

Background



AFSC has been working partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries since 1982. In the 1980s, AFSC worked in mainly in community development, animal health, irrigation and water supply, in Kompong Chhang and Pursat Provinces, as well as technical capacity building at the national level. By the mid-1990s much of this work was complete. Many project activities had become sustainable or could be transferred to larger organizations then beginning to work in Cambodia.

It is AFSC's aim to focus on helping the poor to better provide for their livelihoods and assisting local authorities in areas that are not being served by another international organization. In 1997, following discussions with officials at the national level and in Koh Kong province,

AFSC initiated the Integrated Sustainable Livelihoods Program in Sre Ambel and Kompong Seila districts. At that time, AFSC was the only international NGO with a project based there. Five years later, when the ISLP Strategic Plan was developed, the area continued to be underserved.

While the target districts were initially very isolated and difficult to access, they have undergone rapid change. Major demographic, political and infrastructure changes have significantly altered the socio-economic environment and the use of natural resources in the area. This had a major effect on local communities, who have always depended heavily on natural resources to survive. Main activities have traditionally been logging, collection of forest products, fishing, and basic agriculture.

The 1999 logging ban cut off an important source of income for poor local villagers. Those who remained were motivated to protect their remaining forest area. These communities faced a pressing need to find legal, sustainable ways to make ends meet. However, this transition requires a significant change in livelihood activity and resource use. In 2004, a new road was built linking the area with the Thai border, resulting in the arrival of new stakeholders [outside actors] and further changes to local market economy. Changing and often competing claims on land ownership and use have led to problems such as land speculation, illegal logging and conflict.

For fishing communities situated along Kompong Song Bay, significant pressure has come from illegal mechanised trawlers operating in shallow waters. The resulting decrease in fish yields exacerbated poverty and increased conflict between competing groups, especially as fish stocks in other marine areas collapsed.



Villagers sought other means of survival, such as clearing forests for mangrove wood and rice fields, thus creating even more pressure on natural resources.

In parallel, the Sub-decree on Community Forestry (2003) and Sub-decree on Community Fisheries (2005), as well as the Forestry Law (2003) and Fisheries Law (2006) were passed. The drafting of these laws was a positive step towards the establishment of a legal framework for community-based natural resource management in Cambodia. Regulatory changes engaged debate and dialogue between communities, government officials and civil society. When rules are clearly understood and enforced they will help communities and officials to meet the requirements.

The integrated strategy carried out by AFSC in the area reflects the interconnectedness between the health of the natural environment and the wellbeing of the communities. Effective

and sustainable community management of natural resources in partnership with official authorities is essential. Such collective management is necessary to protect the environment itself, to prevent conflict between groups, and to preserve people's livelihoods, both now and for future generations.

ISLP Project objectives

The goal of AFSC's Integrated Sustainable Livelihoods Program (ISLP) is:

- **To improve livelihood security and preserve the natural resource base in the target area.**

Three major objectives guided this work:

- i. **To develop community-based natural resource management in the target area, according to the sub-decrees of the Royal Government of Cambodia**
- ii. **To improve food security through introduction of new techniques and sustainable agricultural practices**
- iii. **To increase community economic security and access to clean water**

The preliminary phase of the ISLP focused on maintaining natural resources in the project area by promoting alternative agricultural and income generating activities and reducing dependence on forest resources. Mitigating the social crisis brought about by the 1999 logging ban and subsequent loss of livelihoods of many families became a priority.

Major ongoing activities included the training of Village Livestock Agents (VLA), the organizing of animal banks and the introduction of improved integrated farming techniques. The ISLP also provided access to micro-credit, adult literacy classes and health training.

From 2001 activities focused on developing community based natural resource management in a targeted area. This area shares a continuous resource base, the Sre Ambel riverine ecosystem from the upland mountains to the coast. This is a unified environment in which changes in one part affect the situation and livelihoods in another. The target area includes fishing communities along the coastal areas of Kampong Song Bay. It also includes villages in the Sre Ambel River estuarine area dependent on a combination of fishing, farming and use of mangrove forests for survival. The third area targeted is the mid-river catchment area, which initially fell largely within two logging concessions, and later came under the protection of



environmental agencies.

The ecosystem of this core target area is an important natural resource base and an epicenter for biodiversity in the area. By implementing sound community-based resource management practices for fishing and forestry, this environment stands a better chance of remaining for generations to come.

The three major components for the integrated program are: **natural resource management**, with community-based fisheries and forestry; **integrated agriculture** or farming; and **community development**.



