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Mekong Media Stories

Translating research and amplifying voices

Media-research collaboration fellowship

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Preface

Knowledge creates the greatest value when it reaches the people who can use it.

Researchers and journalists play distinct but complementary roles in this process. Researchers generate credible evidence, deepen our understanding of complex challenges, and develop actionable solutions that respond to the realities on the ground while informing policy and decision-making. Media professionals, meanwhile, have a unique ability to translate technical findings into compelling, accessible stories that can be meaningful to the wider public. When these two communities work together, research becomes more visible, more understandable, and ultimately more impactful.

This belief lies at the heart of the Mekong Thought Leadership and Think Tanks (MTT) Program. MTT aims to strengthen the role, capacity, and effectiveness of think tanks and knowledge-based policy influence organizations in co-producing research and engaging in policy processes to address the interconnected challenges of water, energy, and climate in the Mekong Region.

Researchers and media professionals are indispensable partners in this journey. By combining rigorous evidence with compelling storytelling, they help ensure that research reaches beyond academic and policy circles to engage communities, influence decision-makers, and contribute to more informed and inclusive solutions.

This booklet celebrates that collaboration. It brings together stories developed by young journalists working alongside researchers from nine MTT-supported research projects across the Mekong Region. Beyond presenting research findings, these stories capture the voices, experiences, and resilience of communities facing environmental and climate challenges. They also reflect a shared learning journey, with researchers exploring new ways of communicating their work, and journalists strengthening their engagement with evidence-based reporting.

Evidence creates value only when it is understood, trusted, and acted upon. Through partnerships between researchers, journalists, policymakers, and communities, we can bridge the gap between knowledge and action for a more sustainable and resilient Mekong.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), through the Australia Mekong Partnership (MAP), for its generous support and commitment to strengthening evidence-informed policymaking and regional cooperation.

My heartfelt thanks also go to the media fellows, research teams, the MTT Secretariat, and the communications team for their dedication, collaboration, mentoring, and coordination throughout this fellowship. Finally, I extend my deepest gratitude to the communities, practitioners, and policy actors whose knowledge, experiences, and perspectives brought these stories to life.

I hope this publication not only showcases the achievements of the MTT Media–Research Collaboration Fellowship, but also inspires stronger, lasting partnerships between media and research communities across the Mekong Region.

Dr. Chayanis Kittasudthacheewa
Program Director, Mekong Thought Leadership and Think Tanks Network (MTT)
Deputy Director, SEI Asia

Introduction

Translating research and amplifying voices

Scientific research can find solutions to environmental problems. Yet its impact depends entirely on whether the findings not only reach the people who need them most but also are accessible and understandable to them.

For policymakers, communities, and practitioners, valuable data and rigorous analysis mostly remain locked within academic journals. Climate data and solutions may remain inaccessible to many on the frontlines of climate change.

Media is a powerful actor in making sense of, and disseminating, environmental research. Journalists and multimedia producers act as translators, converting complex scientific evidence into compelling, accessible narratives that inform public debate, shape policy decisions, and empower local communities with actionable knowledge.

This booklet demonstrates the transformative power of media research collaboration. It presents the compelling work of six journalists and multimedia producers from across the Mekong Region, who were awarded the 2025 Media-Research Collaboration Fellowship as part of the Mekong Thought Leadership and Think Tanks (MTT) Program.

Supported by the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and coordinated by the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) Asia, this initiative represents a unique partnership between media professionals and research institutions.

The fellowship was an attempt to recognize that addressing complex environmental issues requires not only rigorous science but also effective communication that bridges the gap between researchers, policymakers, and the communities most affected.

Over the course of 2025-2026, these media grantees produced a rich collection of stories, blogs, and short films that illuminate the diverse environmental challenges facing the Mekong region.

Their work explores the promise of solar-powered groundwater treatment in Cambodia, the potential of carbon credit schemes for Lao PDR rice farmers, the hidden costs of small hydropower in Vietnam, and the power of community-led fisheries management in Luang Prabang. Each story is grounded in collaboration with researchers from the MTT program, ensuring that scientific evidence informs public discourse while local voices remain central to the narrative.

These stories provide empirical evidence that communities are not passive subjects of environmental change but rather active participants in shaping their lives and livelihoods often in the face of hardship and obstacles as they develop and practice ecosystem-based solutions, diversify livelihoods to adapt, or assert their rights to resources they depend upon.

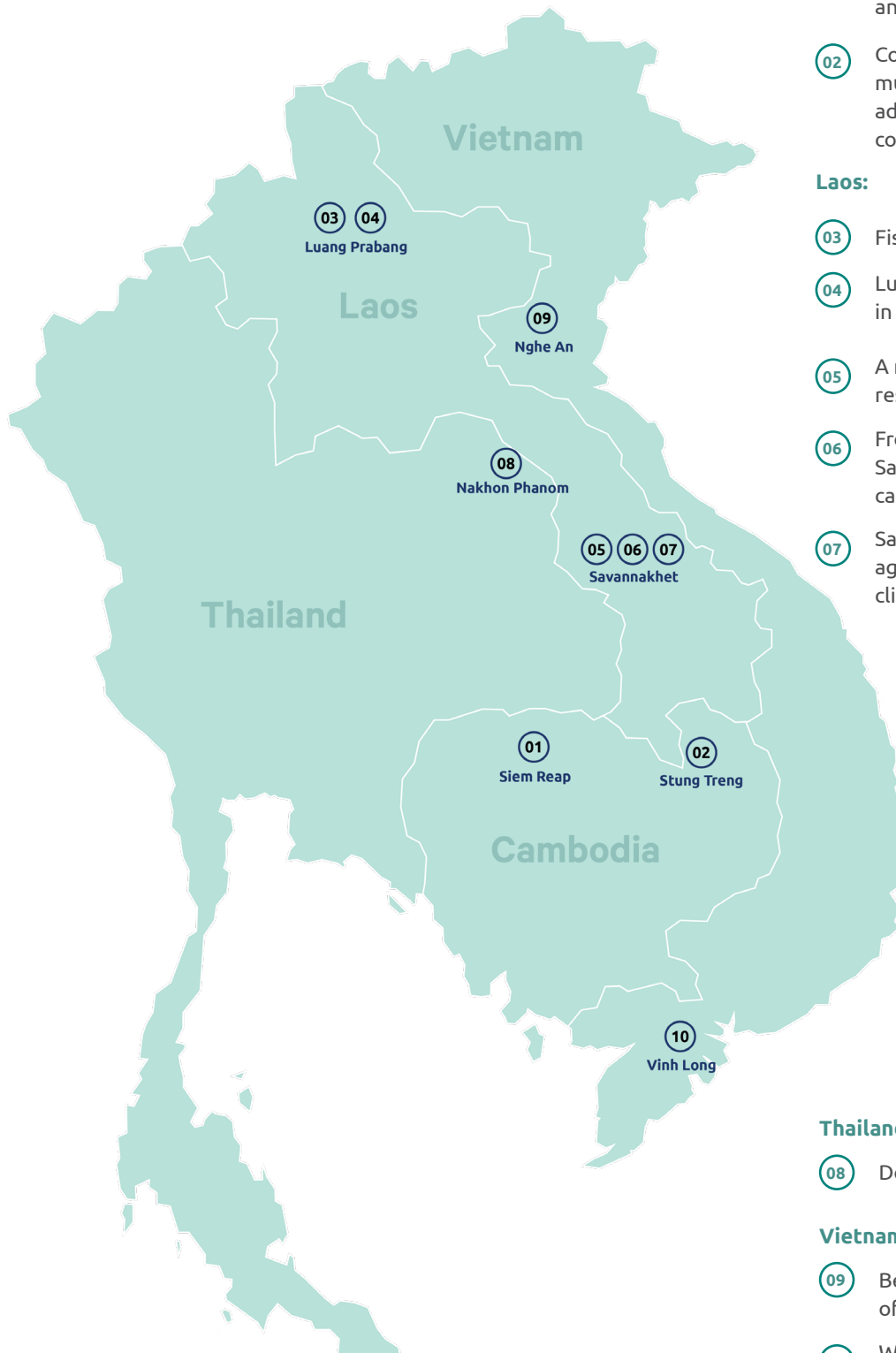
The stories also reveal some persistent gaps: insufficient funding for climate adaptation at the local level, the need for more inclusive decision-making processes, and the challenges of translating ambitious national policies into on-the-ground action.

By connecting journalists with scientists, policymakers, and community leaders, we can move beyond awareness-raising toward meaningful engagement and lasting change. These stories not only document challenges but also offer roadmaps for a more sustainable future, one where the voices of women, Indigenous Peoples, and marginalized communities are not ignored, where development is inclusive and equitable.

We invite you to explore these stories to see how this partnership between media and research can inform action and transcend national and cultural boundaries.

