



**វិទ្យាស្ថានសភាកម្ពុជា**  
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## **BRIEFING NOTE**

**Senate Commission 1**

# **Situation of Marine Fisheries and the Establishment of Fishing Communities**

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**Researchers:** Ms. Top Davy  
Mr. Chhan Paul  
Ms. Kem Keothyda

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## 1. Introduction

The fisheries sector in Cambodia is very important, providing about 80 percent of animal protein for the population: it is particularly crucial for the food security and income of the country's poorest people.[1] Although marine fisheries in Cambodia are relatively small (accounting for about 20 percent of the total fisheries production – 120,500 tonnes per year) compared with inland fisheries, they provide livelihoods for people in the four coastal provinces of Sihanoukville, Koh Kong, Kep and Kampot.[2] The people involved in marine fishing in these provinces account for 4.3 percent of the population in Kep (2016), 5.1 percent in Sihanoukville (2015), 1.4 percent in Kampot (2014) and 17 percent in Koh Kong (2014). Current developments, such as coastal port expansion in Sihanoukville, and the industrial development zone called “Stung Hav Sihanoukville Industrial Zone” which includes petrochemical production, food processing using local fisheries catch, timber processing, etc., could offer some benefits for community fisheries.[3] However, these developments also have the potential to create conflicts with fisheries and affect the marine environment.

Through reforms in Cambodia that began in 2000, fisheries and fishing communities were established to manage, protect and develop natural fisheries resources for sustainability.[4] As a result of the reforms, 517 fishing communities (477 inland communities and 40 marine communities) have been established in the country for small-scale fisheries. [2]

A recent study entitled “Community Fisheries Organizations of Cambodia”, conducted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Fisheries Administration (FiA) in 2012, highlighted fishing communities’ experiences and aspirations for the future. The study looked at 60 fishing communities including 15 marine fishing communities. It found that the fisheries reforms are now considered a success in terms of improving livelihoods and providing access to sources of livelihoods. However, fishing communities still face some challenges in terms of livelihoods and issues related to the management of their fishing communities. [4]

This briefing note reviews the challenges facing fishing communities, the right to form fishing communities, and the related policy and regulatory framework the government is implementing to help address the challenges of fishing communities. Specifically, the briefing note will answer the following questions:

- What are the current developments affecting the rights and development of marine fishing communities in the four coastal provinces?
- What are the challenges facing marine fishing communities?
- What are the policy and regulatory mechanisms the government is implementing to help address the challenges of marine fishing communities?
- What are competent local authorities’ plans to assist in the development of marine fishing communities?

## 2. Marine Fishing Communities: Rights and Current Situation

### The Right to Form Fishing Communities and Rights to Fisheries Resources

According to the Royal Decree on the establishment of fishing communities, all Khmer citizens have the right to join together to establish fishing communities and to take initiatives to improve standards of living through the use of fisheries resources in a sustainable manner. [3] So far, 40 marine fishing communities have been formed, covering 81 villages (10 Community Fisheries in Koh Kong, 16 Community Fisheries in Sihanoukville, and 14 Community Fisheries in Kampot). Each fishing community has control over its fishing area agreement, election of chiefs, management committees, development of internal rules (regarding use, misuse and resources) and management plans.

Fishing communities have the right to the traditional use of fisheries resources in their areas. The term "traditional use" relates to fishers using small-scale fishing gear (gillnets, hooks and traps, etc.) in inshore waters (which extends from the coastline at high tide to the 20 meter deep line).[5] To ensure sustainable use of resources, fishing communities plan and conduct conservation activities in their fishing areas through, for instance, the protection and planting of mangroves and the establishment of a patrolling team to look-out for illegal fishing activities. [6, 7] Fishing communities receive support from the FiA and NGOs working in the fisheries sector. [5]

Fishing communities also have other activities to help to develop alternative livelihoods. These can include other agricultural activities, savings groups<sup>i</sup>, activities concerning ecotourism, and so on.[4, 5]

