



## Final report

to MWBP/ IUCN

Community theatre project with Sovanna Phum Art Association

**"Awareness campaign on fishery issues in the Stung Treng province and in Phnom Penh through shadow puppets performances"**



Shadow puppets used for the projects. In back one can see the truck of Sovanna Phum in Stung Treng Province.

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# 1 Background of Sovanna Phum cooperation

Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme (MWBP) and the World Conservation Union (IUCN) are aiming also to strengthen the capacity of organizations and people to develop sustainable livelihoods and to manage wetland biodiversity resources wisely. MWBP especially is working in the Lower Mekong Basin on the framework for wetland conservation and sustainable livelihoods.

MWBP and IUCN planned to spread out their messages through a different kind of information tool. For this MWBP and IUCN approached Sovanna Phum Art Association to create a performance, which can empower villagers especially in the Stung Treng Province on fishery issues. As Sovanna Phum have already experiences in working in the field of community theatre and awareness campaigns for several different international and national organizations and about different issues, the Small Shadow puppet theatre should be used as main method to inform the villagers in this area.

## Background Stung Treng

Stung Treng province, which covers an area of 11.092 km<sup>2</sup>, is a remote and sparsely populated province in the northeast of Cambodia. It borders Lao to the north, Ratanakiri to the east, Preah Vihear to the west and Kratie and Kompong Thom to the south. The province is divided into five districts, 34 communes and 128 villages. Stung Treng is a unique province quite distinct from other Cambodian provinces in the Mekong basin. It is characterized by extensive forest cover, intersecting rivers and streams, and low population density.

Stung Treng is rich in natural resources and rivers with more forestry, wildlife, minerals and aquatic resources than other province. Home to a diverse ecosystem, there are numerous large fish spawning and breeding grounds, with approximately 100 fish species. There is also a distinct variety of open forest growing on the sandy and rocky islands within the channels of the Mekong. These flooded open forests are very rare, occurring in few other places in Asia. They provide a unique structured environment which may be important at times of high water as areas of refuge for young fish.

About 90% of the population of the province lives along the rivers and streams and rely on fish for food security and subsistence livelihoods.

However, by the 1990s, many fish populations have fallen to levels from which they can no longer recover without significant fishery reduction. Concretely, there are too many people catching too many fish.

Moreover, encroachment and destructive practices are having a serious impact on the existing 700 000 ha of flooded forest in Cambodia. The flooded areas are becoming smaller and the flooding times are becoming shorter, which may cause a reduction in fish species, especially highly migratory ones. Already there was a rapid reduction in the size of the flooded forest over the 1980s and 1990s resulting in a serious depletion of fish stocks.

In addition, illegal fishing activities remain a great concern in the fisheries sector and yet despite this still continue to occur, especially in Kratie and Stung Treng Provinces. The materials used for illegal fishing include electric shock, explosives, pesticide, modern fishing machinery and fishing nets with small holes.

## 2 Objectives of the Project

Based on underlying values of civic engagement and community participation the aims of this project are to:

**To develop a story and play concerning fisheries and Management issues with the villagers in Stung Treng and to encourage awareness through performance of shadow puppet theatre on above issues both in the village of Stung Treng and decision makers in Phnom Penh.**

and

**Enhance the knowledge of the Sovanna Phum artists on the fishery issues and train them to improve their skills regarding to this topic.**

## 3 Process of production/ Methodology

### 3.1 Workshop

In April 2006 MWBP conduct a workshop on Fishery issues in Stung Treng province. 10 artists of Sovanna Phum joined the workshop in order:

- to increase the capacity of the artists to develop a script and perform about the issues of public awareness and behaviour change for conservation and sustainable use of wetlands resources at local and national levels,
- to get information from the partner MWBP/IUCN about fishery biology patterns and fishery issues happening in the Cambodia Mekong basin wide,
- to get information about the flagship species of MWBP and the action to conserve those species.

Resource people from different agencies (Inlands fisheries research and Development and Community fisheries Office of Department of Fishery; national Programme staff of MWBP; Culture and environment Preservation Association, WWF of Dolphin conservation) conduct the workshop on the specific topics (Fishery, Dolphin biology, conservation and sustainable use of fisheries ect). The workshop aimed not only to inform the artists about the objectives but also to give them knowledge to conduct workshop in during the touring and for the question & answer session after every show end. The artists got training materials also in order to teach also villagers in the Province.

