

Development of water resources the key to defeating poverty in the LMB

The only way to alleviate poverty in the Lower Mekong Basin and to meet the UN Millennium Goals is through investment and development and it is up to the MRC to play a key role, MRC CEO Dr Olivier Cogels told international donors last year.

Speaking at the 9th Consultative Donor Meeting held in Vientiane, Lao PDR on 10 December 2004, Dr Cogels outlined the new policy and orientation of the MRC.

More than 80 percent of people in the LMB live a subsistence life relying on water-related resources for food and more than 30 percent of the population live in extreme poverty. Dr Cogels said these facts were not acceptable.

"Investment and development will go on with or without the MRC, so it is up to us to ensure that such development is

coordinated (based on cooperation among countries), sustainable and is acceptable in terms of social and environmental impacts," he said.

He explained that the MRC was in an ideal position to act as an investment facilitator.

"Our vision is to promote and coordinate sustainable management and development of water and related resources for the countries' benefit and the people's well-being by implementing strategic programmes and activities and providing scientific information and policy advice," he said. "This is how we will help alleviate poverty."

In order to achieve its goals the MRC would adopt an Integrated Water Resources Development approach at basin level.

Using its powerful decision support tools

and working through its programmes, the MRC would cooperate with donor and investment banks to seek development opportunities in the areas of irrigation, navigation, hydropower, flood management, fisheries and tourism.

At the same time it would adopt procedures for water utilisation and interbasin diversions aimed at further developments, while protecting the people and the environment and mitigating any harmful effects.

"In 2005 MRC will become more proactive in joint development planning in each sector, it will increase programme integration and coordination and improve quality of outputs," Dr Cogels said.

MRC's donors were enthusiastic about this practical strategy and were keen to support the MRC's new direction. ~



Dr Cogels explains the MRC's new direction to the international donors.

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Council moves on managing flows



MRC Council Chairman H.E. Mr Somphong Mongkhonvilay addresses the meeting.

The 11th meeting of the MRC Council was held in Vientiane in December 2004 and paved the way for agreement on procedures for the maintenance of flows on the Mekong mainstream.

These procedures concern the

maintenance of acceptable minimum monthly flows of the Mekong mainstream in the dry season, the acceptable natural reverse flow of the Tonle Sap (in Cambodia) during the wet season, and the prevention of unnatural peak flows.

In addition to providing benchmark flows against which to assess future development proposals, an important benefit of these procedures will be that they will put in place a framework for drought forecasting and management for the MRC Secretariat and the member countries.

The procedures are considered as interim in nature since the flow assessments are based only on the existing Mekong flow regime and available data that are constantly being improved. At the beginning of 2005 the MRC commenced a programme of flow assessments based on evaluation of the environmental, social and economic beneficial uses of the river.

Council members representing Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam also approved the adoption of a new framework for the MRC's core programme the Basin Development Plan (BDP), which is now entering its second phase.

"The BDP is moving toward the introduction of programme of Integrated Water Resources Management Development in the Mekong Basin, and we think this will lead to significant developmental progress being made within the region," explained MRC Chief Executive Officer Dr Olivier Cogels.

On other matters, the ministers discussed the full-scale implementation of the MRC's new Flood Management and Mitigation Programme (which has received multi-million dollar support from many international donors) and the introduction of a new phase for the Fisheries Programme.

The Council approved the 2005 budget and the MRC's 2005 Work Programme.

The meeting was chaired by H.E. Mr Somphong Mongkhonvilay, Minister to Prime Minister's Office, Chairman of the MRC Council for 2004/2005. ~



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Mekong Day, The MRC's 10th Anniversary Celebration
to be held in Vientiane, Lao PDR on 5 April 2005

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Mainstreaming project targets gender inequalities

If sustainable development is to become a reality in the Lower Mekong Basin gender mainstreaming is essential.

Studies have shown that rural women in the riparian countries often work longer hours than men. They are the agricultural producers, the principal users and caretakers of water resources and the ones who raise children and handle family finances.

However their access to resources such as education, health and income-earning opportunities is frequently much lower than that of men. They are also often left out of community decision-making bodies and have no say in the planning and management of development processes.

At the institutional level, water resource line agencies have also, suffered from a lack of awareness and capacity.

MRC has just initiated a new, three-year project on Gender Mainstreaming in Water and Related Resources Development in the Lower Mekong Basin to help address some

of these inequalities and put the MRC's Gender Policy into action.

Funded by the New Zealand Government, the project represents the second phase of a programme completed in 2001 that helped raise gender awareness within the National Mekong Committees through a series of training initiatives.