One of the policy objectives behind the creation of fishing communities is to ensure sustainable management of local fisheries resources and the equitable distribution of fisheries resources among Cambodian citizens. [8] It should be noted that according to the Law on Fisheries, any Khmer citizen has the right to undertake subsistence fishing anytime and anywhere. This means that citizens who are not members of fishing communities can fish anywhere, even in the fishing grounds of communities of which they are not members, as long as they comply with the rules of those fishing communities.[5, 9]

### Current Situation

Table 1: Occupation[4]

Occupation	Marine CFI (%)
Fisher	50
Farmer	12
Fisher and farmer	28
Fish trader	2

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<sup>i</sup> The savings group initiative is an off-spring of a broader climate change adaptation project funded by Sweden and Australia. If the fishermen go to borrow from outside, the money will flow out of the village by way of repaying the loan and interest. In contrast, savings groups keep the money moving within the village/community.

Fish processor	2
Other occupation	5
Total	100

Most of the members of fishing communities have fishing related occupations. Table 1 is derived from a study that surveyed 15 marine

fishing communities. It found that 50 percent were fishers and about a quarter were both fishers and farmers. Others were also involved in fisheries related occupations. [4]

## Marine Protected Areas

In response to demographic and economic pressures on coastal resources, the Royal Government of Cambodia established Protected Areas based on a Royal Decree in 1993.[10, p.22] Among the 23 Protected Areas in Cambodia, there are six coastal and marine Protected Areas<sup>ii</sup> that cover around 388,700 ha.[10, pp.14-22] In addition, there are three Protected Areas that are partly located in the coastal area and partly in the Central Cardamom Mountains.[10, p.22] In 2016, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries established a specific Marine Protected Area (MPA) around Koh Rong and Koh Rong Sanloem islands that covers around 405 km<sup>2</sup>. [11]

The main purpose of designated marine Protected Areas<sup>iii</sup> is to ensure that fishery resources are managed sustainably while also encouraging tourism, reducing poverty and maintaining biodiversity.[12] Marine fisheries Protected Areas can be used to conserve parts of marine ecosystems, including fish stocks exploited by fisheries.[13, p.1]

Figure 1: Locations of marine fishing communities



Fishing communities are also covered by national development policies and, therefore, fishing communities benefit not only from development policies and development work related to fisheries, but also from other policies and development work such as economic growth in general, agricultural developments, availability of job opportunities, human resource development, D&D policy, and so on.[14]

<sup>ii</sup> The six Protected Areas are: 1) Kep National Park; 2) Bokor National Park; 3) Ream National Park; 4) Botum Sakor National Park; 5) Peam Krasoap Wildlife Sanctuary; and 6) Dong Peng Multiple Use Area.

<sup>iii</sup> Known as a Marine Fisheries Management Area.

Other current developments that could have beneficial effects for marine fishing communities include coastal port expansion in Sihanoukville, the industrial development zone called the “Stung Hav Sihanoukville Industrial Zone” which includes petrochemical production, food processing using the local fisheries catch, timber processing, etc. However, this development could potentially create conflicts in the fisheries and affect the marine environment. [3]

Coastal areas play an important role in the strategy for tourism which has become an important source of government revenue. Because of their ecosystem features, coastal areas are considered to have the potential to attract tourists, as well as to support conservation activities such as the protection and replanting of mangroves. [4, p.87] In 2016, coastal areas received 643,289 international tourists compared with 5,721,350 nationally.[15] The government has a tourism development strategy for coastal areas, which aims to attract investment from around the world for tourism development as an additional source of government revenue and job opportunities for the local people.

The increasing number of tourist arrivals in Cambodia in general and, in its coastal areas in particular, has led to increasing demand for food among these visitors. [3, p.26] This, in turn, has led to a rise in the domestic market price of marine fish in Cambodia.

### 3. Challenges Facing Fishing Communities

Illegal fishing activities are still a problem facing marine fishing communities.[4] There are two types: (1) illegal fishing undertaken by individuals driven by poverty; and (2) illegal and destructive fishing undertaken for commercial purposes.[4] Illegal fishing activities are also conducted by vessels from other countries.

