

SEI in Cambodia



Project Brief
September 2019

Background

Cambodia has a population of approximately 16.5 million people, with close to 50% of its population under the age of 25. Lying in the lower Mekong basin, the country's food security is supported by the Mekong River and its wetland lake, Tonle Sap. The country depends heavily on agriculture, with rice as the staple crop. The current rapid economic growth in Cambodia has increased environmental challenges, including deforestation and pollution of air and water, while poverty and gender inequality persist. These problems are multiplied by climate change, which impairs health, agriculture and water resources, and security in the country.

Areas of Work

In Cambodia, critical areas of SEI work include water and water resources management, agriculture, gender and development, and knowledge and capacity development among both government and communities.

SEI works with Cambodian partners to equip them for facing climate challenges in all these areas and to build robust policies and resilience into current and future responses. As gender, social equity and poverty are entwined with these challenges that must be addressed, SEI integrates them into all its work in Cambodia, with a focus on developing the knowledge and expertise of government officials, community members and community-based organizations. As in the whole of the Mekong Region, drought, flooding and associated water availability and quality issues have a huge effect on individuals and communities in Cambodia. SEI is analysing water and natural resource governance that includes agriculture, floods and droughts, and disaster risk, in addition to the big picture challenge of water as a fundamental source of livelihoods and life.

Projects

1. SUMERNET: SEI engages with a wide group of research and knowledge producers in the Mekong Region as host of the Secretariat of the Sustainable Mekong Research Network (SUMERNET), a regional network that supports research and policy engagement on key sustainability issues in the region. SUMERNET works to strengthen knowledge-based policy processes for sustainable development in Mekong countries. SEI collaborates with nearly 70 member institutes across the region, including agencies in Cambodia, to deliver credible research, to communicate findings, and to influence policy and development. Researchers from Cambodia have been part of SUMERNET's support of more than 200 researchers across the region to conduct cross-border collaborative projects in the Mekong Region. In 2018, SUMERNET research in Cambodia focused on assessing and protecting the rich biodiversity of the wetlands in Kulen Promthep in northern Cambodia.

Photo (above): © SEI



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2. GIS and gender inequality: SEI and the SERVIR-Mekong team are developing a GIS application that enables mapping and visualizing of gender inequality in Cambodia at the subnational level. SEI is working with its Cambodia partners to develop the capacity of women and women's groups, in addition to those promoting gender equality, to understand the usefulness of GIS and acquire the skills to apply it for monitoring gender equality.

3. The Sustainable Water Partnership: SEI is implementing the Sustainable Water Partnership (SWP) as part of a consortium of organizations. SWP's goal is to promote water security and increase resilience to water security risks in basins, sub-basins and communities. To do this, SWP works to improve capacity in water planning and governance and to increase collaboration, learning and adaptive response in the face of water risk. The project implements pilot activities, and is testing the approach in Cambodia's Tonle Sap, as well as in Africa's Mara River Basin, shared by Kenya and Tanzania.

4. Rapid Response Fund on Poverty and Gender: SEI is collaborating with The Asia Foundation to integrate gender and poverty considerations with water resources planning. Focused on Cambodia's Stung Chinit tributary of Tonle Sap, the project will use the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) multidimensional poverty framework to create a localized poverty framework for the region and incorporate it into a water model using SEI's Water Evaluation and Planning (WEAP) software. The work explores how sustainable water management can complement efforts to achieve social equality, economic growth and poverty reduction – and thus ensure access to water for all. It will feed into an ongoing effort under the Sustainable Water Partnership to improve water security in the Stung Chinit watershed.

5. Arsenic in Rice in Cambodia: SEI collaborated with partners, government and stakeholders in Cambodia to better understand how arsenic seeps into rice crops in the country and to determine how stakeholders perceive this problem and knowledge gaps that might affect policymaking. A number of recommendations, including government guiding the development of groundwater irrigation and adjusting its rice export policy, were shared with Cambodian partners as a working paper. The paper was published in November 2018.

6. Sustainable Intensification and Diversification in the Lowland Rice Systems in NW Cambodia: This project addresses low productivity and low income in rain-fed lowland rice systems in Northwest Cambodia that results in poor livelihoods and food insecurity. The project targets rice farming communities in the region. Intensification and diversification options for smallholders are introduced through a systems approach that includes providing information through a variety of channels to influence production decisions, conducting live evaluations and on-farm demonstrations, and producing a baseline assessment of smallholders' needs and livelihood strategies.

7. Capacity development training: In 2018, SEI trained Cambodian agricultural researchers in producing policy briefs and improving research effectiveness in practice, strategic decisions, policy development, and agenda setting. SEI is continuing to expand its research network in Cambodia to include additional research institutes, universities, extension services, NGOs and other community-based organizations.