

## Press Release

24 May 2023

### Thousands of Cambodians empowered to manage sustainably local forests and fisheries

Phnom Penh, 24 May 2023 — The Partnership for Forest and Fisheries Communities (PaFF) has transformed the lives of thousands of rural Cambodians by supporting them to exercise their rights to manage, protect and benefit from local forests and fisheries resources.

The initiative built capacities among communities and government agencies to implement three community-based approaches to manage sustainably natural resources. PaFF supported 120 community forests, 64 community fisheries and 11 community protected areas in Kratie, Stung Treng, Kampong Thom and Preah Vihear provinces.

This included enabling communities to claim and exercise their rights to manage local resources, and to develop and implement management plans for their respective areas. The communities that PaFF supported now manage a total of more than 200,000 hectares.

**Markus Buerli, SDC's Director of Cooperation in Cambodia, said.** "Rural Cambodians depend heavily on natural resources for their livelihoods but are not always aware of their rights to manage these resources. PaFF has closed this gap, enabling tens of thousands of people to secure access to local resources and the rights to manage these resources collectively. This has improved livelihoods and boosted people's resilience, while contributing to Cambodia's efforts to address climate change and protect nature."

Overall, more than 94,000 people in 35,000 households benefited from PaFF. More than half were women, and one fifth belonged to indigenous groups. Women now occupy around 30 percent of the management and leadership roles in community forests, community fisheries, community protected areas and related credit schemes.

Cambodia's natural resources are now more protected as community-led patrolling and reporting of crimes relating to land and natural resources have increased. Between 2021 and 2022, PaFF communities raised 482 cases of illegal logging, land encroachment and related illegalities with the authorities. In 60% of cases, the authorities resolved to address these complaints.

PaFF also established and assisted community-based enterprises selling honey, palm-leaf products and ecotourism services and others. These and other income-generating activities such as agroforestry have improved livelihoods in participating communities.

To help communities manage their resources sustainably over the long term, PaFF established credit schemes and mini trust funds in 141 communities based natural resource management. These have a total capital of more than USD 1.4 million, and provide more than USD 6,500 each month to support the management of community forests and fisheries. The credit schemes also give their members access to loans to improve their livelihoods.

PaFF also helped the Royal Government of Cambodia to draft or revise policies, strategies, regulations or guidelines relating to community-based natural resource management.

**Vong Sopanha, Deputy Director-General of the Forestry Administration, said:** “PaFF aligned well with Cambodia’s policy goals relating to decentralization, forest protection, and progress towards to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. It has been effective at strengthening capacities and policies enabling communities to benefit from participating in the Royal Government of Cambodia’s different models for community-based natural resource management.”

**Camilla Ottosson, Head of Development Cooperation (Sida) at the Embassy of Sweden Section office in Phnom Penh, said:** “By focusing on rights and responsibilities, PaFF has strengthened engagement and collaboration between the Cambodian government and local communities. This is evident in improved responses to community reports of illegality, greater participation by community representatives in policy processes, and the approval by government authorities of communities’ management plans covering a large area of forests and fisheries.”

To boost information sharing and collective power, PaFF worked with 20 community forests, community fisheries, community protected area networks. It also supported 10 multistakeholder platforms through which representatives of these networks can advocate for stronger rights and supportive policy reforms.

**Keo Vanna, chief of Kampong Thom Provincial Community Forestry Network, said:** “The network gives me opportunities. I am able to build my capacity through trainings to share with and learn from different people, inside and outside the country. I can use what I learn to help my constituent communities.”

The partnership’s achievements and legacy were showcased at a workshop hosted by RECOFTC Cambodia in Phnom Penh on 24 May, to mark the end of the initiative.

PaFF was implemented by the Non-Timber Forest Products Exchange Programme Asia ([NTFP-EP](#)), [WWF-Cambodia](#), the [Culture and Environment Preservation Association](#) and [RECOFTC Cambodia](#). It was funded mainly by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

**For more information, see:** [www.recoftc.org/en/cambodia/projects/paff](http://www.recoftc.org/en/cambodia/projects/paff)

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