This second phase will expand on this programme and institute training at both national and regional levels to promote gender mainstreaming in all sectors of water resource and related development activities. It will also focus on working with local women's groups and gender advocacy organisations as well as collecting relevant data and producing suitable training tools and materials to improve communications.

The goal of the project is that it will develop equality in both policy and practice within the participating countries. A regional coordinator based in the MRC



The working women of the Basin often do not get an equal voice in decision-making.

Secretariat will manage the programme.

Gender equality is a priority for the MRC, as in order to promote and coordinate sustainable development and achieve its goal of an economically

prosperous, socially just and environmentally sound Mekong River Basin it is essential that everyone is represented in planning and shares in the social benefits. ~

Basin prepares to meet water challenge



The Challenge Programme aims to make better use of water to produce more food.

The Mekong River Commission's involvement in the CGIAR Challenge Programme on Water and Food (CPWF) has taken a significant step forward with the receipt of funding for two additional projects in the Mekong Basin.

These are the last of eight projects in the Basin that were selected from the 50 submissions short-listed for funding under the CPWF last year.

The two Basin projects, which are funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development are both governance-related and will seek to meet some of the bigger water resource issues facing the Mekong Basin in the coming years.

"Multi-Scale Mekong Water Governance: inter-disciplinary research to enhance participatory water governance from local watershed to regional scales", which will be led by Mr John Dore of Chiang Mai University, aims to improve governance in water related issues so that

critical water-related priorities - food security, livelihoods, environment and health - can be addressed in a more inclusive and sustainable way.

According to the submission, the research team also expects to have a significant influence on policy-making with respect to water in the Mekong region through disseminating a diverse set of Mekong Water Governance documents.

Dr Francois Bousquet from the International Rice Research Institute's offices in Bangkok will be leading the project entitled "Companion Modelling for Resilient Water Management: stakeholder perceptions of water dynamics and collective learning at the catchment scale". This project aims to understand the factors influencing different stakeholder perceptions, how these perceptions are formed, and how they might be modified to allow greater coordination and equitability of water use at the system level, leading to increased water productivity.

The CPWF, which was launched in 2003, aims to increase food production in agriculture, while at the same time increasing water productivity so more food can be grown with less water. The project covers eight other river basins around the world. MRC is the coordinator for the programme in the Mekong Basin.

Since its establishment, CPWF has made regular evaluations of its progress and, following a meeting held in Sri Lanka in January 2004, has now reorganised its management structure in order to maximise its research funds.

"This management reshuffle aims to reduce the programme's transaction costs, releasing more funds for the research that it hopes to carry out. The CPWF's second call for projects will probably occur in May this year, and will partly be competitive, but will also open up opportunities for research and collaboration for the MRC and its member states," explained the MRC's Research Coordinator, Dr Kim Geheb, who acts as the CPWF Basin Coordinator for the Mekong.

"Much of the emphasis in the CPWF is on the partnerships it has created between research institutions in the Mekong countries, and advanced research institutions, such as those within the CGIAR," he added.

As an additional contribution to MRC's involvement in the Challenge Programme, Dr Geheb has also produced a new publication called *Mekong Research*, which will appear as both a periodical and online facility, and is intended to summarise research findings and outputs from the region. The online version will be available on the www.mekonginfo.org website. To obtain a hard copy or contribute contact kim.geheb@mrcmekong.org. ~

Students get help to work on Tonle Sap

The MRC Environment Programme has signed a contract with Monash University to jointly fund a Cambodian PhD student to study the ecology of Tonle Sap Lake. Monash University will provide a part scholarship for the student and MRC will provide the rest of the scholarship plus travel and project expenses.

Tonle Sap lake is an ecosystem with a critical role maintaining the biodiversity and hydrological functioning of the region, as well as providing a critical fishery, supporting livelihoods and feeding millions of people in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam.

"MRC is using Australian expertise in freshwater ecology to assist us to build the capacity of people in the region to manage critical freshwater ecosystems," said Senior Environment Specialist Dr Ian Campbell.

"We hope to develop more links of this kind, and have had preliminary discussions with Griffith University in New South Wales regarding a second Cambodian student."

MRC Events

Flood funding signed

The Government of the Netherlands formally signed a US\$12.74 million agreement with the Mekong River Commission to fund its new Flood Management and Mitigation Programme (FMMP) in December 2004.

"With the FMMP we have taken another step toward the development of the Mekong Region and the Netherlands can be considered a partner in sustainable development and poverty alleviation," said Ambassador of the Netherlands H.E. Mr Gerben de Jong at the signing.

The FMMP consists of five components to be implemented over six years and the Dutch funding will support three of these

components. Component 1: The establishment of a Regional Flood Management and Mitigation Centre in Phnom Penh, Cambodia; Component 2: Structural and Flood Proofing Measures (complementing contributions of the Asian Development Bank); and Component 3: Mediation of Transboundary Flood Issues.