After the artists attended the workshop on fisheries issues and related obstacles, Sovanna Phum, in close collaboration with MWBP office Phnom Penh, started with creating a script containing the key messages, as there are:

- Conservation of the Mekong wetland, special alternative and sustainable fishery
- Awareness of environmental protection
- Stop killing of wild animals
- Local communities / villagers working together with commune council to resolve conflicts of land grabbing but also to discuss together of new ways of investing in the province to promote the livelihoods of the villagers.

### **3.2 Fieldtrip to Stung Treng**

As part of the preparation, the artistic director Mann Kosal, his colleague and Mr. Mao Kosal, National communication and Training coordinator of MWBP, visited Stung Treng province from June 2<sup>nd</sup> till June 10<sup>th</sup>. This field trip was important in order to set up first contacts to the authorities, to MWBP partners in Stung Treng province and to get in contact to villagers as well as to visit the main locations for the performances, to learn the Wetland resource use, conflict within, living standards of the habitants, attitudes and behaviour of the local community toward the sustainable use of Wetlands resource. Although the visit was also the basic for Sovanna Phum to observe, how to create a story especially for this region / local community, which can change habits to good attitudes towards conservation.

Sovanna Phum staff, who went to the field trip, figured out that in some villages like Koh LaNgor Village, which are very close to the Laotian border, only around 10% of the villagers spoke or understood Khmer language. This fact in concern, Sovanna Phum decided to use theatre methods for the performance, which are very visual and can be understood also by people, which do not understand Khmer language to carry on the messages. Many people in this area are undereducated, which can be a result that the next higher school is in Stung Treng town. School levels are only till Primary school in the North Eastern region. The general knowledge level is very low.

The people in this area do know about the fishery law and emphasised that this law should be followed, and especially not to fish in protected areas, like areas in which the dolphins are living. Most of the people explained that the fishing methods used illegally are from people outside of this area like from Stung Treng town.

### **3.3 Production of script**

The script development took a longer time as thought in order to fit to the key messages. The script was finalized in October 2006. During the script development Sovanna Phum and MWBP office Phnom Penh had several meetings and consultations about the well understanding and right integration of the key messages in order to full fill the Terms of References. Several drafts of the story were made till the story was finalized (see attached Annex II). During the script development, problems occurred in finding an appropriate way to combine the creative aspects and understanding with the theoretically concepts.

### **3.4 Puppet making and rehearsals**

Sovanna Phum decided to use different theatre tools for the project as there are:

- Small Shadow theatre (different types of species living in the Mekong river like cat fish, dolphin and turtle ect., different types of animals living around the Mekong like monkey, birds ect and puppets characterizing humans) – 50 puppets,
- Classical dance,
- Animal dance (deer, tiger, buffalo, dolphins ect)
- Speaking theatre and singing.

In preparation for making the puppets, Sovanna Phum researched with help of MWBP office Phnom Penh, in the internet and by environmental NGO's and for the exact features of each of the Mekong animals. MWBP office Phnom Penh was a strong supporter.

After finishing the script and approval by MWBP, immediately the rehearsals started. During two weeks rehearsals time the artists were able to learn and understand the story and the included key messages. The rehearsals went very well without any understanding problems. The duration of the complete performance is by now 1 hour.

Sovanna Phum used different kinds of theatre methods to creatively explain the messages of the project:

- *The Small Shadow theatre*

The Small Shadow theatre helped to show a large number of the animals living in and around the Mekong. The objectives of producing of 30 Small Shadow puppets were completed as this performance has 50 different kinds of puppets like different species living in the Mekong river like cat fish, dolphin and turtle ect., animals living around the Mekong like monkey, birds ect.



Small Shadow puppet screen showing the forest and special trees in the Mekong area

With the Shadow theatre Sovanna Phum was able to show a huge number of animals in interaction but also to show behaviour of people concerning fishery and environmental issues. The dramatic parts of the performance could be shown easily behind the screen beside the speaking theatre parts.

Other methods included:

- Classical dance,
- Animal dance (deer, tiger, buffalo, dolphins)
- Speaking theatre and singing.



Shadows of the artists are in this part of the performance visible for the audience.

## 4 Touring in the Province Stung Treng

Sovanna Phum artists started in Stung Treng town in order to introduce the actual performance to the province governor. After every performance a questions & answer (Q&A) was held by the artists to inform the villagers about the environmental and conversation issues. An average of 400 to 500 people saw one performance. This will be by 8 performances up to 4000 people, who saw the performances in the Province.

Villagers, who could show increased and understood knowledge, were awarded with books and pens. Sovanna Phum artists used the training materials and booklets, passed by MWBP, as training utensils for the villagers.



Sovanna Phum artists trained villagers.

