



Tropentag, September 14-16, 2022, hybrid conference

“Can agroecological farming feed the world?
Farmers’ and academia’s views”

Framing a conceptual toolkit for institutional transformations of Cambodian inland fisheries

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Abstract

In Cambodia, fisheries play an important role in the national economy, culture and food security with food sovereignty. The natural supply of fish and other aquatic animals from rice fields is an important contribution to rural economies and their nutritional well-being. Thus, maintaining or even increasing this supply, captures the attention of policies and strategies targeting the Cambodian food system. In this context, agroecological interventions, such as community fish refuges, are developed as fish conservation measures that aim to improve fish productivity in rice fields. The complexity of the interactions between the numerous environmental and socioeconomic variables influencing these socio-ecological interventions requires a deeper understanding of the institutional transformations of food systems. In this sense, this research focuses on developing an analysis on collective action and governance of Cambodian inland fisheries. Our position aims to address the socio-ecological relations and power issues at the heart of a food sovereignty approach that prioritises the need to respond to the basic food needs of local people, proposing food as a right of local communities. To this end, we develop a set of conceptual tools for the analysis of institutional transformations in Cambodian aquatic food systems. We draw on the social-ecological systems framework and the theories of critical institutionalism. Based on both, we elaborate a conceptual toolkit as a first step for the governance analysis of the community-based fisheries refugee project developed by WorldFish in Cambodia. We conduct an assessment of the impact of this project on the institutional dynamics of rural communities in Kampong Thom province. Our study considers the trajectory of the project, selecting a sample of rural communities that established community fish refuges in the period 2016–2021, and communities that are developing the same from 2021 onwards. The conceptual model can feed back into existing governance models developed for the project and systems for decision support and collective action in aquatic food systems in

Cambodia. In turn, highlighting the achievements of an agroecological approach project that has demonstrated a significant increase in terms of food productivity and biodiversity in the intervention areas.

Keywords: Cambodia, collective action, fisheries, food systems, institutions