Local Partnership was established at the national, provincial and district levels. The program coordinated with the Community Forestry Research Project (CFRP) – a joint effort by the Ministry of Environment, Department of Forestry, and Royal University of Agriculture – to research the process of setting up community forestry in the concession area.

Local Partners



ISLP engaged government staff in training programs for villagers, and supported training and study tours for groups including both villagers and government officials. The program worked closely with government ministries and officials to

coordinate its actions in fulfilling the requirements of the fisheries and forestry laws and sub-decrees. Raising awareness on rules and regulations, building local government capacity and sharing expertise between officials and villages were strong features of ISLP. The program worked to build communication and cooperation between different stakeholders including villagers, government, private companies and non-government organizations.

The most important partners of the program are the local villagers and the members of the community fisheries and forestry communities, who are the key target group of project activity and who set the program's priorities and determine how to carry out activities.

Project Activities & Achievements



The Integrated Sustainable Livelihoods Program has made some important achievements. The program has contributed to the ability of many

households to improve their livelihood in a sustainable way. In particular it worked to raise awareness of how livelihoods and natural resources are interconnected.

Income-supporting activities such as rice and animal banks and credit schemes have improved food and economic security. These activities, combined with new and improved agricultural techniques, have contributed to the improvement of livelihood for many poor villagers, in particular women. Solidarity with poor villagers has increased in the target communities and some have begun using surplus to support projects benefiting the whole village, such as roads and bridges.

The fishery and forestry committees have been successful in protecting the fishery grounds and forests from intruders and working towards sustainable use of natural resources. They are fully embedded in communities and able to operate independently. The program was also instrumental in building the capacity of committee members to solve problems by managing their committees properly. Collaboration and dialogue between communities and commune or district officials was facilitated. ISLP worked to find peaceful solutions to problems and conflicts over resources, engaging communities with authorities and other stakeholders.

Women were encouraged with training and gender promotion to take part in managing community development and natural resources. Although women were still a minority in the committee membership they have gained influence. Women are better informed about community issues and are increasingly involved in decision-making processes.

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

The goals of the Natural Resource Management Component were:

- *Organize and develop Community of Forestry and Community of Fisheries Management Committees and register the Committee with the responsible Provincial authorities*
- *Assist communities and local authorities to participate in national level networks*
- *Raise awareness about environment and policy issues in target communities and with local authorities*



The program achieved these goals and had many successes in the establishment of community forestry and fishery management committees. These committees participated in the implementation of the government policy and regulations for the protection of natural resources. The communities have shown strong initiative in protecting their resource area.

There are positive examples of cooperation and improved communication with government officials.

Fisheries

ISLP worked with committees to develop a **resource management plan**. The program worked to include maximum participation of community members to build solidarity and ensure continued recovery and protection of natural resources. ISLP facilitated workshops and **awareness raising** with community members and local officials. Workshops were able to identify solutions to problems and **clarify fishing rules and rights**, procedures, punishments and use of fishing gears. ISLP worked in collaboration with the Fisheries Action Coalition Team (FACT).

Community fisheries members completed boundary demarcation and have received a very good level of **cooperation and recognition from local officials**.

This official recognition allowed the fisheries to deal with the problem of illegal fishing and encroachment by trawlers. Community fisheries were fully recognised by 2005 with the power to **protect the area from destructive fishing practices**. The community fishery committee members formed a

patrolling group made up of committee members and community people. The patrols worked with the cooperation of local, district and provincial authorities to enforce rules and regulations, including the arrest and punishment of illegal trawlers. As a result

illegal fishing activities have decreased and there has been a marked increase in the number of fish.

Unfortunately, this increase in fish resources resulted in encroachment by trawlers from outside areas. This showed that **sustainable management of resources must take place in all areas**, because the natural environments and livelihoods are interconnected. Effective enforcement is needed in neighbouring communities to stop destructive practices and allow fish resources to be maintained. If all communities protect their natural resources, there will not be the need for encroachment.

ISLP facilitated **conflict resolution and mediation** through meetings between local and provincial officials, communities and other organizations. These meetings worked to solve problems by achieving compromise and finding agreement on common points. ISLP also began assisting other areas to establish community fisheries and access grants for livelihood projects so that they can protect their own

environment. ISLP is working with other organizations to unite communities around the **mutual protection of the bay's resources**. ISLP found that communities are showing a commitment and a capacity to work with each other to resolve problems.

Forestry

ISLP assisted with the establishment of community forestry. Committees were successful in **fulfilling the requirements of the forestry sub-decree**. The program helped to increase awareness of the importance of protecting forests and finding peaceful solutions to conflicts over forest resources.

