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THE WETLANDS ALLIANCE



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THE WETLANDS ALLIANCE

Building local capacity for sustainable, poverty-focused wetlands management.

...The Combined strengths of four partners

Four development partners have joined forces in an alliance to work towards a common approach to building the skills needed to ensure that wetland ecosystems and aquatic resources are used in a more sustainable way for the benefit of the poor whose livelihoods and food security depend on them.

- The Asian Institute of Technology (AIT)
- Coastal Resources Institute (CORIN) of the Prince of Songkla University
- The WorldFish Center
- Living Mekong Programme of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)

The Wetlands Alliance brings together the strengths and expertise of these institutions known for their work in conservation, development, education, training and research.

The aim of the Alliance is to help local government, NGOs and community networks and associations make and maintain changes that will improve the livelihoods and food security of the region's rural and peri-urban poor through sustainable management of wetlands and aquatic resources.

...Focusing on the importance of aquatic resources

The Alliance works in some of the poorest areas in the Mekong Region, areas with low human population densities and high biodiversity values. In these areas, relatively intact aquatic ecosystems offer a wide range of goods and services to local people. The rivers, streams, marshes, islands, rapids, deep pools, and seasonally flooded plains provide food, medicine, building materials and income, as well as spiritual, religious, aesthetic and recreational benefits.



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But aquatic biodiversity is declining even more rapidly than terrestrial biodiversity, and we know that for the poorest people in the region, these wetland systems are a key element in their livelihood strategies.

The Alliance works alongside local partners, helping them collect and document information that demonstrates the importance and value of aquatic resources to their livelihoods. With this knowledge, local people can better identify, understand and respond to the threats facing their communities and aquatic habitats.

...Starting with local management and mitigation

The people in the best position to work with the rural poor are local agencies at the provincial, district and community level. Helping these agencies learn and apply the skills they need to better manage local development helps them work more effectively for sustainable use of aquatic resources, livelihood security and poverty alleviation.

Alliance support may be the critical factor in giving local staff the confidence they need to take local action for sustainable development.

Improved management in provincial, district and community institutions complements development work at regional and national levels. More and better local initiatives create more demand for these broader programmes and provide national and regional institutions with the feedback they need to improve the services they provide.

...Promoting Bottom-up approaches to institutional policy change

The Alliance makes knowledge of best practices, lessons learned and appropriate technologies more accessible. Local agencies can adapt the new knowledge they gain by working with partners in the Alliance and, at the same time, explore options

for institutional and policy reforms that may improve coordination and high-level decision-making processes.

Through the Alliance, information on distribution of aquatic resources, their economic and other values, and threats at the local level can be fed more effectively into national, regional and global systems of resource valuation, development planning, and policy dialogue.

Past initiatives have demonstrated that many of the most promising examples of institutional innovation come from communities. Initiatives at the provincial, district, and community level are a laboratory for experimenting with new development approaches that can influence national and even regional decisions.

What the Alliance is doing now...

Support for the Wetlands Alliance is provided by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

On 5 April 2006, Sida formally committed to support the Wetlands Alliance programme of activities until December 2008. During April and May of 2006, the four partners held a series of scoping meetings in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam to brief local and national stakeholders on the Alliance and seek their input for the design of a more detailed consultation process.

Between June and October 2006, more detailed consultations are being carried out in southern Lao PDR and Vientiane; in the northeast and the southeast coastal areas of Thailand; northeast and coastal Cambodia; and central Vietnam and the Mekong Delta.

By November 2006, a detailed strategy and implementation plan for each country and site will be developed in collaboration with national and local partners in each country. These plans will be presented to Sida for review.

...and our future plans

In developing the Alliance, we are intentionally starting with existing programmes and projects to test and explore the many ways we can work together as we extend and strengthen the collaboration that has developed among the partners over the years.



