
➤ **CAMBODIA:**
ANGKOR WAT COMBINES CONSERVATION WITH COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND INNOVATIVE DEVELOPMENT

In a Nutshell

A world heritage site is a global public good. Its conservation, accessibility and the blending of these with local realities can test planning, execution, institutional coordination and commitment. Complex and multiple capacities are called for. In Cambodia, Angkor Wat is especially challenging not only because it is the world's largest temple complex, but also because the site is in a country that has recently emerged from war and has 22,000 inhabitants.

While an international umbrella arrangement remains, Angkor Wat is today primarily managed by the Cambodian Authority for the Protection of the Site and the Development of the Region of Angkor (APSARA), which has with wide-ranging competencies and authority. Together with the local communities and other partners, APSARA moderates the tourist flow, safeguards the complex and manages social transformation in the surrounding area.

The Story

After 20 years of conflict, the signing of the Paris peace agreements in 1991 ushered in a new era in Cambodia. His Majesty King Norodom Sihanouk and the Director-General of UNESCO immediately launched appeals to the international community to safeguard the historical site of Angkor Wat. It had been included on the List of World Heritage in Danger in December 1992, after being systematically looted during the war. By October 1993, an intergovernmental meeting had adopted the Tokyo

Declaration, which created an International Co-ordinating Committee (ICC) for the site, co-chaired by France and Japan. UNESCO provided the secretariat for the ICC, and has since worked to focus international efforts covering not only architectural and archaeological conservation, but also related capacity development and training.

The ICC is staffed by diplomatic nominees from various countries. Given the complexity of coordinating the restoration of a site of such magnitude, a technical wing was also formed to provide scientific advice and evaluate project proposals. A forum for debate as well as exchanges of experience and advice, this ad hoc group of experts guides the ICC on the monuments, defines standards and ensures a level of consistency in the numerous restoration projects. Since 1993, the ICC has coordinated over 100 projects involving some 30 partners (international organizations, universities, private enterprises, NGOs and governments). Each has worked along the lines advocated by the ICC, which, in addition to enforcing highly successful conservation practices, has promoted an approach based on integrating culture and development.

Although the umbrella for Angkor Wat remains international, an early step was to adopt protective national measures and to create the Cambodian Authority for the Protection of the Site and the Development of the Region of Angkor (APSARA). It has wide-ranging authority over any measures taken by national and/or local authorities, with the sole right to grant building permits and destroy unauthorized buildings without compensation. It has also benefited from new financial regulations, which channel roughly 50 per cent of entrance fees in its direction.

Overall, three principles guide restoration work at Angkor Wat.

- It must be done by and for Cambodians.
- A long-term vision requires close links between research and study, and entails investigation and reflection before any work is undertaken.
- There must be a commitment to balancing restoration with the economic and social development of the local communities.

With these in mind, all international projects include training components based on the knowledge offered by the international teams and the resources of Cambodian craftsmen. One initiative supported by Japan in 1993 enabled the training of more than 500 Cambodian archaeologists and architects, 50 of whom were subsequently employed by APSARA and the Cambodian administration, thus ensuring the sustainability of restoration.

Starting in 2003, an International Documentation Centre created by UNESCO will be administered by APSARA, but will continue to benefit from the UN organization's intellectual and scientific contributions. Its mission is to collect, develop and manage all the scientific and technical documents related to the site, keep track of activities, and allow access for researchers, experts and institutions. The centre will also promote the scientific studies needed for future projects.

Today, Angkor Wat receives more and more national and foreign visitors. In 2000, the number of international tourists in Cambodia reached 466,365, a 27 per cent increase over the previous year, and in 2003 the number is expected to jump substantially. With tourism poised to become pivotal to the country's economic development, the Cambodian authorities and the ICC are now considering ways to offer cultural tourism, which includes economic, social, educational, scientific, environmental and ethical considerations along with the involvement of local communities. An overarching strategy to control the tourist flow, safeguard the site and manage social transformation is in the works. One area of critical focus is a job creation strategy. It covers the development of infrastructure; civil and public works; maintenance of facilities; training in tourism services, including for guides and tourist transport operators; and production and marketing of crafts.

With a view to future challenges, the Cambodian government declared an Angkor Development Decade from 2002 to 2012 to step up its struggle against poverty, promote stable economic growth and improve the overall quality of life. This declaration is consistent with a royal decree signed in 1994, which specifically underscores the involvement of local communities and the preservation of their traditional cultures and lifestyles. The Angkor Wat site, with its 22,000 inhabitants, has a unique opportunity to put into practice community participation and innovative development.

Results and Critical Factors

The end of conflict in Cambodia has mobilized the international community and enabled the government to develop an integrated vision and strategy backed by strong political will. This manifests in several ways:

- New legislation for the conservation, management and protection of Angkor Wat as well as coordinated economic development provides a unique framework for conservation and enhancement.
- Endowed with a large and clear mandate over the entire site, APSARA can strategize, plan and implement balanced conservation and development activities.
- The ICC steers all activities on the site, thereby providing invaluable and consistent scientific backing to the government, including on issues related to conservation of monuments, training, tourism, urban development and community participation.
- UNESCO, as the only UN organization whose mandate covers culture, has provided its unique professional expertise, developed over five and a half decades of international activity.
- Strong capacity development components – including creating the ad hoc group of experts, setting up APSARA, training and absorption of locals in

their capacity as architects and managers, and maintaining an information resource centre – have all added up to a successful whole.

- The strong political commitment of the Cambodia government and the responsive collaboration of the international community have succeeded not only in establishing effective oversight of Angkor Wat, but also generated an unprecedented learning process that transcends the mere transfer of know-how and skills.

Further information

Authority for the Protection of the Site and the Development of the Region of Angkor (APSARA) (www.autoriteapsara.org/).

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). International Co-ordinating Committee for the Safeguarding and Development of the Historic Site of Angkor (http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php@URL_ID=10348&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html).

Angkor Wat (www.angkor.com/index.shtml).

The authors gratefully acknowledge the contributions of Galia Saouma-Forero, Senior Programme Specialist, Cambodia unit, Division of Cultural Heritage, UNESCO.