



**Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme  
(MWBP)**

**Report on World Wetlands Day (WWD)  
2 February 2006  
Phnom Penh, Cambodia**

**Organised by the Ministry of Environment  
In cooperation with Mlup Baitong and MWBP**

## **Introduction**

World Wetlands Day (WWD) 2006 was celebrated outdoors in Chroy Chang Va, Russey Keo district, Phnom Penh, under the theme of, "In the face of poverty...wetlands are our lifelines".

WWD is organised annually to commemorate the signing of the Convention on Wetlands on 2 February 1971, in the Iranian City of Ramsar on the shores of the Caspian Sea.

In Cambodia, the event was organised by the Ministry of Environment with support from the Mekong Wetlands Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use Programme (MWBP) and collaboration with Mlup Baitong. The event was presided over by a highly honoured delegation consisting of H.E. Tan Vutha, Secretary of State of the Ministry of Environment, H.E Lonh Hol, National Programme Director of MWBP, H.E. Koy Sokharith, Under Secretary of State of the Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology, Prince Sisovath Pheanurath, Vice Governor of Phnom Penh Municipality, H.E Lim Sokun, Secretary of State of Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, and H.E Hou Taing Eng, General Secretary of the Cambodia National Mekong Committee. A total of 364 participants attended the event, among who were representatives from other Ministries, international and local NGOs, high school students, university students, Buddhist monks, local authorities and communities. See annex II for the complete participants list.

## **Aim**

In addition to marking the date of the signing of the Convention on Wetlands on 2 February 1971, this event was organised to raise awareness among all stakeholders including students, communities, government agencies, civil societies and other institutions on the significance of wetland and biodiversity conservation for the sustainable development of Cambodia. See Annex I for the full agenda.

## **WWD activities**

This is the third time that World Wetlands Day has been organised in Cambodia and the first outdoor celebration on the mainland between Mekong and Tonle Sap River in front of Royal Palace in Phnom Penh. A day before the event, a waste clean up campaign around the event venue was organised by local authorities and involved a number of local people and school children from the area. Annex II: list of participants

Banners were also hung across the main roads of Phnom Penh and the outlets of national roads in 35 locations. The slogans used on the banners were chosen to draw people's attention to WWD and its significance. Please refer to annex III for the slogans

Before the arrival of the special delegates, participants visited the NGO exhibition next to the registration desks. Many university students and participants were interested in the products, materials and project pictures produced and demonstrated by the NGOs who are working in the wetland areas of Cambodia. A boat parade of local communities on Tonle Sap River, also read the slogans over a loudspeaker. 500 printed t-shirts, 250 posters, 500 stickers and 400 copies of speeches and others documented were distributed to participants and journalists from various media.

After the monk blessing, the honourable delegates delivered speeches. H. E Lonh Heal gave a comprehensive definition of wetlands determined by the Ramsar convention and also pointed out that in Cambodia 30% of the total country area is wetlands, with 20% considered internationally significant. He stated that MWBP is working in the Lower Mekong countries including Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam; and focuses on strengthening development strategies, policies, raising awareness, capacity building and sustainable use through its demonstration project in Stung Treng province.

Prince Sisovat Pheanurath, Vice-Governor of Phnom Penh Municipality also shared an impressive speech. He appreciated the participation of government institutions, civil societies and general public in improving the environment of Phnom Penh, which is considered an important part of wetlands. Municipality of Phnom Penh, he said, has made strong efforts since many years through several development projects in order to promote clean environment, sustainable livelihood of its people in and around the city.

H.E Hou Tang Eng, General Secretary of the Cambodia National Mekong Committee, briefly described the natural resources of the Mekong river; he said that the Mekong National committee

has cooperated with stakeholders both national and regional to discuss and find out procedures for wetlands management, biodiversity environment and trans-boundary issues for sustainable development. He said that good environment could contribute to poverty reduction.