Rajesh Daniel
Communications expert, MTT Program
Head of Communications, SEI Asia

Media stories by location in the Mekong Region



Cambodia:

- 01 Addressing water scarcity via solar-powered groundwater treatment system in rural Cambodia: Benefits and challenges
- 02 Community-based initiatives and multi-stakeholder approach: Key to addressing climate change for rural communities in Cambodia

Laos:

- 03 Fish conservation in Luang Prabang
- 04 Luang Prabang villagers join forces in sustainable fisheries management
- 05 A roadmap for agricultural resilience in Savannakhet
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Thailand:

- 08 Documentary: Our river

Vietnam:

- 09 Beyond the light: The hidden costs of small hydropower
- 10 Women keep the 'rhythm of life' amidst the saline intrusion season in the Mekong Delta



Connecting journalists with researchers and communities in the Mekong Region

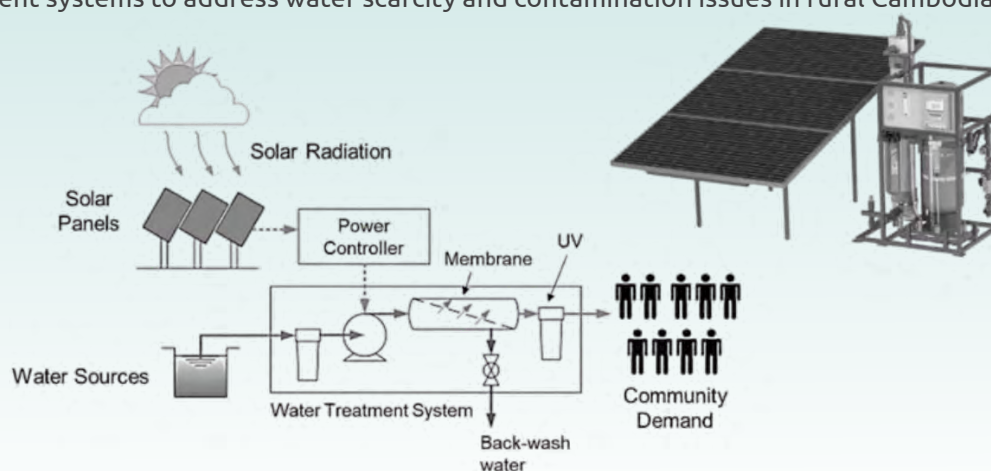
MTT media-research collaboration
fellowships 2025-2026

01 Addressing water scarcity via solar-powered groundwater treatment system in rural Cambodia: Benefits and challenges

Author: Eung Sea

Introduction

This article discusses the benefits and implementation challenges of using solar-powered groundwater treatment systems to address water scarcity and contamination issues in rural Cambodia.



Synoptic diagram of solar-powered water treatment system.

Photo: WE Lab. (Supplied)

Siem Reap Province— Water scarcity is a growing global challenge, and in many regions, groundwater is a critical alternative to unavailable surface water resources. However, groundwater often requires treatment due to contamination.

In Southeast Asia, including Cambodia, groundwater can be contaminated with arsenic, iron, manganese, and fluorides, posing significant health risks. This is particularly problematic in remote areas, as seen in many parts of Cambodia, where access to electricity for conventional water treatment is limited. Therefore, small-scale, sustainable groundwater treatment units are essential for addressing water scarcity in these regions.

A team of researchers from the Water Environment Laboratory of Institute of Technology of Cambodia, launched a project called “Addressing Water Scarcity through Groundwater Use: Development of Solar-Powered Groundwater Treatment System for Remote Area of Cambodia”. The goal is to develop a solar-powered groundwater treatment system for remote Cambodian communities.

Researchers collected groundwater samples from 14 wells in Preah Dak commune, Siem Reap province and analyzed them based on chemical and physical parameters. A laboratory was established to conduct crucial experiments. Statistical analysis of groundwater quality parameters of the samples indicated harmful substances — high levels of turbidity and iron, exceeding WHO guidelines for iron. It means groundwater treatment is needed to ensure safe drinking water for rural communities across Cambodia.



Importance of solar-powered water treatment systems

A report from researchers suggested that 54% of households in Preah Dak commune remain water deficient. This suggests that although a significant portion of households meet basic health needs, a majority still lack access to adequate water for optimal hygiene, sanitation, and other domestic uses.

The fact that over half the community falls short of optimal water access underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions to improve water distribution and ensure more equitable access to this vital resource. Addressing this issue is crucial for enhancing overall community health, well-being, and quality.

The same report indicates that groundwater is the predominant drinking water source in the community, supplying 71% of households. A significant portion of the community (over 60% of households) perceives their groundwater as unsafe. The primary concern appears to be the water's color, suggesting potential issues with clarity or the presence of contaminants.



Many rural Cambodians depend on wells for drinking water, especially during the dry season when surface water sources decrease, making groundwater a crucial resource for their daily needs. Photo taken on March 23, 2025. (Eung Sea)

Access to clean and safe drinking water is recognized as a fundamental human right, essential for health and well-being, yet many communities around the world, including Cambodia lack access to such resources.

Traditional water treatment solutions like biosand filtration systems, often require a significant amount of resources, and it is not effective in removing contaminants like iron, arsenic, as well as turbidity determination from water, while also requiring more frequent cleaning and maintenance. This problem clearly demonstrates the urgent need for reliable and safe drinking water solutions. Therefore, solar-powered water treatment has become an increasingly popular and effective way to address this problem.

Solar-powered water treatment solutions offer a sustainable and cost-effective approach to providing clean water. They utilize renewable solar energy, reducing reliance on fossil fuels and lowering greenhouse gas emissions. Although initial setup costs are higher, long-term energy costs are virtually zero once the system is up and running, making them ideal for rural communities with limited access to affordable energy.

Solar-powered water treatment systems are also highly reliable. Unlike traditional water treatment solutions, solar-powered systems can operate even during power outages or other disruptions. This makes them particularly useful in areas where access to energy is unreliable, such as in remote or rural communities.

Commune clerk Sor Sophal told CamboJA News that while some residents obtain drinking water from the Project Water Treatment plant in Preah Dak Commune, which was supported by an NGO at a cost of 1,500 riel per 20 liters, supply was inadequate for many remote communities.

"Areas which were distant lacked access to clean water, thus implementing a groundwater treatment system could be a vital solution, significantly improving water availability and quality for underserved populations," he added.

These systems are reliable, require minimal maintenance, and can be scaled for various applications. They provide a versatile solution for purifying diverse water sources, contributing significantly to global efforts to ensure universal access to clean water while promoting environmental sustainability. Additionally, solar-powered water treatment systems have the potential to address water scarcity issues, improve sanitation conditions, and enhance overall community well-being.



Rise in solar powered systems

Chea Vireak, a 46-year-old resident of O' Totoeng, says groundwater treatment system is vital for delivering safe drinking water. "In my opinion, it is crucial to have this system. By efficiently using groundwater, it helps alleviate water scarcity, providing a reliable clean water supply even where surface water is limited."

"I think that this approach improves public health and supports sustainable water management in my village as many villagers use water from wells," he adds.

Vireak indicates that many villagers consume drinking water using traditional filtration methods like sand filters to treat their water. Some buy 20-liter bottles for drinking water, which costs approximately 2,000 riel (USD 0.50).



Vireak shows how the sand filtration system works. However, it is not effective in removing contaminants, hence an urgent need for reliable and safe drinking water solutions. Photo taken on March 23, 2025. (Eung Sea)

A survey by researchers revealed that higher-income households in Preah Dak commune show a pronounced reliance on bottled water, with 50% consuming it as a primary drinking source. This trend suggests a correlation between socioeconomic status and perceptions of water safety and quality. Bottled water may be viewed as a safer and higher-quality alternative to groundwater, which reflects concerns about the quality of untreated or filtered groundwater.

Policy Engagement Manager at EnergyLab Asia Out Phalkun opined that solar technology is becoming more affordable and efficient, which offers a dual advantage. She went on to say that solar panels are getting lighter and more flexible, facilitating their use in remote areas where transporting heavy equipment can be difficult. "It is now increasingly feasible to extend the operating time of solar-powered water treatment, further benefiting communities," she said.

“Cambodia is rapidly increasing the number of solar-powered processes. From solar-water pumps for rice farmers, to solar-lights for community safety, there is so much potential to utilize free renewable energy and replace expensive diesel and grid electricity,” Phalkun added.

Utilizing solar energy for water purification offers significant environmental benefits, including reducing reliance on fossil fuels and minimizing greenhouse gas emissions. Solar-powered systems contribute to a cleaner and greener environment by harnessing renewable energy, which lowers the carbon footprint compared to traditional methods.



Environmental impacts, implementation challenges

“The costs of these systems continue to drop, making them accessible for more Cambodians. At the same time, the engineering skills required to properly design, install and maintain solar systems are increasing.”

However, these systems come with challenges that must be addressed to ensure their sustainability. Proper disposal of solar panels is critical, as damaged or improperly discarded panels can leach harmful chemicals like lead and cadmium into soil and water. By addressing these drawbacks through research and innovation, solar-powered water treatment systems can remain a vital tool in combating water scarcity while minimizing ecological impacts.



Empty 20-liter water bottles are laid on the stair tread, ready to be exchanged for new water supply. Photo taken on March 24, 2025. (Eung Sea)

Phalkun of EnergyLab Asia, states that several challenges hinder the widespread adoption of solar-powered water purification systems, which include high initial costs, lack of awareness, and limited technical expertise.

“While the overall cost of solar systems is low compared to the prevalent diesel-powered generators, the high upfront costs can often be out of reach for rural communities,” she says.

“This is a perfect opportunity for Cambodian banks to support rural development by offering tailored options that meet the needs of communities to boost sanitation, lower costs, and improve their lives,” she adds.

Phalkun notes that modern solar panels are often expected to operate for decades before they need to be replaced. “Regular maintenance of solar systems, cleaning, and correct installation all ensures that the technology operates for as long as possible”.

“Like all electronic equipment, it is important to properly recycle when damaged and obsolete, and there is an excellent opportunity for rural communities to safely collect and recycle the increasing number of solar panels as a good source of extra income,” Phalkun says.

Cambodia’s 2050 Net Zero commitment, embodied in the “Blue Skies & Net Zero 2050” campaign, aims to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 through comprehensive climate actions.

A key objective is to significantly increase solar energy utilization, as well as the expansion of renewables like hydro and biomass to 35% of the power mix by 2050, with solar contributing 12%. The strategy also emphasizes energy efficiency, grid modernization, and reducing coal dependency, supporting sustainable economic growth and job creation while combating climate change.

This story was written by Eung Sea as a part of MTT media-research collaboration fellowship and was published in CamboJA News: [Addressing Water Scarcity Via Solar-Powered Groundwater Treatment System in Rural Cambodia: Benefits and Challenges](#)



02

Community-based initiatives and multi-stakeholder approach: Key to addressing climate change for rural communities in Cambodia

Author: Eung Sea

Introduction

This article discusses the necessity of a community-based, inclusive, and well-funded approach, integrating technical expertise, to effectively address the impacts of climate change in rural Cambodia.



