

Challenges and Opportunities for the MRC and Civil Society Partnership:

Critical Issues in Sustainable Basin Development

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Market-driven globalization and new need for Multilevel + Multilayered Governance

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Why is an atmosphere of partnership necessary

1. Real-world problems of development
2. Perception gaps and unfavorable climate of opinions
3. Complexity of actors and actions
4. No actors can do it alone

Critical issues of MRB and MRC

1. MRB objectives too big for MRC
2. MRC too small for the big MRB
3. MRC too far away from community
4. MRC too 'technical'

Perspectives of civil society on the role of MRC

1. Needed historically

- Geo-politics
 - ▶ Outside actors eg. USA, WB, ADB, Japan, other donors, [China]
 - ▶ Inside six countries...esp. 4 active members
- Actors with different interests
- Support for whole of river basin approach
- Support for organization to deal with cross border-transboundary issues

Perspectives of civil society on the role of MRC (cont...)

(2) MRC vision yes, but...

- Sustainable development that is:
- Economically prosperous,
- Socially equitable
- Environmentally sound

Perspectives of civil society on the role of MRC (cont...)

3. Performance in Significant and difficult issues: Risks of Irrelevance?

(a) Recent examples where MRC was largely absent

- Negotiations on navigation improvement, or, “river-rapids blasting”
- Engaging in Yunnan hydropower expansion
- Debate about development on tributaries

Perspectives of civil society on the role of MRC (cont....)

(b) Current water governance examples in which MRC must engage

- Possible Lao-Thai water transfer
- Possible inter-basin water diversions
- Risks to Tonle Sap & fisheries (already part of IBFM e-flows)
- Mainstream Mekong dams

Hope that MRC is willing & capable to engage

Perspectives of civil society on the role of MRC (cont...)

4. MRC transparency, inc. engagement with civil society?

- Eg. Fisheries, strong engagement with non-State actors, CSOs from the basin
- Eg. 6 years of WUP, weak engagement, low transparency
- Eg. BDP1, limited participation; BDP2: more participatory?

MRC as a policy process facilitator: enabling atmosphere of dialogue and exchange, open to analysis, support & constructive criticism

New Context for MRC: New Challenges

1. Regionalization of development: “national interests” vs. “transboundary interests”
2. Stronger private economic actors and market forces:
Weaker social actors
3. MRC for whom: Legitimacy crisis?
4. MRC for sustainability?
(Awareness, willingness and capability)

Opportunity for Future Partnerships

Partnership

‘voluntary/collaborative relationship between state and non-state actors to work for common purpose and share risks, resources and responsibilities’

1. Knowledge gaps

- MRC and need for broadened platform of knowledge-policy process
- How to bridge the gap between technical knowledge and other neglected knowledge actors i.e. knowledge networks, CSOs, NGOs and communities

Opportunity for Future Partnerships

(cont..)

2. Regional public sphere and policy gaps

- Can the voice-of-the-voiceless be heard?
- Are countries just going ahead with own planning & implementation regardless of the MRC?
- How can MRC engage constructively and proactively, without being overtaken by events or swept along by the momentum of meta-justifications (inc. biofuels)?

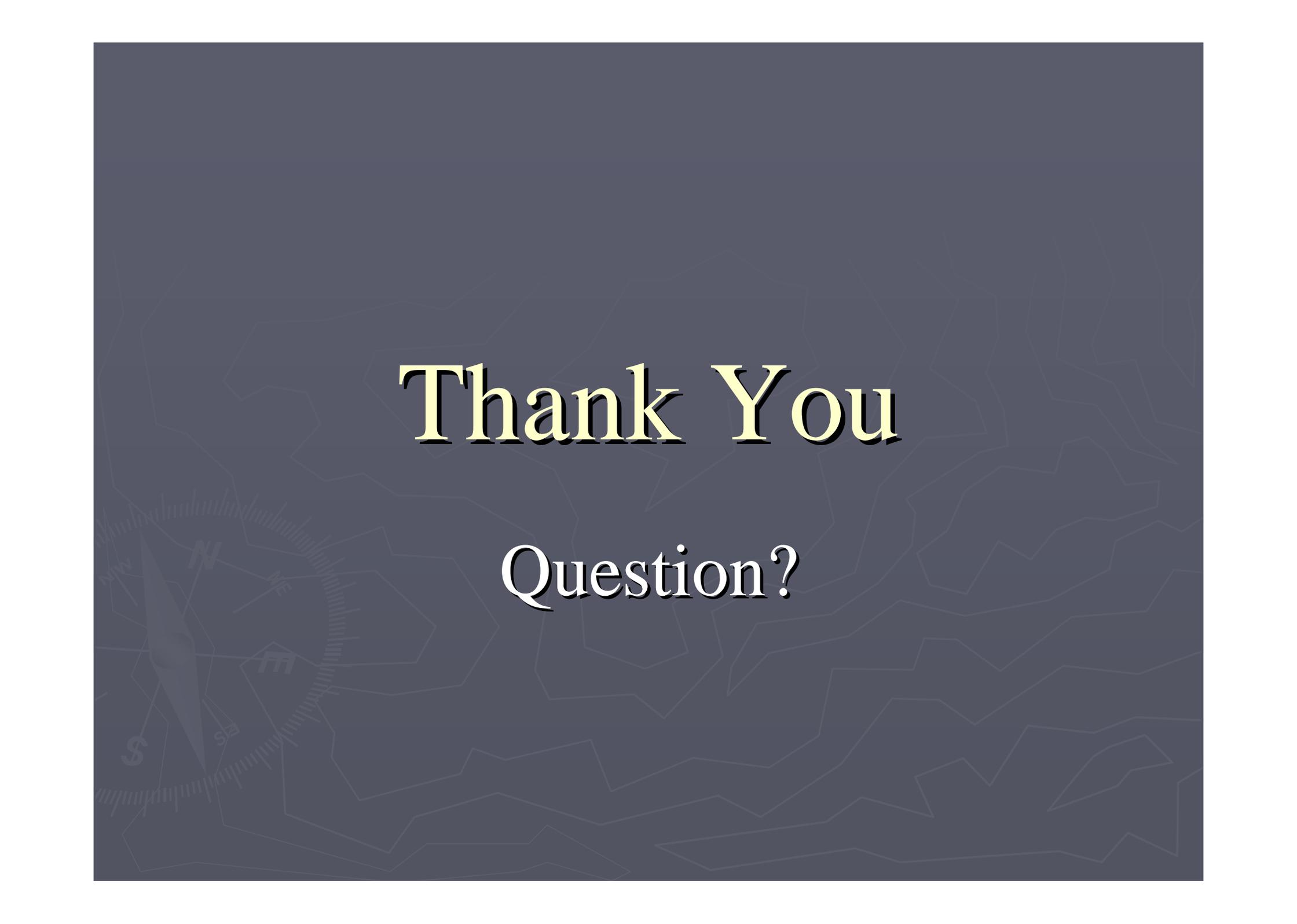
Opportunity for Future Partnership Challenges (cont...)

3. MRC and public policy process

- Role and capacity in dealing with complex issues, inter-disciplinary perspectives
- Willingness to listen to different perspectives: donor perspectives consultants, different peoples from the basin, and open for counter-narratives, uncertainty
- Engage with relevant networks e.g. Research networks, Regional NGOs, M-POWER, local NGOs etc....

Opportunity for Future Partnership Challenges (cont...)

4. Policy platform and participatory multilevel governance through Multi-stakeholder dialogues
5. Engage regional organizations like ASEAN

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Thank You

Question?