



WWF

CASE STORY

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Livelihood Benefits from Dolphin Conservation

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Listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List in 2004, the Mekong Irrawaddy Dolphin is part of Cambodia's national heritage and an important source of income for communities involved in dolphin watching ecotourism. However, this species, with its small remaining population and restricted habitat range could disappear from the Mekong River.

Gillnets are the biggest known threat to dolphins in the Mekong. Fishermen do not try to catch dolphins, but sometimes dolphins get caught in their nets and die. The Cambodian government recently approved a sub-decree that creates Dolphin Managerial Protection Zones where gillnet use is prohibited. This is a very important step, but community support for dolphin conservation is critical to success. If fishermen can no longer use gillnets in protected areas, then they must be able to secure food and income from other sources. WWF and government agencies have partnered with local NGOs to provide alternative livelihood opportunities in communities along the Mekong River to assist with this process. Some of these alternative livelihoods are described below.

Tour Boat Operator

Sok Chea takes foreign and local tourists to view the dolphins at the Kampi pool by boat daily. Describing the importance of the dolphins, Sok Chea

states, "the presence of the dolphin at Kampi helps me and other villagers maintain jobs that are a crucial source of income to our families."

Sok Chea is one of 15 local people who are now working as boat drivers at the Kampi dolphin watching site. From early morning to evening, he takes tourists in his boat to get good views of the dolphins at Kampi. "I usually get two trips per day and earn a total wage of 30,000 riel (\$7.50)," he says adding that November to May is high season, and he can make more money during that time.



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Sok Chea operates a tour boat at the Kampi dolphin watching site.

Despite 5 years in the business, Sok Chea still faces difficulties communicating with his guests. “For Khmer tourists, I can guide them and tell them about the history and background of the dolphins. But for foreign tourists, I can only take them to see dolphins,” Sok Chea says.

Sok Chea says that fishing is a vital source of food and income for people living along the Mekong. He adds that he used to fish with gillnets, but stopped in 2005 when the government first began to ban gillnet use. A short time later the Kampi dolphin watching site was developed and he began his career as a boat driver.

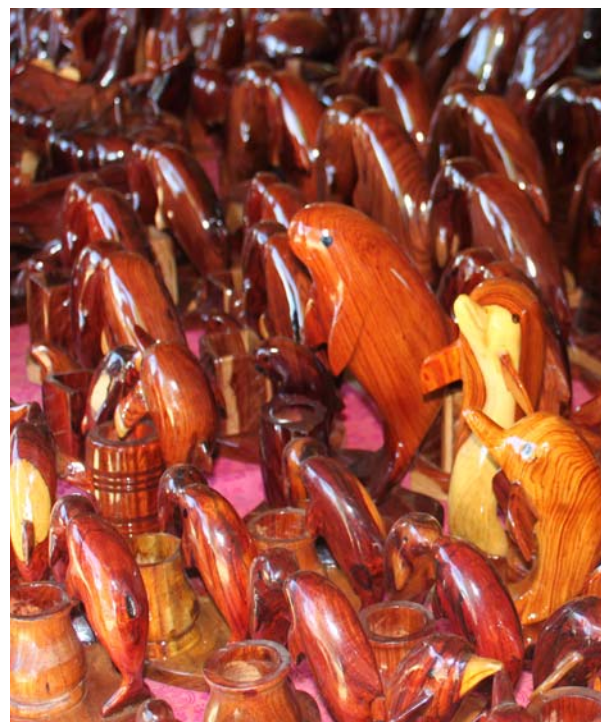
“Dolphins are a vital source of income for me and other villagers at Kampi. Without dolphins, we would face difficulties making a living” he adds.

Wooden Dolphin Sculptor

Following in his father’s footsteps, Chan Chaly, a local man living close to the Kampi dolphin watching site, began his career as a wood sculptor in 2008. He is able to make many kinds of wildlife sculptures, but he focuses mainly on dolphins. “The dolphin is a friendly animal and a lot of visitors love it,” says Chan Chaly, adding that the growing demand for dolphin sculptures is not only made by tourists visiting Kampi, but also from other provinces around Cambodia.”



Chan Chaly is producing horse wood sculptures for local markets, including Kampi.



