

FISHCULTURE IN CAMBODIA

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I. GEOGRAPHY

Cambodia is a Southeast Asian country. It is bounded to the Northeast by Laos, to the Southeast by Viet-nam, to the Northwest by Thailand and to the West by the Gulf of Siam. Its area is approximately 181,000 sq km (70,000 sq mi). It is about the same size as Washington State. About 50 percent of its area is forest, 10 percent is water, leaving only about 40 percent arable.

The dominant topographical feature of Cambodia is the Mekong River, which rises some 800 miles across the country from North to South. Near the center of the country is the Lake of Tonle Sap, the largest freshwater lake in the Southeast Asia. The central portion is a level plain where most of the population lives near the rivers and their tributaries.

II. CLIMATE

Cambodia is a typically tropical country with temperatures ranging from 68 F in January to the high of 90 F in April. It has only two seasons: rainy and dry. The rainy season lasts from May to October and the dry season from November to April. Over 85 percent of precipitation occurs during the rainy season. The average yearly rainfall for the entire country is 85 inches.

III. POPULATION

Cambodia has a population of about 7,000,000. The population density

is approximately 100/sq mi. Cambodian or Khmer is the national language.

IV. FISHERIES

Cambodian Fisheries is under the Ministry of Agriculture. The Division of Fisheries has responsibility to preserve the natural resources in both salt and fresh water. Cambodian fisheries has two Institutes. Hydrobiology Institute located in Phnom-Penh and Oceanography Institute located in Kampong Som (near the sea). Both Institutes have no experts, few staff, no equipment and no budget. As a result, no research has been done about Fisheries in Cambodia.

1. Fish production

Fish is the 3rd most important production after rice and corn and it is the chief source of protein for Cambodian people. In 1969, the total catch of fish was about 171,000 tons. Tonle Sap Lake provides more than 50,000 tons of fish per year. The Gulf of Siam produces about 30,000 tons per year. Other principal fishing grounds are the Mekong Rivers and its tributaries.

These statistics were gotten only from the commercial fishermen that bought fishing lots from the government. No statistics were taken from the small commercial fishermen and from the people living in the country that eat fish every day. In addition, the fishermen never record the right amount of fish they catch. If they record the right weight that they get, they have to pay more tax and next year the price of fishing lots will become higher. Therefore this value of statistics is not accurate.

2. Fishing Season

Usually family subsistence fishing is permitted all year round.

For commercial fishermen the capture period is from November to June. Most fishing is done between November and April. The off-season is from July to October.

3. Fishery products

About 60% of the catch is used for the production of salted dried fish and smoked fish. Most of the former is exported to the Southeast Asian countries. Other fishery products are fish sauce, fish paste and fish oil. Fish sauce and fish paste are very important to Cambodian diet especially for the people living in the country sides.

4. Marketing and prices

Fish are usually sold fresh in the market. Very few fish are frozen except salt water fish that can't be transported alive to the market.

The price of fish in Cambodia is very cheap but it varies among the species.

20¢ to 50¢ per kg (= 10 to 25 riels) for snake head (Ophiocephalus)
15¢ - 40¢ per kg (= 7 - 20 riels) for catfish (Clarias)
10¢ - 30¢ per kg (= 5 - 15 riels) for Carp (Cyprinidae family)

5. Fishculture

Because of its geographic situation, fish can be cultured in most parts of Cambodia without any problem for water supply. But fishculture has not developed in Cambodia yet due to two reasons:

- a. The lack of fishery experts. Cambodia has no specialist in fishculture.
- b. The natural production of fish is still sufficient for the requirement of the people.

Cambodia has no station for fishculture. In 1970 it received an AID from the

Government of Taiwan to establish a fishculture station in Takhmad near the river of Prek-Thnot and about 12 miles from Phnom-Penh. But because of the war this project has been post-poned.

It is believed that fishculture has been long practiced in Cambodia (cage culture in running water). Unfortunately, the methods of fishculture practiced by Cambodian fish farmers are wasteful, faulty and without scientific background. They used trash fish and rice bran to feed fish. They never figured out about the feeding rate and about conversion. They never thought about parasites and diseases. They don't believe that fertilizer increases food for fish yet.

Compared to other countries in the world, fishery research in Cambodia is still very infantile. In regards to this purpose, a lot of fishery biologists are needed and research must be done at a rapid pace in order to help the future Cambodian people that use fish as their main source of protein.