



INFOFISH speaks to.....

DR SHETTY SEETHARAMA THOMBATHU

Chief Technical Advisor, United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO)

Q: What is the CAPFISH-Capture: Post-harvest Fisheries Development Project?

A: The CAPFISH-Capture: Post-harvest Fisheries Development project is a collaborative effort between the Fisheries Administration (FIA) and United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) designed to improve Cambodia's post-harvest fisheries. The project aims to enhance the regulatory system at the institutional level and promote the implementation of sustainable industry best practices by partnering with private sector enterprises, universities and financial institutions. Co-funded by the European Union (EU), the project commenced in September 2019 and is set to conclude in December 2025.

Q: A central component of the project appears to be its Value Chain Investment Support (VCIS) scheme. Could you explain what the VCIS is, and how it works to empower the fisheries value chain in the country?

A: The Value Chain Investment Support (VCIS) scheme is a key element of the CAPFISH-Capture Post-harvest Fisheries Development Project, offering financial and technical support to enterprises. The VCIS aims to support post-harvest fishery enterprises and eligible input suppliers to upgrade their operational facilities; increase productivity and competitiveness; and improve the safety and quality standards of their products and operations, thus reaching new markets and improving businesses in a more sustainable and inclusive way. The VCIS works to empower the fisheries value chain through the following channels:

- **Investment Support Facility (ISF):** VCIS provides financial support to eligible enterprises, encouraging them to upgrade their business facilities and operations. This supports enterprises by providing eligible equipment to enhance productivity and efficiency. The VCIS investment or ISF combines project financial support with loans from local financial institutions, credit guarantees from the Credit Guarantee Corporation of Cambodia, and financial contributions from enterprises.
- **Food Safety and Certification:** VCIS enterprises are supported with tailored food safety coaching and preparation for the Cambodia Quality Seal (CQS) and Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP) certifications. This helps improve the safety and quality of fishery products, making them more competitive in both national and global markets.

¹ <https://open.unido.org/projects/KH/projects/180039>; <http://newslettercapfish-postharvest.org/achieve>

- **Environmental and Social Management Planning (ESMP):** To ensure sustainable business development, regulatory compliance, and effective risk management, VCIS enterprises receive technical support for developing and implementing ESMPs.
- **Innovation and Product Development:** The VCIS assists enterprises in adopting new innovative technologies and practices and developing new products in collaboration with national universities and stakeholders. This is facilitated through the Food, Technology, Research, and Innovation Platform established in Cambodia with support from the CAPFISH-Capture project.
- **Market Access:** By meeting higher food safety standards, adopting social and environmental safeguards, and obtaining certifications, enterprises can access new markets and expand their customer base. The VCIS supports enterprises in participating in domestic and international trade fairs and B2B and B2C events and provides technical support on market requirements to enhance their market access.
- **Inclusivity:** The scheme prioritizes support for women-led businesses, youth entrepreneurs, and entrepreneurs with disabilities, promoting inclusivity and diversity in the fisheries sector.

Overall, the VCIS scheme aims to create positive social, economic, and environmental impacts by empowering enterprises to upgrade their operations, comply with food safety requirements, and reach new markets.

Q: In addition to the VCIS, in what other ways does UNIDO offer technical support to organisations, both in the private sector or government-linked?

A: In addition to the **Value Chain Improvement Strategy (VCIS)**, UNIDO offers technical support to both private sector organizations and government-linked institutions. Key areas of assistance include food safety and regulatory support, which involves developing food safety regulations, creating technical guidelines, and implementing official control activities, along with promoting digital traceability for transparency in food supply chains.

UNIDO also focuses on training and capacity building by providing specialized training programs and webinars to enhance knowledge of food safety and quality. Collaborations with national universities facilitate joint research initiatives and curriculum development, strengthening educational programmes.

The **Food Technology, Research, and Innovation Platform (FTRIP)** plays a vital role in research and development, uniting government, private sector, and academic stakeholders to provide demand-based technology solutions. So far, **23 research projects** have been completed with **USD 0.5 million** in grants, leading to the development of **20 new products and technologies** by various enterprises.

UNIDO promotes innovation through the **Cambodia Packaging Center (CPC)** and the **Cambodia Enterprise Innovation Index (CEII)** guidelines.

Support for national laboratories includes gap assessments and tailored training for **ISO 170025 accreditation**, ensuring quality testing services. Additionally,

through these efforts, UNIDO aims to enhance the capabilities of both private enterprises and government institutions, fostering improved food safety and innovation in the sector.

