

The Slawson Award

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Emma Whittingham

Education

- BSc Zoology, University of Edinburgh (1996)
- MSc Tropical Coastal Management, University of Newcastle Upon Tyne (1999)

Current position

PhD Research Student in Human Geography in the Department of Geography at University of Exeter (to complete end of 2007)

Slawson Award

Emma received the Slawson Award in 2005 for her work entitled *Exploring local and external development interfaces in changing fisheries livelihoods in Cambodia*. Since major policy reforms in the fisheries sector in Cambodia in 2000, there has been a proliferation of community-based fisheries management programmes, which give local people the rights to control and manage their local fishery resource. These programmes are closely linked to concepts of sustainable and participatory development, which have been widely promoted within Cambodia by international donors.



The aim of the research is to explore the different meanings of sustainable development within the context of community fisheries development in Cambodia and to understand how global representations of sustainable development are transformed locally and the implications of this process on local livelihoods. The research focuses on two case studies: the Mekong River in the northern province of Stung Treng on the border of Laos, and in the southwest coastal province of Koh Kong on the border with Thailand. At each location, internationally funded projects are being run by Cambodian NGO and government agencies to help local people set up community fishery institutions to manage their local fishery resources. Local people depend on fishing in a range of different ways to support their lives and they are encouraged to participate in the community fishery with the aim of ensuring sustainable livelihoods and sustainable development.

Taking a qualitative approach, the research attempts to gain in-depth insight from the many people involved in each project, ranging from project staff and their partners from provincial and local government, to a range of different households in one village where the project works. Through semi-structured interviews, in some cases using simple participatory research tools, and observation the research tries to understand the diversity of local livelihoods and encourages people to reflect on their involvement in the community fishery and what they perceive to be its purpose. A four-day workshop with national and provincial level project staff from the case studies was also held to reflect on their understanding of, and practice in, community fisheries.

The research process is being carried out through a partnership with a Cambodian NGO – the Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) Learning Institute, which has provided funds from the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC) to support local field advisors. So far, the research work at the first case study location in Stung Treng has been completed. Work is still underway in Koh Kong and should be finished by early December 2006.

Since the Slawson Award

Emma's research work will finish in December 2006 but planning is already underway with the CBNRM Learning Institute for follow-up work with the projects at the case study sites and more widely in Cambodia during 2007 in order to allow some of the research learning to be applied to practice. This will focus on raising awareness among those involved in community fisheries, from national policy makers, to provincial practitioners and local people, of the different perceptions and experiences linked to the community fisheries. Emma hopes to be involved in this follow-up work and continue her work with the CBNRM Learning Institute and case study projects in the future.