

# Fisheries & Adaptive learning

## A NEW project has begun...

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Brief #1

### WHAT?

The full title is: **Uptake of Adaptive Learning for fisheries enhancements**. It is funded by DFID (UK Department for International Development) under their Fisheries Management Science Programme.

The project (R8292) is being implemented through a partnership between organizations in the UK, India & the Lower Mekong Basin region. These are: MRAG Ltd, UK; Mekong River Commission (MRC); the Central Inland Fisheries Research Institute (CIFRI), India; the Department of Agriculture, Government of West Bengal; and finally, WorldFish, India.

### WHY?

As you will know, managing and enhancing fisheries (through stocking fish in lakes, reservoirs and other waterbodies) has great potential to increase benefits from aquatic

resources, resources which frequently play a crucial role in rural livelihoods in South and South East Asia. Unfortunately however, benefits are not always realised and outcomes can be unexpected or even harmful.

One of the main reasons for this is that resource managers, whether they be local people or outside 'experts', often have to make management decisions under conditions of great uncertainty - these systems are complex and every situation is different.

Frequently it is necessary to act even though our understanding is incomplete. Given this, an approach that explicitly aimed to reduce uncertainty about resource systems *at the same time* as they were being managed was piloted in Southern Lao PDR by MRAG Ltd and Regional Development Co-ordination (RDC).

Between 1999 and 2002, 38 villages in Southern Lao took part in an experimental approach to stocking in their village communal waterbodies. Results were extremely promising and the approach, called 'Adaptive learning', helped to increase benefits from these waterbodies and, importantly, increase understanding of how and why this was possible. More information about this project can be found at <http://dialspace.dial.pipex.com/town/green/gov67>. Click on Final Technical Reports, then go to project code R7335.

Given the pilot's success, this project's main aims are to promote the approach more widely, amongst people like yourselves, and test it in different settings, to increase its applicability.

### WHEN?

- The project began in April 03 and will continue for 23 months until March 05.
- Develop and implement communication network (May-Oct 03)
- Implement pilot projects (June-Oct 03)
- Monitor and evaluate pilot projects (June 03- Dec 04 )
- Regional workshops (Sept 04-Jan 05)
- Promotion of results (throughout)

## HOW will the project work?

**Communication is the key** to the project and a priority is to establish links with people like yourselves; organisations/individuals involved in aquatic resources management and/or potentially interested in the adaptive learning approach. We want to learn from your experiences and see how ours can best be shared.

We will therefore develop a '**communication strategy**'; a means of communicating with relevant people in the region in a manner and form that they have decided is both accessible and helpful. Watch this space! One of the first activities is to canvass opin-

ion on the usefulness and readability of our previous project output; the **Guidelines for Adaptive Learning**.

Embracing the principle of 'learning by doing', a key activity will be the **implementation of the adaptive learning approach in new settings**; rice-fish systems and small reservoirs in India and large reservoirs in the Lower Mekong Basin. We will evaluate whether we have been able to increase benefits from these systems, increase our knowledge of how they work and increase our understanding of how adaptive learning approaches can best be implemented.

Drawing from these experiences and from those generated through the communication network, our final main activity will be to **synthesize** our learning, through **workshops and discussion**. This will enable us to improve existing guidelines and project outputs and then promote lessons learnt in suitable and accessible media forms.

## WHERE are the project sites?

Given the poverty focus of DfID a key criteria for site selection is that the resources have the potential to improve the livelihoods of the poorer sectors of rural communities.

We will therefore be working with farmers on rice-fish systems in West Bengal (India), with fishers on small reservoirs in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka (India) and with resource users in a selection of large reservoirs in Vietnam and/

or Cambodia/ Thailand/Lao PDR. Precise details of location will be decided in the next few months.

**Watch this space!**

## YOUR role...

This will be up to you! We have identified you and/or your institution as having an interest in aquatic resources management and/or enhancement. We are very interested to share our ideas with you and will work towards finding effective means of doing so. Perhaps you would just like to remain on our circulation list and be kept informed of our activities, or perhaps you would like to become more actively involved?

Given the wide geographical spread of project sites, we will be relying on e-mail to a certain extent to share ideas, results and

allow feedback on progress and direction of the research. To avoid the usual pitfalls of email communication (i.e. too much is sent to everyone), we aim to develop a series of project briefs, of which this is the first. We recognise the huge demands on your time, but hope that these small 'windows' into the research will serve to inform, share results and stimulate feedback from you

However, nothing beats face-to-face contact and in the next few months we will be trying to arrange meetings with interested

parties within the region. If you are one of these, please let us know by contacting one of us at the email address below.

As part of our communication strategy, we will be in touch again to discuss how communication with you may best be facilitated. If you know of people or institutions who might be interested in this work please forward this brief. We are more than happy to add to our circulation list so send us your contact details if you want to add your name.

## WHO is involved?

The project is implemented through a partnership between MRAG Ltd., Mekong River Commission (MRC), Central Inland Fisheries Research Institute (CIFRI), West Bengal, India, WorldFish and Department of Agriculture, West Bengal



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