H.E Koy Sokharith, Under Secretary of State, Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology, expressed his concern over the destruction of wetlands through economic concessions granted without Environmental Impact Assessment. He highlighted the vital importance of biodiversity in the development of country. A signatory of biodiversity convention in 1995, he added, the Royal government of Cambodia has shown its commitment to protect and conserve natural resources through many development programs in order to promote the sustainable use of wetlands in the country. Raising awareness of wetlands among local people is a key tool of participatory and successful development.

The speech of H.E Lim Sokun, Secretary of State of Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery described briefly the natural resources of Mekong river, Tonle Sap lake, sea and other water sources. Agriculture jobs, on which most Cambodians rely, get huge benefits from the wetlands. Moreover, other benefits of wetlands are the sustainability of water cycle and basin, to prevent land degradation, storming and other natural disasters, to provide wildlife shelters, to promote eco-tourism, to provide aquaculture. It can be concluded that wetlands have priceless economic value. He was also concerned regarding the forestry destruction, land encroachment, charcoal production from watersheds, dam construction, chemical and pesticide uses, and hard waste disposal and mining caused harmful to biodiversity of those wetland areas. He finally gave strong support to all development projects aiming at protecting the wetlands and promoting sustainable use of the natural resources.

At the end, Chairperson, H. E Tan Vutha, Secretary of State of Ministry of Environment, provided a speech saying that Cambodia has been a signatory of Ramsar convention since 1999 and has formed a National Committee of relevant ministries and institutions in order to assist the Royal Government of Cambodia to conserve and sustainably use its wetlands. He ended his speech by reminding that all of us must be aware of wetlands' values and protected them for our benefits and our next generations.

In summary, all speeches strongly emphasised the priceless values of wetlands in Cambodian economic development, and the roles of local communities, authorities, government agencies, all institutions and civil societies are important for conservation and sustainable use of wetlands. All speeches called upon and suggested to all stakeholders to deal with the challenging environmental problems in a more cooperative and committed manner.

The next coming programme was the citation of poem winners who had researched documents on the values and function of wetlands in Cambodia for composing their poem. The poems were scored by the Department of Education, Information and Extension, and Department of Nature Conservation and Protection, Ministry of Environment, Director of Mlup Baitong, local NGOs, and MWBP staff. The awards were provided to the five winners; those winners were:

- 1- Royal University of Law and Economic, first prize
- 2- Royal University of Phnom Penh, second prize
- 3- Royal University of Agriculture, third prize
- 4- Norton University, fourth prize
- 5- Royal University of Fine Art, fifth prize

Last on the agenda for WWD was the comic performance of "Neay Khchep Group" on the importance of wetlands in Cambodia. It was a funny technique to raise awareness about wetlands. It was a short story about income generation activities of a fisher family who is living along Tonle Sap Lake. One of their jobs is fishing by using illegal fishing materials such as electric cut fishing net. Other jobs are hunting wildlife and land encroachment of flooded forest for speculation. In the performance environmental education and fishery laws were provided and disseminated to the son of the family to educate the people to do their jobs correctly for environmental protection in order to use the natural resources in a sustainable way. The group's performance was very much appreciated by participants because the presentation was not only funny but it is meaningful for advocacy and public awareness to policy makers and local authorities and communities.

The WWD celebrations were broadcast on two TV and radio stations and published in four local newspapers.

## **Conclusion**

The World Wetlands Day celebrations for 2006 were interesting and appreciated by participants. The local authorities and communities were actively involved in the arrangements of the event from cleaning up campaign and venue, to security and safe traffic. The event really promoted the awareness of wetlands in Cambodia. Implementation of the event went smoothly and took place in a cheerful atmosphere. See annex IV: evaluation of the event

However, some processes were recommended by many participants to be improved for the next year event. Their recommendation is given details in the following.

## **Recommendations**

- The voice from boat parade was not audible to the audience in the tribune since the loud speakers have low capacity and the boat could not operate near the river bank. We should improve the loud speakers and boat direction.
- Registration system should be changed since there were not accessible to all participants. The registration desk should be away from exhibition areas. Printed t-shirts should be delivered to participants through their representatives a day before the event and organisers could collect the participant list afterward.
- Organisers should organise more committee meetings in order to strengthen coordination and smooth process.
- Master of Ceremony (MC) should be trained prior to the event, they should also be proactive and look at the details of the whole programme. It means that they should be flexible in managing all steps of the process so that the event is continuously engaging.