Communities formed committees and worked together to **manage illegal logging and protect resources**. The project staff provided **training** in leadership, recording, administration, forestry, and conflict resolution. ISLP helped the group tie into national networks dealing with forestry issues. Workshops helped to **clarify regulations and improve awareness**. The community people and community committee formed a patrol group to enforce the rules and regulations and prevent illegal logging.

ISLP worked with villagers to improve **cooperation and communication between different stakeholders** to protect resources and livelihoods. These include: local, provincial and national government; people and private businesses making land claims on the forest; environmental groups seeking to enforce protection of the forest with rangers; illegal logging groups. An ongoing issue is therefore clarifying and supporting land rights and legal uses of land. ISLP supported villagers in carrying out **land use planning** and an inventory of forest resources. ISLP supported forestry committees

to hold village-level consultative workshops, with the support of the Community Forestry Research Project (CFRP), under the Ministry of Environment, Department of Forestry, and Royal University of Agriculture.

The project began assisting the village committees in the preparation of a **forestry management plan** by organizing a series of consultation workshops at the district level. This plan will help committees and government to **fulfil community forestry laws and guidelines**.



LAND RIGHTS & LAND USE PLANNING

Conflicts over land use often derive from unclear tenure. Without clear rights to use land communities will not engage in responsible, sustainable use of the land. If land boundaries and conditions for land use are not clear conflicts will continue to arise. As pressure continues from land speculators ISLP has continued working with partners to build awareness on land law and land rights, as well as providing training for communication skills and negotiation.

Participatory Land Use Planning was an initiative designed to clarify rights of villagers to access and use resources in the area in which they live. It used a method developed by the Ministry of

INTEGRATED AGRICULTURE

The goals of the Integrated Agriculture Component were:

- Organize and develop Village Livestock Health Agent Associations and Pharmacies and register:



train households in livestock production

- Conduct vaccination campaigns in the wider target area (31 villages) twice a year
- Introduce integrated farming techniques, fishponds and rice intensification in target villages

The Agriculture component was successful in supporting improved farming techniques and sustainable practices. It improved food security and provided alternate income-generating activities that helped communities to be less dependent on natural resources. Technical trials were able to identify successful improved rice seed varieties and fertilizers.



Improved rice seed varieties

With cooperation from the Cambodian Agricultural Development Institute (CARDI), ISLP completed a series of trials to identify the most appropriate rice seed variety for the soil. Most rice fields in Sre Ambel district are located in the coastal area where

Land Use Planning (?). Initially the project involved training, conducted surveys and held discussions to clarify villagers rights to access and use area resources. The PLUP team made strong progress in clarifying current and future land use and boundaries along Road 48. PLUP activities have helped to reduce tension with environmental enforcers. The next step in the process is to ensure approval from commune and district officials. However, if the official map is ignored, villagers will lose confidence in government process. The potential for violence related to land use and rights remains a serious concern. Furthermore, large land claims by rich persons and companies threaten land agreements and planning efforts. Clear, enforced policies and successful community planning for sustainable land use continue to be extremely important.

they are affected by sea water. The project provided techniques on rice production and improved seeds to the villagers. During 2004-5 rice trials were able to successfully identify suitable seeds and seed production groups were able to provide the



improved seed to local farmers. The results of the trials were again confirmed in trials in 2006.

Five main varieties were identified as being the most successful and are now being employed by villagers. Four dry season varieties were identified: the long term variety Raing Chey and the medium term varieties Pkamalis, Pkaromdoul and Sar Talong. The variety Hivin was identified as being most suitable for the wet season. These varieties have an average yield of 3.5 tons per hectare (3-5 tons/h depending on the soil conditions).

Villages were trained in **home gardening** and seed production. Families were able to grow vegetables, mainly for consumption but also in some cases for sale. Families were also assisted in setting up village nurseries, which have improved access to fruit trees. Women report that growing their own vegetables eased food shortages and reduced time spent travelling to Sre Ambel to buy food.

In order to increase crop extension services at village level, **farmer promoters** were recruited from each of the core target villages. Farmer promoters received technical training in rice production, gardening and compost making and were then able to provide training and extend services to other people in their own villages.

The **fish raising** program was targeted at poorer households in the village to provide an additional source of income. Families received training in fish pond management, prevention of erosion, fish seed

transportation, fingerling releasing, feeding, water quality improvement, monitoring and management. **Pig raising** demonstrations were successfully implemented through the Village Animal Health Worker association.