Table 2: Illegal fishing activities

Threats in marine waters	Percentage
Fishing using destructive fishing nets	73%
Trawling by larger boats	37%
Illegal fishing by vessels from other countries	17%
Pollution of coastal waters	10%

Source: Community Fisheries Organizations of Cambodia[4]

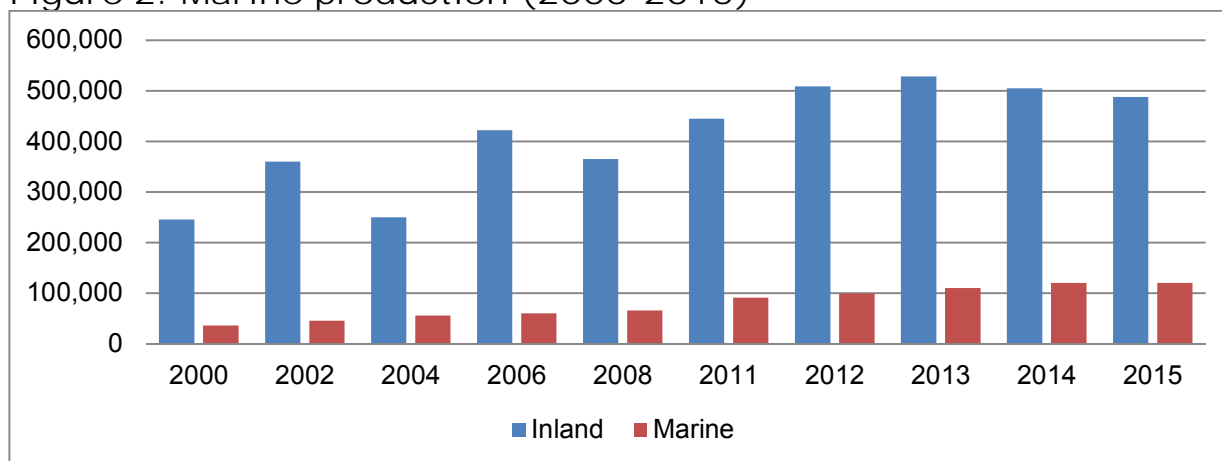
Fishing offenses are criminal offences, and officials of the Fisheries Administration, as judicial police officers, have the role to investigate them and to file complaints. Local authorities cooperate with the FiA and provide forces to investigate and prevent fisheries offenses.[5] Fishing communities cooperate with the FiA in dealing with fisheries offenses, and, in an emergency, they cooperate with local authorities, arrest offenders and confiscate evidence for FiA officials. [9]

A patrol team at each fishing community was created to prevent illegal fishing activities. [6, 7] However, fishing communities claim they do not have enough resources or the authority to apprehend offenders. [4] Resources may include patrol boats, gasoline, and budgets necessary to operate patrols.

According to statistics on coastal fisheries offenses, in 2015 there were 64 cases,[6, p.12] and, in 2017 there were 41 (data for 2016 is not available). [16] Most offenses are committed by foreign fishing boats[17, 18] that destroy fish using chemicals, gasoline, bombs, explosives and illegal fishing gear.[18]

Fisheries conflicts can take place within a fishing community, or between fishing communities. However, there is no information available on fisheries conflicts and their resolution. Fishing communities mediate fisheries conflicts occurring in their communities. In cases where conflicts cannot be resolved, they are sent to FiA authorities with the participation of local and competent authorities if necessary. The conflicts are sent to the court if they still cannot be resolved by FiA authorities.[19]

Figure 2: Marine production (2000-2015)



Source: Annual Reports of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries

Several studies have similar findings suggesting that marine fishing communities perceive marine fish catches to have decreased in size due to impacts of climate change, the use of certain fishing gear, sand dredging, an increase in the number of fishermen, **and the destruction of mangroves, sea grass and corals by large industries etc.**[20, 21, 22] Figure 2 above shows that at the national level, marine production has been increasing over the years. According to commune databases, the numbers of fishing boats have decreased and, relatively, the number of fishers has not changed. If this is true, then it can be inferred that middle-scale and large-scale fishing activities may have contributed to the declining stock for small-scale fishing communities.



