

File note

Safeguard compliance with the International Center for Living Aquatic Resources proposal: *Stung Treng Ramsar Site in Cambodia – Integrating Fisheries Management and Wetlands Conservation*

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In the preliminary safeguard screening of CEPF grant applications under the third funding in the Indo-Burma Hotspot, the International Center for Living Aquatic Resources proposal *Stung Treng Ramsar Site in Cambodia – Integrating Fisheries Management and Wetlands Conservation* was determined to potentially trigger both the Involuntary Resettlement and Indigenous Peoples policies. However, it was noted that the latter policy would only be triggered if the project site was found to be home to Indigenous Peoples.

In the full proposal, submitted by the International Center for Living Aquatic Resources, the applicant clarified that, during its consultations with local authorities and NGOs, it was confirmed that there are no indigenous communities or ethnic minority groups living at the project site who would require special consideration. Specifically, it was confirmed that, although many families with Lao ethnic background live in local villages, they are legally recognized Cambodian citizens, well integrated into local communities, and are not considered marginalized.

For these reasons, CEPF is satisfied that the project does not appear to trigger the Indigenous Peoples policy, and a Social Assessment document was not required. Nevertheless, the implementation of the social safeguard policies will be monitored during project implementation and, if any Indigenous People are found to be present at the project site, appropriate documentation will be prepared and measures implemented.

Process Framework on Involuntary Restrictions
Safeguarding the Fisheries-Dependent Poor Stakeholders in the Stung Treng Ramsar Site

The WorldFish Center
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A. Project Background

The project entitled *Stung Treng Ramsar Site in Cambodia – Integrating Fisheries Management and Wetlands Conservation* aims to reconcile the conservation of critical freshwater habitats and species within the Stung Treng Ramsar wetland complex and the sustainability of local livelihoods through ecosystem-based fisheries co-management. The direct resource users living in the Stung Treng Ramsar site will be engaged in the collaborative government/civil society efforts for the conservation of ecosystems and natural resources they rely on, while special attention is paid to mitigate negative impacts on the livelihoods of the poor.

Within the Stung Treng Ramsar site lie 4 communes and 21 villages, with a total population of approximately 12,000 residents. Significant numbers of seasonal licensed and unlicensed fishers also come to the area following the annual fish migrations. The resources use patterns of local communities, not only fishing but cutting trees, collecting NTFP, and hunting wildlife, have previously been assessed and its complexity is well acknowledged by the local authorities and NGOs.

The last 10 years has seen a dramatic increase in fishing effort, combined with an increase in the use of modern gears and destructive fishing practices. This has placed severe pressure on some fish species as well as associated pressures on wetland biodiversity. The existing legal framework protects the rights of local communities living in and around wetland protected areas to continue accessing the natural resources for their sustenance, under conditions according to other natural resource laws such as the Fisheries Law. Therefore, local community rules regarding the exploitation and conservation of fisheries and other aquatic natural resources within the Ramsar site, including flooded forests, are broadly in line with the Fisheries Law as in any other fishing grounds in Cambodia.

With the Community Fisheries Sub-Decree issued in 2000, the key legislation has been in place for some time to facilitate community-based initiatives through defining the role, responsibilities and relationships between villagers, NGOs and government agencies involved with the management of the wetlands resources, especially fisheries, and the balance between conservation of biodiversity in the Ramsar site and sustainable use of wetlands resources. Nearly all 21 villages in the Ramsar site each has a Community Fisheries (CFi) group established. The CFi member fishers will be engaged in the project as the main resource user group who have the best chance at succeeding in the user-led resource conservation efforts within the Ramsar site, as they rely most on wetlands-based livelihoods and have a highest stake in resource conservation.

The project implementation will largely rely on voluntary compliance by the local community members, coupled with active participations and law enforcement by the CFi leadership. It is not the intention of the project to impose involuntary restrictions on livelihood activities that are matter of day-to-day survival for the poorer members of the community; however, WorldFish acknowledges that in facilitating the local communities to make collective decisions on how to manage and conserve the natural resource base and the biodiversity assets, 100% consensus is unrealistic and some disagreements/conflicts are inevitable. WorldFish and its project partners will make the best effort to avoid, mitigate, or compensate for negative impacts of the project activities on the local communities.