A Canal in Samkouy village, Stung Treng province, crucial for local irrigation, nearly dries up during the dry season, impacting water availability for agriculture. Photo taken on February 21, 2025. (Eung Sea)

STUNG TRENG, CAMBODIA — Led by a team of researchers from My Village Organization (MVi), a project was implemented and aimed to empower marginalized groups who take the brunt of climate change disasters along Mekong River to co-create disaster risk management plans, leveraging a multi stakeholder platform that brings together local leaders, NGOs, and government agencies by building local communities' resilience and ensuring local planning includes a community resilience with water-energy-climate nexus approach.

Researchers have found that indigenous groups also face heightened vulnerability, with all five surveyed villages experiencing climate change impacts. Local administrations lack budgets for climate adaptation as well as water-energy-climate nexus analyses and gender-inclusive strategies — further hindering holistic resilience planning. Addressing these gaps is critical to developing equitable, long-term solutions for climate-affected communities.

Kry Solany, a researcher who led the project, said MiV used Gender Equality, Disability & Social Inclusion (GEDSI) approach during the project implementation for “benefit to all the marginalized groups” including women, youths, people with disabilities, indigenous people, LGBTQI, and widows.

“[We aim] to increase understanding on marginalized community’s resilience (women, men, youths, people with disabilities, GLBTs and people from poor families) to climate change with water-energy-climate nexus approach with identified solutions for climate change among decision-makers and policy-makers at sub-national and national levels,” he says.



Dams and climate change impact on livelihood

Hydropower dams have had a dramatic effect on the Mekong river's natural cycle over the last two decades, resulting in water diversion, low water levels in the dry season, and depletion of the sediment carried by the river, further threatening fisheries, agriculture, ecosystems and biodiversity.

To date, there are over 160 operational dams along the Mekong River and its tributaries, including 13 dams on the mainstream. On top of that, 88 hydropower projects are operational in the Lower Mekong Basin, with an installed capacity exceeding 13,257 MW. All 745 dams were completed or under construction throughout the Mekong River Basin. China operates a cascade of 11 dams on the mainstream within its borders, with several more planned or under construction, according to Mekong Dam Monitor Annual Report: 2023-2024 by Stimson Centre.

Sixty-year-old Phe Vath is one of the estimated 1,000 people living across the four villages that make up Koh Snaeng commune, which straddles the Mekong river. He says many residents also used to go fishing, but most of them have given up this job, with approximately few families out of 100 still practicing it.

"The number of fish has drastically declined, not like before," says Vath. "In the past, we could do fishing to get fish for sale to supplement our income, but now we can hardly fish for cooking a meal."



Fishing boats are docked at the riverbank in Koh Snaeng village. Because of the fish decline, many residents have turned from fishing to farming and some have migrated for work in the city or other provinces. Photo taken on February 23, 2025. (Eung Sea)

Cambodia's fisheries are facing significant challenges, with a significant decline in fish catches. According to the Fisheries Administration, the total national fish catch dropped by 13.71% from 2019 to 2020, reaching 413,200 tons. This trend continued with a further 7.3% decline in 2021. Several factors contribute to this decline, including climate change, dams on the Mekong River, and illegal fishing. These issues not only affect fish stocks but also impact the livelihoods of fishing communities, who are experiencing reduced catches and economic hardship.



Impact of drought on livelihood

The impacts of climate change on the five research target villages in Stung Treng province also include experiences of floods and droughts, which have particularly affected community assets.

Droughts have severely disrupted Cambodia's agriculture-dependent economy, with rice production—central to livelihoods and food security—hit hardest. Between 2009 and 2018, droughts damaged over 235,000 hectares of land annually, affecting millions of people and destroying 20,000 hectares of rice fields in 2018 alone.

By 2050, climate impacts could reduce Cambodia's GDP by 10% without adaptation, with agriculture bearing the brunt. Erratic rainfall and rising temperatures exacerbate water shortages, triggering crop failures, food

insecurity, and farmer indebtedness, particularly among rain-fed communities. Droughts also strain rural infrastructure, such as irrigation systems, worsening conflicts over water resources.

40-year-old Sron Bophong plants various vegetables on her 300 square meters garden near her house in order to make an extra income to improve her family's livelihood. But she says she cannot plant it during the rainy season because these kinds of vegetables are less resilient to wet conditions. This comes to her concern during the dry season as the primary issue is the lack of adequate water for irrigation, which is crucial for crop growth. Without sufficient water, vegetables may wither and die.

"There is always a water shortage. It has always been a recurring issue as there is no water to pump from the canal to irrigate my vegetables," she bemoans. "Therefore I have to use a water supply from a private service provider."



Sron Bophong pouring water from the water tank, which is connected with a water system built by a private company, to water her lettuce, but the price is rather expensive. Photo taken on February 21, 2025. (Eung Sea)

To address drought impacts in Cambodia's agriculture, Cambodia should focus on expanding irrigation systems and adopting drought-resistant crops. Implement early warning systems and community training in water conservation and crop diversification. In terms of that, strengthening policies by integrating climate resilience into national plans is also important as well as enhancing infrastructure and community capacity can mitigate drought effects and stabilize rural economies.

Irrigation systems are crucial for Cambodian agriculture, as they reduce reliance on rainfall and enhance crop predictability. During dry seasons, irrigation allows farmers to cultivate multiple crops, improving productivity and livelihoods. However, many systems are outdated, necessitating upgrades to support the country's predominantly smallholder rice farmers.



A child walks toward his father, who is working under the scorching sun, drying chopped cassava pieces in their village in Stung Treng province. Photo taken on February 22, 2025. (Eung Sea)

Floods significantly impact Cambodia's economy and agriculture, causing substantial losses in rice production—a mainstay of rural livelihoods. Over 40,000 hectares of rice paddies were impacted in 2024, an increase from over 22,000 hectares the previous 2023, and reported 17 fatalities linked to flooding, further affecting food security and exacerbating poverty.

Many villagers urge for effective management for quick recovery from flood disasters involving comprehensive planning and preparation. Therefore, ensuring the availability of supplies, shelters, and emergency response systems is crucial.

This includes establishing early warning systems, conducting regular drills, and maintaining infrastructure like flood control reservoirs and detention basins. Collaboration among stakeholders, such as the Mekong River Commission, is vital for transboundary flood management. Efficient management also involves integrating climate change considerations into land-use planning and development controls to minimize flood risks. By combining these strategies, communities can enhance resilience and expedite recovery from flood events.

Researchers believe that integrating climate change adaptation into national development plans and securing funding for climate resilience projects are crucial. Strengthening community capacity through training and support for adaptation strategies is essential for long-term economic stability in the agriculture sector. By combining these measures, Cambodia can reduce flood-related economic losses and ensure sustainable agricultural development.

Multi-stakeholder approach is essential to mitigate climate change impacts

A multi-stakeholder approach for climate change disaster is crucial for communities in Cambodia, as it empowers them to address the complex challenges of rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, floods, and droughts resulting in damaging homes, infrastructure, crops, and fisheries, exacerbating food insecurity and livelihood losses, especially among marginalized communities.

This collaborative framework brings together indigenous leaders, NGOs, government agencies, and private sectors to integrate traditional knowledge with scientific data, ensuring inclusive decision-making.

Community engagement is also crucial for disaster management success. The success of any localized activity depends on the willingness and ability of the community and households to adopt supportive activities to improve the resilience. Technical assistance supports risk monitoring and planning. Strong stakeholder cooperation is essential for harmonious efforts that accelerate resilience and sustainability, ensuring effective localized activities and enhancing community capacity to adapt to disasters.

In Tonsang Village, Siem Bok Commune, Siem Bok District, a village in which researchers garnered data, there are 147 indigenous Kuy families. Mostly they cultivate rice, cassava, and work as a laborer to eke out a living. They say they receive support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) through My Village organization to encourage youth and women to raise awareness and engage themselves in addressing climate disaster.

While specific funding for empowering indigenous youth and women is not detailed in their village, UNDP indicates that UNDP has been working in partnership with the National Committee for Disaster Management (NCDM) since 2015 in building climate resilience across the country through “strengthening climate information and early warning systems”, “enhancing climate-responsive planning”, and “promoting local adaptation solutions”.

Kha Sros, a 65-year-old community leader in Tonsang, is at the forefront of addressing climate change and promoting community resilience in her village. However, her community faces significant agricultural challenges, primarily due to water scarcity. The villagers rely heavily on rainfall for irrigation, and their crops are frequently ravaged by pests. Despite efforts by NGOs to raise awareness about these issues, the villagers continue to struggle in finding practical solutions to these problems.

“We always face water scarcity to grow our crops which leads to financial loss for our livelihood. Most importantly, our crops are always destroyed by pests and we do not have any technical skills and support to tackle these issues,” Sros said.



Kha Sros pointed at the information board about a project supported by UNDP which aims to empower youth and women in decision making and involvement in finding solutions to climate change. Photo taken on February 22, 2025. (Eung Sea)

To address this, she urges relevant stakeholders to support the community in need of sustainable funding, technical expertise, and access to climate-resilient agricultural practices.

A Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) report identified key challenges in Cambodia’s agricultural innovation system, including land degradation and limited adoption of conservation agriculture (CA) due to high input costs, lack of machinery, and weak market incentives. It highlights the need for multi-stakeholder collaboration, capacity building, and institutional strengthening. Policy dialogue recommended improving CA input supply chains, market development, and extension services to promote sustainable, climate-resilient agriculture through innovation, coordination, and farmer support.

Villagers say they need achievable collaborations with local organizations and government support that could provide the necessary resources to enhance agricultural resilience and empower women in addressing these challenges effectively for their community.

However, a report called “Scaling up locally-led climate action in Cambodia” suggests that in Cambodia, community engagement from local authorities in addressing climate impacts is limited due to capacity constraints and competing development priorities. It adds that strengthening governance systems and integrating climate resilience into local planning can also bridge the adaptation gap.

Securing funding faces a challenge

Securing funding to address climate change issues in Cambodia, particularly at the sub-national level, is challenging due to several factors. Limited financial resources and technical capacity hinder local governments’ ability to integrate climate resilience into development plans. Less than 1% of commune budgets are allocated to climate-related investments, leaving a significant gap in addressing local needs. Additionally, accessing external climate finance from mechanisms like the Green Climate Fund involves complex eligibility criteria and lengthy processes.