Table 3: Incomes from fishing (Members of fishing communities, 2015-2016)

Season	Fishing Income per season (USD)	
	Min	Max
Wet season	589	936
Dry season	923	1433

Source: Community Fisheries Organizations of Cambodia[4]

The incomes of members of fishing communities fluctuate between the dry and wet seasons and also among members. As indicated in Table 3 , fishermen earn small incomes during the wet season, and it is usually dangerous to fish at this time [4, 23]. Poor fishermen without other livelihood options may find it difficult to get by and if the fish catch decreases among local fishermen, fishing alone may not be a sustainable livelihood option.

Management committees of fishing communities also face some challenges such as lack of funds, limited knowledge and leadership, poor involvement of members, lack of support for patrol teams, inadequate support from the relevant organizations, and too many people involved in fishing activities.[4]

#### 4. Existing Policies concerning Marine Fishing Communities

Two phases of fisheries reforms in Cambodia began in 2000, which led to partial cancellation of commercial fishing lots during the first phase and cancellation of the remaining fishing lots during the second. The fisheries reforms empowered small-scale communities in both inland and marine fishing areas, giving them the right to form fishing communities, to manage local fishing grounds and conservation areas, participate in conflict resolution and help to combat illegal fishing activities, etc.[4] Below is a brief summary of the main fisheries policies related to the development of fishing communities.

##### Policy Statements

The vision for the fisheries sector is “management, conservation, and development of sustainable fisheries resources to contribute to people’s food security and socio-economic development in order to enhance people’s livelihood and the nation’s prosperity.” Management of fishing communities and family fisheries is one of the policy pillars aiming to establish fishing communities, along with support for sustainable livelihoods for fishermen in both socio-economic and nutrition terms.[24, 25]

##### Efforts to Assist in the Development of Fishing Communities

There are a number of strategy papers relating to fishing communities including the Strategic Planning Framework for Fisheries 2010-2019, and the Agriculture Sector Strategic Development Plan 2014-2018. The Fisheries Administration (FiA), the main actor in the fisheries sector, has its own three strategic fisheries development plans and annual work plans.[5, 26] In order to achieve the vision, part of the government’s efforts revolve around

encouraging local communities to formally create fishing communities, and to assist them in doing so. In summary, the policies aim to increase the protection of fisheries resources and conservation efforts by effective law enforcement: eliminating all types of illegal fishing activities; strengthening fisheries management capacity; promoting aquaculture development to ensure sustainable fisheries resources; and improving the quality and safety of fisheries products for domestic use and for export.

#### Achievements in Brief

In addition to successes in terms of the development of policy and regulatory frameworks, and the establishment of fishing communities, a study claims that another objective of the fisheries reform that has been achieved relates to the promotion of access to food and increased livelihoods.[4] Members of fishing communities have unrestricted access to more fish for their own consumption and to earn income, which plays an important role in raising their living standards. Social benefits have also been reported, including greater trust within fishing communities, a higher awareness of, and value placed on, conservation, and the desire to build a better future.[4]

### 5. Addressing the Challenges

#### Efforts at the National Level

Poverty in Cambodia continues to decline and diversification of livelihoods is playing a role in the steady reduction of poverty.[27] Non-agriculture wage incomes now account for more than one third of rural incomes.[27] This shows that the government's efforts to implement development plans in all sectors is working to help to reduce poverty in rural areas including among fishing communities. Specifically in coastal areas, some sectors warrant priority, and these include industrial development zones (covering, for instance, marine product processing), education, tourism, agriculture development, ports, etc. as mentioned above. This, in addition to the implementation of fisheries policies, will speed up livelihood diversification within fishing communities.

