Kampot Coastal Zoning Plan

In order to protect the vital habitats and the natural resource base of the area, a Kampot Coastal Zoning Plan is being developed at the request of the provincial authorities. Coastal zonation focuses on the characterization of coastal waters, lands and natural resources, and helps to avoid conflicts in the use of the coastal area. The Governor has established a Provincial Task Force including all relevant line agencies. The zoning plan will include spatial planning for the 66.5 kilometres of the coastline and the identification of different zones for specific purposes, such as industrial use, tourism, conservation, and fishery activities.

The coastal zoning planning process will be based on a multi-stakeholder, participatory approach. In this process, the endorsement of the zoning plan by the provincial authorities, its legitimation through local and national policies and legislation, as well as awareness raising activities are key for the successful implementation. It is hoped that the implementation of the zoning plan will ensure the sustainable management of Kampot’s coastal area and promote the restoration and conservation of its natural resources, and eventually increase the adaptation capacity and hence the resilience of local ecosystems and local communities to climate-related hazards.

Seagrass conservation

In cooperation with the sub-national Fisheries Administration, the Provincial Environmental Department, the Department of Land Management, Urban Planning, Construction and Cadastre, and local communities, IUCN is conducting the first detailed survey of seagrass beds in Kampot, in order to assess the current status of the seagrass, its contribution to local livelihoods and its role in climate change adaptation (and mitigation). The study will be used as a basis for the development of improved community-based management and conservation of seagrass beds and related fisheries in the area. It is also intended to promote an improved recognition and understanding of the economic value and importance of coastal ecosystem services – for example the huge value of carbon sequestration by seagrass.

Recommendations for further action

The project recommends and supports the integration of climate change adaptation activities into policy development and local planning. Particularly, it promotes ecosystem-based solutions that allow for interaction between people and nature. The pilot activities in Kampot Province will demonstrate that a well-managed zoning scheme and seagrass management can play a critical role in climate change adaptation. The Kampot Coastal Zoning Plan is a crucial tool in ensuring that the development of Kampot’s coastal area is sustainable, in promoting the conservation of seagrass and other endangered marine species, and in enhancing the resilience of both local ecosystems and local communities to climate change. In the longer term, a better understanding of the carbon sequestration function of Kampot’s seagrass meadows may provide opportunities to finance their management through carbon markets.

Background

As part of the European Union funded project Building Resilience to Climate Change Impacts in Coastal Southeast Asia (BCR), Kampot Province, Cambodia, has been selected for pilot activities to reduce vulnerability to climate change. The four-year project, which started in 2011, aims to strengthen the ability of local governments and local people in Thailand, Cambodia and Viet Nam to plan for, and adapt to, future climate risks. In Cambodia, this IUCN project collaborates with the Department of Climate Change, Department of Wetlands and Coastal Zones of the Ministry of Environment and with provincial authorities.

In Kampot Province, Cambodia, the Prek Thnout commune has been selected after the project team, together with the provincial line departments, local authorities and local communities, carried out a Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA) that identified the commune as particularly sensitive to the impacts of climate change. The commune is mainly dependent on fishing and farming for subsistence livelihoods and income generation. The highest vulnerabilities found in this commune are related to the degradation of fishery resources and coastal habitats as well as the increasing pressure from local infrastructure developments.

The pilot activities include (i) promoting the sustainable management and strategic rehabilitation of natural resources – particularly the seagrass meadows – in order not only to make local ecosystems more resilient to climate change, but also to improve the food and livelihood security of local communities; and (ii) conducting the spatial planning and zonation of Kampot’s coastal area to minimize development impacts on key natural resources, reduce potential conflicts between different types of use, and to ensure space for nature to adapt to climate change. The activities will subsequently be subject to participatory evaluation to capture lessons learned to improve future planning at the local and provincial levels.

International Union for Conservation of Nature

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Kampot Province

Kampot Province is located in the south-western part of Cambodia and is one of the country’s four coastal provinces. It has a total coastline of 66.5 kilometres and borders Viet Nam to the East. Kampot’s coastal habitats include coral reefs, mudflats, approximately 1,900 hectares of mangrove forests, and 25,240 hectares of seagrass beds. The seagrass areas of Kampot Province are the largest in Southeast Asia. Seagrass habitats play a critical role in supporting fisheries, preventing erosion, providing storm protection, conserving biodiversity and sequestering carbon. They are important nursery and feeding grounds for many species of fish, as well as endangered species such as dugongs and seahorses.

Prek Thnout commune is located between the Bokor Mountain and the coastline and has approximately 7,944 inhabitants. The commune includes four villages, which are divided by estuaries. The area is mostly covered by secondary forest, while mangrove forest stands as a greenbelt along the shoreline. Mangroves have been significantly reduced due to land-use changes, overcutting and land encroachment for private ownership.

Fishing is the principal livelihood in Prek Thnout commune, complemented with secondary occupations such as farming and non-timber forest product (NTFP) harvesting. Most of the fishing is conducted within the seagrass beds.

Climate Change Vulnerabilities

Climate change scenarios for Kampot Province indicate stronger winds, higher waves and an increase in the frequency of storms. Fishing activities are particularly vulnerable to climate-related hazards such as severe storms, water temperature increase, heavy rainfall and sea level rise.

Identification of priority issues

Priority issues identified in the Prek Thnout commune and along the Kampot coastline include the overexploitation of fishery resources, the degradation of coastal habitats and increasing pressure from local infrastructure developments.

Overexploitation of fishery resources

Overfishing and the resulting decline in fishery resources are further accelerated by the presence of large-scale trawlers operating in offshore waters and small-scale trawlers near the shore. There is no comprehensive zoning scheme of the fishing area and no adequate management within the fishery communities that would limit the overexploitation of fishery resources.

Degradation of coastal habitats

Large areas of mangrove forest have been lost due to the development of shrimp ponds, salt pans and the collection of wood for charcoal and other uses. Protected mangrove areas have been established, but enforcement is still weak. Seagrass beds have been extensively degraded due to trawlers encroaching into near-shore fishing areas and unsustainable fishing practices. They are further threatened by unplanned local development.

Increasing pressure from infrastructure developments

The Kampot coastline is experiencing increasing pressure from human activities such as settlements, land reclamations in sea areas, the creation of coastal tourism sites and other infrastructure developments. A deep-sea water port is currently under construction. Kampot’s coastal zone plays an important role in the economic development of Cambodia’s industrial, agriculture, fisheries, transport and tourism sectors. Yet, uncontrolled construction along the shoreline and unrestricted infrastructure developments are contributing significantly to coastal environmental degradation.

Pilot adaptation activities

Without a clear zoning and protection scheme, the rapidly increasing economic activity in the Kampot coastal zone will accelerate the loss of seagrass and other habitats in the near future. The huge seagrass beds of Kampot could be lost to development before their real value is even understood.

The Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment conducted in 2012 provided a clear understanding of the current climate variability and likely future climate change, as well as the capacity of local communities and government to address both climate- and non-climate-related stressors affecting their local livelihoods. Based on this assessment, activities have been prioritized in order to conserve, manage and restore coastal natural resources as a means to increase resilience to climate change.