

**EVALUATIVE STUDY**

**DFAT GREATER MEKONG WATER RESOURCES PROGRAM'S  
APPROACH TO POLICY DIALOGUE**

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## Abbreviations

ACIAR	Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AWP	Australian Water Partnership
AIRBMP	Ayeyarwaddy Integrated River Basin Management Project
AWP	Australian Water Partnership – An Australian government development cooperation initiative bringing together public and private organisations from the Australian water sector with Asia-Pacific development partners
BES-Net	Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Network
BRIDGE	Building River Dialogues and Governance
CACID	Cambodia-Australia-China Irrigation Dialogue
CAVAC	Cambodia Agricultural Value Chain Program
CDTA	Capacity Development Technical Assistance (through ADB, World Bank)
CGIAR	A global agricultural research partnership of 15 ‘CGIAR Centres’ including International Water Management Institute, International Rice Research Institute etc.
CIA	Cumulative impact assessment
CEPF	Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund
CBWG	Community based water governance
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (Australia)
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
C4C	Coordination for Change
DAWR	Department of Agriculture and Water Resources (Australia)
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)
DFID	UK Department for International Development
DPs	Development Partners
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment – ESIA: Environment and Social Impact Assessment
EU	European Union
eWater Solutions	eWater Custodian of Australia’s hydrological modelling platform, eWater Source.
HDWG	Hydropower Developer’s Working Group
GIA	Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) tool
GIZ	German Corporation for International Cooperation
GMWRP	DFAT Greater Mekong Water Resources Program
ICEM	International Centre for Environmental Management
IFC	International Finance Corporation (World Bank Group)
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
IWMI	International Water Management Institute
IWRM	Integrated Water Resource Management
KESAN	Karen Environmental and Social Action Network
LMC	Lancang-Mekong Cooperation
MDBA	Murray Darling Basin Authority (Australia)
MDS	Mekong Delta Study
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MHRI	Myanmar Healthy Rivers initiative
MKs	Mekong research for development projects
MOA	Memorandum of Agreement
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MRC	Mekong River Commission (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam)
PNPCA	Procedures on Notification, Prior Consultation, and Agreement (MRC)
R4D	Research for Development
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
Sida	Swedish International Development Agency
SOBA	State of the Basin Assessment
SUMERNET	Sustainable Mekong Research Network
PEA	Political Economy Analysis
TbEIA	Transboundary Environmental Impact Assessment
ToC	Theory of Change
WLE	Water Land and Ecosystems Program (of the CGIAR system)
WBG	The World Bank Group, comprising The World Bank and the International Finance Corporation

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This evaluative study of Australia's Greater Mekong Water Resources Program (GMWRP) was commissioned by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). Lessons and recommendations are intended to be integrated into the ongoing management of the program (by both DFAT and its implementing partners) and to provide valuable reflections for other governance programs.

Australia has been supporting Mekong societies to manage their water resources since the 1990s. Australia's (GMWRP) 2014–2019 is the current five-year phase with a goal of contributing to water, food, energy and environmental security in the region.

The program focuses on making regional water governance fairer and more effective by engaging with governments and regional organisations, the private sector, civil society and local researchers in pursuit of five program outcomes:

- **Effectively managed water governance:** Strengthening the institutional frameworks and capacity of regional, national and local actors to manage their water resources more effectively;
- **Accountable water governance:** Raising the accountability of government and the private sector; normalising high standards for water investments; and promoting more transparent decision-making;
- **Informed water governance:** Enhancing the availability and influence of research to improve water resources management and water investment decision-making;
- **Inclusive water governance:** Supporting civil society and local community input into water decisions and management at all levels.
- **Policy dialogue:** Fostering trust and open discussion between Greater Mekong governments and other water-related stakeholders.

Within this framework, DFAT is actively promoting constructive engagement and policy dialogue on priority topics such as: seeking solutions to development challenges; gender equality; public disclosure of information; public policy and regulatory improvements in irrigation, hydropower, mining and river basin management.

The objectives of this **evaluative study** are to:

- Test the logic of the GMWRP and the effectiveness of various policy dialogue initiatives by DFAT and program implementation partners;
- Seek out and learn from innovative and successful policy dialogue contributed to by the GMWRP to enable wider replication; and
- Identify other policy dialogue approaches that could be used by GWMWRP partners.

The team observed and conducted key informant interviews at major regional events in Thailand 7-12 November 2016, followed by visits to Vietnam November 13-16, Cambodia November 17-20, Laos 21-25 November, and Myanmar December 12-16, 2016.

The key informants included the DFAT Greater Mekong Water Team, the program's key implementing partners and other development partners, namely: Greater Mekong government officials with water-related responsibilities, Mekong River Commission (an inter-governmental river basin organisation), World Bank Group (The World Bank and International Finance Corporation), Oxfam Australia, International Water Management Institute and the Greater Mekong Water Land and Ecosystems Program, the Australian Water Partnership, other DFAT officers, officials of non-Mekong governments and other people knowledgeable in Greater Mekong water governance and political economy.