A study conducted by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) for the Royal Government of Cambodia suggests that Cambodia should upgrade its marine fisheries sector so that the associated marine products can have more access to both the local and export markets. More markets for fisheries products will lead to more demand for fisheries products from fishing communities. The report also suggests developing infrastructure along the value chain, such as landing centers, ice factories, cold store, etc., strengthening the regulatory framework for food safety, and promoting product quality and diversification. [28]

#### Efforts at the Local Level (Fisheries Administration)

The FiA and relevant non-profit organizations have supported fishing communities in terms of promoting alternative livelihoods through the establishment of savings groups, fish processing groups, shrimp processing groups, crab banks, and training on raising livestock and processing fish products into souvenirs. [6, 29] Local FiA officials and NGOs have conducted

other relevant work such as the planting of mangroves and forests, and conserving seaweed, mangroves and inundated forests. The FiA has also worked to fight illegal fishing activities, and to mobilize support for patrol teams in fishing communities. In addition, they have helped to improve fishing communities' management capacity, their resilience to climate change, and their ability to manage their resources.

In order to comply with the Ministry's campaigns to promote "One Commune One Fish Pond Shelter Community", the Marine Fisheries Administration Inspectorate and Fisheries Administration Cantons in coastal areas, as well as partner organizations, local people and local authorities, have created a community of fish pond shelters and a management system for each community. They have also developed a public awareness campaign about conservation, etc. [6]

The FiA has also implemented other development activities that indirectly help fishing communities. These include establishing marine habitats, conservation areas (of which there are 40) and Protected Areas (of which there are four), and releasing fingerlings.

#### Efforts at the Local Level (Commune Councils)

Commune Councils, together with local FiA officials, have been playing a important role in helping to establish fishing communities, in combating illegal fishing activities, and in resolving conflicts. Fishing communities could incorporate their plans and needs into Commune Councils' development and investment plans. A study has also suggested that fishing communities could be transformed into organizations focusing on livelihoods.[4]

All of these efforts contribute to the improvement of livelihoods in fishing communities. First, conservation, the establishment of Protected Areas, the release of fingerlings, and combating illegal fishing help to ensure the sustainability of natural resources that benefit communities. Second, upgrading the value chain in the fisheries sector will increase the demand for local marine fisheries products. Finally, developments in other sectors help to promote the development of alternative livelihoods leading to improved standards of living in general.

## 6. Conclusion

Cambodian citizens have the right to form fishing communities, and to use, manage and conserve their local fisheries resources. A total of 40 marine fishing communities have been formed in the four coastal provinces. These marine fishing communities benefit both from fisheries policies and from development work in the coastal region. Marine fishing communities have access to marine fisheries resources for livelihoods and cash income, and have alternative livelihoods in agriculture, ecotourism, processing, and so on.

In assisting the development of fishing communities, the government has formulated a number of fisheries policies such as the Strategic Planning Framework for Fisheries (2010-2019), the Agriculture Sector Strategic Development Plan (2014-2018), the FiA's strategic development plans and annual work plan, etc. Fisheries reforms resulting in the creation of fishing communities are considered to have met the government's objective of improving the livelihoods of marine fishing communities, and of building trust among members. Despite this success, marine fishing communities still face some challenges such as the perceived decline of fish stocks, a diminishing fish catch, illegal fishing, small incomes from fishing during wet seasons, and a lack of alternative livelihoods for poor fishers.

The FiA is the main actor in combating illegal fishing activities, but fishing communities also have a role in terms of patrolling and cooperating with FiA local authorities to combat illegal activity. However, fishing communities claim that they lack resources for such activities. In order to further develop fishing communities, efforts at the national level are continuing in sectors such as education, tourism, and agriculture development and these help to speed up livelihood diversification within fishing communities. In addition, upgrading the value chain of the fisheries sector is a good option to increase access of marine products to both domestic and export markets. Likewise, at the local level, development efforts continue, and these aim to promote alternative livelihoods, to conserve mangroves and inundated forests, to increase fish stocks, improve fishing communities' management capacity, to support patrol teams, and to address climate change.

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