Q: Cambodia has expressed ambitions to export fish and other fishery products to the EU market by 2025. In its position as a support organisation, how will UNIDO contribute towards realisation of this goal?

A: Cambodia aims to export fish and fishery products to the European Union by **2025**, and UNIDO is playing a crucial role in this ambition through the **CAPFISH-Capture project**. This initiative supports the FiA (Competent Authority) in establishing a robust food safety control system, which includes enhancing the policy framework, implementing **digital traceability**, and achieving **ISO accreditation** for laboratory testing services. Additionally, it assists post-harvest fishery enterprises and food business operators (FBOs) in meeting food safety standards.

To qualify for EU exports, Cambodia must undergo an audit by the Directorate General for Health and Food Safety (DG-SANTE), scheduled for **2025**. In preparation, the FiA is working towards aligning its food control system with global safety requirements, including the execution of the **Cambodia Quality Seal (CQS)** certification scheme and a comprehensive National Action Plan for Inspection and Control (2020-2024) and implementing National Residue Monitoring Plan (2020-2025). The FiA has also requested an official audit from DG-SANTE and is currently addressing the necessary technical questionnaires.



Photo: Samruol Im/CAPFISH-Capture/UNIDO

Cambodia Quality Seal certification

Looking ahead, a mock audit is planned for **March 2025** to identify any gaps in compliance before the official audit in the **third quarter of 2025**. With these efforts, Cambodia is positioning itself to become an eligible exporter of fish and fishery products to the EU market.

Q: Could you relate some success stories related to the following areas: (i) strengthening food safety standards; (ii) supporting the fisheries private sector; (iii) enhancing innovation and R &D; and (iv) gender equality?

A: The official control system in the fisheries value chain has ensured compliance with food safety and public health regulations. So far, this has led to the exports of fish and processed products to China, Australia, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, and other ASEAN countries.

The CAPFISH-Capture project has helped over 40 enterprises improve food safety and gain market access. Notable success stories include UNICA,

which upgraded its facilities, launched new products and expanded into domestic and export markets. Similarly, another organisation, Home Taste Food, successfully exported its products to Australia with project assistance. The results show that 50% of businesses earned the Cambodia Quality Seal certification; 69% of supported enterprises were women-led; and women accounted for 68% of new jobs created.

The Food Technology, Research, and Innovation Platform (FTRIP) supports collaboration between the fisheries sector and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) promoting R&D and innovation. It has funded 23 research projects that benefit 20 enterprises, including seven women-led firms, and engaged 68 researchers. This initiative has led to the development of 20 innovative products.

The CAPFISH-Capture project implemented gender mainstreaming guidelines that enhanced women's empowerment through capacity-building. The project's successful initiatives earned it the Gender Equality Mobilization Award 2023² at the UNIDO General Conference, recognizing its commitment to advancing gender equality in Cambodia's fisheries sector.

Q: In light of lessons learned since the CAPFISH-Capture project began operations in 2019, do you envisage any significant adjustments linked to its activities and its presence in Cambodia. In other words, what does the future look like for the project?

A: The **CAPFISH-Capture project** is scheduled to conclude in **December 2025**, with no major adjustments expected until then. Since its launch in **2019**, the project has successfully implemented initiatives like the **Cambodia Quality Seal (CQS)**, **Value Chain Improvement Strategy (VCIS)**, and the **Food Technology, Research, and Innovation Platform (FTRIP)**. Based on lessons learned, the project recommends scaling these approaches to other agricultural value chains in Cambodia.

As the official fisheries control system is strengthened, it will promote food safety and fair trade. Once Cambodia becomes eligible for EU exports, increased investment in aquaculture and fish processing is anticipated. This system can also be adapted for other agricultural sectors, enhancing food safety and traceability.

Looking ahead, the project aims to foster innovation and address challenges in the fisheries and R&D sectors. Strengthened partnerships with higher education institutions, enterprises, and communities will facilitate collaboration and knowledge sharing. The focus will be on promoting sustainable practices and enhancing R&D investment among enterprises through practical training. These initiatives are designed to ensure sustainable growth and competitiveness in the sector.



Photo: Samruol Im/CAPFISH-Capture/UNIDO

Drying seafood using the solar dryer dome

² <https://cambodia.un.org/en/254203-cambodia-capfish-capture-project-received-gender-equality-mobilization-award-2023>