

Adaptive learning has been described as a structured process of 'learning by doing' that emphasises learning [processes](#) in management. Natural resource management often has to be undertaken without a complete understanding of the resources being managed (and therefore what the best management approach should be). In such cases the adaptive learning approach can be helpful by enabling management and improvements in understanding to occur simultaneously.

This publication synthesises knowledge gained from this project's experience with the approach, which was adopted with respect to community fisheries management in Southern Lao PDR. It is a non-technical guide aimed at organisations involved in natural resource management who wish to learn more about their resources at the same time as managing them. The guide explains the principles of adaptive learning and how these principles were executed in a real field setting. Amongst other things, it discusses; when it is appropriate, potential problems, and what skills and/or resources are required. It also outlines how the full participation of all stakeholders can be encouraged by facilitating and enhancing communication at all levels and increasing the learning of all involved.



These guidelines synthesise, in an accessible manner, the wealth of experience gained about 'community fisheries' in Southern Lao PDR. 'Community fisheries' is a term given to a particular [rural development](#) initiative in which small waterbodies are managed by the local community, collectively, to obtain benefits for the village as a whole. During the last decade, these benefits have been increasingly in the form of cash income, raised from fish and used for activities such as improving the village school, health centre or temple. Where they exist, these community fisheries are often one of the only ways that villages can generate communal income to help themselves.

This publication describes what community fisheries are, what they require and what benefits they can bring. It details where and how these systems can be promoted and what options would be preferable in which circumstances.

Technical advice (such as when and what to stock) is provided alongside ideas such as how to increase stakeholder participation. Importantly, advice is also given on circumstances under which such initiatives would not be appropriate. The guidelines are aimed at any organisation whose remit is to promote rural development in a way that enables villagers to develop their own capacity and set and realise their own development priorities.

## About the project

The MRAG Ltd / RDC 'Adaptive learning approaches to fisheries enhancement' project started in February 1999 and finished in June 2002. It was a continuation of a collaborative effort between the two organisations that had started in 1995, looking at reservoir enhancement.

The second phase focused in on 'community fisheries' and concentrated on establishing a methodology that would enable Government staff and village communities to combine their strengths and learn more about management together. In total 38 villages in two Provinces, (Khammouane and Savannakhet) were involved in the project. During the course of the project technical experiments on stocking were carried out alongside socio-economic analysis of the costs and benefits of different management strategies. Most importantly, methods were established to make sure that all lessons learnt were available to, and evaluated by, both government staff and villagers alike.

The guidelines advertised here are an output from the Adaptive Learning project (R7335) funded by the UK Department for International Development (DfID) as part of their Fisheries Management Science Programme (FMSP). The views expressed in them are not necessarily those of DfID.

# Where can I find out more?

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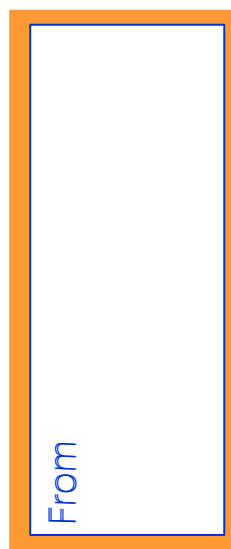
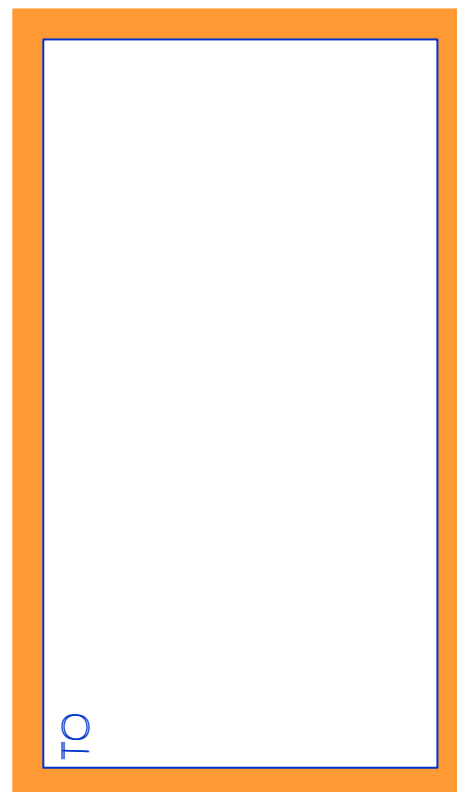
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It is also anticipated that copies will be available in Lao (community fisheries guidelines) and also downloadable in english from the MRAG website (<http://www.mragltd.com>).



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Announcement of publications arising from the MRAG Ltd / RDC Adaptive Learning project in Southern Lao PDR, sponsored by UK DfID.

July 2002