During the daytime 2 - 4 artists taught 6 villagers how to play Shadow puppets and also to play theatre. Seven days, 3-4 hours (in the morning and in the afternoon) the workshop for the villagers was held. Villagers, who were volunteers, performed during the show.

A total number of 42 villagers were directly trained during the Sovanna Phum artists.



Farmer, Mr. Koh Kadien, during a workshop conducted by Sovanna Phum artists.

## Evaluation of the Tour in Stung Treng Province<sup>1</sup>

### Message

The main messages the villagers learned, was that there are many species in the environment and that people shouldn't engage in unrestricted poaching. It cannot be determined at this stage whether the villagers will apply what they learned. However, the performance was clean and accessible even for those who do not speak Khmer.

### Questions & Answers

The villagers did not ask any questions, perhaps because they did not feel comfortable asking questions in public. The Question & Answer session was short. One we saw had only three participants, only one of whom was truly responsible. It was not clear whether the participants were ordinary villagers or members of the NGO. The participants seemed only interested in obtaining the free gift. It may not be such a good idea to ask for volunteers and then put them in a spot. They felt shy. Perhaps it would be better to introduce audience participation activities before the Q&A session, and to introduce games rather than a discussion, which is less interesting.

### Reaction of the villagers to the show

It was well-attended, with roughly 300-500 audience members (almost the entire village). It was attended by all age groups. The audience laughed at the jokes and seemed captivated by the shadow theatre (at one point they gasped at the stunning images). However, when the dialogue grew too serious, the audience appeared to lose interest.

### Communication with MWBP office in Stung Treng

The communication between MWBP office in Stung Treng and Sovanna Phum appeared to have a significant positive degree of communication between Sovanna Phum and the NGO. Some NGO members even performed on stage.



Villagers during a break in Stung Treng province.

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<sup>1</sup> This evaluation and observation are from Koh Sneng village.

## 5 Performance in Phnom Penh

Sovanna Phum and MWBP arranged two performances in Phnom Penh, on November 29 and December 3<sup>rd</sup> 2006.

The performance on November 29 was held in Sovanna Phum theatre. The audience came mainly from International Organizations, NGO's and Ministries, foreigner and Cambodians, which have similar working objectives. MWBP and Sovanna Phum gave out questionnaires to the audiences related to the understanding of the story ect. Before the performance started, Mr. Sok Vong from MWBP and Lydia Parusol, Sovanna Phum, gave an introduction to the audience about the background of the collaboration. Question & Answers could be raised after the performance. Approximately up to 30 people joined the performance in Sovanna Phum theatre.



Sovanna Phum artists (Speaking theatre) during one of the performances.

The second performance in December 3<sup>rd</sup> 2006 was held at a public place, where in general every day live music (Karaoke) is played. The public place is huge and open, with a capacity to have 500 people as audience. Because, in general the place is well visit by people on Sunday's, many people attended the show. The audience appreciate the performance as an event never happen before. Sovanna Phum gave out questionnaires to the audience but only one person responded in this location. The reason can be that in general this audience is not used to answer questionnaires.

### **Evaluation of the questionnaires passed to the audience of the performances in Phnom Penh on November 29 and December 3<sup>rd</sup> 2006**

This research is written base on the questionnaires of the Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity projects. There are 21 respondents available in this research, and some of the questions are not applicable. Nearly all of the answers came from the audience attended the performance in Sovanna Phum theatre.

In overall, the performance is highly appreciated. As the result of the research, about 33% of the respondents saying that the performance is good and 19% is moderate while 47.62% rise up the word "Excellence".

### **Meaning of the story:**

About 90% of the respondents have stated that the story is understandable and easy to get the points, and meanwhile the other 10% saying that the story is difficult to understand. And also, all of the respondents have stated that the story performed is relevant to the reality of the present life. There are some things need to be improved.

Most of the respondents have commended on the show such as:

- when the actors talked about the community they did not mention about the protected areas within,
- some information is not completed (illegal fishery is about using battery, but actually it includes using bomb for fishery),
- the show is attended with only few kinds of people (the respondents want all kinds of people's involvement include old people, monks ... etc.),
- space for the performance is narrow and some parts of the performance is not really related to the real life and also some words that performer said are awkward,
- the show concentrate more about the corruption,
- not detail enough about preservation issues,
- the story should use some legal terms to make people understand it clearly about related law terms in the related issues.

