



CAMBODIA PROGRAM

Wildlife Friendly™ Ibis Rice

Background

The Cambodian protected areas network was established in 1993, when there was limited information about biodiversity conservation priorities and local communities. As a result, several protected areas were created in areas that included rural settlements, with significant numbers of people living within the protected area boundaries. Since these local communities are heavily dependent on forest resources for their livelihoods, there is a potential conflict between the agricultural and other livelihood activities of these local communities, and the biodiversity goals of protected areas.



Rural communities rarely possess legal tenure for their land, even when they have inhabited an area for many years. The country's legal system was devastated by more than three decades of civil conflict, while low levels of education and literacy in the countryside mean that rural communities are often unaware of their land rights. As a result, they are vulnerable to illegal 'land grabbing' by a rich and powerful elite who hope to benefit from high land prices and weak law enforcement to seize rural land for subsequent re-sale at a substantial profit. This means that rural communities have little incentive to manage their land sustainably.

There is also little economic incentive to manage land efficiently. Most villagers are small-scale farmers who cultivate rain-fed paddy rice during the wet season, for sale to traders and middle men. These farmers use low input and low output agricultural systems suited to their subsistence existence. The communities are often geographically isolated, with very few traders visiting the village; as a result, those that do make the journey are able to set very low prices for the rice they purchase. Since farmers also have no access to credit, they often resort to borrowing money from these traders to purchase the following season's rice crop, further enhancing their dependence on them.

With growing human populations, the pressure on land resources is increasing, leading to widespread forest clearance in key conservation sites and protected areas, and conflicts between communities and government agencies responsible for conservation. Community members have

little incentive to abide by national laws, particularly those that protect the forest estate. Successful wildlife and habitat conservation therefore depends on engaging them through tools that directly link local economic and social development to environmental conservation, particularly limiting deforestation.

Implementation

A partnership of NGO and government agencies has made the link between economic development and environmental conservation with the launch of the 'Wildlife-Friendly Ibis Rice Project'. This project provides local communities with an incentive to engage in conservation, by offering farmers a premium price for their rice if they agree to abide conservation agreements that are designed to protect the rare water birds and other species that use the protected areas. The first of these agreements is a land-use plan that is developed by the local community and which clearly delineates the areas that farmers are permitted to clear for fields. This therefore limits the conversion of wetland areas to rice fields. They then develop a 'no-hunting' agreement, which outlaws the hunting and collection of rare waterbirds and their chicks. These agreements are enforced by a locally elected natural resource management committee, which is composed of representatives from the village, and thus guarantees a high degree of 'local ownership' of the scheme. Since the majority of the inhabitants of rural communities in Cambodia are engaged in rice farming, the scheme has the potential to benefit a high proportion of the population within each village.

The implementation of the project in each village follows a prescribed number of simple steps. Firstly, a Village Marketing Network (VMN) is formed in the village. The VMN is responsible for purchasing the rice from farmers and verifying that the farmers have respected the conservation agreements, with oversight from the natural resource management committee. The



VMN then stores the rice at a central location within the village. Transportation, processing and packaging, as well as the eventual marketing and sale of the rice, is coordinated by a local NGO, Sansom Mlup Prey (SMP). SMP organizes the collection of the rice from each of the participating villages, and delivers it to a mill where it is processed. The rice is then packaged and labeled as 'Wildlife Friendly™', and delivered to those outlets that have been contracted to sell the rice. WCS Cambodia has received certification from the Wildlife

Friendly Enterprise Network (WFEN) for Ibis Rice so the rice can now be marketed under the Wildlife Friendly™ brand. All contracts are negotiated by SMP, which is a non-profit organisation. Farmers are paid at the point at which they supply their rice to the VMN, with the VMN funding the purchases with a cash advance from SMP; revenue earned by SMP is used to cover these advances, as well as funding their operating costs. Surplus revenue is returned to the VMNs to be divided amongst farmers that are participating in the scheme.

Partnerships and Funding

The Wildlife-Friendly Ibis Rice Project is implemented by WCS in partnership with the Ministry of Environment and the Forestry Administration. The project is funded by a 2-year World Bank Development Marketplace grant, a 1-year APFED grant and part of the UNDP-GEF CALM project. All village-level activities, including subcontracts to local NGO partners, are supported by the Multi-Donor Livelihoods Facility's (MDLF) Civil Society and Pro-poor Marketing Program (CSPPM) through The Asia Foundation. The MDLF comprises the UK government's Department for International Development (DfID), the Danish International Aid Agency (Danida) and New Zealand Aid.

There are several partners involved in the implementation of the project. Farmers receive training on how to grow new varieties of rice, maintain rice quality, maintain water levels and procure seeds. Support is also provided for the creation of a local VMN, managed by a local board of elected officials; training includes courses on financial management, stock keeping and rice storage. These activities are not implemented by WCS, but subcontracted to local agricultural NGO partners, such as Farmer Livelihood Development (FLD).

WCS and the VMN are responsible for the certification and purchase of Ibis-Friendly Rice in each village. Local Village Committees manage land-use plans each year, and develop plans for acceptable rice field expansion for approval by the community and the government agencies. Each year the VMNs prepare a list of candidate farmers for the Ibis Rice scheme that have kept to land-use plans and respected the 'no-hunting' agreements.

WCS independently verifies that the candidate farmers have followed land-use plans and agreements, in close consultation with the government agencies running the reserves, and the VMNs are then provided with financial capital by SMP to arrange the purchase from the chosen farmers. Rice is then kept in the VMN village storage area.

Rice is transported from the village store for processing, milling and packaging at a mill close to the point of sale. Most rice is to be sold to hotels and restaurants in either Siem Reap or Phnom Penh. The marketing and sale of Ibis Rice is undertaken by SMP, who verify sales and ensure that Wildlife-Friendly criteria are being adhered to. SMP maintains a list of 'acceptable buyers', who follow certain procedures in their restaurants, such as banning the sale of wildlife products and bushmeat on their premises.



Preliminary experience in 2009

Over 30 tons of Malis (fragrant) rice was purchased from farmers in these villages between December 2008 and January 2009, at almost double the price initially offered by local middlemen. Farmers who signed up to the scheme signed agreements not to hunt species of conservation concern or clear land outside land-use plans developed by the village committees. This had an immediate noticeable impact, boosting the authority of the committees and reinforcing the importance of keeping to land-use plans.

Ten buyers for the rice have been identified in the tourist market in Siem Reap, including several up-market hotels. The hotels are Soria Moria, La Residence d'Angkor, Le Meridien Angkor, La Maison d'Angkor and Shinta Mani; the restaurants are Sugar Palm, the Warehouse, Common Grounds Café, V and A, Kamasutra. One boutique hotel with three properties in Phnom Penh, the Boddhi Tree, has shown support for the project by purchasing Ibis Rice prior to the scheduled availability in the capitol city, which is expected by the fall of 2009. The preliminary financial model should eventually generate a return of 40-50%, which will be reinvested in expanding the Ibis Rice initiative and shared with local farmers as 'dividends.'



New Ibis Rice Logo

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