

Riverine & Water Tourism

Community Managed Success Stories & Learning for the Region from Cambodia

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To facilitate a process of engagement and sharing between experts and civil society leaders from the Brahmaputra/ Jamuna (India Bhutan and Bangladesh) and Mekong basins, an exposure visit to Cambodia was organised by Asian Confluence in Collaboration with the Heinrich Böll Foundation (HBF). A visit to Phnom Koulen, Tonle Sap- Kampong Plouk, Angkor Wat and local market is an eye opener for the team. Some of the community managed success stories & learning for the region from Cambodia are mentioned below:

1) **Formation of the Mekong River Commission**

MRC is an "inter-governmental organisation that works directly with the governments of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Vietnam to jointly manage the shared water resources and the sustainable development of the Mekong River. There are 25 River basin committee bodies within the Mekong River basin and more than 500 networks at the ground level developed to have knowledge, capability and participation in management of the river basin from the ground level.

In Meghalaya we may encourage the people residing near the river basin to form groups and these different groups will form a network of people who will protect the rivers. Trainings and knowledge required may be imparted to the people in order to preserve and conserve the rivers. In this way, it is the people who will own the rivers and they will understand that all rivers are interconnected. It may not be easy to start with a river commission between different countries; we can start with one State.

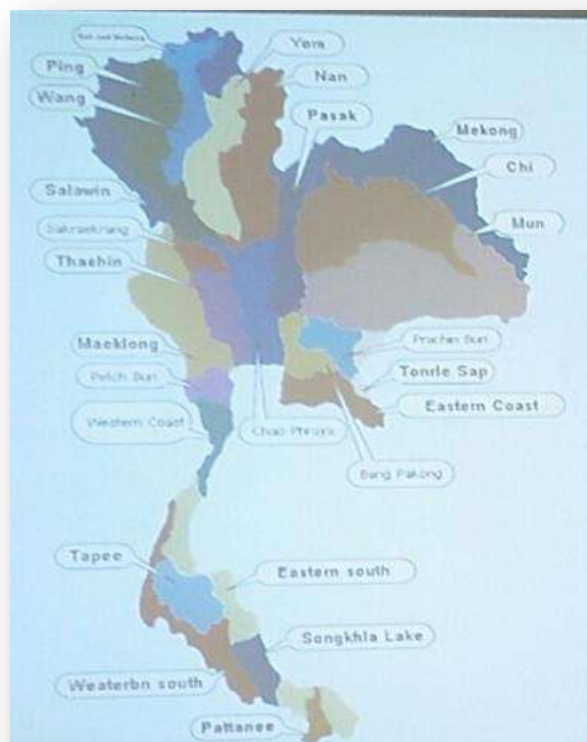


Fig. 1. Mekong River Basin Committees

2) **Souvenir Plantation Park, Phnom Kulen National Park**

Koulen Mountain is considered by Khmers to be the most sacred mountain in Cambodia. One of the main attractions in this place is the Souvenir Park, tourists or visitors buys tree saplings and then plants the sapling in the strategic area identified by the management where it will help in preserving the river basin. This creates awareness for the tourists and visitors on the importance of natural resource management and conservation. The same practices can be adopted in the Brahmaputra-Meghna basin parks and forests.



Fig. 2. Nursery at Souvenir Plantation Park, Phnom Kulen National Park

3) *Kampong Plouk, Tonle Sap*

Tonle Sap is around 80,000 sq km and it is covered with flood for 6 months in a year. The area of flood forest covered is 6748 ha. Despite the hardship the locals are facing every year, the people have adapted with the situation and took this as an opportunity for livelihood activities and eco-tourism. The livelihood activities of the people of Kampong Plouk (one of the villages in Tonle Sap) are 70% Fishery, 20% Tourism & 5 % small business. Few initiatives practiced in Kampong Plouk which may be introduced in the Brahmaputra – Meghna Basin are:



Fig. 3. Tonle Sap: Kampong Phlok (Top view)



Fig. 4. *Kampong Plouk: Wet season & Dry Season*

a) *Community – Regulated & Participatory Boating Services*

In Kampong Plouk the village encourage each and every household to buy at least one boat. There are 30 boats in the village which are divided into 5 groups and the boats are operating on a rotational basis. In case there is more than usual tourist footfall in a day, the next group in line is given opportunity to cater to tourists after the first group has fulfilled their quota for the day.

All small boats are managed exclusively by women. They charge USD 5 per ride and they have a benefit sharing mechanism. Of the USD 5, collection charges is shared between the commission to the Agent who brings in the tourist, the boat owner & the Community funds.



Fig. 5. *Boat operated by one of the lady in Kampong Plouk*

b) Supporting Community Fisheries

There are 16 Community Fisheries Committees (CFC) in Tonle Sap and the members included are at least one from each household, with an emphasis on participation by women and youth. The local volunteers in the CFC were selected by the community. The Fisheries department empowered the CFC by providing trainings on management, fisheries law, problem analysis, GPS use, patrol techniques, data collection, bookkeeping, financial management, report writing, manage nurseries, forest conservation, etc. The CFC plays active part to conserve the flooded forest, protect the fish sanctuaries, patrolling and reforestation activities. The group organizes monthly meetings and workshop on issues related to harvesting, management, protection of fish habitats and flood forests. The groups are highly professional: they have structured and recognised rules & regulations for fishing, conservation periods and demarcation for fishing, conservation areas and benefit sharing mechanism.



Fig. 6. Flood Forest, Tonle Sap



Fig. 7. Interaction with the CFC's members

Fostering Saving's Group

The savings group loan money to 76% of the small start ups. The rate of interest charge is 3% for the members and 5% to the non-members of the group. They also take up community development projects and contribute funds for campaigns and protection of the natural resources and wild life.



Fig. 8. Interaction with one of the Savings group

4) *One entry point for multiple tourist destination*

This automatically creates a circuit for the tourist and decreases the cost of operation. This method of one entry point is a win-win situation for both parties as tourists time is reduced standing in queues for entry ticket. At the entry point to visit the temples in Cambodia, we were given a ticket where our photo was printed and the list of the places included in the given rate was mentioned.

The same may be done in our tourist site like Sohra, Mawsynram etc. Equitable benefit may be shared to the stake holders (owners of the tourism destination) after deducting the management & operational cost, waste management etc.

5) *Value addition of Local Food & appreciate local artist*

This is one of the main sources of income for the local people in Siem Reap, Cambodia. In Siem Reap there is one small market (with traditional structure) where one can find all kinds of value added local foods and local artist. This is an important area where we also we need to focus for developing the local products and to encourage the local artist.



Fig. 9. One of the Local Market, Siem Reap, Cambodia



Fig. 10. Value added Cassva, Jackfruit & Others; Boil potato serving in restaurants; Sticky rice(mixed with herbs) & Coconut wrapped with leaves



Fig. 11. Stickers made in the orphanage. Paintings & one of the local artist in the market



Fig. 12. Local handcrafted products, Siem reap

The practices of keeping a souvenir park, management and operation of boats for the tourist by women, community led eco-tourism, active participation of the community in preservation of the flood forest, proper entry point for the tourist, encouragement of the local artists & handicraft and simple value addition of the local foods were few of the initiatives worth mentioning which may be implemented in the Brahmaputra – Meghna Basin.

Most of these initiatives are simple, yet, each one of them play an important role. Placing them all together they form and create an attractive tourism product along the Mekong river basin in Cambodia. And this was possible because they empowered the people at the ground level. For any plan to be successful and flourish; we need to understand, value and take care of the human resources available.