

Press Release

Embargoed for 5pm (Cambodia time) on 16 March 2010

The first Field Guide of the Rattans of Cambodia, a contribution to sustainable rattan management

Phnom Penh, 17 March: Today, the Cambodian Government's Forestry Administration, General Department of Administration for Nature Conservation and Protection, Mr Khou Eang Hourt - the author of the first Field Guide of the Rattans of Cambodia - and WWF are proud to launch the result of more than two years of research on rattan in Cambodia. The guide contributes an important step towards sustainable rattan management as it describes the diversity, ecology and characters of rattan.

"This is the first rattan taxonomic study carried out in Cambodia and should serve as a milestone in the Cambodian flora research," says Mr Seng Teak, WWF Country Director.

The research documents more than 20 rattan species across 13 provinces all over Cambodia and identifies five species with the highest market potential. The resulting guidebook provides the common Khmer name (local names) as well as scientific name of each species. It also supplies detailed information on rattan characteristics including habit, leaf sheath, sheath spines, knee, climbing organ, leaf, cane, inflorescence, and fruits. Detailed distribution maps provide information on where to find each species while descriptions and colour photographs support field identification. The guide provides a source of key knowledge to anyone involved or interested in sustainable rattan harvest and production.

"While we are all familiar with rattan as finished products like chairs or tables, very few people know what these plants look like in the forest or how many species there are in Cambodia," says Mr Khou Eang Hourt, Cambodian Senior Botanist.

Mr Eang Hourt continues that the knowledge about rattan is vital for a sustainable development of the Cambodian rattan industry: Collectors need to identify which rattan-species to harvest; traders need to assess the value of the different species; processors need to select the right rattan species for handicrafts or furniture-production; and buyers are interested in the exact sources of green and clean rattan products.

The rattan resource is decreasing due to over-harvesting and loss of forest ecosystem. There is an urgent need to stop this trend and protect rattan and forest biodiversity through sustainable use of rattan resources for economic growth. The publication of the first 'Field Guide of the Rattans of Cambodia' is part of a larger programme to establish a sustainable production system for rattan products in Cambodia. Since 2006, the WWF's Rattan project has reached out to all stakeholders along the rattan value chain to promote sustainable rattan production and supply.

"Besides workshops and trainings for suppliers, processors and traders, the project has successfully set-up community-based models for sustainable rattan management in 20 villages totalling around 4900 families in five provinces of Kampot, Preah Sihanouk, Koh Kong, Kompong Thom and Preah Vihear," says Mr Ou Ratanak, Rattan Project Manager.

In partnership with NTFP network and AAC, the rattan project, co-funded by EC, also works to engage small and medium enterprises in Cleaner Production, which aims at introducing proper techniques for processing activities to ensure a system of quality assurance. In doing so, the project supported the foundation of the first Rattan Association of Cambodia to strengthen the position of all rattan stakeholders. The project's unifying hope is that, if conducted sustainably, the rattan industry can provide financial incentives to maintain large areas of forest, the natural rattan habitat, while providing significant support to local livelihoods.

Notes to the Editor:

Rattan plays an important part in Cambodia's economy. In rural areas, these climbing palms can account for up to 50% of village cash income. The large global rattan market – estimated at \$4 billion per year – offers enormous growth potential to the Cambodian rattan sector because of the kingdom's impressive diversity of rattan species. However, Cambodia's natural rattan resources are severely decreasing due to over harvesting and deforestation.

Since 2006, WWF has been helping local people of Prek Thnot community in Kampot province apply a community-based model of sustainable rattan resource management taking into account proper technique of harvest, nursery and plantation in natural forest. Processing techniques provided to the community were a strategy to motivate community-run rattan productions to reduce unsustainable export of raw rattan to neighbouring countries. This rattan management model currently covers 4900 households in provinces of Kampot, Preah Sihanouk, Koh Kong, Kampong Thom and Preah Vihea.

With 70% of the total budget funded by European Union, the program for sustainable production of rattan in the Greater Mekong region aims to achieve cleaner and more efficient production and give communities, governments and industries an economic incentive to conserve forests. By 2010 up to 100 villages in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam will be working towards a greener and sustainable management of rattan production.

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About WWF

WWF is one of the world's largest and most respected independent conservation organizations, with almost 5 million supporters and a global network active in over 100 countries. WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the earth's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world's biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.