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The WorldFish Center (formerly known as ICLARM)

The WorldFish Center is an international research organization committed to assisting developing countries reduce poverty and hunger by providing solutions for fisheries and aquaculture. Through research, partnership, capacity building and policy support, WorldFish promotes the sustainable development and use of living aquatic resources based on environmentally sound management. WorldFish works to raise and sustain the productivity of fisheries and aquaculture systems, protect the aquatic environment, save aquatic biodiversity, improve policies for sustainable development of aquatic resources, and strengthen the capacity of national programmes to support sustainable development. To achieve its mission, WorldFish uses science for developing solutions to reduce poverty.

We are building on existing national and local institutional relationships of Alliance members in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam, and using existing staff capacity and experience to develop an approach that will simplify, streamline and enhance our collective efforts under a common framework.

The Wetlands Alliance is intended as a shared platform for addressing local capacity building. Our efforts will focus on provincial and district institutions, but the Alliance will also encourage national agencies to explore ways they too can offer more effective support to local initiatives in development and conservation.

The Alliance will act as an institutional umbrella under which doctoral and masters students can conduct practical research with real-world applications. Students from universities around the world can benefit from our national and local links.

Alliance members will be able to work with a greater number and a wider range of institutional partners than would be possible on an individual basis.

The Asian Institute of Technology (AIT)

AIT is a regional institution offering postgraduate education and short-course training with an extensive network of alumni in over 40 countries. Through its Aqua Outreach Programme, AIT has been helping farmers and communities in the Mekong region manage their aquatic resources for over a decade. The Programme offers students opportunities to address issues related to wetland development and management.

The WorldFish Center is one of 15 international research centers supported by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). This gives WorldFish a breadth of expertise, in partnership with other CGIAR centers, to apply holistic, cross-sectoral approaches that set fisheries in the context of water allocation and management, integrated rice-fish farming systems, agricultural development strategy, governance, collective action, and trade policy.



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CORIN Prince of Songkla University

The Coastal Resources Institute (CORIN) of the Prince of Songkla University (PSU) has earned an international reputation as an institute that excels in coastal resources and river basin management. CORIN is involved in various programmes and activities, in Thailand and in the region, for the enhancement of sustainable living in coastal and river basin areas. It focuses on integrated approaches, multi- and inter-sectoral cooperation and strong community participation by combining the top-down and bottom-up approaches and incorporating local and indigenous knowledge with scientific understanding in a way that empowers and strengthens local communities and authorities. Specifically, it builds capacity for (i) field-based research and learning, (ii) improved policy and enabling conditions, (iii) increased capacity for education and training through "learning by doing", (iv) institutional strengthening, and (v) dissemination of lessons learned. It acts as a catalyst to improve linkages between local level initiatives and local government planning and budgeting for sustainable resources and livelihood management. Its position as a local institution with extensive experience in local CRM complements the regional experience of the other members of the Alliance. In addition, the local case studies it is working on can be examples for local-level capacity building for resources management in the region. CORIN's future direction includes continuing research on science and policy, ICZM site plan and model development, and curriculum development.

WWF Living Mekong Programme

In November 2005, WWF Cambodia, Lao PDR, Vietnam and Thailand merged to form the WWF Greater Mekong Programme, with a core focus on the Moist Forests of the Annamite Range, the Dry Forests of the Lower Mekong, and the Mekong River system.

Within this structure, the "Living Mekong Programme" works towards a Vision whereby, *"Healthy freshwater ecosystems are established and maintained that enhance and sustain the livelihoods of local communities whilst ensuring the long-term conservation of Mekong Basin biodiversity"*

Ongoing activities implemented in the four countries of the Wetlands Alliance, as well as the Mekong Basin parts of Yunnan and Tibet, contribute to three main objectives:

- Policies and mechanisms that significantly reduce major and large-scale threats, particularly infrastructure, to sustainable livelihoods, biodiversity and social equity of the entire Mekong basin are formulated and used effectively in decision-making processes;
- Establishment of effective protection, management and, where necessary, restoration measures for critical Mekong species, habitats, and ecosystem processes is ensured;
- Local people in targeted priority areas sustainably manage and use Mekong basin aquatic natural resources to their benefit thus contributing to national economies and regional development.



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