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Trade in Natural Resources in Stung Treng Province, Cambodia: An assessment of the wildlife trade



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TRADE IN NATURAL RESOURCES IN STUNG TRENG PROVINCE:

**An assessment of wildlife trade in the Cambodia
demonstration site of the Mekong River Basin Wetland
Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme
(MWBP)**

**Prepared by TRAFFIC Southeast Asia - Greater Mekong Programme
for the Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme
(MWBP)**

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ADHOC	Association for Development of Human Rights in Cambodia
CEPA	Culture and Environment Preservation Society
CI	Conservation International
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
DC	District Capital
DFID	Department for International Development
DoE	Provincial Department of Environment (of the Ministry of Environment)
IUCN	The World Conservation Union
KHR	Riel - Khmer Currency (USD1 = KHR4,080, May 2006)
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
MP	Military Police
MRC	Mekong River Commission
MWBP	Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme
PC	Provincial Capital
PFA	Provincial Forest Administration
PFO	Provincial Fisheries Office
PPA	Participatory Poverty Assessment
TSEA	TRAFFIC Southeast Asia
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
USD	US Dollars
WCS	Wildlife Conservation Society
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As a contribution to the Mekong River Basin Wetland Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme (MWBP), field studies were conducted in the MWBP demonstration sites of Cambodia and Lao PDR to investigate trade in natural resources. This report summarises findings from the Cambodian demonstration site in Stung Treng Province.

The aim of the field study was to provide an overview of natural resource trade, including fish, wildlife (terrestrial and aquatic vertebrates aside from fish) and non-timber forest products (NTFPs). The MWBP is founded on an integrated approach to natural resource management, as it seeks to incorporate needs for biodiversity conservation with the promotion of sustainable use that supports local livelihoods. Thus, the study sought to highlight the varied economic, ecological and social factors that influence trade dynamics in the MWBP demonstration site.

Participatory methods were used to collect information from seven villages and nine camps in the demonstration site, as well as from local urban markets, in order to identify the types of natural resources being traded, trade routes and trends in trade over time. In addition, information on regulations and current management practices was collected from government offices in the Stung Treng provincial capital.

The results demonstrate the critical importance of trade in natural resources for rural livelihoods. Of all reported income sources, only trade in natural resources was reported across all villages to be important for the livelihoods of most households. Reliability in supply and market demand, along with flexibility in use, were key characteristics of natural resources that were preferred trade items. Trade in fish and wildlife is long-established and very active, so it is not surprising that this makes the most important contributions to the local economy. In comparison, trade in NTFPs appears to be largely emergent for villages in the demonstration site.

Villagers consistently reported fish as being the most important type of natural resource for consumption, exchange, and income-generation. Trade in monitor lizards and turtles was also locally significant, while their use for consumption has declined. Given the impacts of trade on consumption patterns, it is not surprising, therefore, that while trade in natural resources is incredibly important for local livelihoods, unregulated trade is also regarded by officials and villagers as an issue of concern.

In Stung Treng, 12 globally threatened wildlife species and 22 CITES-listed species were observed in trade during the field studies. As market demand and market access are key determinants of trade patterns, ongoing road improvements in Stung Treng Province have had a noticeable effect on trade in natural resources in the demonstration site. The prices, volume and diversity of natural resources being sourced from the demonstration site for trade purposes have, by the accounts of villagers, traders and officials, all increased in recent years. As construction of additional roads and bridges in Stung Treng is completed in the coming year, it can be expected that the trade-driven pressures on natural resources in the demonstration site will continue to intensify.

Recent amendments of relevant laws have improved the regulatory framework regarding natural resource trade, and provincial authorities do regard this as an important issue. However, uncertainties and contradictions persist in both implementation and enforcement, as they do in policy. Interventions must ensure that local communities with limited economic opportunities are able to secure their natural resources for long-term benefits. Village-level interventions are appropriate for some trade issues, but there must be corresponding action to control the activities of outsiders, as well as interventions aimed at local, domestic and international markets in order to ensure the effectiveness of management and the sustainability of trade in natural resources.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Mekong River Basin Wetland Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme (MWBP) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), IUCN - The World Conservation Union and the Mekong River Commission (MRC) seeks to promote the conservation and sustainable use of wetland biodiversity. There is wide recognition that a challenge for such integration is trade in natural resources. Trade in aquatic and terrestrial animals and plants is an important component of rural livelihoods in the demonstration sites where MWBP is working, yet unregulated and unsustainable trade has also been identified as a major threat to biodiversity in the Greater Mekong Region (Nooren & Claridge 2001; WCS 2004; World Bank 2005; see also Robinson & Bennett 2000).

Socio-economic development in China, Thailand and Viet Nam has seen increasing affluence resulting in increased demand and ability to purchase natural resources (World Bank 2005). As natural resources in

consumer countries have declined over recent decades, valued products have been increasingly sourced from neighbouring countries, including Cambodia and Lao PDR. Plans for socio-economic development often envisage an increase in regional trade as a means to achieve poverty alleviation goals¹. Thus, it is likely that trade in natural resources will continue to expand.

These issues are particularly critical in MWBP demonstration sites in Stung Treng Province in Cambodia and Attapeu Province in Lao PDR. Both demonstration sites are characterised as less-developed but resource-rich areas within their respective countries. Stung Treng and Attapeu are also becoming increasingly connected with regional trade through improved transport networks. Hence there is a need for a greater understanding of the dynamics of trade in order to develop appropriate interventions that allow management actions to contribute to the integration of sustainable resource use and biodiversity conservation.

In Cambodia, recent studies indicate the importance of natural resources for rural livelihoods. Given that 85% of the total population and 90% of poor households reside in rural areas (IUCN & Action Aid 2003), the importance of natural resources translates into a priority for both national development and poverty alleviation. The rural economy is highly reliant on forest as well as wetland resources that complement outputs from agricultural production (Vantomme *et al.* 2002; IUCN & Action Aid 2003; Tola & McKenney 2003; Chong 2005; Try & Chambers 2006). Yet many types of natural resources are in decline, precipitated by over-harvesting as well as habitat loss and environmental degradation. Eventually the decline of these natural resources will negatively impact local livelihoods as well as the national economy.

Figure 1: Map of MWBP demonstration sites.



Source: MWBP (<http://www.mekongwetlands.org/>)

¹ The most significant in the region is ADB's Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) program (<http://www.adb.org/gms/>).