Wetlands-based adaptation through a Ramsar Regional Initiative

in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam

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The context

- Region rich and diverse in wetlands;
- Wetlands host globally important biodiversity;
- Critical natural infrastructure providing Nature-based Solutions to climate adaptation and mitigation, DRR, water and food security;
- All countries have ratified the Ramsar Convention, but disparities in implementation;
- Threats: Climate change, encroachment and water extraction for agriculture, hydropower;
- Lack of robust policy and legal framework; capacities; effective management framework on wetlands

Climate change

-High temperatures

-Changes in precipitation regime

-Longer and more intense droughts

- More frequent intense precipitation events

Overall decrease in water availability

Degradation of wetlands

Livelihoods affected (agriculture, Fisheries)

Maladaptation

Increased irrigated rice and encroachment on wetlands

Loss of ecosystem services

(biodiversity, water supply and regulation, carbon storage)

Reduction of natural capital and income → **increased vulnerability of communities**

Anthropogenic causes

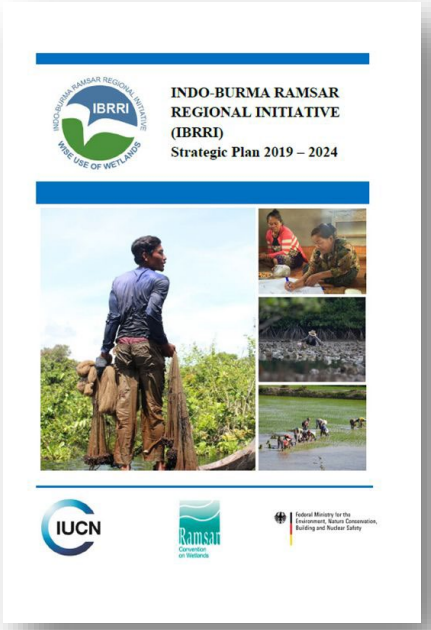
- Land use change (Agricultural and Urban expansion, logging)
- Water infrastructures (dams, dikes, watergates)
- Pollution (nutrients and plastic)
- Invasive species
- Over-fishing and hunting

IBRRI – A regional platform to strengthen wetlands conservation and climate resilience

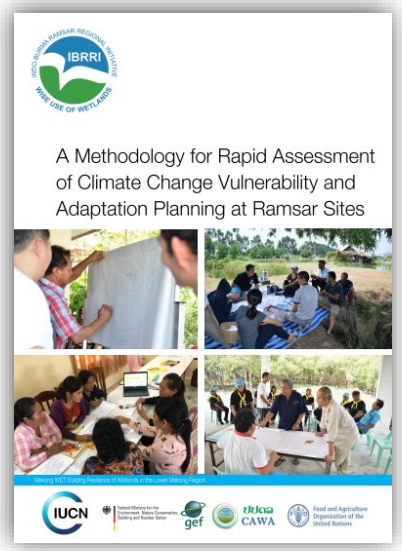
- Ramsar Regional Initiatives are platforms providing regional coordination and coherence on the implementation of the Ramsar Convention Strategic Plans in specific regions or sub-regions.

- Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam, with support from IUCN, decided to form the Indo-Burma Ramsar Regional Initiative (IBRRI). IBRRI was endorsed by the Ramsar Standing Committee in 2016

➢ **Early in the process, as part of the IBRRI Strategic Plan, countries agreed to provide significant focus on climate change and on promoting the role of wetlands as infrastructure for adaptation**



1 – Understanding the climate impact and wetlands-services and wetlands-dependent communities