Key elements and achievements of the GMWRP are:

- Provision of core support to the Mekong River Commission during a period of intensive reform, downsizing and decentralisation, resulting in the MRC Strategic Plan 2016-2020 and a basket fund of USD 65 million budget - 90%+ financed.
- Provision of core support to the IFC Hydro Advisory program in Laos, now expanding to Myanmar for improving the quality of the hydropower sector particularly with respect to social, environmental and governance performance. Efforts are well-advanced with the adoption by governments of new tools such as River Basin Profiling (Nam Ou in Laos), Cumulative Impact Assessment (in Laos), Strategic Environment Assessment (in Myanmar), and hydropower developers' cooperation platforms (Laos and Myanmar).
- Provision of core support to Oxfam Australia's regional water governance initiatives, specifically a multi-level Inclusion Project, resourcing associated civil society organisation partners across the region.
- Provision of core support to International Water Management Institute and the regional research for development community funded thru a DFAT contribution to the Greater Mekong Water Land and Ecosystems Program with a portfolio of thirty-three projects across all GMWRP targeted river basins, and series of annual Greater Mekong Forum on Water Food and Energy (2011 China, 2012 Cambodia, 2013 and 2014 Vietnam, 2015 Cambodia, 2016 Thailand, and 2017 Myanmar).
- Enlisting the DFAT-funded Australian Water Partnership to further strengthen the Australian contribution by provision of carefully selected Australian expertise to join particular initiatives of Mekong governments.
- Since early 2017 provision of core support to World Bank's future guidance of a diverse Greater Mekong water resources management investment portfolio with Governments of Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and Myanmar.

The specific achievements of individual partners are addressed in the main report.

The overall DFAT GMWRM program approach is commendable, in using relatively small amounts of funding wisely, and is more relationship focused, building trust rather than coming in with big money and ready-made technical solutions. It can be concluded that the DFAT GMWRP is clearly supporting the creation and nurturing of preconditions for positive changes and their institutionalisation by strategic nudging - policies and actions that change incentives, opportunities and institutional frameworks in order to achieve fairer and more effective governance.

GMWRP is primarily a governance program where DFAT has worked closely with a number of partners to make strategic interventions into different regional and transboundary water governance arenas. The DFAT approach to water-related policy dialogue has been to concentrate – with its contracted partners - on fostering trust and open discussion between Greater Mekong governments and other water-related stakeholders.

The consultants consider this approach has been rightly selected as the most viable strategy for the GMWRP in the Mekong Region and in Myanmar. However, policy dialogue is defined variously by different partners and agencies, with each describing different processes, approaches and outcomes. GMWRP and its diverse partners need a more uniformed understanding of policy dialogue, and relevant approaches, and robust theory of change based on regularly updated political economy analysis. It would help improve program relevance and effectiveness in influencing policy.

DFAT has maintained direct and consistent water diplomacy engagement with Greater Mekong government representatives from Cambodia, China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. In addition, DFAT has contracted relationships with key implementation partners: Mekong River Commission, World Bank Group - The World Bank and the International Finance Corporation, Oxfam Australia, International Water Management Institute, and the Australian Water Partnership (AWP).

Partner organisations have their own niches, methods and emphases – Mekong River Commission being inter-governmental, World Bank working very closely with governments and improving management, International Finance Corporation working very closely with governments and the private sector, Oxfam Australia predominantly with civil society organisations, International Water Management Institute resourcing the regional research community in its diverse engagements.

The logic of the approach to engagement, and the selection of partners are both considered as being sound and appropriate, but at the same time, very demanding. The diversity of partners ranging from an inter-governmental organisation, financing institution, research institution, Non-Governmental Organisation and advocacy organisations with different organisational set-up and practices, both presents its strength and strategic and operational challenge.

The Greater Mekong Water Team has led the recruitment of these above-mentioned partners into the GMWRP and worked closely with their leadership teams in shaping and implementing their complementary – but different – agendas for behavioural change leading to fairer and more effective governance. Each partner organisation knows the agenda of other GMWRP partners, and when possible they actively cooperate, but it is recognised by the Greater Mekong Water Team that while each may share the goal to improve water governance, their entry points, opportunities, constraints and methods differ. In Myanmar, in particular, the approach (including very strategic involvement of AWP) and selection of relevant development partners, government agencies, and CSOs, provides an exemplary model that can be replicated in other countries.

This rich diversity of implementing partners requires more time and resources for GMWRP management, and constant and systematic efforts to ensure consistency, synergy and meaningful communication and collaboration (area of commonness) among different pillars and associated partners while respecting diversity.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are the consultants' suggestions to further improve GMWRP policy dialogue implementation:

### **Contextualising policy dialogue**

- 1. Clarifying:** DFAT should bring implementing partners together to agree as far as possible on a common definition and understanding of policy, policy influencing, and policy dialogue to be used for this whole program.
- 2. Thinking and working politically:** Political economy analyses should be annually updated in a two- step process – first for individual outcome areas (and implementing partners) then for the program as a whole, facilitated by DFAT in the annual joint meeting of implementing partners, which should be a longer 1-day meeting.
- 3. Focusing:** GMWRP should through consultation with key implementing partners, identify a short-list of priority policy issues in which the program would like to exert some influence, and should together with partners, convene a series of dialogue events on these issues.
- 4. Measuring and learning:** