

## ***Comments on Ton le Sap Brief***

The brief provides a good description of the lake basin's geography and the physical and social issues concerning Lake Ton le Sap. One interesting feature of this lake is the explicit understanding that its centrality to the livelihoods of the local population mean that preservation of its biodiversity has to be part of the country's poverty reduction program. There are few countries where this linkage between poverty reduction and biodiversity protection are so explicit.

The threats facing the lake are only mentioned briefly – they appear to be the loss of the annual silt load and the consequent diminution in agricultural productivity; over-exploitation of fish stock; and introduction of exotic species. Upstream damming of the Mekong river constitutes a major future threat. The extent and seriousness of these threats could be described in some more detail.

The complexity of management institutions and their fragmented responsibilities comes through very clearly. There are numerous plans and policies, all seemingly imposed top down with little community involvement. This may change if the present intention to decentralize authority to village, commune and district level comes to fruition. However, the plan is meeting opposition and it isn't clear the extent to which it will be effective. The relevant laws are also listed but there is no commentary on them. Capacity building activities are described in sufficient detail.

The lessons learned do not contain any surprises but do cover a wide range of important topics. They are well presented and thorough. While the lessons include the need to decentralize if, for no other reason than that the centralized approach of previous governments is disintegrating anyway. However, the costs arising from the fragmentation of responsibility and lessons on how to overcome it are not included in the institutional lessons.

The Brief is very clearly written and well structured. It would be improved if some more information could be provided (1-2 paragraphs) on each of:

- The extent and severity of the threats to the lake from loss of silt load, exotic species, over-exploitation of fish stock.
- The consistency or otherwise of the various laws and the effect of this tangle of legal instruments on practical management of the lake
- Any lessons arising from the fragmentation and overlap of responsibilities for managing different parts of the lake system.