In **Animal Health and Production**, ISLP worked with the support from Heifer Project International (HPI), associated with Department of Animal Health within the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery. ISLP supported Village Animal Health Workers (VAHWs) to provide basic veterinary services and advice and training on animal health and production at the village level. In 2004-2005 ISLP achieved the successful handover of the vaccination campaign to the government and the VAHW Association. VAHWs together with the

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The goals of the Community Development Component were:

- *Introduce rice banks, savings/micro-credit groups, and animal banks in target village, based on community interest and needs*
- *Assist communities in the construction of wells and/or water jars to improve water security*

This component of the program was successful in improving food and economic security in the target communities. Credit schemes and animal banks function in many villages well and to a large extent independently. These projects succeeded in improving local conditions, water security and community resources.

Communities where ISLP is working have also begun planning and funding their own village development activities, using surplus capital from interest on the micro-credit and rice bank funds. ISLP was successful in introducing special criteria making it possible for the poorest to benefit from program. Village solidarity was improved and villages took initiatives to identify and help the poorest villagers.

ISLP is now being encouraged to disseminate experience and models of community cooperation and management to surrounding areas. Places which had not been targeted are now requesting ISLP assistance.

ISLP supported and monitored successful **micro-credit programs** in the target villages. Households organized themselves into micro-credit warranty groups, giving them access to small-scale loans. These loans are mainly used to support agricultural activities and businesses such as grocery shops, pig and poultry raising, as well as to address immediate food shortages and make payments on existing debt. Some villages took steps to include poorer villagers and allow them to borrow for emergency purposes with zero or lower interest. ISLP assisted villages to conduct wealth rankings, to raise awareness about the importance of including the **poorest families**.

provincial animal health department conducted an independent vaccination campaign successfully in 2005. ISLP provides some support to remote areas to access pharmacy supplies. Some VAHWs have set up their own pharmacies, while others buy supplies from local sellers.

ISLP carried out a series of projects to introduce **improved rice seed varieties**, appropriate for different types of soil. In addition the project also introduced techniques to improve **soil quality**. Households in villages were involved compost making demonstrations; training courses on rice growing and field management, fertilizer use and planting technique, as well as seed selection and seed propagation training.



ISLP continued to monitor the **animal banks** established in villages. The project was expanded and ISLP provided buffalo to additional households. The poorest families were found to benefit from the animal bank, including the women-headed households.

Existing **rice banks** were effectively monitored and the program added new rice banks in additional villages. In these villages more than half of the households reported facing rice shortages four to five months per year. The loans helped families during the food shortage period at the end of the rainy season, as the rates charged were considerably lower than the rate charged by local lenders. The rice banks also provide storage and loans of improved seeds and of fertilizer.

For **water security**, the project monitored and oversaw the construction of a total of 38 wells. An effective local well reduces women's workload, improves health and hygiene and helps with small



gardening. Well building focuses not only on the construction process but also on training local people to locate a suitable site, build and maintain the well on their own. Communities were also trained in water sanitation.

Gender discussions were held in villages, and ISLP successfully initiated the **gender promoters** program to build community awareness and support opportunities for women. ISLP supported women seeking training in areas like leadership, animal raising and vegetable production, as well as training women newly elected to Community Fisheries and Forestry committees.

Developing Community Solidarity & Initiative

Lessons Learned & Challenges Ahead

The program's successes suggest that important lessons can be learned, while important challenges remain. When people become aware of the importance of the natural environment to their survival and the wellbeing of future generations, communities have shown they can work together to protect their natural resources and find peaceful solutions to problems. The program also found that supporting livelihood activities that strengthen the spirit of self-help in the community is the most effective way to improve economic security.

In several of the target villages, members of credit schemes decided to use a significant percentage of the surplus capital earned through interest to support community development projects in their village. During 2003, communities initiated eight projects, including four bridges, one dam, one road, and two examples of distributing support to needy families in the community. ISLP supported these initiatives, which were a very positive sign of community solidarity. The initiatives showed that people were prepared to spend their own profit for the benefit of the community as a whole. ISLP also allocated small grant funding to support development activities planned and carried out by communities. ISLP conducted training programs for villages to build their capacity in many different aspects of community development. The project observed that people actively participated in their community's development by taking part in activities benefiting the whole village and coming together to discuss community issues. This is a real sign of a change in perceptions in terms of community development and solidarity at the community level.



It is therefore important to strengthen solidarity within and between communities. Communities and other stakeholders need to come to mutual understanding about the importance of protecting the resource base. This is especially vital in situations where groups can come into conflict about how resources should be used.