Any short-term negative impacts will be mitigated through the targeted livelihood assistance provided to the vulnerable groups, e.g. preferential access to other fishing grounds or provision of subsidies to enhance other components of the existing livelihood portfolio, such as livestock and fish farming. In the medium-term promising new livelihood opportunities, such as ecotourism and value-added processing, will also be explored and the necessary training will be provided through working with other projects of CRDT, Mlop Baitong, CEPA, and the World Bank.

In the long run, the proposed fisheries regulations will begin to show some positive impact on fisheries productivity and thus compensate for the inconvenience caused by the adjustment in fisheries-related activities.

B. Potential Social Impact on Local Communities

The project activities will entail seasonal restriction on fishing activities in selected priority conservation areas within the Ramsar site where fishing activities are currently unregulated. Such restriction will potentially cause reduction in fish catch and thus negative impact on fisheries-dependent livelihoods of some local communities in the short-term, if they do not have access to alternative fishing grounds or other livelihood opportunities during the time period/season when fishing activities is severely restricted in these areas. These activities are:

3.1. Select 2 priority conservation areas within the Ramsar site, based on ecosystem approach to fisheries management

3.2 Review existing biological and social information on the selected areas, including fisheries resources, use of the area by various stakeholders, and current access regimes, and identify information gaps and target stakeholders in need of impact mitigation, supplemented by field surveys implemented jointly with FiA officials and CFi members

3.4. Revise the priority fish conservation areas and sanctuaries and their boundaries, and identify appropriate management regimes through consultation with local stakeholders based on scientific information and the local knowledge gathered from Activity 3.2

3.5. Form core groups of several CFis to directly implement the priority fisheries management activities identified through Activity 3.4, and facilitate the implementation in collaboration with the FiA Cantonment and the Ramsar management unit

The project will generally contribute to strengthening law enforcement by local authorities and CFis against all illegal and destructive harvesting practices in “fisheries domain” within the Ramsar site, including cutting flooded forests and unsustainable harvesting of aquatic animals, as stipulated in the Fisheries Law. In addition, the project will facilitate selected CFi groups in the Ramsar site to develop additional community rules over the management of priority conservation areas. For example, Activities 3.4. and 3.5. will confirm and demarcate the boundary of priority conservation areas that become “no-take zones” during the certain period in dry season where all forms of fishing gears, legal and illegal, may be prohibited. Depending on who currently access these areas for fishing for the time period, these fishermen will be asked to go fishing elsewhere or find alternative source of food and income for that time period. Without targeted mitigation/compensation measures, it would be difficult for many fishermen to respond to these changes.

C. Approach for Impact Mitigation

The project will explicitly address these negative impacts on local livelihoods as a main component of the community-level activities. These activities include:

3.2. Review existing biological and social information on the selected areas, including fisheries resources, use of the area by various stakeholders, and current access regimes, and identify information gaps and target stakeholders in need of impact mitigation, supplemented by field surveys implemented jointly with FiA officials and CFI members

3.3. Elaborate and adjust the social safeguard strategy based on the information gathered from Activity 3.2, and on the progress of mitigating negative impacts of fisheries regulations on the livelihood of the poor people during its implementation

3.6. Identify appropriate livelihoods incentives for the CFI members and also priority interventions in support of poorer groups affected by the new access regime, through consultation with local stakeholders, and make recommendation for implementing these livelihoods enhancement activities by CRDT and the new World Bank project in Stung Treng.

3.7. Facilitate regular reflection on the effectiveness of the fisheries management measures and the livelihood enhancement activities and make necessary adjustments

Through Activities 3.2. and 3.3. a stakeholder analysis under the current access regime for each conservation area will be conducted and groups that are particularly vulnerable to negative impact from restriction on fisheries will be identified for receiving targeted livelihood assistance as safeguard measures. Mitigation measures for those vulnerable stakeholder groups may include preferential access to other fishing grounds or provision of subsidies to enhancing other components of the existing livelihood portfolio, such as livestock and fish farming. Appropriate livelihood interventions will be identified and recommendations on priority options will be provided to the CRDT project and to the Fisheries Administration which is a lead agency to design and implement the World Bank project.