Samkouy commune chief Khav Kham Orn shares this concern. She notes that communes like Samkouy in Stung Treng province receive limited funding, compelling them to seek additional resources from philanthropists and local initiatives to fulfill community needs while awaiting future national budget allocations. Furthermore, she highlights that funds specifically dedicated to addressing climate change impacts in her commune are particularly scarce, as most of the budget is focused on building essential infrastructure like roads.

“We have discussed with relevant parties to find ways to ensure that our commune has sufficient funds to address climate change impacts more broadly in the future, as these funds are currently very limited,” she says. She urges the national government to increase the development budget, as well as adding funding for climate change impact management to the budget allocation.



Samkouy commune chief Khav Kham Orn in Stung Treng province talking about challenges when it comes to the development budget in her commune. Photo taken on February 21, 2025. (Eung Sea)

Cambodia should enhance awareness among local governments about climate risks and provide training to build technical capacity. Strengthening the Commune/Sangkat Investment Fund and integrating climate resilience into local planning can help optimize fiscal transfers. Furthermore, mobilizing additional financial resources through innovative financing mechanisms and international partnerships is crucial. Scaling up successful incentive mechanisms like the Performance-Based Climate Resilience Grant can also support sub-national climate initiatives.



The importance of inclusivity and a gendered approach

Inclusive strategies incorporate insights from various stakeholders, including marginalized groups, to create more resilient and adaptable solutions. This ensures that resources and benefits are distributed fairly, reducing disparities and enhancing overall community resilience. By engaging diverse perspectives, communities can develop tailored responses that address specific local needs, fostering a more equitable and sustainable environment for all members.

Gendered approaches are essential because they recognize the disproportionate impacts of climate change on women. Women often face more pronounced consequences due to societal roles and limited access to resources. By integrating gender considerations into climate policies, women's participation in decision-making processes increases, leading to more effective and sustainable solutions. Empowering women in this context not only addresses gender disparities but also enhances the overall resilience of communities by leveraging diverse perspectives and skills.

Without inclusivity and gendered approaches, climate change strategies may overlook critical vulnerabilities and needs, leading to ineffective interventions that exacerbate existing inequalities. This can result in wasted resources and missed opportunities for sustainable development. By integrating these perspectives, Cambodia can develop more holistic and impactful climate resilience strategies that benefit all community members and foster long-term sustainability.

Bun Puthy, spokesperson for the Ministry of Women's Affairs, did not respond to inquiries about how the ministry includes vulnerable women's voices, their roles, or support in Cambodia's climate change initiatives.



Knowledge sharing and good practices among community themselves

Knowledge sharing and good practices among communities are vital in addressing climate change in Cambodia. Training and awareness-raising programs help communities prepare and respond effectively. Targeted initiatives for women, children, older people, and persons with disabilities ensure inclusivity. For instance, training women in leadership roles empowers them to participate in decision-making processes, enhancing community resilience. Such practices foster a culture of cooperation and mutual support, enabling communities to better mitigate and adapt to climate impacts. This inclusive approach ensures that all members contribute to and benefit from climate resilience efforts.



How the non-profit sector can make a change

In Koh Snaeng village several villagers have received funding from Oxfam in Cambodia to install solar panels and water tanks, along with training to enhance the community's capacity in solar operations and maintenance. However, this support is insufficient, and the community requires further assistance from all stakeholders to build resilience and ensure sustainable development.

Oxfam has been a key supporter of Cambodia's development, collaborating with local partners, community groups, government entities, and stakeholders nationwide. Their comprehensive programs encompass sustainable livelihoods, humanitarian aid, disaster preparedness, governance, civic engagement, agriculture, and climate change adaptation, aiming to build a resilient society free from poverty and injustice.



A water tank funded by Oxfam Cambodia is installed in Koh Snaeng village in Stung Treng province. Photo taken on February 23, 2025. (Eung Sea)

Organizations like My Village Organization, UNDP, Oxfam, Plan International, and many more have made significant contributions to disaster risk management and development initiatives in Cambodia. Bilateral and multilateral partnerships are essential for supporting Cambodia's national efforts in achieving inclusive development and disaster response goals. Donor assistance plays a critical role in helping the country manage the financial burdens associated with climate change and disasters.

Kry Solany says partnerships with NGOs not only help to garner financial support but also bring technical expertise and collaborative frameworks that can help Cambodia strengthen its disaster response and development strategies. By leveraging these partnerships, Cambodia can better address the impacts of climate change and enhance its resilience against future disasters, he adds.

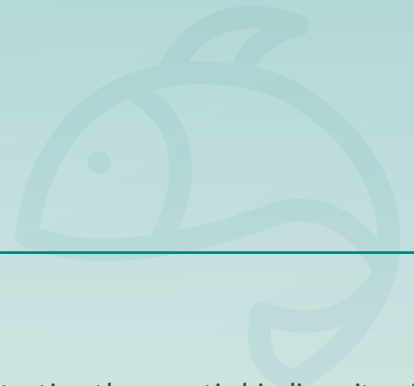
"The findings will also serve as concrete evidence for advocacy with commune administrations and district administrations to increase budget allocations for climate change impacts with a focus on the water-energy-climate nexus," he emphasizes.

This story was written by Eung Sea as a part of MTT media-research collaboration fellowship and was published in [CamboJA News: Community-based Initiatives and Multi-Stakeholder Approach: Key to Addressing Climate Change for Rural Communities in Cambodia](#)

03

Fish conservation in Luang prabang, Lao PDR

Author: Patithin Phetmeuangphuan



Introduction

This article highlights the critical role of fish conservation initiatives in protecting the aquatic biodiversity of Luang Prabang.



*Villagers learn how to process fish as an alternative livelihood.
Photo: Patithin Phetmeuangphuan.*



*Villagers learn about gender roles and leadership in fishery management.
Photo: Patithin Phetmeuangphuan.*



*Fish are released into the conservation zone.
Photo: Patithin Phetmeuangphuan.*



*The fish conservation zone.
Photo: Patithin Phetmeuangphuan.*

Nestled at the confluence of the Mekong and Khan rivers, Luang Prabang is a UNESCO World Heritage site celebrated for its breathtaking landscapes and rich cultural heritage. Yet, beneath its serene facade lies a pressing environmental issue: the decline of fish populations and aquatic biodiversity.

In response to this challenge, the establishment of fish conservation areas has emerged as a vital initiative, promising both ecological sustainability and enhanced community well-being.

Laos boasts an extensive network of rivers and lakes, teeming with a diverse array of aquatic species. For local communities, fishing is more than just a livelihood; it is a cornerstone of food security and economic stability.

However, overfishing, illegal fishing practices, increased population, pollution, habitat destruction, and climate change have led to a dramatic decrease in fish populations, threatening the very fabric of these communities. Fish conservation areas serve as critical sanctuaries for various species. Protecting these habitats is essential for maintaining biodiversity and ensuring the survival of threatened species.

By establishing designated fishing zones with regulated practices, local communities can sustainably manage their fish stocks. This approach not only prevents overfishing but also allows fish populations to recover, promoting healthier ecosystems.

As of 2025, Laos had 1,677 Fish Conservation Zones (FCZs), which includes 1,313 that are formally recognized by the government, and 364 unofficial FCZs that are managed solely by communities.

Recently, a 465-metre stretch of the Nam Xeuang River in Viengsavanh village, Luang Prabang City, became a fish conservation zone after receiving AUD50,000 in funding from the Australian Government, over the period September 2024 to August 2025.

The aims of the initiative are to reduce fishing during the spawning season, study the diversity of commercial fish and water quality in the Xeuang River, and develop legislation, policies and guidelines with the participation of villagers and government officials.

The Head of Viengsavanh village, Mr Somsanith Chanthavong, said in the past people could catch fish to sell to earn an income for their families, but in recent years the number of fish caught has dropped and it has been observed that some species of fish caught have already spawned and some fish they used to catch can no longer be found.

To tackle these challenges, a collaborative effort was launched involving villagers, Associate Professor, Dean of the Fishery Technology and Aquatic Resources Faculty at Maejo University in Chiang Mai, Thailand Dr Jongkol Promya; Director of the National Agriculture and Forestry College in Luang Prabang Dr Outhai Soukky, and Assistant Professor from Souphanouvong University, Luang Prabang Dr Timnoy Salitxay. Further support came from the Luang Prabang Provincial Department of Agriculture and Environment, and the Agriculture and Fishery Office police.

These stakeholders convened a series of meetings to jointly analyse the issues and strategies solutions, drawing upon government policies and village-level measures to restore water sources and promote sustainable conservation of the fishery.

This project, titled 'Enhancing Fishery Resilience and Managing Resources Sustainably under Climate Change Impact through Local Community Engagement in the Lao PDR', received a rapid response grant from the Stockholm Environment Institute based in Bangkok, with funding provided by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Dr Khajornkiat Srinuansom, Vice Dean for Academic Affairs and Academic Services at the Faculty of Fisheries Technology and Aquatic Resources, Maejo University, and project director, told the Vientiane Times that they want to register the project areas as a fish conservation zone. They would like to protect the fish and other aquatic species because they have decreased significantly in abundance compared to some years ago.

He said fish conservation zones serve as critical sanctuaries for various species, and protecting these habitats is essential for maintaining biodiversity and ensuring the survival of threatened species.

By establishing designated fishing zones with regulated practices, local communities can sustainably manage their fish stocks. This approach not only prevents overfishing but also allows fish populations to recover, promoting healthier ecosystems.

"This project will help improve and reduce bycatch during the spawning season, conserve the rich natural resources, and establish water management regulations. It will also be a learning experience for villagers, covering five villages with a total population of approximately 2,100 people. The villagers will be involved in improving the management of the rich Mekong River resources," Dr Khajornkiat said.

The project has also integrated Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) into its activities, reflecting its commitment to inclusivity. An initial gender scoping analysis in the community's fisheries was conducted to understand the diverse roles and challenges faced by all community members to ensure that efforts, particularly within fish conservation zones, deliver equitable benefits.

