

## **Project Update: October 2012**

### **1. Rationale for Rufford-funded project intervention**

Stung Treng Ramsar Site is an area of critical biodiversity significance with local reliance on wetland resources and covers approximately 37 km of the Mekong River in Stung Treng Province, northern Cambodia. Because of its significant characteristics and richness in the natural biodiversity, it was designated as the Ramsar Site on 23 October 1999 with total area of estimated 14,600 ha.

Wetlands play a vital role in supporting the livelihoods of local people and the socio-economic development of the region by providing fuelwood for cooking, aquatic plants and wildlife for traditional medicines, timber for housing, furniture and construction, foods such as rice, meat, fruits and vegetables, water for washing and horticulture.

Agriculture is the single most important economic activity for local people living within the Ramsar Site. Fish provides an important contribution to food security of local people in this area in the form of consumption of fish bought or caught and cash income from fish related action ranging from making nets to fish sales and collection of other aquatic animals and useful plants as a part of the livelihoods of people in this Ramsar Site.

Rufford-funded project site is now being implemented in Thmey village, entirely located in the Ramsar Site, where most of local villagers are heavily reliant on the Mekong's wetlands for their food needs and income generation for the sustainable livelihoods. Local people's main occupations in the study area are agriculture and fishing is done in the Mekong River for year round.

Because of the high diversity of wetland functions and services supporting livelihoods and economic development within this area, it is no surprise that the population is concentrated around wetlands by placing the health of wetland ecosystems and their ability to sustain the livelihoods of a growing population at risk.

Therefore, Rufford-funded project intervention in Stung Treng Ramsar Site at the second stage will be able to make a partial contribution to encouraging local people to reduce their single dependence on the natural resources through its financial supports to local community in Thmey village to apply integrated fish-vegetable farming system in order to reduce their heavy reliance on the harvesting of aquatic resources from the river and thereby improving local people's livelihoods.

### **2. Objectives of the meeting and the project**

The specific objective of the meeting was to inform local authority and people of the second stage of Rufford-funded integrated small-scale fish culture and vegetable production project aimed at:

1. Replicating the integrated farming system of fish-vegetable production to enable local community to cope with climate change.
2. Identifying climate change-induced underlying risk factors posing threats to economics and livelihoods of small-scale inland fishers

### **3. Duration and Participants**

The meeting was held in a small Buddhist pagoda for the half-day on 19th October 2012 with the active participation of:

1. Stung Treng fisheries administration cantonment officer
2. Thmey community fisheries committee members
3. Samaki commune chief
4. Thmey village chief
5. 27 local full-time and part-time fishermen

### **4. Results**

To begin with, the project leader Mr. Lou Vanny introduced to local participants about the second stage of UK-based Rufford-funded livelihood project of the integrated small-scale fish and vegetable farming.

He also informed them of two main specific objectives of the project at the second stage of funding as follows:

1. To replicate the integrated farming system of fish-vegetable production to enable local community to cope with climate change.
2. To identify climate change-induced underlying risk factors posing threats to economics and livelihoods of small-scale inland fishers

Twenty local people will be supported by the project at the second stage of Rufford funding. The second-stage project has supported the same 15 project beneficiaries from the first-phase project intervention. An additional five local people have been supported to get involved in this second stage. However, it is a little bit different from the first stage. Under this second-phase of the project, participants will be required to contribute \$20 each at the end of harvesting season which will be used to help other interested people.

The project is willing to bring about changes in local people's livelihoods activities by promoting the combination of small-scale fish culture in ponds and plastic bags and vegetable production to increase their household income and thereby encouraging local people to reduce their single heavy dependence on the collection of the aquatic resources from the river to adapt their livelihoods to uncertainty and alteration in the natural resources.

Mrs. Vorn Bun Ly—Samaki commune chief, saying on behalf of the local people, especially project beneficiaries, expressed her deep thanks to Mr. Lou Vanny for trying to seek funds as well as Rufford Small Grant for providing this fund to help local people in her commune, especially local people in Thmey village. She added that it was another good opportunity for her local people to focus on the fish culture rather than single heavy dependence on the natural fish species and hopefully their livelihoods will be changed to the better through the project intervention.

She also encouraged non-project beneficiaries and other people to do the same even though the project cannot help more than 20 people because it has a limited budget to help some families, especially the poor. Those who are interested in this integrated farming system can attend a training session to be provided on 16th November 2012. This training session will bring us to gain some techniques on the culture of fish. If the fish culture has been properly conducted, it will bring us some additional household income and ensure our food security.

Mr. IV Vichet—Stung Treng fisheries administration cantonment officer—said the Stung Treng fisheries administration cantonment welcomes the project because it is relevant to what fisheries administration in Stung Treng province is doing to promote the local people's living conditions. He said that it does not have so many livelihood activities in the village, so it is very good that the Rufford Small Grants provide some funds to support and help local people in this village. Stung Treng fisheries administration cantonment stands ready to help this project as much as I can.

Thmey community fisheries committee chairman Mr. Sen Ven said of the first stage of the Rufford-funded project from 2011-2012. It reflected that most of project beneficiaries were happy with this kind of livelihood activities because it could save their families some amounts of money via the sales of cultured fish and locally-grown vegetables. Citing speech from one of the first-stage project beneficiaries, he said that it could reduce their spending on buying vegetables from outside.

However, he also mentioned about the challenges of the integrated system of fish-vegetable production such as mortality rate of fish fry during the culture and invasion from amphibian species such as frog. He will bring those two concerns for discussion with the training instructor to settle those issues.

A representative of the first-stage project beneficiaries expressed his willingness to continue practicing this system because it has brought him some benefits. On behalf of local people, he would like to express his grateful thanks to the Rufford Small Grants for providing additional funds to support local people here. Through this continued financial supports, it will lead to the partial improvement of the livelihoods of local people reaping benefits from this project.



## **5. Future Actions**

- Training on integrated fish and vegetable farming in mid-November 2012.
- Starting integrated culture of fish and vegetable in early December 2012.
- Baseline survey will be conducted in December 2012 with the project beneficiaries to gather data on their livelihoods variables in the pre-project intervention and post-project survey will also be carried out at the end of this project at the second stage to test the effectiveness of the pre and post-project interventions.