The WorldFish project will not directly provide livelihood assistance services to the communities; however, the project will provide recommendations to other ongoing and upcoming projects in the Ramsar sites with the shared objective of balancing conservation and local livelihoods, and are designed to provide the necessary livelihood assistance and to complement this project.

Existing CFI plans already identify resource conservation as one of the priorities and the community awareness of the conservation need is higher compared to other CFIs operating in fishing grounds outside of protected areas. Environmental education and resource awareness building has previously been carried out in many Ramsar villages by CEPA and Mlop Baitong. The project will leverage the ongoing effort by these environment-focused NGOs to promote long-term objective of the project and the importance of ecosystem based fisheries management for sustaining local livelihoods for future generations.

D. Participatory Implementation

The project will directly partner with the local CFI groups in the Ramsar site in implementing its activities. CFI member fishers represent the main resource user group and have the best chance at succeeding in the user-led resource conservation efforts within the Ramsar site, as they rely most on wetlands-based livelihoods and have a highest stake in resource conservation.

The project will facilitate their participation in project activities as well as voluntary compliance to fisheries regulations by local community members through a series of incentive schemes. Some local community members will be employed by the CFI groups as members of patrolling teams and communication officers on fishing regulations as already practiced by many existing CFI groups to implement their local by-laws or various donor-funded activities. Identification and protection of

fisheries conservation areas is already included in many existing CFI management plans and is promoted nation-wide by FiA.

Livelihood assistance to be provided by the CRDT project and others will be introduced through existing CFI institutional structures and serve as an incentive scheme for the active participants to the project to carry out specific tasks within CFI and also serve as in-community advocates for the CFI activities and encouraging compliance by other community members. Many existing CFIs in Cambodia already implement similar livelihood activities and trainings through support from FiA and NGOs.

E. Stakeholder Consultation Mechanism

The project strategy will take a multi-scale approach to stakeholder engagement. Stakeholder consultation activities will be held at national, Ramsar site level, and local community levels at various stages of the project implementation. The project will also hold a series of reflection meetings for the local stakeholders themselves to evaluate both fisheries management activities and livelihood assistance activities. These meetings will provide opportunities for the project partners and local community members to share experience, document lessons, and influence the group decisions, and in turn improve the effectiveness of the project. More specifically there are three venues/mechanisms for stakeholder engagement:

National level: Ramsar Steering Committee

The existing steering committee will be revitalized possible with appointment of new members, and a national level workshop will be held to announce the intention of the project, high level commitment by the steering committee, and seek broad policy support from relevant authorities. At least 3 steering committee meetings will be held during the project period to update on the project progress and make decisions as needed.

Ramsar site level: Ramsar village network

A Ramsar village network representing 21 villages located in the Ramsar site will be formed and the periodical network meetings will be held as venue to discuss options, shared issues and concerns, and seek resolutions for any collective problems that may arise.

Community level: CFI groups

Two management groups consisting of several CFIs will be formed for each priority conservation area and subsequently numerous community-level meetings will be held to update on the project progress and discuss various options and strategies for fishing regulations as well as livelihoods compensation/incentives that are appropriate for the local situation.

F. Conflict Resolution

The project intends to use the stakeholder consultation venues described above to resolve any conflicts that may arise from the project implementation as much as possible, however, if the matter is beyond the capability of the direct project partners the intervention of respected local leaders such as village chiefs and Commune Council members will be sought. These key local authorities will be engaged from the start of the project and their overall support to the project will be sought through regular updates. The re-established Ramsar Steering Committee members may also be requested to serve as resource people as appropriate.

G. Implementation Arrangements

WorldFish is responsible for the overall implementation of the project and ensure that the Process Framework is followed. WorldFish will closely collaborate with relevant government authorities, including the Provincial Department of Environment and Fisheries Cantonment office in Stung

Treng, and also NGOs working in the Ramsar site and the region, including WWF, CRDT, CEPA, Mlop Baitong. Other upcoming donor projects, including the World Bank-funded transboundary fisheries co-management project, and the SIDA-funded Wetlands Alliance Programme, will also be regularly consulted to maximize the synergetic effect.