To bolster community leadership in sustainable fisheries, the project conducted a workshop on empowering women in the management and utilisation of conservation resources.

The workshop's goal was to empower the villagers by integrating gender equality principles into fish conservation efforts and by fostering strong community leadership. In an effort to discourage fishing in the conservation area, community needs were assessed, revealing villagers' desire for alternative income opportunities. As a result, the project will support local livelihoods by developing and training people in alternative occupations, thereby reducing pressure on freshwater resources.

This approach exemplifies a community-driven conservation approach that respects and addresses local livelihoods. Furthermore, the project will raise community awareness regarding the benefits of fish conservation and sustainable fisheries management at local high schools.

However, it may affect the livelihoods of villagers as fish is part of their staple diet and an important source of income. In addition, it is necessary to take into account the community's perspective on the benefits or harms, including gender and ethnic differences in the perception of those impacts.

Ms. Linda, a community member in the project area, described how the project has directly influenced livelihood strategies and empowered women to take leadership roles in conservation. She is optimistic about the outcomes of the project in that although the creation of conservation areas has impacted livelihoods, it has also opened up new opportunities. She also highlighted the crucial role of women in protecting and managing these areas for the community's benefit. "While these changes have impacted us, they have also created new opportunities, and women have played a key role in ensuring the protection and management of our conservation areas for the benefit of our community," Ms. Linda said.

Project staff also suggested the possibility of shifting from solely relying on fishing to diversifying livelihoods. Ms. Linda added: "The changes in our livelihoods have been significant. Fishing, which was once our main source of income, is no longer allowed due to the creation of conservation areas. However, we've adapted by turning to other occupations." Dr Khajornkiat said the conservation zone extends for only 465 meters because they don't want to have a great impact on villagers' livelihood as they traditionally rely heavily on fishing. He also stressed that the rules governing the protection of the fishery need to be stronger and enforced during the breeding season to ensure sustainability.

Community engagement is a further cornerstone of successful conservation efforts. Involving local residents in the management of these areas fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility toward natural resources. Education and awareness programs can empower communities to adopt sustainable practices, transforming them into stewards of their environment. A deputy village chief, Mrs Kongphet Phongsavath, was clearly excited about the project and expressed her enthusiasm about the establishment of the conservation area and its role in promoting sustainable tourism. "I am truly proud of the project to set up the conservation zone in our village. With the support we received, we were able to establish the area as a conservation site, and it will become a key part of promoting sustainable tourism," he said.

Despite the promise of fish conservation areas, several challenges continue to threaten aquatic life in Laos. Pollution from agricultural runoff, industrial waste, and untreated sewage poses significant risks to fish habitats. Furthermore, the construction of dams along the Mekong River disrupts migration patterns and alters natural habitats, impacting both fish populations and the communities that depend on them. Climate change adds another layer of complexity, with rising temperatures and changing precipitation patterns affecting river flows and water quality.

However, the establishment of fish conservation areas in Luang Prabang holds great promise for local communities. Sustainable fishing practices will ensure that fish stocks are replenished, providing consistent income for fishers and their families. Moreover, fishing is deeply intertwined with the cultural identity of many communities in Laos; by protecting fish populations, these conservation efforts help preserve traditional ways of life. Healthy aquatic ecosystems are better equipped to withstand environmental stressors, enabling communities to build resilience against climate change and other challenges.

As Luang Prabang navigates the complexities of modern development while striving to preserve its natural heritage, fish conservation areas represent a vital step forward.

By prioritising sustainable practices and safeguarding aquatic biodiversity, Laos can ensure that its rivers continue to thrive for generations to come. The journey toward ecological balance is not merely an environmental necessity; it is an opportunity to strengthen communities and honour the cultural richness that defines this remarkable region.

This story was written by Patithin Phetmeuangphuan as a part of MTT media-research collaboration fellowship and was published in the Vientiane Times: [Fish conservation in Luang Prabang](#)



04

Luang Prabang villagers join forces in sustainable fisheries management

Author: Patithin Phetmeuangphuan

Introduction

This article details a project in Viengsavanh village, Luang Prabang, successfully establishing a fish conservation zone and alternative livelihoods, ensuring sustainable fisheries management despite climate change.



The project team, local residents and authorities gather for the project closing ceremony.

Following a heartwarming demonstration of community spirit and environmental stewardship, a year-long project to build community capacity in the management of fisheries under the impact of climate change came to a close in August.

The closing ceremony was the culmination of a collaborative effort between the Northern Agricultural and Forestry College at Mae Cho University in Thailand and Souphanouvong University in Laos, together with the Livestock and Fisheries Sector of the Luang Prabang provincial Agriculture and Environment Department.

Under the venture, a fish conservation zone was created in the Xuang River in Viengsavanh village, Luang Prabang. The overall aim of the project was to encourage village residents to manage their fish stocks sustainably, while also promoting alternative livelihoods and easing the harmful impacts of climate change.



Fingerlings are released into the fish conservation area.

Over the past year, the community came together to establish the “Vang sa nguan”, protecting fish breeding grounds and fostering sustainable fisheries management. The project also introduced alternative livelihoods, such as processing fish and bamboo shoots, to reduce direct fishing and promote economic stability.

The empowerment of women and future generations was a key focus of the project, aiming to include more women and members of smaller ethnic groups in decision-making and resource management. The project also instilled a sense of responsibility in children and students, teaching them about the importance of resource conservation for future sustainability.

As the project came to a close, the residents of Viengsavanh village expressed their commitment to continuing their efforts in sustainable fisheries management and environmental conservation.

At the closing event, village head Mr Somsanith Chanthavong said the villagers’ way of life is closely related to fishing but they struggled to bring in a decent catch after many fish species disappeared from the river. Consequently, he, together with the villagers as a community, applied to create a fish conservation zone in the village before other species of aquatic creatures also went missing. “We now have a fish conservation zone stretching over 465 metres, where all aquatic creatures can stay safe and breed. But most importantly, the villagers now understand the importance of aquatic life. They are better informed about which fish it is illegal to catch and are keen to protect them,” Mr Somsanith said.

Vice Dean for Academic Affairs and the Academic Services Faculty of Fisheries Technology and Aquatic Resources at Maejo University, Dr Khajornkiat Srinuansom, said the project had three main aims. Firstly, to teach local people how to manage their fisheries resources sustainably, while also recommending alternative livelihoods and reducing the impact of climate change. Villagers learnt about the best times to fish and when not to fish because, with climate change, fish might breed earlier or later than usual, so people must be aware of when not to fish.



Fingerlings are released into the fish conservation area



A project team visits a local market to observe villagers at work.

Secondly, the project encouraged villagers to comply with and improve the rules around protecting the fish conservation zone, as full community cooperation, support and understanding of the rules is essential for the success of the initiative. Lastly, the project introduced alternative livelihoods, such as processing fish and bamboo shoots, to reduce direct fishing and promote economic stability. Most protection projects affect people's lifestyle because they rely on the the money they earn from the sale of the fish they catch and the animals they hunt, so alternative ways of earning a living need to be adopted.



Villagers learn to process fish and bamboo shoots for sale.

Assistant Professor Dr Tinoy Silidxay said gender equality was one important focus that the project never lost sight of. Project staff were careful to ensure that everyone, including children and elderly people, shared in all conservation activities. Workshops were held about community leadership and gender equality, with attendees including people with disabilities and members of smaller ethnic groups, so that everyone participated in decision making and receive shared benefits. Schoolchildren were also taught about the importance of fish conservation through quizzes and the addition of fingerlings to the river to replenish stocks.

Head of the Women's Union at the Northern Agriculture and Forestry College, Ms Chanthaphone Phondala, explained the possibilities for alternative livelihoods to the villagers. Two training sessions were given on the processing of fish, pork and bamboo shoots for sale, which are viable ways to earn an income because these products are readily available locally. "After the training we are now working more closely together and have set up a group to process fish, pork and bamboo products. Some people are doing this to earn an income for the village as a whole," local resident Miss Noy Chandala said.

Another villager, Mr Khamsing Chuangphanch, now aged 50, said he grew up in the village and loved catching fish. There used to be a lot of fish, especially around breeding time. He and his friends sometimes used illegal devices because they didn't realize the long-term impact they could have on fish and other aquatic creatures, but now they see that there aren't enough fish and that many species have disappeared altogether. But now they understand the situation, the need to comply with the regulations around fishing, and the importance of fish conservation areas.

The Mekong River flows through Laos for nearly 1,900 kilometres, making it the country's widest and largest river. It serves as a vital source of livelihood, culture, and biodiversity for the Lao people. The Xuang is a small river that flows into the Mekong and the fish conservation zone it now contains is 300-400 hundred metres from the Mekong.

