sustainable management of water resources in the Mekong Basin. A series of World Bank supported projects for Mekong Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) aim to assist Lao PDR, Vietnam, and Cambodia in the sustainable management of water and livelihood. Among other, these projects are supporting citizen engagement activities, such as participatory consultation in planning, implementation, and evaluation, with the aim to strengthen the integrated management of water resources at the national and transboundary levels. This snapshot highlights select citizen engagement activities, with a particular attention to gender and inclusion, in the Cambodia and Lao PDR projects.

ENGAGING CITIZENS IN FISHERY CO-MANAGEMENT

One of the key areas of intervention in the projects is to strengthen stakeholder capacity in the management of fisheries. This is being achieved by fostering village-level ownership for the co-management of aquatic resources, particularly with the participation and support of women and ethnic minorities, as well as of relevant government fisheries institutions. The projects support communities to establish **fisheries management committees**, set goals and objectives, and to develop strategies and monitoring programs to manage their fish resources, as described in a formally-approved fisheries management plan. Each management committee, which include **women, ethnic minorities**, and other vulnerable group members, is provided with equipment and patrol boats to implement their plan and is given grants to support alternative livelihoods. **Disadvantaged members of the community are prioritized by the management committee to receive these grants.** Further project funds are provided to the

¹ In 1995, LMB countries formed the Mekong River Commission (MRC) to jointly manage the shared water resources and the sustainable development of the Mekong River. As part of a program to enhance transboundary water cooperation, the World Bank has been working very closely with the MRC to foster IWRM in the lower part of the basin.

community to purchase construction materials and labor for much needed infrastructure such as culverts, small bridges, and school buildings that are prioritized in the commune development plan.

Don Som kum banh, Lao PDR

In Kong district, Champasak, Lao PDR, the fisheries management committee of Don Som commune, or 'kum banh', has recently received formal approval for its management plan from the district governor. The plan seeks the sustainable use of aquatic resources, the protection of biodiversity, and the re-building of fish stocks to levels that maximize their yields. To achieve these goals, **the community selected an array of management measures**, including the prohibition of destructive fishing gear, the specification of minimum net mesh sizes to avoid the capture of immature fish, the enforcement of seasonal closures of river channels to protect migrating fish, and the establishment of fish conservation zones to provide refuges for fish during the dry season. The community is hoping to achieve a 15% increase in fish catch by 2021. To support alternative livelihoods, **members of the community have received hens, livestock vaccinations, and rice seed**. The community has also received support from the project to **construct school buildings, a village office, several culverts, a bridge, and an irrigation canal**.

GENDER

The Mekong IWRM projects recognize that for the sustainable management of water resources, **women must be integrated into the planning and decision-making processes** of the fisheries communities. In Lao PDR, women make up approximately 15 percent of the Fishery Management Committees' membership. In Cambodia, similarly, women are provided with opportunities to engage fully in the management process and to enhance their voice and role in the committees. Additionally, these two projects support **activities targeted at female villagers**, such as supporting their livelihood skills in fish processing. This is in line with the Gender Policy and Strategy developed by the Mekong River Commission that seeks to mainstream gender into all activities relating to the Mekong River Basin.

ETHNIC MINORITIES

In both Lao PDR and Cambodia, the population is ethnically very heterogenous, and many of the ethnic groups are heavily dependent on fisheries. Both projects included ethnic minorities as beneficiaries and, based on initial consultations with local communities, agreed that **ethnic minorities would participate in each step of community fishery management**. An Indigenous Peoples Planning Framework (IPPF) was formulated in both projects to ensure the ethnic groups receive culturally appropriate opportunities to benefit from the project, particularly through livelihood enhancement actions, and that project activities implemented in their communities receive broad community support, based on inclusive consultations.



Photo credit: World Bank

Sources and additional information:

Lao PDR:

- [Project Appraisal Document; Restructuring Paper](#)
- Guidelines for Establishing Co-Managed Fisheries
- Ethnic Groups Development Framework (EGDF) ([Aug 2010](#), [Dec 2016](#))

Cambodia:

- [Project Appraisal Document](#)
Guidelines for Community Fisheries Development
- [Indigenous People Policy Framework \(IPPF\)](#) (May 2014)

Note prepared based on inputs from Eileen Burke, Virak Chan, Ashley Halls, and Martin Henry Lenihan.

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