

## SALAPHOUM AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE

### BACKGROUND

Village-based action research in Stung Treng province, known locally as *Salaphoum* research, is a process of participatory research driven by villagers themselves. It aims to document local knowledge on the relationship between natural resources and local communities, and to communicate findings to influence local planning and development decisions.



*Salaphoum* research was conducted initially in only four villages, *Koh Lngor*, *Veun Sean*, *Koh Sneng*, and *Koh Khorndin*, and then extended to another three villages including *Sre Tapann*, *Damrey Phong*, and *Phluk*. The process of *Salaphoum* research was facilitated by a local NGO, Culture and Environment Preservation Association (CEPA), with technical backstopping and financial support from the Wetlands Alliance.

*Salaphoum* research in Stung Treng and Kratie covered four thematic issues related to natural resources, local livelihoods, community humanization and customary practice. The data and information generated include fish species, forest species, fish habitat and traditional fishing gear. *Salaphoum* research

does not only document its findings; it is also a process of local capacity building, communications enhancement, and local governance improvement as well.

### LOCAL CAPACITY BUILDING

The capacity of local villagers to manage their own fisheries has been strengthened through participatory surveys, data collection, group discussions, and self-organizing. Importantly, group discussions and workshops have provided opportunities for researchers to share knowledge with each other. Mr. Sareth, research team leader in *Koh Khorndin*, says "*Salaphoum* created opportunities for our villagers to share our own knowledge about such things as fish and plant species, and to document this information, which is useful for management and conservation plans and for our younger generation".



Capacity building initiatives also promoted self-confidence among local researchers, both men and women, with the ultimate aim of empowering them to organize network meetings and discussion groups independently. "*Salaphoum* changed me from a shy person to village-based research instructor in the

community", Lim Sai, a researcher in *Koh Sneng*, said.

#### COMMUNICATIONS ENHANCEMENT



The village-based research process created opportunities for local researchers, villagers, village heads, commune councilors, commune police, and research assistants to discuss research findings and develop management plans.

By investing villagers with responsibility for researching their own resources, it provided villagers a platform to share their views with local authorities, who in turn adopted some of their recommendations. Villagers were also able to express their views with district and provincial officials through meetings, research finding presentations and workshops.

#### LOCAL GOVERNANCE IMPROVEMENT

Through *Salaphoum* research villagers and local authorities have developed positive relationships for the effective management of local resources. Villagers have become more active players in the preparation of village/commune development plans, including proposing protected fish habitats and participating in co-management of deep pools, while commune councils have recognized the knowledge and capacities of local villagers. "*Salaphoum* research contributed to local capacity building among many villagers. Some research findings have already been integrated into commune development plans", said Man Lihor, *O'svay* commune chief.

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