This story was written by Patithin Phetmeuangphan as a part of MTT media-research collaboration fellowship and was published in Vientiane Times: [Luang Prabang villagers join forces in sustainable fisheries management](#)

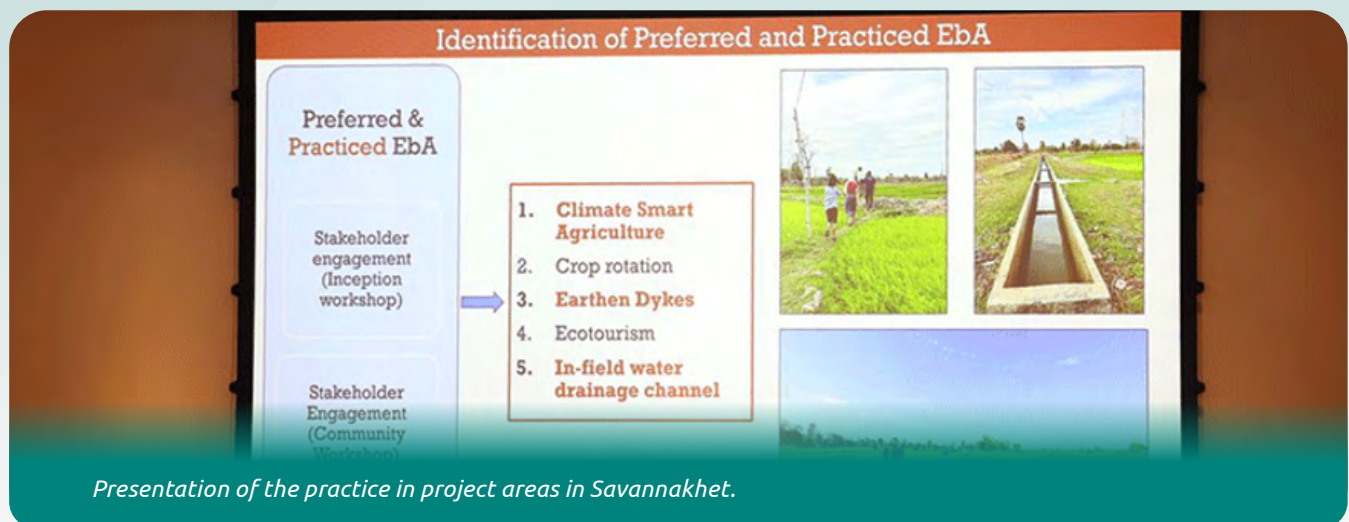


A roadmap for agricultural resilience in Savannakhet

Author: Keoxomphou Sakdavong

Introduction

This article outlines a community-driven roadmap for enhancing agricultural resilience in Savannakhet, Laos, using Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EbA) informed by local knowledge and research.



In the heart of Laos, Savannakhet province has long been celebrated as the nation's "rice bowl". To drive through the province is to see a sea of green—paddy fields stretching toward the horizon, fueled by generations of agricultural tradition.

But today, if you sit with the farmers who work this land, the conversation quickly turns from the beauty of the harvest to the uncertainty of the sky.

The weather, they say, is no longer an old friend they can trust. The "typical" seasons that their grandfathers relied on have vanished. The rain might not come in June when the seedlings are thirsty, yet it might arrive in a deluge in December, drowning the harvest just as it's ready.



Lead project researcher, Ms. Oulavanh Sinsamphanh, visits a project field in Savannakhet province.

Lead project researcher, Ms. Oulavanh Sinsamphanh, visits a project field in Savannakhet province.

This isn't just a change in the weather; it's a fundamental shift in how life works in Savannakhet. For farmers, climate change isn't a headline in a newspaper—it is the flood in their kitchen and the crack in their dry soil.

However, a new narrative is taking shape. It's a story not of defeat, but of a clever, community-driven roadmap to a more stable future.

This roadmap comes from a year-long research project titled “Strengthening climate resilience of agricultural livelihoods in Savannakhet province”.

Supported by the Australian Government (DFAT) and led by the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) alongside local and regional universities, the project has found that the secret to surviving a changing climate lies in one simple idea: working with nature, rather than trying to beat it.



The power of “Ecosystem-based adaptation”

To the scientists, it’s called Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EbA). To a farmer, it simply means using the natural world—the trees, the soil, the hills, and the water—as a shield.

Ms.Oulavanh Sinsamphanh, a lead researcher on the project, explains that this isn’t about bringing in expensive, foreign technology that the locals don’t understand. Instead, it’s about looking at what already works and making it stronger.

“Some of these activities have been done by the local people for years,” she says. “It works well because it matches what they actually need.”

The research team—a partnership between the National University of Laos, Kasetsart University, and the Asian Institute of Technology—spent a year listening to these farmers.

From those conversations, 10 key findings emerged from the study, outlining practical EbA strategies that local communities can adopt to build resilience.

These are:



Afforestation



Agroforestry



Climate-smart agriculture



Crop rotation



Use of flood-resistant crops



Construction of earthen dykes



Development of ecotourism



In-field water channels



Integrated crop-livestock systems



Intercropping techniques

Climate smart agriculture, earthen dykes and in-field water drainage channels are initially implemented in the area.



Bridging the gap: From wisdom to action

The beauty of this plan is that much of it is built on “local wisdom”. Ms.Oulavanh points out that things like earthen dykes and water channels are already being built by villagers using their own hands and knowledge.

“It is an effective method,” she notes, “but it is not sufficient. They need it more.”

Ms.Oulavanh meets with farmers in Savannkhet province to ensure that practices are based on local preferences.

The farmers told the researchers that they have the will, but lack the resources. They need help scaling up.

They need “sub-tunnels” to bring water to fields that are miles away from the main river. They need the government to help them map out “zoning”, deciding which land is best for rice and which land should be used for other crops that don’t mind getting their feet wet.



A call to action for the future

The research provides more than just a list of farming tips; it provides a mandate for action for the government, NGOs, and international partners. The findings give reason to be optimistic about the potential of ecosystem-based adaptation measures to enhance climate resilience in agricultural communities. However, to realize this potential at scale, the policy brief recommends the following:



Mainstream EbA into national and subnational development planning, including agriculture, water, and natural resource management strategies.



Bridge implementation gaps through locally led planning and budgeting, ensuring that community knowledge informs policy and that funds reach community initiatives that plan, implement, and benefit from EbA.



Embed GEDSI principles in climate adaptation, supported by inclusive training, improved policy design, and accountability mechanisms.



Strengthen multi-level governance and coordination, enabling synergy between EbA and infrastructure investments for long-term water and agricultural resilience.



Sustained investment, inclusive approaches, and cross-sector collaboration will be essential to safeguard rural livelihoods and ecosystems in the face of a changing climate.



Ms. Oulavanh meets with farmers in Savannakhet province to ensure that practices are based on local preferences.



The road ahead

As the sun sets over the fields of Savannakhet, the challenge remains great, but the path forward is clearer than ever. By combining the scientific rigor of international research with the deep-rooted knowledge of the Lao farmer, we can protect the “rice bowl” of the nation.

This is to ensure that when the next unpredictable storm comes, the farmers of Savannakhet aren’t just surviving—they are thriving. This is a call to action for everyone to invest in the soil, the water, and the people who feed the country.

This story was written by Keoxomphou Sakdavong as a part of MTT media-research collaboration fellowship and was published in Vientiane Times: [A roadmap for agricultural resilience in Savannakhet](#)

06

From skepticism to action: Savannakhet farmers embrace carbon credit scheme

Author: Keoxomphou Sakdavong

Introduction

This article explores how Lao rice farmers are embracing sustainable agriculture to generate carbon credits.



A rice field used in the carbon credit project in Xaybouly district, Savannakhet province.

“How do we actually sell carbon credits? Do we have to put the air from our rice fields into a tube and sell it?” a farmer in Champhon district, Savannakhet province, named Ms. Nang, asked with a hearty chuckle. Her question is typical of most people’s reaction to carbon credit trading, a concept so new in Laos that it baffles educated city dwellers, let alone those in rural villages who continue to engage in age-old traditions. Nang was not the only person to misunderstand the concept; her reaction was shared by most of the people in her village when they were introduced to the scheme. The slender plastic tubes they were shown only added to the mystery, leading to the amusing misconception about selling “rice field air”.

However, in the quiet fields of Xaybouly and Champhon districts, rice farmers are on the frontline of a pioneering carbon credit initiative, transforming skepticism into a powerful local force for national and international climate resilience.

A few months ago, I accompanied a team on a visit to the two districts in Savannakhet province, observing a sight that defied conventional wisdom. Farmers were inserting plastic tubes deep into seemingly dry rice fields, not to irrigate, but to monitor. This deliberate drying of fields, known as “Alternate Wetting and Drying”, is a scientifically proven method to reduce methane emissions – a potent greenhouse gas – that arise from rice cultivation. This innovative practice forms the core of a new carbon credit sale contract with a foreign entity, marking a significant departure from traditional farming. The tubes, far from collecting “air”, serve as critical monitors of underground water levels, ensuring the rice receives just enough moisture to thrive while minimising the time it spends submerged in water. This precise water management is key to cutting down on harmful gas emissions. This new approach to their age-old practice was initially met with disbelief on the part of villagers.

“When the project team explained the system and we started putting it into practice, we then started to understand it better,” Nang said, highlighting the importance of persistent engagement and education. A researcher and key figure behind the project, Ms Oulavanh Sinsamphanh, acknowledged the challenges. “This is an innovative scheme and it’s quite hard to get people to understand what we’re trying to do and participate. But we are trying hard and have shown them how they can benefit.”



A tube is inserted into the ground to monitor the underground water level. The rice is not submerged in water but the ground still has sufficient moisture, in line with the Alternate Wetting and Drying method.



Mr Inpong, a farmer in Xaybouly district, Savannakhet province, talks about the Alternate Wetting and Drying practice used for carbon credit sale.

While the exact carbon credit payments are still being calculated on an annual basis, Ms. Oulavanh is optimistic. “As we have only just started, the calculations concerning carbon credits have not been worked out in detail yet. But when the villagers receive some payments, I’m sure more people will want to participate.” The benefits extend beyond potential future payments and rice growers are already experiencing tangible improvements in their daily lives. “The villagers not only earn money from the sale of carbon credit; they also save money on buying water for their rice fields in the dry season,” Ms. Oulavanh said. By regulating water use, the Alternate Wetting and Drying practice reduces the need for constant irrigation, which is a significant cost saving, especially in areas prone to drought like Savannakhet.

“I’m happy to be involved in the project,” said Mr. Inpong, a farmer in Saybouly district. “Traditionally, we always have water in our rice fields, but this new system is good. Even though we don’t have water in the fields on some days, the rice keeps on growing and we save money on water.” This grassroots initiative is not an isolated effort. It’s part of a national strategy to position Laos as a significant player in the global carbon market. The project is a collaboration with an Indian company, leveraging international demand for carbon credits. As Ms. Oulavanh says, “The carbon credit market is quite large internationally as developing and developed nations, and major corporates, have agreed to buy carbon credits from countries as part of their social business responsibilities.”



Ms. Oulavanh meets with farmers in Savannakhet province to ensure that practices are based on local preferences.

