



WWF

COMFISH

APRIL

2015



People

Conservation

Sustainability

# Community Fisheries III

Successes & Impacts 2013-2015



A woman from a Comfish III target village in Khammouan Province with freshly caught fish

# WHAT IS COMMUNITY FISHERIES?



Laos is a country replete with freshwater resources, from the shallow streams that turn to fast-flowing waterways in the rainy season, to the perennially nurturing Mekong River. Their conservation and sustainable use at present and into the future is paramount for the benefit of both people and nature.

**165**

THE NUMBER OF FISH CONSERVATION ZONES ESTABLISHED IN COMFISH I & II

Community Fisheries III (Comfish III) is a joint project by WWF and Oxfam Novib, in partnership with the Department of Livestock and Fisheries of the Ministry of Agriculture, that works towards expansion of freshwater protected areas in Bolikhamxay, Khammouan and Savannakhet provinces. At its core is strengthening management capacity of villages and local government agencies, helping to improve livelihoods and reduce stress on natural aquatic resources.

The project promotes the application of the 2009 Fisheries Law, which does not only allow but explicitly mandates communities to manage their natural aquatic resources (i.e. water, fish and other aquatic species), in cooperation with district authorities. This result is the creation of Fish Conservation Zones (FCZs), managed by Fisheries Management Committees (FMCs).

**72,000**

PEOPLE, INCLUDING 30,300 WOMEN, BENEFITTING FROM THE PROJECT IN THREE CENTRAL PROVINCES OF LAOS

Begun in 2008, Community Fisheries is now in its third phase and is building on the achievements of the previous two phases, which included work in 7 provinces and the creation of more more than 160 FCZs until 2012.

### How does it work?

The participation of communities, with a focus on women's involvement, is crucial. FMCs are created and oversee the management of their FCZs with assistance from provincial and district fisheries officers.

Key activities carried out in Comfish III include the monitoring and evaluation of FCZs, creating 25 new FCZs, biodiversity research, training FMCs, and supporting community livelihoods.



# LIVING RIVERS

From the Nam (River) Kading in Bolikhamxay, to the Nam Hinboun in Khammouan, and further south to Savannakhet’s Xe Banghieng, tens of thousands of people have for centuries fished these bountiful waters for subsistence.



**SILVER BARB (BARBONYMUS GONIONOTUS) IS A SPECIES THAT LIVES AT MID-WATER TO BOTTOM DEPTHS IN STREAMS AND RIVERS. IT IS OF HIGH VALUE IN LOCAL FISHERIES**

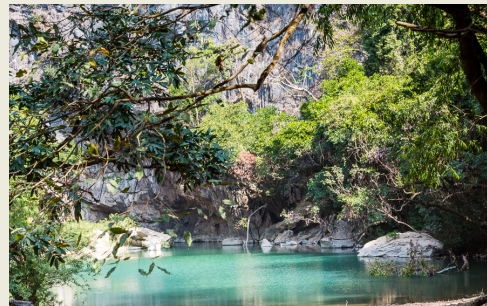
The freshwater ecosystems of these target provinces hold a remarkable array of biodiversity, much of which has the potential to be sustainably managed by individual communities.

Some of the most common fish species include Pa Mang (*Amblyrhynchichthys truncatus*), a benthopelagic mainly herbivorous species, which moves into the inundated areas where it spawns during the flood season, Pa Pak (*Hypsibarbus spp.*) and Pa Viengfai (*Barbonymus schwanenfeldii*), an omnivorous fish occurring in most rivers of the Lower Mekong Sub-region, as well as the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra and Borneo. All have importance in fisheries, both in terms of food security (protein intake) and income generation (direct sales and transformation).

Other species belong to the “catfish” family (*Siluriformes* order), such as the Pa Kot (*Hemibagrus spilopterus*) and the more rare and elusive (and protected under the Fisheries Law) Pa Khao (*Wallago attu*), a nocturnally active, predominantly carnivorous fish found in deep, slow-flowing rivers and which moves into various floodplain habitats during the high water season.