*(Three respondents do not make any comments while 7 other respondents stated the story and performance is nothing to change.)*

In order to improve, they want:

- the story should be extended more about the importance of the wetland and its impacts on deforestation,
- the performers should stated the issues more clearly to the preserved areas,
- the story should be made to give people hope and should add the protected area communities and water pollution,
- should mention any economic situation of the poor and the issue about the environment,
- the performers should express their dislike toward the corruption of the government,
- add some songs and comedy which are related to the youth,
- want both the story and performance make more improvement.

*(There are seven respondents do not stated any comments.)*

Most of the respondents, 20 out of 21 respondents, want to see more of this kind of performance. The places that they want the performance played, shall be a place that can widespread the information to the stakeholders, like in every provinces (especially, the provinces around Tonlesap Lake, along Mekong River or near any other lakes or rivers) or villages (with government officials attended), in the related area (to the current issues or to played-story) places that face the destruction, school and also on the TV (in order to show the high-ranking government officials) and other places that have a lot of people. For the following performance on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, about 81% of the respondents promise to attend.

For the artists, most of the respondents want to say thanks for their good performances, and they want artists continue their good works and wish them to get success in the future performance.

Even if most of the respondents have good comments, there are also some negatives to make improvement. Some respondents have stated that the story or performance should be possibly involved by the local people there. Another point, small leather shadow theatre

(Sbek Touch) should reduce some awkward words. And also, the performance should improve their techniques and extend the use of comedy words to attract the people.

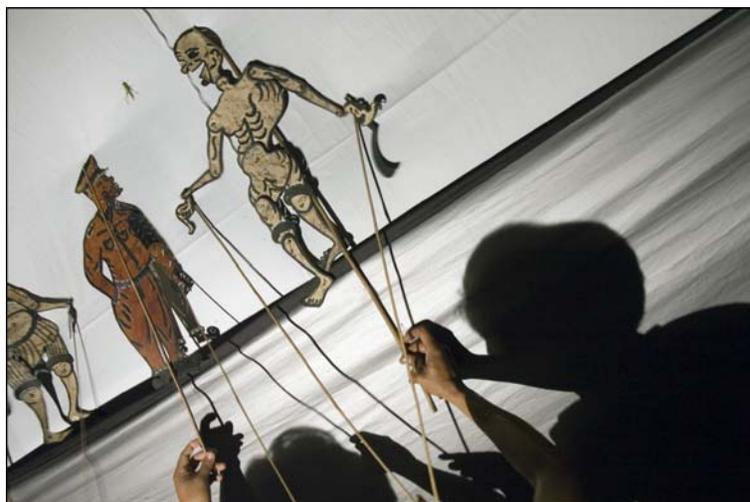
## 6 Lesson learned

The project full fills the objectives in a very good way. Nearly all audiences appreciated the performance, understood the messages and could learn. Good response came also from the governor level. Significant was the difference between urban and rural area (Phnom Penh and villages in Stung Treng province). In some areas only a small number of people could speak Khmer language. The performance itself was structure that also people do not understand Khmer can follow the story. In general it would be better to minimize the speaking to a very low level, especially if the audience does not speak Khmer. Also the understanding of problems in the rural areas is different as in urban areas, for example the audience from the Phnom Penh had a different view and humour than people in the country side. The audience in Phnom Penh did not understand fully how and where the performances worked in the countryside.

To which extend the audience will keep in mind the messages their learnt during the performance, one can not say at this stage. This can be only figured out through a survey. Most of the villagers had sometimes no 4 hours time to participate in the workshop because of the field work their have to do.

The combination of different theatre methods, like Small Shadow theatre Speaking theatre and Dancing, could give the audience a wonderful experience of theatre work. The audience laughed, but also understood the messages.

The communication between Sovanna Phum and MWBP office Phnom Penh was in general very good and based on an understanding of each other.



Small Shadow Puppet theatre during a performance.

## 7 Recommendations

The project "Empowerment of villagers on fisheries issues through Shadow puppet performances" was very successful. Some people from the Cambodian audiences wishes strongly to play this story in more public places and as suggested in the Evaluation of the performances in Phnom Penh, this performance should be shown in every province, which has free water excess (river, lakes, sea ect).

For future performances, one should think about:

- Q&A but also games for the people, especially if the audience is not used to answer question in front of many people,
- more public places as performance location (for example schools),
- on TV
- in more provinces
- less speaking theatre
- with more fund more actors could be hired for the show in order to have more characters involved.

The performance has definitely capacity to improve. With this performance the key messages can be spread out to many different groups of the Cambodian population, and of every age group.

It is very important to use this story further for more performances, and especially for awareness campaigns in schools.



Children in Stung Treng province, Koh LaNgor Village, observing the rehearsal. In front - Shadow puppet forest.