In January 2005 the Asian Development Bank also signed an agreement to provide US\$1 million in funds for Component 2 of the FMMP. ~

Australians increase aid

The Australian Government has increased its support for the work of the MRC

through the provision of a new, three-part assistance package that will operate over the next three years.

The support will focus on assisting development of MRC's next five-year strategic plan to guide management of the Mekong River Basin; the provision of technical expertise in natural resource management research and policy development; and further assistance from the Murray Darling Basin Commission, (MRC's current partner) and other relevant Australian organisations and institutions.

Dr Peter Shergold, Secretary, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet announced the new package during an official government visit in late 2004. He was accompanied by Ms Gillian Bird, First Assistant Secretary, International Division, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, and Mr Murray Proctor, Assistant Director General, East Asia Branch AusAID and the Australian delegation. ~

of the National Mekong Committees (NMCs) and the MRC Secretariat in the four member countries.

As well as targeting policies and practices to strengthen regional EG in the Lower Mekong Basin, the programme also aims to contribute to vulnerability reduction and livelihood enhancement.

The programme has two components: 1) Developing country-specific strategies and activities for NMCs for improved EG within each national context and for transboundary issues; and

2) Enhancing MRCS capacity in EG development and coordination within the MRC framework and existing programmes.

UNDP says the NMCs and MRCS are viable facilitators for promoting good governance strategies among the countries of the Lower Mekong Basin.

Good environmental governance means:

- Giving citizens the ability to obtain environmental information in the possession of government authorities.
- Allowing them the opportunity to provide informed, timely and meaningful inputs to influence decision-making on policies, plans and projects that may have environmental impacts.
- Giving them access to impartial arbiters or mediators to resolve disputes over environmental issues.

Conversely, this principle requires accountability of officials for environmental decision-making. ~



Mr Gerben de Jong and MRC CEO Dr Olivier Cogels shake on the agreement.



Thanongdeth Insiengmay explains flood monitoring to the Australian group.

Green light for environmental governance

UNDP, in partnership with the Mekong River Commission, has launched a US\$1 million Environmental Governance (EG) Programme to strengthen the capacity

Latest information products

Fisheries Information in the Lower Mekong Basin



The Fisheries Information in the Lower Mekong Basin CD-ROM contains nine databases related to catch assessment and five databases related to migration and spawning. Each database has its own manual and/or data dictionary. It also offers a vast range of information produced by the Mekong River Commission's Fisheries Programme and its counterparts including technical papers, features, photographs and in-depth reports produced over the past 10 years. Users can also access and explore 18 pre-made maps using the ArcReader, GIS software provided.

November 2004. US\$5.00.
Postage costs Apply

Catch and Culture, Volume 10, No.2



The newsletter of the Fisheries Programme contains news and research on all aspects of the Lower Mekong Basin fishery. This issue highlights the new challenges facing the Mun and Songkram Rivers in Thailand and the important role played by Lao women fishers. Free (postage applies).

Catch and Culture - riparian edition

A compilation edition of selected stories has now been translated into the four riparian languages. Available as a free download on www.mrcmekong.org. Free (postage applies)

An Introduction to Cambodia's Inland Fisheries



The fisheries of Cambodia are the mainstay of the country, providing income and food security for millions of people. This report draws on varied data to document the current state of the fisheries, while examining their significance and the problems they face for future sustainability.

Mekong Development Series No 4, November 2004. US\$5.

Mekong Research

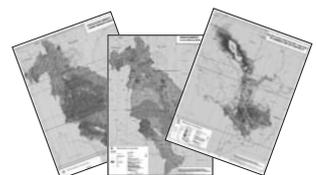
All the latest research and outputs from around the Mekong River Basin. www.mekonginfo.org/partners/mekongresearch/index.htm

Information Products Catalogue 2005



This updated version of the MRC catalogue contains details of all publications, CD-Roms, maps and datasets available from the Mekong River Commission. Also available as a free download on www.mrcmekong.org. Free (postage applies).

Technical data maps are available from the Documentation Centre.



How to order

All products can be ordered from the MRC Secretariat's Documentation Centre. Postage costs apply. Mekong region government agencies may write to the MRC to obtain free copies.

Check the MRC website for a full list of products. Credit card sales are also available through the website.

Contact

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BDP trains basin planners of tomorrow

River Basin planners of the future are getting a helping hand from a new training curriculum developed by the MRCS BDP team, with technical assistance from the Murray Darling River Basin Commission (MDBC) under the MDBC & MRC Strategic Liaison Programme.

