



The success story of Co-management in Au Tho B

THE FOREST IS RETURNING TO THE MEKONG DELTA

6 years ago, no one in Au Tho B could ever imagine the kind of work they are carrying out now in their forest such as setting up a mangrove snail farm. It has been a long process, starting with the establishment of co-management group in Au Tho B in 2009.

Co-management (or more appropriately shared-governance) of natural resources is a setting in which local communities take part in the resource management decision-making process together with local authorities. It implies sharing power, responsibilities and accountability among key actors. This is very different from other attempts that the government of Vietnam tried in the past to ensure people's participation in natural resource conservation. Instead of a fixed benefit sharing scheme which is often used to give incentives to people such as the right to use forest land for aquaculture or a list of resources allowed to be collected, co-management focuses on dealing with issues recognized by all key parties through negotiation and learning by doing.

For example, regulations to protect young seedlings at the seaward edge of the mangrove were jointly developed based on the

aquatic resources which in turn provide additional income for all people in the community. These regulations ensure that people do not go that area during high tide and limited the size of fishing nets. Another example is who is in charge and what the responsibilities of local people and forest rangers are when dealing with illegal activities. All regulations have been negotiated and written down in the co-management agreement.

Coming back from a field visit sponsored by GIZ to a nearby province, local people started dreaming about growing mangrove snails in the forest. But instead of making individual farms, the group decided to work together and create a common farm for the benefit of the whole group. The local authorities also got inspired by the plan and helped to turn it from idea to reality.

Being responsible for the decision making of farming methods, the community groups could act on trial-and-error basis, but they gain their lessons learnt. And most importantly, the spirit of collaboration for a better life through natural resource conservation among local actors is becoming the local asset.





Thach Soai – Head of Community Group:
"I still remember the old days when some people cut mangroves but our villagers could not stop them" said Mr. Thach Soai. We were not organized, did not work with forest rangers and had no position to ask them to leave" he added.



"Our lives rely much on the well-being of the mangroves. Everybody here can tell about how we appreciate the healthy forest after the storm hit us in 1997. Our children enjoy collecting crabs and fish in mangroves and mudflat. However we did not regulate our collection to make it more sustainably. Everybody took as much as they could which made our fish stock decreased..." said a group member."



After the success of Au Tho B Co-management, Soc Trang authorities, with supports from GIZ, have established two more co-management sites in Trần Đề and Cù Lao Dung. ICMP is also supporting Ca Mau province to establish a co-management model for Mui Ca Mau National Park.