



Wetland Livelihoods

Rural livelihoods in the Lower Mekong Basin are essentially wetland livelihoods – based around the cultivation of a wetland crop, rice and the harvesting of a range of aquatic resources. Wetland resources are essential for meeting all water needs – whether for agriculture, drinking, sanitation and washing. Any degradation of wetland resources will have significant impacts on poor people’s livelihoods while sustainable, equitable management of wetland resources can generate tangible, lasting improvements to poor people’s livelihoods.

Managing wetlands and water can make an important contribution to international strategies to reduce poverty, such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)	Contribution of wetlands and water resources management
1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wetlands provide the main source of food for rural people in the Mekong – particularly rice and fish. • Managing wetland and water resources is essential for improving agricultural production and ensuring sustainability • Aquatic resources provide the main source of protein in protein-poor diets and are of particular importance for poorer people. • Preventing degradation of aquatic resources and improving management of capture fisheries can make a significant contribution to food security and nutrition, and can generate income and employment
2. Achieve universal primary education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring the productivity and sustainability of wetland resources can reduce demands on child labour, allowing children greater opportunities to benefit from primary education • Improvements in household food security, income and health provides better opportunities for children to attend school
3. Promote gender equality and empower women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women play important roles managing wetland resources particularly near the household, and in harvesting, cooking, processing and marketing aquatic resources.
4. Reduce child mortality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving nutrition from wetland resources and securing access to clean drinking water and sanitation can contribute to reducing child mortality
5. Improve maternal health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving nutrition of pregnant and nursing women – particularly from aquatic resources is an essential component of improved maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing wetland resources to reduce the prevalence of malaria and water borne diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wetlands are rich natural resources very much under threat. The degradation of wetland resources will have further impacts on wider environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • wetlands and water resources cover many stakeholders and many different sectors and require an integrated approach for sustainable development that meets the needs of poor people



Putting this into practice – starting from an understanding of poverty and the needs of poor people

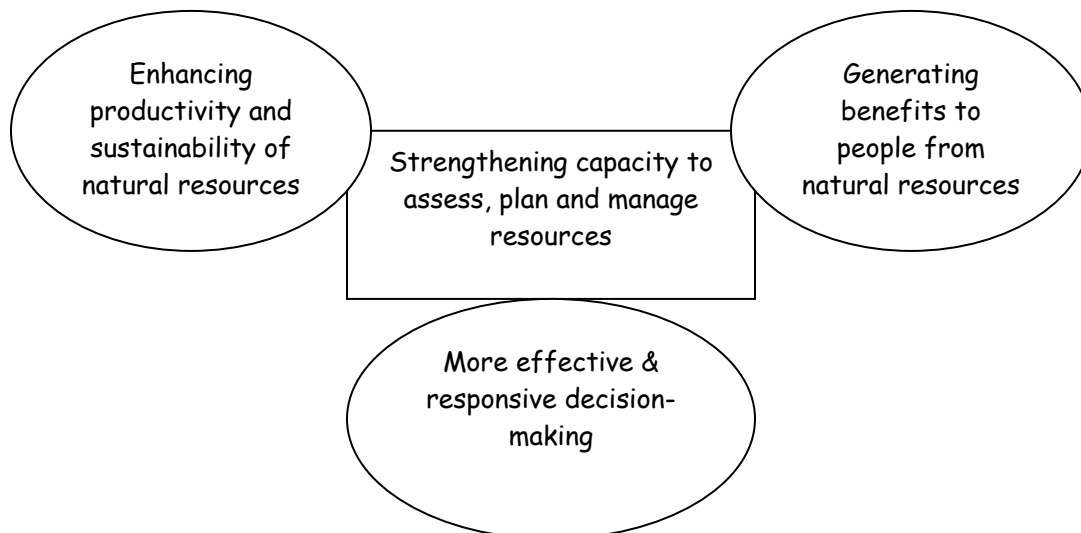
The Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme (MWBP) has taken an understanding of poverty and vulnerability that draws on current thinking about sustainable livelihoods, social exclusion and rights-based approaches in order to strategise the contribution that the programme can make to reducing poverty and improving people's livelihoods.

Through a process of Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPAs) MWBP, partners and local people assessed dimensions of poverty and vulnerability in order to strategise programme activities. This has involved developing partnerships outside the traditional sphere of wetland management, and developing a close partnership with the NGO Health Unlimited in Cambodia and Lao PDR. Health Unlimited have extensive experience working with some of the poorest and most marginalised peoples, as well as local government health agencies, village health groups and traditional healers. This partnership addresses the significant linkage between ecosystem and human health. In Viet Nam a partnership has been established with CARE Viet Nam who are providing technical assistance and co-finance to support communities in forming Resource User Groups, and promoting alternative livelihood and income generating activities. This partnership with CARE is expected to expand to the other MWBP demonstration sites. MWBP also works with a number of local grassroots organisations and NGOs supporting local capacity to address natural resources and livelihoods issues.

Strengthening capacity for livelihood benefits

MWBP focuses on strengthening capacity to manage wetland resources and on generating tangible benefits of wetland management to local people.

The approach of MWBP is represented below:





Strengthening capacity to assess, plan and manage resources

The long-term sustainability of MWBP initiatives depends on local partners – local resources users, government agencies, NGOs and civil society groups – being able to take on responsibilities for assessment, planning and management of their resource base. MWBP takes a broad-based view of resources to include natural resources, as well as the range of economic, physical, human and social resources that contribute to household livelihood strategies.

The starting point for MWBP interventions is to strengthen this capacity, whether it is to assess the natural resources base (fisheries, flooded forest vegetation), or health resources.

Enhancing productivity and sustainability of natural resources

In order to meet local livelihoods needs MWBP addresses the productivity and sustainability of the wetland resources on which these livelihoods depend. This includes rehabilitation of forest resources by establishing community nurseries, promoting sustainable agricultural practices in flooded forest and floodplains, promoting management of capture fisheries through rehabilitation and protection of important breeding and spawning grounds, and promotion of integrated rice-fish techniques.

Generating benefits to people from natural resources

Improved productivity and sustainability of natural resources does not on its own necessarily lead to tangible benefits for local people. It is important to ensure that the productivity of natural resources are converted into improved food and nutrition, diversified and improved income or improved employment opportunities. MWBP undertakes a range of activities to ensure benefits of natural resource management accrue to local communities and poorer groups. These include promoting sustainable harvesting and marketing of aquatic resources and non-timber forest products (NTFPs), promoting processing and marketing of aquatic resource products, and improving access to and management of safe drinking water resources and sanitation.

More effective and responsive decision-making

Key factors in poor people's poverty and vulnerability are the insecurity of rights of access to and control over the natural resources on which they depend, and decision-making about how these resources are managed. Additional wetland and water resources are often used by many different stakeholders who may have conflicting interests in the use of the resources. MWBP strengthens initiatives that promote local people's access and control over resources such as through community-based natural resource management regimes. MWBP also promotes dialogue and negotiation between different stakeholders, and strengthening networks of resources users across different communities. In order to ensure more effective and responsive decision-making MWBP promotes the participation of local resources users in planning and decision-making processes and works with local institutions (at village, sub-district and commune levels) to ensure environmental and livelihood issues are incorporated into their planning processes.