

LIVELIHOODS IN TRANSITION – FEMALE FISH PROCESSORS AT THE TONLE SAP, CAMBODIA

Colleen Cranmer*

Department of International Development and Global Studies University of Ottawa, Canada

*ccran087@uottawa.ca

The Tonlé Sap, Southeast Asia's largest freshwater lake, is a significant fishery that supports millions of livelihoods. Over the past three decades, fish diversity and volume have declined due to overfishing, climate variability, damming, and agricultural intensification (Chevalier et al., 2023). More recently, aquaculture intensification has added pressure, as forage fish are increasingly used as direct feed in fish farming. Processed, dried fish products are a key livelihood for many low-income women around the lake. As wild stocks decline, women are changing how they create their livelihoods. Trey neat, (a salted, sun-dried fillet), is no longer produced at the lake and is now primarily made from aquaculture in urban areas. Many micro-scale processors are abandoning their businesses to work as laborers for other processors, while some are choosing to sell forage fish as aquaculture feed for immediate income.

Current development programs emphasize growth and profit, favouring medium and large enterprises while overlooking small-scale processors. These strategies reinforce structural inequalities by failing to address institutional and systemic gender issues. This research examines the shifting organization of women's livelihoods within the dried fish value chain and the unequal impacts of ecological and economic change. As the Tonlé Sap reaches a critical ecological juncture, the study asks: who benefits, who is left behind, and what do these transformations mean for the future of dried fish social economies?