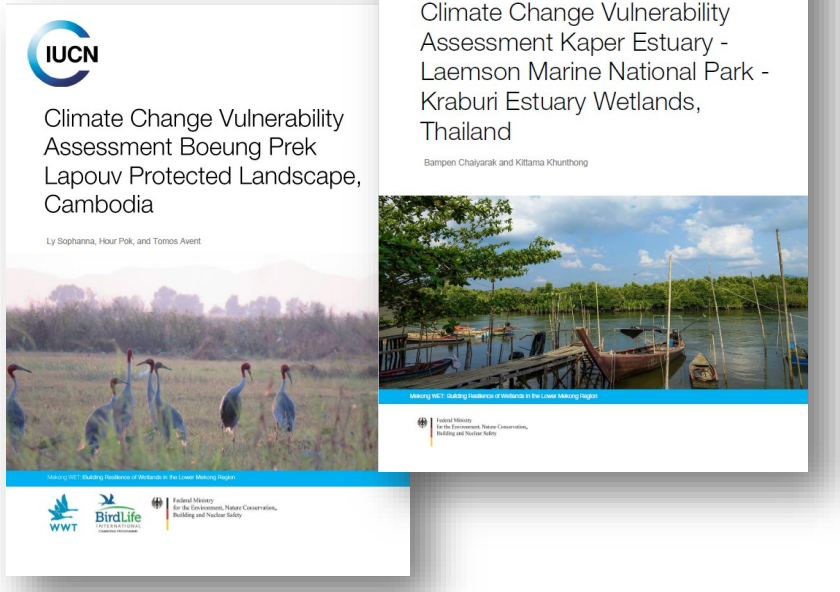


➢ **Supported the development of a regional tool for rapid assessment of Climate Change Vulnerability and Adaptation planning at Ramsar sites**

- The tool assesses the vulnerability of habitats, species and communities in an inter-related manner
- It blends local knowledge on historical data and scientific knowledge (historical data and projection)
- It is implemented by a local team consisting of government representatives, local experts and IUCN

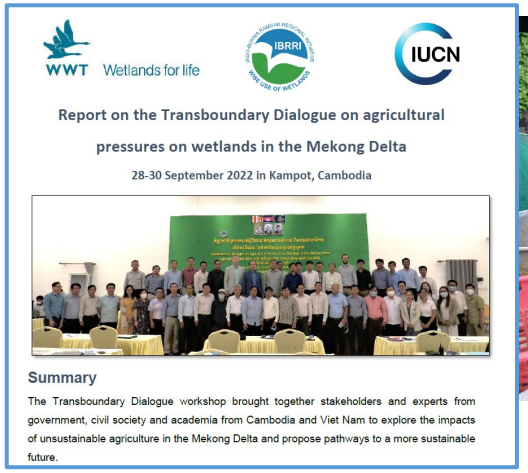
➢ **Vulnerability Assessments were carried out** in 10 Ramsar sites in the region – they identify wetlands' climate vulnerabilities and the implications for wetlands-dependent communities livelihoods and biodiversity

- Key vulnerabilities include:
  - Sea-level rise impacting rice production in the Mekong Delta;
  - Changes in precipitation affecting key species such as the Sarus Crane and their food supply, the water chestnut (*Eleocharis dulcis*);
  - Increased storm severity and changes in seasons impacting coastal fisheries;
  - Increased temperatures affect the reproductive success of turtles and other reptiles.



2 – Piloting and promoting locally-driven NbS

- **Supported a small grant programme** (18 grants) on Nature-based Solutions in wetlands totaling 400,000 € for CSOs, academia, and government agencies;
- Grants ranged from supporting additional vulnerability assessments to technical interventions on wetlands;
- **Key NbS approaches implemented include:**
  - Restoring seagrass beds;
  - Developing broodstock protection zones in Tonle Sap;
  - Restoring seasonally inundating grasslands;
  - Promoting the conservation of flooded forests
- The information was compiled in an **Indo-Burma Outlook** providing key knowledge at regional level and identifying regional level strategies for conservation of wetlands
- A series of training and dialogues on NbS on wetlands, a citizen journalism programme and policy dialogues supported the uptake of lessons learned


WWT Wetlands for life

IBRRI

IUCN

Report on the Transboundary Dialogue on agricultural pressures on wetlands in the Mekong Delta

28-30 September 2022 in Kampot, Cambodia

Summary

The Transboundary Dialogue workshop brought together stakeholders and experts from government, civil society and academia from Cambodia and Viet Nam to explore the impacts of unsustainable agriculture in the Mekong Delta and propose pathways to a more sustainable future.


Indo-Burma Ramsar Regional Initiative

Policy Brief: National Wetland Policies

Regional Dialogue on Wetland Policies in the Lower Mekong Region

The Indo-Burma Ramsar Regional Initiative (IBRRI) and the Ramsar Regional Centre-East Asia, convened a regional dialogue on wetlands policies to review the state of national wetland policies across the region. It was attended by the five IBRRI country governments, non-governmental organisations and academics.

This policy brief provides IBRRI partners with specific recommendations on the development and implementation of national wetland policies discussed during the dialogue.