## **Acknowledgement**

On behalf of MWBP and the WWD organisational committee, we would like to thank:

- Governor of Phnom Penh Municipality for providing the event venue, permitting to hang banners in the city and coordinating the local authorities to cooperate with organisers of the events.
- Department of Education, Information and Extension, Department of Nature conservation and Protection and administrative offices of Ministry of Environment for supporting and providing the administrative arrangements.
- All international and local NGOs, Ministries, universities, schools, local authorities and other institutions for sending their representatives, staff, fisher communities and students to participate this event.

## **Annex I: Agenda**

- 8:00- 8:30 Registration and visit the exhibition
- 8:30 - Arrival of delegations  
- Boat parade
- 8:30- 8:35 - Blessing by Monks
- 8:35- 8:40 - National anthem
- 8:40-10:00 - Agenda announcement of the WWD celebration by Master Ceremony  
- Speech of H.E Lonh Heal, National Programme Director MWBP  
- Speech of Prince Sisovath Pheanurath, Vice Governor of Phnom Penh Municipality  
- Speech of H.E Hou Taing Eng, General Secretary of Cambodia National Mekong Committee  
- Speech of H.E Koy Sokharith, Under Secretary of State of Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology  
- Speech of H.E Lim Sokun, Secretary of State of Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery  
- Speech of H.E Tan Vutha, Secretary of State of Ministry of Environment  
- Citing of poems by the winners and presenting of the award by the event delegation.  
- Flying the balloons with banners
- 10:10-10:50 - A comedy was conducted by a local famous comedian Group, "Neay Khchreb" highlighting the importance of Wetlands biodiversity and its management
- 10:50-11:00 Closing ceremony.

## Annex II: Participant list and poem winners

Participant List That Jointed in World Wetland Day on 02 February 2006

Institutions		Participants
Ministries		31
Student of University	Chrouy Chongva High School	41
	Royal University of Phnom Penh	24
	Build Bright University	51
	Norton University	31
	Royal University of Agriculture	25
	Royal University of Fine Art	25
	Pannasastra University	29
	Royal University of Law and Economic	25
	Prekleap Agriculture School	25
NGO		25
Media		18
Company		1
Local authorities		50
Community fishery of Chrouy Chongva		19
Total		420

### **Annex III: Slogan for banners on the main roads**

1. Wetland is important to our daily life
2. Sustainable use of Wetlands for next generation
3. Wetlands are source of food
4. Loss wetland loss water source
5. Wise use of Wetlands are sustainable Development
6. Sustainable Use of wetlands help maintaining socio-culture
7. Flood and draught depend on Wetlands
8. Wetlands are sources of Eco-tourism
9. Wetlands are source of income for national economy
10. Poor people depend on wetlands resources
11. Sustainable use of our wetlands is our duty
12. Use wisely the wetland resources for our next generation
13. In the face of poverty ... wetlands are lifelines

**Annex IV: 33 interviewees from Government institutions, Universities and NGOs**

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Optional answers</b>	<b>Results</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Reception	Good	29	87%
	Not good	1	3%
	No ideas	2	6%
Document distribution	Satisfactory	18	54%
	Not satisfactory	15	45%
	No ideas	0	0%
Venue of WWD	Reasonable	30	90%
	Not reasonable	3	9%
	No ideas	0	0%
General arrangement	Good	29	87%
	Not good	3	9%
	No ideas	1	3%
A. Exhibition	Good	28	84%
	Not good	5	15%
	No ideas	0	0%
B. Recite the poem	Good	28	84%
	Not good	3	9%
	Too short	2	6%
	No ideas	0	0%
C. Comedy	Very meaningful	33	100%
	No meaningful	0	0%
	No ideas	0	0%
D. Time allocation	Enough time	23	69%
	Too long	0	0%
	Too short	10	30%
	No ideas	0	0%