## IN FOCUS: KONG LO

Kong Lo village is located in Khounkham District, Khammouan Province, at the very end of a superb karst valley in the heart of the Phou Hinboun National Biodiversity Conservation Area (NBCA). The village settlement was built right next to the entrance of a magnificent natural limestone cave



on the Hinboun River (the “Kong Lo Cave”), which exits 7 kilometers away in Nakai District, in yet another splendid valley surrounded by karst formations. In 2012, through the Comfish project, WWF-Laos supported the creation of a 0.375 hectare FCZ in Kong Lo village, and a FMC to effectively manage the FCZ. Since then, the villagers have seen fish populations recover and now fish can be seen swimming freely at the entrance of the famous cave. Visitors can even engage in conservation there by feeding the fish in their natural environment!

# IMPROVED LIVELIHOODS

The creation of FCZs is one way of helping to replenish natural fish stocks, but not the only means to achieve this goal. Another way that Comfish tries to reduce pressure on the river ecosystem is by providing opportunities for alternative income and food sources. In particular, these activities are aimed at benefitting women's livelihoods.



**1,200**  
COMMUNITY FCM  
MEMBERS TRAINED  
ON FISHERIES CO-  
MANAGEMENT

Developing the capacity to produce fingerlings through the establishment of small hatcheries has been initiated in Comfish III. So too, farming and livestock technical trainings, which include rice intensification and disease prevention in cattle are seen as ways to enhance the livelihoods of local people.



**10**  
VILLAGES USING  
REVOLVING FUND FOR  
GOATS

Women have also led 'floy' fish tagging research with partner company FISHBIO and a hatchery was created in Ban Thouat, Champone district of Savannakhet, with technical training to a model entrepreneur household.



Other technical trainings provided to target villages focus on livestock raising, veterinary skills work and vegetable cultivation.

**200**  
FCZS IN 7 PROVINCES  
INCLUDING PROJECTS  
SUPPORTED BY  
WWF, HSBC WATER  
PROGRAMME, BMZ,  
CEPF AND MCKNIGHT  
FOUNDATION



## GENDER INCLUSIVE

All activities in Comfish are undertaken to be gender-sensitive and WWF has one dedicated gender specialist working on its implementation.

The data collected in the project is disaggregated by gender, and FMCs are to be composed of at least 3 women who are present at all meetings or represented by another female delegate. Livelihood support initiatives are also planned so that women participate in the decision, planning and roll-out of the activities, directly benefitting from them in the long-term.

Comfish's gender inclusive approach focuses on opportunity, participation, decision-making, and benefit. First, women should have the opportunity and possibility to participate (not only should they be invited to important events, but it should be made possible that they actually participate). Second, all activities must include women representation. Third, women must be able to have a say in all decision-making processes. Finally, women should equally benefit from the project.

# THE VOICES OF COMMUNITY FISHERIES

Over 72,000 people benefit from Comfish III in three central provinces of Laos. These are some of their voices.

**Mr Vone Keomany, President of Donxai Village, Pakkading District, Bolikhamxay Province**



*“I’m very proud of our Fish Conservation Zone and the way we’ve come together to manage it. It has taken effort by many people in the village, and even drawn tourists off Road 13 who come to see the river protected area. We earn on average 800,000 kip (US\$100) per month through the sale of fish feed to these visitors, who we welcome to the community and tell the story of fish*

*conservation here. We know that by having a well-managed zone we’ll be helping boost the fish population and into the future, have a healthier river.”*

*“The enthusiasm and dedication of the communities is inspiring. It reveals to us there is a great base for expansion of co-management activities, and perhaps even can be a lesson learned to feed into other WWF-Laos projects. We’re really helping to conserve freshwater biodiversity and bring immense benefits to those at the river’s edge.”*

Mr Keosavai  
Phommalasy,  
Comfish III Project  
Manager, WWF-Laos

**Mr Phone Bangeoin, Head of Lao Women’s Union, Vatthad Village, Bolikhan District, Bolikhamxay Province**



*“We keep feeding the fish well so they will stay longer in the area. They are visible in the river much more now than in the past. Honestly, we are so happy the village has been chosen within this project, as it highlights that we have, or will learn to have, the capacity to manage it. Everyone is aware that fish conservation here is bringing real benefits and especially for women. I am part of the*

*decision-making group and can speak my mind about the way we carry out activities. I’m delighted to be given this chance and support my village development.”*



*Different fish species caught near a Comfish III target village in Savannakhet Province*

# Community Fisheries in numbers

25

The total number of villages creating new FCZs under Comfish III

1-30

The average size (in hectares) of Fish Conservation Zones in the Comfish III project



120

The amount of district and provincial fisheries officers trained on fisheries co-management

30,300

The number of women directly benefitting from Comfish III

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