The overall objective of the modular Integrated River Basin Planning (IRBP) programme is to increase IRBP knowledge and skills of riparians who are involved in the Mekong River Basin Development Plan, to ensure they are provided with the competencies needed for formulating and producing the various BDP outputs.

The training manual comprises of two training packages: an executive package to be delivered to high-level audiences and the planner package for basin planners.

The curriculum is drawn from the four training modules delivered in the past three years to the National Mekong Committee/BDP team, plus core contents from real work experience in the BDP.

One of the first steps in this training programme, which is scheduled to start in June, includes lesson-testing with the Junior Riparian Professionals working at the MRC Secretariat and integrating their feedback into the curriculum and course contents.

Shortly after this, training of trainers in each member country at national and Sub-Area levels will commence. The BDP is working with 10 Sub-Areas.

Five trainers from Sub-Area working groups in each country will be selected to attend a two-week course. The first week will focus on acquiring the IRBP knowledge and skills, while the second week will focus on the facilitation and training capabilities of the trainers.

Following this training, the country team will produce the IRBP training manual in its own language and start field-testing the national training package.

When it is ready each Sub-Area training team will conduct IRBP training courses for all members of their working groups.

Training at senior level will take the form

of a consultative meeting with senior officials of concerned river basin organisations and provinces in the Sub-Area, such as provincial governors, directors general and chamber of commerce heads. The training manuals

will then be sent to all academic and training institutions in the 10 Sub-Areas.

Each training package will also be available as a CD-Rom containing all the materials in the package, plus references and maps. ~



Training courses developed specifically for basin planners will improve work quality in the region.

MRC researchers get to work in the field

The work of the MRC takes place in many areas: in the office, in the laboratory and, very importantly, in the field.

In the top picture members of the Agriculture, Forestry and Irrigation Programme's Water Use Efficiency Component gather data for analysis on the multi-functionality of paddy fields. This data will be used to analyse the seasonal changes of water use for rice farming.

In the bottom photo, Environment Programme researchers take samples from the river bed as part of the programme's ongoing work to measure the ecological health of the Mekong.



Flood programme all systems go

The Mekong River Commission's new core programme, the Flood Management and Mitigation Programme (FMMP) is funded and ready to start operations. Staff recruitment for the FMMP is now under way.

The new Regional Flood Management and Mitigation Centre will initially be operating from the former MRC Secretariat building in Phnom Penh as a temporary location from March 2005.

The FMMP is presently working closely with the Cambodia National Mekong Committee and the Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology by providing the technical requirements for the design and construction of the new Flood Centre

which will improve forecasting tools and provide flood management services.

Work on the German-funded components of the FMM (Flood Emergency Management Strengthening and Land Management) began in September 2004.

As part of this year's programme activity the FMMP will be holding the Third Annual Flood Forum in Vientiane, Lao PDR on 7-8 April.

More than 100 regional and international experts will gather to discuss Flood Management and Mitigation in the Lower Mekong Basin and will share information on their needs as well as the progress they are making toward managing floods. ~

Workshops and events

The Celebration of the 10th Anniversary of the Signing of the MRC Agreement on Cooperation

5 April 2005 - Vientiane, Lao PDR
Contact: kim.geheb@mrcmekong.org

The Third Annual Flood Forum

7-8 April 2005 - Vientiane, Lao PDR
Contact: Thanongdeth@mrcmekong.org

The 4th Mainland Montane South-East Asia Conference

16-19 May 2005 - Sa Pa, Vietnam
Contact: Malita Allan & Ms Trinh Thi Khanh Chi email: MMSEA4_Vietnam@netnam.vn

The 2005 Watershed Management Conference

July 19-22, 2005 - Williamsburg, US
Contact: conf@asce.org Website: www.asce.org/conferences/watershedmanagement2005

Second South-East Asian Water Forum

28 August- 3 September 2005 - Denpasar, Bali
Second SEAWF Secretariat, Tel: 021. 7398604, 7396616 ext. 635
Fax: 021. 7398604 Contact: sekretariat@inawater.com; s_sutardi@hotmail.com Website: www.inawater.com

8th International River Symposium

6-9 September 2005 - Brisbane, Australia
Water and Food Security - Rivers in a Global Context plus the International and National Thiess Riverprize.
Call for papers and nominations
Website: www.riverfestival.com.au

19th International Congress on Irrigation and Drainage

10-18 September 2005 - Beijing, China
Contact: cncid@iwhr.com. Website: http://www.icid2005.org.

31st WEDC International Conference

Maximising the Benefits from Water and Environmental Sanitation
31 October-4 November - Kampala, Uganda
Contact: wedc.conf@Lboro.ac.uk Website: http://wedc.Lboro.ac.uk

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