



Why freshwater fisheries?

Globally, freshwater fisheries provide the equivalent of all dietary animal protein and essential nutrients for over 200 million people. They also provide jobs for more than 60 million people, over half of whom are women. The majority of those who depend on freshwater fisheries are among the poorest and most vulnerable, and this vulnerability can result in unsustainable fishing activity and few options in the face of a fishery decline. Securing freshwater fisheries is a nature-based food security and poverty alleviation solution that produces conservation, climate adaptation and mitigation, and health and well-being benefits.

Conservation International is partnering with local communities to find durable solutions for sustaining freshwater fisheries in some of the world's most biodiverse systems, while simultaneously elevating freshwater fisheries within global food-water-energy agendas.

Conserving Cambodia's Fish Factory

Southeast Asia's largest lake, *Cambodia's Tonle Sap*, more than quadruples in size during monsoon season, flooding the region with water and life. Home to more than 1 million people, this floodplain provides roughly 500,000 tons of fish for people each year, and the flooded forests purify water and buffer communities from storms — an increasingly important benefit as climate change makes extreme weather more frequent. But, the Tonle Sap's health is suffering from a suite of threats, including upstream dams, local and upland deforestation, and overfishing.

Building on work that Conservation International has done with local communities and government since 2008, we are implementing a 'Fisheries and Families Resilience Building Model' in Tonle Sap that incorporates floodplain restoration, fish reserves, alternative livelihoods, microfinance, and strengthening local governance — and, importantly, a monitoring system for assessing the model's impact.



Translating and Scaling the Model

We have recently begun applying the main elements of our Tonle Sap model in *East Africa's Lake Victoria*, another aquatic biodiversity and freshwater fisheries hotspot under threat. In collaboration with two local communities, the tilapia company Victory Farms, and NGO partners, we are developing and applying a 'three-legged stool' approach that combines fish habitat conservation, wild capture fisheries management, and responsible aquaculture. We are testing the model in Kenya and plan to scale it to Uganda and Tanzania.

We are ready to translate key elements of these community-based freshwater fishery models to other geographies.

- In the *Brazilian Amazon*, we are working with partners to design an initiative that would bring sustainably managed arapaima, a high-value food fish, to urban markets – providing an incentive to local communities to protect the floodplain lakes where the fish live.
- In *Suriname's Tapanahony River*, a project will support Indigenous communities in developing a sustainable ornamental fishery as an alternative to mining or commercial logging.
- In *Zambia's Lower Zambezi River*, a collaboration with Conservation Lower Zambezi will facilitate co-management agreements between local fishing communities, ecotourism operators and government, while developing recreational fishing opportunities for tigerfish.
- And in *Cambodia's Cardamom Mountains*, we are ascertaining the potential for developing fish- and river-focused ecotourism, to support the creation of community-managed fish reserves in high-elevation streams.

Surfacing Freshwater Fisheries on the Global Stage

Successful local projects, even if replicated widely, will be insufficient if freshwater fisheries continue to lack a seat at the table when development decisions around food, water, and energy are being made. Freshwater fishes and other species that depend on healthy freshwater ecosystems are largely invisible, unreported, and undervalued. Now is the time for CI and partners to champion their importance as critical natural assets.

To that end, Conservation International has spearheaded a new *Inland Fisheries Alliance*, bringing together organizations to elevate freshwater fisheries within global development and conservation agendas. After successfully establishing itself as a voice for freshwater fisheries in its first year, the Alliance is poised to expand its membership and direct its influence toward key sectors whose upstream decisions have downstream implications for forgotten freshwater fish.



WE ARE ASKING YOU TO JOIN OUR CALL TO ACTION

By joining our efforts to conserve freshwater fisheries, you are also supporting the millions of people that depend on them and on the rivers, lakes, and wetlands that sustain them.

Help us make sure that freshwater fish, fisheries, and ecosystems aren't forgotten.