The Lao government has been building a robust framework to facilitate such initiatives by issuing decrees such as the Forest Carbon Management and most recently the Carbon Credit decree, laying the legal groundwork for managing carbon markets, attracting investment, and ensuring fair benefit-sharing from carbon sequestration activities. While forestry remains the cornerstone of the scheme, Laos is increasingly exploring carbon credit opportunities in its energy and agriculture sectors, demonstrating a holistic approach to sustainable development. The journey experienced by the Savannakhet rice farmers embodies the spirit of this transformation. From initial bewilderment about “selling air”, they are now active participants in a global effort to combat climate change. Their willingness to adapt traditional practices, learn new methods, and embrace scientific innovation showcases the incredible potential of local communities to drive wider impacts.

This story was written by Keoxomphou Sakdavong as a part of MTT media-research collaboration fellowship and was published in Vientiane Times: [From skepticism to action: Savannakhet farmers embrace carbon credit scheme](#)



07

Savannakhet strengthens agricultural resilience through climate adaptation research

Author: Keoxomphou Sakdavong

Introduction

This article illustrates how research-driven solutions are securing Savannakhet's agricultural future.



Savannakhet province, the largest in Laos and a key agricultural hub, is increasingly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Frequent floods and droughts have taken a toll on local livelihoods, with about 78 percent of the province's rice cultivation relying solely on rainfall.

To help address these challenges, a group of Lao and regional researchers carried out a one-year research project supported by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The project was part of the Mekong Thought Leadership and Think Tanks Network Program (MTT), and involved partners like the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI), National University of Laos, Kasetsart University Chulermphrakiat, Sakonnakhon Province Campus, and the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT).

Last week, government officials, researchers, and local representatives from Savannakhet came together in Vientiane for a final workshop. The event gave them a chance to share the results of the project and discuss how these findings can be used to create better policies and support for farmers facing climate impacts.

The project, called "Strengthening climate resilience of agricultural livelihoods in Savannakhet province through Participatory Ecosystem-based Adaptation", looked at how local communities can use nature-based solutions to cope with climate change. These solutions are known as ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA) and involve working with nature instead of harming it.

Ten key findings emerged from the study outlining practical EbA strategies that local communities can adopt to build resilience. These include: (1) Afforestation, (2) Agroforestry, (3) Climate-smart agriculture, (4) Crop rotation, (5) Use a flood-resistant crops, (6) Construction of earthen dykes, (7) Development of ecotourism, (8) In-field water channels, (9) Integrated crop-livestock systems and (10) Intercropping techniques.

“Savannakhet is a key province under the national agricultural development strategy, contributing around a quarter of the country’s rice production.” said Project Advisor and Dean of the Faculty of Environmental Sciences at the National University of Laos, Assoc. Prof. Kaisone Phengsopha.

“This workshop brings together boundary partners from regional, national, and local levels to find ways to help communities build better livelihoods and adapt to climate change, especially through ecosystem-based approaches. Moving forward, stronger collaboration is needed among educational institutions, international organisations, and government agencies at both central and local levels to continue supporting these efforts,” he added.

Project Lead and Chair of Disaster Preparedness, Mitigation and Management from Asian Institute of Technology, Assoc. Prof Indrajit Pal, said the project focused on involving communities and understanding their real needs. “The ecosystem approach is important because people and nature are connected. This research can help shape good policies and support local livelihoods.”

Ms. Sushmita Mandal, Senior Research Fellow from SEI, also highlighted the importance of the work. “Agriculture remains the bread and butter of almost all countries in our region. In these times for climate uncertainty, we must strengthen our food systems through solutions that work with nature—not against it.”

“When I visited Savannakhet in 2022, I saw first-hand how unpredictable rainfall and scarce water resources are making life harder for farmers. Today, we are one step closer to finding real workable solutions,” she added.

Deputy governor of Champhone district, Savannakhet province, Mr Khamta, said the province has received support from the government and development partners, which helps villages recover from disasters and adapt to climate change. “We still face many challenges, but access to water and new farming techniques are helping. The project’s suggestions are useful, but we need more support to make them happen in all areas,” he said.

Officials from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment also attended event and share the current policies and strategies for climate adaptation. Representative from the private sector, including finance and technology companies, also joint the discussions.

The project is one of several Rapid Response Projects under the MTT program. These projects aim to quickly provide knowledge that can help governments and communities make better decisions about climate change and development.

As Savannakhet continues to face the climate risks, efforts like this research project are giving hope to local communities, offering practical ways to protect their livelihoods and build a more resilient future.

This story was written by Keoxomphou Sakdavong as a part of MTT media-research collaboration fellowship and was published in the Vientiane Times: [Savannakhet strengthens agricultural resilience through climate adaptation research](#)

08

Documentary: Our river

Author: Theerayut Weerakham



Introduction

This documentary explores the lives of communities along the lower Songkhram River, shedding light on the interconnected ecosystems of this globally significant wetland.



“Our River” is a 12-minute documentary film that takes viewers on a journey to explore and listen to the voices of local communities along the lower Songkhram River which is an area recognized as a globally significant wetland. The documentary invites the audience to observe the lives of people who depend on the Songkhram River, from Ban Pak Yam to the river’s mouth where it joins the Mekong. It highlights the interconnected ecosystems that shape and sustain this way of life. The film was screened at the Mekong-ASEAN Environmental Week.



Watch on YouTube: [Our River](#)
(2025 / Thailand / 12 min) Eng-Thai subtitles.

This documentary was produced by Theerayut Weerakham as a part of MTT media-research collaboration fellowship.

09

Beyond the light: The hidden costs of small hydropower

Author: Kieu Mai

Introduction

This article examines the negative environmental and socioeconomic impacts of small hydropower projects, particularly on downstream communities, and advocates for fairer water resource sharing and more effective mitigation mechanisms.

The light from small hydropower plants is not enough to dispel the shadows of drought, crop failure, and poverty downstream. When benefits are not distributed equally, the burden of more equitable water sharing cannot rest solely on the shoulders of businesses.



Water is the lifeblood of every community, not only nourishing fertile fields but also providing abundant aquatic resources and maintaining natural balance.

Thanks to water, the soil is soft for sowing seeds, streams are filled with fish and shrimp, and forests remain lush. With water, hydropower projects bring light to villages, allowing children to study under electric lamps and providing people with opportunities to access a more modern way of life.

“In the past, residents in our village only used oil lamps. Since the hydropower project was established, we have had electricity, making life more convenient. Social welfare issues have been supported by the businesses, leading to many positive changes in our lives,” said Ms. Dao Thi Lieu, Head of Cua Rao 1 Village, Xa Luong Commune, Tuong Duong District, Nghe An Province.

However, the dams have also caused streams to dry up, fish and shrimp populations to dwindle, and downstream fields to gradually lose their fertility. In the context of climate change, with extreme weather events occurring more frequently, the impacts of small hydropower projects are becoming increasingly complex, sometimes exceeding the predictions of stakeholders, thereby increasing the challenges of prevention and risk mitigation. These negative impacts necessitate a mechanism for broader, more timely information sharing, along with a clear action plan defining specific tasks for each participant. This framework must be monitorable and evaluable to ensure a more equitable distribution of water resources.

This is not just a solution for a single project, but a lesson for hundreds of small hydropower facilities across Vietnam. According to the Vietnam's National Power Development Plan for the 2021 - 2030 period, with a vision toward 2050 (Power Development Plan VIII), small hydropower continues to be a power generation source with a planned capacity increase of nearly 4,500 MW between 2023 and 2030.

Furthermore, addressing the negative impacts of small hydropower on local livelihoods is essential to ensuring a more just energy transition as small hydropower is categorized as a form of renewable energy.



Small hydropower continues to be a power generation source for Vietnam.

Photo: Kieu Mai



In the shadow of small hydropower

Representing one of the communities affected by the Xoong Con hydropower plant in Nghe An province, Ms. Lieu noted that many villagers have lost land, forests, and cultivated fields due to the plant's operations. Additionally, aquatic resources have declined compared to the past.

Data from the study "Promoting equitable water resource sharing for ethnic minority communities downstream of small hydropower plants" points to the same trend.

Crop yields have dropped by 20-40%, and water shortages can further reduce productivity by 40 - 60%. Simultaneously, natural aquatic resources from shrimp, fish, and snails to the high-value Mat fish have declined in both quantity and biodiversity, eroding traditional income sources and directly impacting the community's food security.

That means the livelihoods of residents have become highly vulnerable to changes in water sources and the environment because the population primarily relies on farming, animal husbandry, manual labor, and aquaculture, stated Dr. Ho Thi Phuong, a lecturer at Vinh University and author of the study.

In addition, during the rainy season, hydropower operations have exacerbated flooding in fields, ponds, and gardens along streams downstream of the dams, while also causing severe bank erosion in many villages within Tam Thai commune of Tuong Duong District.

These changes have forced men to take on more strenuous tasks, such as searching for irrigation water and mitigating drought, while women bear a heavy economic burden due to the lack of available labor and limited opportunities to engage in alternative livelihoods.

Representing her community, Ms. Lieu shared that when harvests fail, many people are forced to work far from home or even take out bank loans to afford working abroad. "For women, the lack of clean water for daily use forces them to travel further to find springs and streams."



More equitable water sharing

To reduce the negative impacts of hydropower on livelihoods, Ms. Lieu suggests that stakeholders should provide clean drinking water to residents such as by digging bore wells and support families in transitioning their livelihoods, such as by providing terrestrial seeds and livestock.

Mr. Bui Dai Nghia, Deputy Director of MCK Investment and construction JSC, the developer of the Xoong Con hydropower project, said: “The business understands the project’s impacts on the lives of the local people. We have been implementing many solutions to bring about more balanced benefits for all parties.”

He added that the company has made efforts to minimize impacts from the hydropower project, even though the business itself faces operational difficulties and has not yet become profitable. On average, a small hydropower project takes about 10 years to recoup its investment, while the Xoong Con plant only began operations at the end of 2018.

The process of disseminating information to residents to ensure timely solutions also faces challenges, as communication gaps still occur, leading to unfortunate consequences.