The program also showed that working together with local authorities is possible and the way forward. Improving communication between villagers and local officials is very important. Commune officials in particular play a key role in area development, local planning, and local level conflict resolution. However national authorities

also must be engaged. The interconnectedness of natural resources and peoples' livelihoods mean that solutions sometimes need to reach beyond the local level.

Gaining wider recognition of community efforts, and working to make sure rules and regulations are clear, fair and understood by all is of high importance. Policies are supposed to be for the benefit of the community. Villagers and local authorities need to have a strong and clear understanding of policies and laws in order to be able to fulfil them. The policies themselves need to be implemented so that they help the community in the way that was intended.

Competing claims for resources continue to be a challenge. They raise important questions about how to use the land and reveal competing ideas about what "development" means. We must be careful not to destroy the resources that people need to survive.

The Integrated Sustainable Livelihoods Program has made some important achievements, improving livelihood security and helping communities to preserve their natural resources. AFSC will build on this foundation to address the issues and challenges now facing the area.



Integrated Sustainable Livelihoods Program: Fact Sheet

Community Based Natural Resource Management

- Villagers became fee-paying members of Community Fisheries and Forestry, formed committees and elected representatives to Community Fisheries and Forestry and to the regional committee
- Community Fisheries covered a total protected area of 37,033 ha and 991 families
- Around 90% of households became members of community fisheries
- Community Forestry covered a total protected area of 3,046 hectares with 607 families
- ISLP held more than 14 capacity building training courses in leadership, recording, administration, land laws, negotiation skills and conflict resolution
- ISLP supported villagers in establishing resource management plans, completing resource inventories and fulfilling official guidelines, and facilitated exchange visits and networking
- Boundaries demarcation was completed in both forestry and fisheries and official recognition was sought with good cooperation from local authorities
- Fisheries committees and local authorities formed 43 patrol groups to prevent illegal fishing
- Workshops were held to improve cooperation and coordination and raise awareness between villagers and local authorities, including representatives from local and district departments
- Conflict mediation meetings were held to find peaceful solutions to conflicts arising over fishing encroachment, fishing and forest boundaries, and use of non-timber forest products
- The Participatory Land Use Planning committees completed mapping and data collection, clarifying village and commune boundaries for 4 communes



Integrated Agriculture

- 45 people were trained as village animal health workers (VAHW) with support from ISLP and the Heifer Project International in providing basic veterinary services and animal production advice
- 3,700-4,500 animals were vaccinated each year in 63 villages by VAHW with local government support
- Piglets were distributed to villagers and pig raising demonstrations were held on 22 established sites
- ISLP provided training in correct animal feed, held grass demonstrations, and provided training in home gardening, compost making and vegetable seed support
- Villagers received training in rice production, improved field techniques, fertilizer use and seed selection and participated in field trial visits
- Rice seed trials identified and confirmed successful improved seed varieties, with advice from CARDI and cooperation from the Ministry of Agriculture; fertilizer trials were also carried out
- Private nurseries were set up in 9 villages
- 13 villages were part of the farmer promoter program, farmer promoters were trained to demonstrate and advise on rice production, home gardening etc.
- 32 villages received fish pond set up support and fish pond training



Community Development

- ISLP provided training and support in animal bank management, rice bank management, and micro-credit schemes, well digging and maintenance and animal raising techniques
- ISLP monitored rice banks with which allowed 50% of families to borrow, and small village micro-credit schemes which generated capital for 492 target members. Repayment was around 90%
- A total of 159 buffalo were distributed through 16 animal bank schemes and more than a hundred calves were born, leading to a total of 259 buffalo
- The poorest families were identified through wealth rankings and targeted for buffalo distribution and were granted reduced interest rates by village committees
- 26 gender training courses were carried out; 20 village gender promoters were able to train 608 people
- Training in water sanitation was carried out; 38 wells were effectively built and monitored
- Technical assistance was provided to the planning of village infrastructure projects: 4 dams, 12 bridges, 3 schools, 6 village libraries and 3 water filters
- Villagers used surplus capital to support community development projects including four bridges, one dam, one road and programs to support the poorest members of the community

Emergency & Material Assistance

- AFSC provided emergency material assistance during drought crisis caused by unusually low rainfall in the program area in 2004-2005, working with local and district authorities, the agriculture Department and community committees
- Villagers in Prakam and Chamkar From were supported in organizing themselves to repair broken parts of the dam that protects village water supply
- AFSC provided diesel fuel and gasoline to assist in emergency pumping, serving 17 villages in the ISLP area, saving an estimated 423 hectares of rice fields
- 2857 kilos of rice were provided as food for work to families in Prakam and Chamkar From