The Ramsar Convention and Wetland Policy

- A National Wetland Policy is a key feature of the implementation of the wise use concept of the Ramsar Convention.
- The Fourth Ramsar Strategic Plan 2016-2024 proposes that Contracting Parties to the Convention should implement the Strategic Plan at national and regional levels by developing national wetlands policies. Such policies should recognise the benefits wetlands provide and be cross-sectoral to ensure greatest impact on the wise use of wetlands.
- The Ramsar Convention adopted Resolution VII.6 on "Guidelines for developing and implementing National Wetland Policies" in 1999. The annex to Resolution VII.6 sets out comprehensive guidance for the development, integration and implementation of wetland policies. This guidance has been expanded in Ramsar Handbook 2 (4th Edition) on *National Wetland Policies*.

Wetland Policy or Wetland Policies?

Two distinct, but not necessarily mutually exclusive, approaches can be pursued. Both approaches come with an element of risk. However, the challenges may be more significant in attempting to embed wetland issues within multiple cross-sectoral policies, as the potential for policy gaps to occur is greater, especially where the appetite for uptake and integration within some sectors is weak.

National Wetland Policy

A unique, 'wetland-centric' stand-alone policy at a national level can provide a strong opportunity to recognize the importance of wetlands and to establish clear management responsibilities and objectives. A national wetland policy can:

- Help raise the profile of wetlands, with legislators and the public;
- Articulate the key roles and responsibilities of government thus enhancing accountability.

Integrated Wetland Policies

The integration of wetland issues within multiple cross-sectoral policies and strategies can also be beneficial to raising awareness of wetlands. Integrated wetland policies can:

- Assist with embedding the wise use of wetlands in multiple ministries;
- Raise awareness of wetland ecosystem services across different levels of government from the national to the local levels.

Sectoral Policy Interests

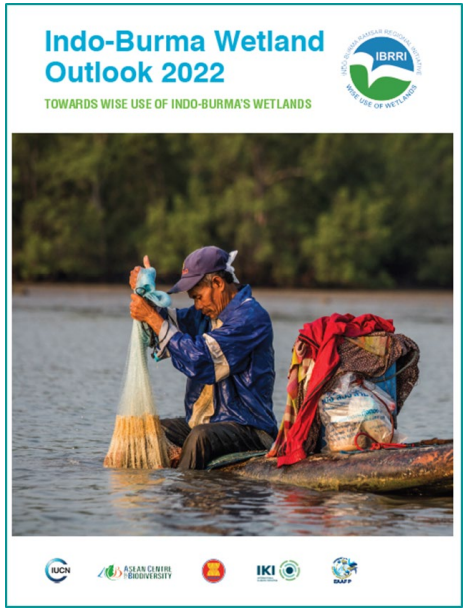
Wetland policies can be integrated within the policies and strategies of multiple sectors. For instance:

Water sector: Water resource planning can highlight the key role that wetlands may play in improve water quality and quantity, regulating water flow in rivers, or recharging groundwater resources.

Energy sector: Wetlands can be highlighted in strategic planning for hydropower and the need to ensure their wise use along with the need to generate renewable energy.

Agriculture sector: The conversion of wetlands to agriculture can often result in the loss of key benefits to local communities. Sustainable agricultural policies can emphasise the wise use of wetlands for both food production and their novel use in treating agricultural runoff.

Tourism sector: Well-designed and managed wetland tourism can make a significant contribution to sustainable development objectives whilst maintaining the ecological character of wetlands.


Indo-Burma Wetland Outlook 2022

TOWARDS WISE USE OF INDO-BURMA'S WETLANDS

3 – Toward a GCF project upscaling NbS for adaptation regionally

1 – CEPF-like grant mechanism to improve management, restoration and conservation of priority freshwater wetlands to maintain or enhance adaptation services

2 – Technical assistance and blended finance for climate resilient wetlands-based businesses and producer organizations

3 - Technical assistance and regional exchange to mainstream wetlands-based adaptation into regional and national policies and sectoral planning

Wetlands-based adaptation and mitigation benefits

- Direct beneficiaries: 700,000 (0.2%) /Indirect beneficiaries: 1,400,000 (0.4%)
- Interventions on around 10 wetlands landscapes, over 25,000 km² of wetlands ecosystems
- Mitigation – avoidance = 180 Mt CO2

- Total budget – 93.6 million USD
  - GCF funding – 67.8 million USD
  - Co-funding (loans, grants from AFD) 25.8 million USD