



Transboundary Water Management with the Mekong River Commission

Project Partner:	Mekong River Commission (MRC)
Project Region:	Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam
Project Term:	overall: June 2011 – December 2017 current phase: June 2011 – December 2014
Project Budget:	total: EUR 22.6 million current phase: EUR 11.95 million

Context

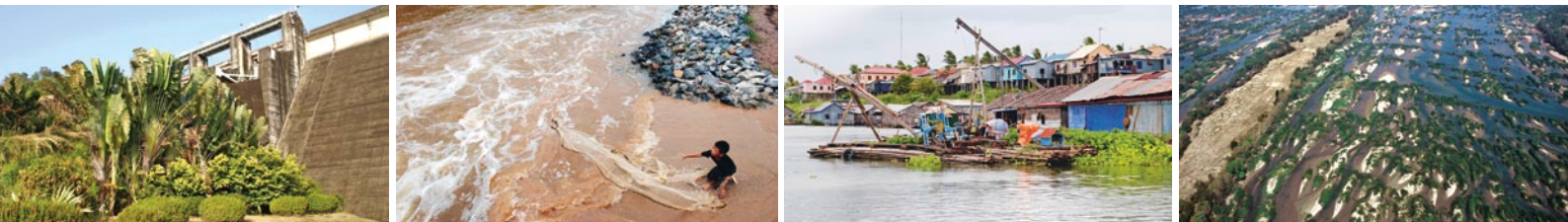
The Mekong River and its tributaries are the lifelines of the lower Mekong riparian countries. The vast diversity of the river's ecosystem is the basis for a wide array of livelihoods and is the source of food security for the majority of the basin's 60 million inhabitants. However, increasing stress has recently been placed on the basin's water resources due to continued economic development, population growth, and the move towards highly dynamic development and use of the hydropower potential in the lower Mekong basin. Additionally, the impacts of climate change are likely to increase the threats faced by people in the basin.

The Mekong River Commission (MRC) is a regional river basin organisation that was founded in 1995 by the riparian countries of the lower Mekong – Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam. The MRC promotes alignment and integration of varying national interests regarding the sustainable utilisation of the Mekong's water and related resources, particularly in the areas of agricultural development, fisheries, hydropower and navigation. In creating the MRC, the four countries have committed themselves to carrying out joint planning in the basin. China and Myanmar, the two upstream riparian countries, are engaged in the MRC cooperation as dialogue partners.

Project

Development cooperation carried out by the German government through GIZ supports the MRC in its efforts to bolster regional cooperation and sustainable water resource management. The main areas of cooperation include organisational development, adaptation to climate change and sustainable hydropower development:

- ▶ The MRC is engaged in the process of decentralising functions hitherto assumed by the Secretariat of the MRC to institutions in the member countries. GIZ supports the MRC and its member countries in planning and structuring this transition process. Efforts are also being undertaken to improve the MRC's result-based monitoring.
- ▶ In order to successfully adapt to climate change, MRC member countries need to agree on a regional adaptation strategy. In order to be effective, this strategy should integrate current research findings. GIZ assists the MRC in developing the expertise necessary to turn the commission into a regional knowledge hub on climate change. Furthermore, the MRC's capacity to carry out flood forecasting in the face of a changing climate regime is being strengthened.
- ▶ In order to achieve sustainable hydropower development in the region, the MRC must engage in dialogue with line agencies in the respective member countries as well as with hydropower project developers on criteria for hydropower sustainability. The MRC's contributions to this goal consist of developing guidelines and sustainability assessment tools for hydropower projects, development of human capacity and fostering innovations (i.e. benefit sharing mechanisms) on both the transboundary and national levels.



Processes, activities and time frame: In the project's current implementation phase (2011 – 2014), GIZ is assisting the MRC in the following ways:

First and foremost, direct advisory services to the MRC Secretariat are delivered in reference to three MRC programmes: sustainable hydropower, climate change adaptation and flood management. These services include: organisational management advice in the decentralisation of MRC functions to riparian states; the utilisation of internationally recognized, ecological, social assessment tools in the decision-making process for hydropower development that consider poverty and gender issues; networking support that strengthens the MRC in its goal of becoming a knowledge hub for climate change; and in the technical development of flood forecasting systems under climate change conditions. Human Capacity Development measures such as curricula development, training sessions and networking events are employed to integrate the hydropower sustainability agenda within the programmes of various regional academic and training institutions. Furthermore, financial contributions directly help the MRC programmes in executing their work plans.



Mekong River Commission Secretariat, Vientiane (Laos)

Impacts

The expected results of the MRC-GIZ cooperation programme are fourfold:

- ▶ During the decentralisation process, former MRC functions will be devolved to line agencies in member countries. These line agencies will be supported by the MRC to ensure they have the necessary capacities, processes and coordination.
- ▶ As the region is likely to witness a significant increase in hydropower development, it is vital that decision makers and technical staff in the member countries, as well as hydropower developers, take sustainability criteria into consideration. Cooperation between the MRC and GIZ seeks to develop the capacities of involved actors, ensuring that these factors are integrated into the planning, design and implementation of hydropower projects.
- ▶ The impacts of future climate change on flood generation in the Mekong basin will be a key challenge to the flood forecasting done by the MRC. The programme is expected to increase the abilities of the MRC and member countries in flood forecasting and particularly in the incorporation of climate change projections. Additionally, practical flood protection measures are being implemented in areas prone to future increases in flooding.
- ▶ Climate change is best tackled via regional, transboundary efforts. Though individual MRC member countries are already implementing adaptation projects, knowledge and expertise from a regional institution such as the MRC will be crucial in managing climate change impacts. For this reason, cooperation will increase MRC expert capacities in giving advice and assistance to Mekong countries in targeted adaptation.

On the whole, the cooperation effort will contribute to the MRC's increased capability in serving as an advisory body for its member countries, utilising a distinct regional perspective, and helping them overcome the key challenges posed by hydropower development and climate change.

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