In the coming time, the company representative stated that MCK will continue to engage more closely with residents through local authorities and will continue to support the community in building welfare facilities and promoting livelihood transitions.

At a workshop held in Nghe An in April this year, Mr. Nguyen Huu Hien, Vice Chairman of the People’s Committee of Tuong Duong District, proposed an action plan for more equitable benefit sharing to enhance stakeholder consensus at the Xoong Con project, contributing to the reform of small hydropower development policy in Vietnam.

He emphasized that cooperation in water resource sharing is an interdisciplinary task, a responsibility shared by commune and district-level authorities, the business sector, and the communities of villages and communes downstream.

In particular, the Provincial People’s Committee needs to allocate funds from hydropower tax revenue to quickly provide water for drought relief in agricultural production, while relevant departments and agencies must work with businesses to research and update flood and drought maps.

“Researching and evaluating the impacts of hydropower, as well as equitably sharing the benefits of water resources downstream of projects, is absolutely essential to ensuring sustainable development for the community and protecting the environment,” Mr. Hien emphasized.

This story was written by Kieu Mai as a part of MTT media-research collaboration fellowship and was published in TheLEADER: [Khoảng tối sau ánh sáng từ thủy điện nhỏ](#)

10

Women keep the ‘rhythm of life’ amidst the saline intrusion season in the Mekong Delta

Author: Pham Nguyen Tuan An & Nguyen Thi Anh Thu

Introduction

Once seen as vulnerable, many women in the Mekong Delta now play central roles in water conservation efforts and in helping their families adapt to climate change.

In early March, Nguyen Thi Diem Suong, 36, placed two 2,000-liter water tanks in the yard of her home in Tich Phu Hamlet, Vinh Long province. As tidal shifts and salinity become more severe each year, collecting and storing rainwater has become part of her routine.

“From the 14th to the 18th of the month, we stop watering crops,” she explains. “If we use salty water, it burns the roots. The only option is to rely on what we’ve saved.”

Suong grew up in a salt-prone area of Thanh Phu district, Ben Tre province. That early experience prepared her for life in Tra On, where saltwater intrusion is now a seasonal certainty.



*Diem Suong spent years in Ben Tre before moving to Trà Ôn with her husband.
Photo: An Pham*



No longer just passive victims of climate change

After moving to Vinh Long in 2016, Suong recalls long queues for water deliveries back in her hometown. “Whenever the tanker came, it felt like a celebration - like your mom coming home from the market,” she says. “But sometimes you’d wait over an hour and still get nothing. We spent 400,000 to 500,000 VND (~19 USD) a month for water, sometimes for four or five months a year.”

Her family was not classified as poor, but every period of salinity brought disruption. Even simple tasks like bathing required rationing; freshwater had to be prioritized for laundry and crop irrigation.

Women are typically the first to feel the impact. “In the Mekong Delta, women manage the water, cook, care for children and the elderly. When the water turns salty, they’re the first to be affected,” says Nguyen Thi Tham, Vice President of the Vinh Long Women’s Union.



*On May 9, Tham shared insights on climate change with members of the Tich Thien Women’s Union.
Photo: An Pham*

In households where young men migrate for work, women manage both the home and the fields. “Climate change doesn’t just affect livelihoods. It touches women’s reproductive health and basic hygiene,” Tham notes. And yet, in these conditions, women have not remained passive. They have adapted quietly, often without recognition, adjusting daily habits and sharing practical knowledge with others.



From household adaptation to community sharing

Today, women like Suong aren’t just adapting; they’re teaching. In the rainy season, she plants cassava, which needs a lot of water. In the dry season, she switches to watermelons or peanuts - less water-intensive crops that help her maintain an annual income of several tens to hundreds of millions of dong, regardless of water shortages.

She’s an active member of the Tich Thien Women’s Union, where members meet monthly to exchange energy- and water-saving strategies.

Elsewhere, women are taking similar initiatives. In Soc Trang, they operate cooperatives focused on sustainable shrimp farming. In Ca Mau, a UNDP-backed project is helping women transition from rice cultivation to climate-resilient aquaculture.



*Over 30 Women's Union officers from climate-affected provinces received training on water–energy–climate interlinkages.
Photo: Courtesy of the interviewee*

These efforts are being reinforced by scientific research. In February 2025, a project titled “Building the Resilience and Adaptability of Women’s Unions to Address Water-Energy-Climate Challenges in the Mekong Delta (WEC)” launched in four provinces Vinh Long, Soc Trang, Ben Tre, and Tra Vinh. The project is led by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nguyen Thanh Binh and Dr. Nguyen Anh Minh from Cần Thơ University.

The aim: to train Women’s Union officers in understanding the WEC nexus and communicating these concepts to the public.

“The key is not just delivering knowledge, but helping people understand it clearly so they can apply it,” says Dr. Binh. “We focus on building foundational awareness, not teaching complex techniques, so that women feel confident to act.”



*Dr. Nguyen Thanh Binh hopes this model connecting local actors and researchers will expand in future.
Photo: Courtesy of the interviewee*

Following the training, core members of the Women's Union are now leading local information sessions. In Vinh Long, around 100 participants attended between late April and early May. Similar activities are planned for May and June in other provinces.

"Universities have theoretical knowledge. Women's Unions are close to the people," says Tham. "When the two work together, knowledge doesn't stay on paper. It reaches kitchens, rain barrels, and daily routines. Our aim is for women to learn, act, and pass on what they've learned."

The outcomes are visible. From tree-planting for wave reduction to home-based waste recycling, water-saving, and power reduction, women are transforming basic knowledge into local action.

"We never had these kinds of classes before," says Le Cuc, a Women's Union member in Tich Thien. "But once we learned, we saw that many solutions cost nothing, just attention and mutual reminders."

Solutions may start in research labs, but success depends on women like Suong and Tham, who pass them along in quiet, consistent ways that shape how families live and adapt.

Far from passive observers, women across the Mekong Delta are sustaining life - steadily, quietly, and together - amid the creeping tides of change.

This story was written by Pham Nguyen Tuan An and Nguyen Thi Anh Thu as part of MTT media-research collaboration fellowship and was published in VietNamNet: [Phụ nữ giữ 'nhịp sống' giữa mùa ngập mặn ở đồng bằng Sông Cửu Long](#)



Profiles



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Eung Sea

Eung Sea obtained a bachelor's in Media Arts and Studies from the University of Cambodia. He is a freelance journalist based in Cambodia, focusing on human rights, the environment, and social issues. He primarily contributes to CamboJA News, one of the country's few remaining independent media outlets. He has also reported for Mekong Eye, Dialogue Earth, and The World. With a strong commitment to social justice, He loves to report on the challenges communities face in Cambodia, particularly regarding land rights and environmental degradation. In his work, he highlights how governmental policies and corporate interests can adversely affect the livelihoods of local populations. He was selected for MTT Media-Research Collaboration on two research projects: Addressing Water Scarcity through Groundwater Use: Development of Solar-Powered Groundwater Treatment System for Remote Area of Cambodia and Assessing the Communities' Resilience to Climate Change: A Case Study-Climate Nexus: A Case Study in Mekong Sub- Conference Marginalized Commune Province, Cambodia. By collaborating with researchers, he believes that his reports will drive a positive change, and he can effectively communicate complex climate issues, ultimately promoting informed dialogue and policy action to address the pressing environmental challenges faced by Mekong communities.



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Patithin Phetmeuangphuan

Patithin Phetmeuangphuan has been a freelance journalist for newspapers, magazines, radio, and various organisations for 13 years. He writes articles on education, development, travelling, and the environment. His work involves extensive research and travelling, which requires a lot of interaction with people and photography. His exceptional talents lie in social media and media production, including video editing, education, and development.



Keoxomphou Sakdavong

Keoxomphou (Keo) is a journalist and Deputy Head of the Feature Desk at the Vientiane Times, an English-language newspaper in Laos. Keo began her career in 2000 as a volunteer reporter, planning to try it for a short time, but two decades later, she's still here, loving every moment. Keo covers topics ranging from economics and business to environment, development, health, travel, and lifestyle. What she loves most about journalism is the adventure: "One day, I'm in a remote village hut; the next, I'm in a luxury hotel. It's a journey that keeps me exploring and learning every day."

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Theerayut Weerakham

Theerayut Weerakham is an independent documentary filmmaker deeply committed to exploring stories about people, society, and environmental issues. His work reflects a strong sense of social responsibility and a passion for amplifying marginalized voices. Based in Nakhon Phanom Province, he also founded an independent film screening project that brings thought-provoking cinema to local audiences to foster dialogue and awareness around pressing social and environmental issues.

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Quach Thi Kieu Mai

Kieu Mai has been a dedicated journalist, specializing in sustainable development since 2018. She is particularly drawn to exploring innovative storytelling approaches, including multimedia reporting, data visualization, and solution journalism, to engage audiences and promote a more profound comprehension of intricate issues.

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Pham Nguyen Tuan An

Pham Nguyen Tuan An is a reporter at Znews (Vietnam), specializing in solutions journalism. He focuses on gender, climate, and social equity, telling human-centered stories that highlight how marginalized communities confront challenges and create change.

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Nguyen Thi Anh Thu

Nguyen Thi Anh Thu is a creative practitioner based in Hue, Vietnam. She focuses on storytelling and visual communication, exploring women's everyday lives, especially in communities shaped by climate change, migration, and the quiet loss of traditional ways of living.

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Resources



Mekong Thought Leadership and Think Tanks Network (MTT)

Find out about MTT program overview, objectives, activities, and more.

bit.ly/4rvlczu



Profiles of MTT Fellows

This booklet provides the profiles of MTT fellows from 5 batches, including the media-research collaboration fellowship.

bit.ly/4dQ0NiF



MTT Projects Booklet (2023-2025)

This booklet provides MTT project profiles, including 4 flagship studies and 7 rapid response projects.

bit.ly/4hi64kd



SUMERNET Mekong Media-Research Partnership 2021-2022

This booklet is a compilation of 8 environmental stories in the Mekong Region related to SUMERNET research projects.

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