Small and medium size dolphin wood sculptures are sold at Kampi.

By selling 6-7 small pairs of dolphin sculptures, Chaly can earn \$10-13 per day. “The survival of the dolphin in the Mekong River is very important to keep my job alive. People buy dolphin souvenirs because they love dolphins and would like to show their neighbors what Mekong dolphins look like,” he adds. “Before, around 10 families made dolphin sculptures in Kampi village, and sold their products at the Kampi dolphin watching site. Now many families are making sculptures because it provides a good salary and there is increasing demand for it as well.”

Chaly added that he loves the Mekong dolphins, and he goes often to see them. “Dolphins are very important for my family. I hope that the Mekong dolphins will live in safety and peace.”

Dolphin Wood Craft Vendor

Khoeun Sitha is one of 32 local villagers who sell dolphin sculptures at the Kampi dolphin watching site. Despite its seasonal nature, Sitha is happy with her job and believes that selling dolphin sculptures is a good way to earn money to support her family.

“Selling dolphin sculptures helps me earn money to support myself,” says Khoeun Sitha. “The best season is during the dry season, from

November to April. I make a good profit during those months.”

Sitha said that her business is in demand because of the presence of the Irrawaddy dolphins in the Kampi pool which attracts both local and international tourists to visit and buy her products. She added that she can earn \$80-100 per month from her business. “The dolphins support me, and I hope that they will continue living in this area.”



Khoewn Sitha sells dolphin wood sculptures at her stand at Kampi.

Community Homestay Service Providers

Seng Khim runs one of 9 community homestays on the island village of Koh Pdao located in the Mekong River.

“Besides farming, the homestay is an activity that helps me generate income to support my family,” says Khim, adding that before operating the homestay, he used to go fishing on the Mekong and would spend at least 2 nights there to gather fish for feeding his family and to sell at the local market.

Seng Khim states that he used to use gillnets for fishing, but stopped when he became aware that it



Seng Khim points to a lightbulb in his house fueled by biogas. He installed the system to accommodate guests at the homestay.

could kill the dolphins. “Dolphins are very important in attracting people to visit Koh Pdao, and I would therefore like to take part in protecting them from extinction,” he says.

Fishing is still a vital source of protein and food for Kim’s family and as a result they continue to fish. “I am old now, so I cannot go fishing anymore. Now, my sons are responsible for fishing, but we fish outside banned areas. In addition, we use traditional fishing tools that do not harm or impact the survival of dolphins in the Mekong River,” he says.

He added that he is aware of the significance of the Mekong dolphins in providing livelihoods for local villagers at Koh Pdao. “I will take part in protecting dolphins for the benefit of all people and our country,” he said.



Community homestay run by local villagers at Koh Pdao village, Kratie province.

Community farmers

Restrictions on gillnet use and restricted fishing areas create difficulties for local villagers who have lived around the dolphin habitat and rely entirely on local fisheries. Ros Miroun is one of the villagers at Koh Pdao that is suffering from that ban. With technical support from the Cambodian Rural Development Team, her family decided to develop a family fish pond where she can produce and harvest fish for food.



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Ros Miroun produces fish in her homemade pond to feed her family.

“My family did not plan to make money from the pond, but instead built it to have fish for food without going to catch fish in the river,” Ros Miroun says, adding that the leftover fish will be sold to neighbors within the village, at \$2 per kilogram.

In order to earn income to support her family, Miroun also raises chicken and pigs. This livestock enables her to earn about \$500 per year. “I used to hear about the mortality of dolphins caused by gillnets, and it saddened me. But, I am now happy to hear the government issued a new sub-degree for dolphin protection. I hope that all people are aware of the significance

of the Irrawaddy dolphin and will take part to protect them for our young generations and the country,” she adds.

Her neighbor, Prom Sarot is one of many people who work to plant vegetables as a source of income. She began growing vegetables more than 10 years ago, but it did not provide a high yield as she expected.

“Slow growth and insects caused low yield,” says Prom Sarot, adding that her success was improved when she learned new techniques and skills from the Cambodia Rural Development Team in 2008.

With proper technique and knowledge, her crops are now plentiful, and she can earn \$25 per month.



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Prom Sarot generates incomes from vegetables to support her living .



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To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

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