

## Case Study: The change of Steung Moung's functions, the danger of biodiversity

During the rainy season from May to June, Steung Moung (also known as river Dauntri) used to bring water from Phnom Teuk Snow (1425 meters) through Moung Reussey and Rokkakiri districts in Battambang province. The increased water flow during those periods was enriching for the biodiversity in the river, and surrounding forest area which provided forage to a variety of fish and terrestrial wildlife.

There used to be diverse fish species, eels, frogs, crabs, snails, and other animals that flourished in the river and surrounding flooded areas. The water level remained deep and provided adequate supply for people and other living things during the dry season.

Many people in the community were engaged in activities such as fishing, collection of wild honey and mushrooms as a secondary source of income. Fishing had also become the main occupation for many families during the rainy season, including the family of Mrs. Hay Dany (shown below) which has 5 family members. Each family was able to catch 5 to 10 kgs of fish per day which was sold for USD2.50/kg.



However, the river has recently been affected by the construction of dams in upper stream,

effects of climate change and landslides. These changes have greatly impacted on-farm and off-farm livelihood activities for people that depend on the river. Natural resources such as fish habitats, crabs, eels, snails, wildlife species (mammals, birds, reptiles), and other seasonal flood plants which people used to rely on are becoming more depleted every year. Most places in the river have become shallow and some other places dry up during the dry season. The exploitation of natural resources was also observed in the area due to illegal fishing/poaching, burning flooded plants and deforestation. The community people are increasingly using chemical fertilizers and pesticides to increase cash crop yields.



Mrs. Dany who is from Moreah Prov village, Chrey commune, Moung Reussei district said, “my family and other community people have seriously suffered from the biodiversity changes and are forced to find other options to supplement the needs for food and income security. I work as a cashier for the Livelihood Improvement Group in the village, which was established in 2019. My family’s livelihood depends on crop cultivation, seasonal labourer for weed control on farms, and construction work. Many others have migrated to Thailand, or other provinces in Cambodia seeking temporarily jobs. She also added,” sustainability is very important to improve my family’s and other people’s livelihoods”.

Similar to the above views, I would like to strongly suggest for the local and competent authorities at all levels to effectively strengthen

the enforcement of laws which prevent further deforestation, and protect mammals, reptiles, birds, fish, and other species in Steung Moung and the Tonle Sap. This could help to preserve the sustainable use of natural resources as they are convenient sources of income and livelihood for many.

*Narrated by: Mrs. Hay Dany on 17 July 2022*

*Photographed by: Keo Sothorn and Village Chief of Moreah Prov village*

*Interviewed by Keo Sothorn*

*Rewritten by: Sok Somith*

