

A model for sustainable protected area management in Cambodia



Photo Jonathan C. Farnes





Photo Jonathan C. Eames

The challenge

Sustainable protected area management aims to support both people and forests to prosper. In rural Cambodia the primary livelihood is rain-fed rice farming. Forests regulate water and nutrients supporting rich soils for farming. However the expansion of rice fields is decreasing the size of Cambodia's forests and the services they provide. Furthermore, in rural Cambodia land tenure is largely informal and land rights are rarely enforced. This means that land and forest are freely available to any prospective user. This results in overexploitation and loss of forests, negatively impacting both people and nature.

To overcome these challenges the Royal Government of Cambodia has proposed a national policy for sustainable management of forest protected areas that aims to "contribute to sustainable economic development through participatory management and forest resource use by local communities"¹.

1. Royal Government of Cambodia. (2014). Article 2, Chapter 1 in Prime Ministerial Decree (Sub Decree) On Establishment of Protected Forest for Genetic Conservation of Plants and Wildlife Siem Pang, Stung Treng Province. No 77 Or No Kro Bor Kor.

Complimentary approaches in support of sustainable protected area management

Western Siem Pang is a Wildlife Sanctuary in north-eastern Cambodia, supporting globally significant populations of five Critically Endangered bird species and other threatened species including Asian Elephant, Eld's Deer, Gaur, Banteng and Sunda Pangolin. The Sanctuary aims to implement national policy for sustainable management through four linked actions:

1. Dialogue with all stakeholders to support equitable decision-making processes

- Giving all stakeholders a voice in protected area management decisions is an important component of transparent, fair management. This inclusive approach promotes the legitimacy of decisions in the eyes of different stakeholders and a shared responsibility for upholding protected area rules.
- Regular meetings also provide an important mechanism for sharing information, avoiding misunderstandings, negotiating and resolving conflicts.

PROGRESS:

- In Western Siem Pang a Stakeholders Forum has been created that meets quarterly. All relevant Siem Pang stakeholders will attend this meeting such as local authorities, representative of Village Forum, Police, Military Police, Army, Department of Environment, Department of Agriculture and Birdlife representatives.
- Seven subsidiary Village Forum Committees have been established in Western Siem Pang with equal participation of



**KEY
MESSAGES**

**Sustainable protected area
management requires:**

Dialogue with all stakeholders to support equitable decision-making processes

Adoption of sustainable land management regulations, Secure land tenure to support long-term planning

Sustainable livelihood opportunities.

women and men. Each has by-laws and is meeting quarterly. The objectives of these Forums are 1) to create a mechanism for conflict resolution by providing opportunities for villagers to raise any concerns they have about the management of the wildlife sanctuary; 2) support villagers in preparing the annual Commune Investment Plan with the integration of conservation actions; 3) raise awareness and provide training on sustainable forest management.

2. Zonation and monitoring to adopt sustainable land management regulations

- Some land-use practices are not compatible with both development and conservation objectives. Forest clearance for agriculture is one such example. Where trade-offs cannot be reconciled, land-uses may need to be spatially separated.
- To reconcile these trade-offs the Sanctuary has embarked on zonation process to set aside land for different uses. Zones will include a core zone, conservation zone, sustainable use zone, and community zone.
- A protected area enforcement team has also been established to ensure that the Sanctuary users abide by Sanctuary zone regulations.

PROGRESS:

- As part of the Western Siem Pang Wildlife Sanctuary zonation process, consultations have to date taken place in 10 villages. In all ten villages, a total of 548 participants have been interviewed.
- The main focus of the enforcement team has been to intervene in unregulated land clearance and demarcation for farming and settlement. The number of reported instances remains high, with 101 cases in 2015, 87 cases in 2016 and

122 in 2017.

3. Securing land tenure to support long-term land-use planning

- Formalising land tenure provides users with the rights to exclude others, thereby providing the opportunity to benefit exclusively from farming and other livelihoods on the land without competing with other users.
- Formalising land tenure also gives users the security to make longer term plans for how they would like to use the land, such as investing in farming technologies. This paves the way to sustainable land-use decision-making that maximises long-term returns. In this way land users are incentivised to manage the land sustainably as they stand to gain long-term benefits from the land's sustainable use.

PROGRESS:

- To date rice field maps have been produced in four villages

"I now encourage my son and daughter to join the Ibis rice scheme in the village and they all now are members. All my family and community are happy with the project because through BirdLife we are changing behavior on land use and local practice to cultivate rice that protects the water birds and the environment. Selling rice at a higher price helps us to increase income and improve our living conditions."

Mrs. Nou Chanthy, 54 years old, member of Ibis rice scheme and Village Forum committee



Photo: Jonathan C. James

in the communes of Prek Meas and Tmor Keo in Western Siem Pang District. The Department of Land Management and Urban Planning has mapped 719 rice fields for 488 households.

4. Sustainable livelihood opportunities to promote pro-conservation behaviour

- To support a transition to more sustainable land-use, economically viable livelihood options that do not damage the forest must be readily available.
- Performance based payments can be a powerful economic incentive to encourage a transition to sustainable behaviours.

"I felt so happy when I first heard that BirdLife would continue to support the Ibis rice scheme in my village. This project is very valuable to my family and community because BirdLife supports not only training techniques that my family and villagers lack of but also educate the community with conservation and protection of the wildlife behind my village. Through this scheme, my family as well as my community can generate more income through selling Ibis rice with higher price and we always have chance to learn and practice with new techniques. I also joined the Village Forum committee to help collecting the concerns of my fellow villagers and report to other village chief, commune chief and BirdLife staff and I hope that in the future my village will be better developed if I and other committee raise their concern to the public."

Mrs. Mai Nary, 24 years old, member of Ibis rice scheme and Village Forum committee:

- To incentivise this transition a programme of sustainable, wildlife-friendly livelihoods has been developed focusing on rice production. Where rice producers can demonstrate that their rice has been grown sustainably and growers have not cleared forest to plant additional rice paddies, the rice will be purchased and sold for a premium price as Ibis Rice – a jasmine rice product that is certified as wildlife friendly. Ibis rice ensures that farmers have safe and equitable access to markets, obtaining a fair price for their produce and increased income.

PROGRESS:

- In 2018, 5,500 kg of organic Romdul purity rice seed were delivered to 4 villages, which was planted in an area of 138 ha by 202 households.
- In 2018, Siem Pang rice was officially labelled as organic and an initial 20 % premium on rice sales agreed with the first harvest anticipated in 2019.

Summary

The Sanctuary's vision is sustainable protected area management for the benefit of people and nature. This will be achieved through procedures for decision-making that promote equitable participation of all stakeholders, formalising use and land tenure within the Sanctuary to promote long-term land security for development and conservation and support for sustainable livelihoods.

ABOUT BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL CAMBODIA PROGRAMME

BirdLife has been working in Western Siem Pang Wildlife Sanctuary since 2004, in close collaboration with the Ministry and Department of Environment. BirdLife's approach is to work at site-level by addressing management planning, livelihood support and enforcement. BirdLife is working at the species-level on monitoring and conservation management interventions, including nest and roost monitoring and protection.

For more information, please contact admin@birdlifecambodia.org

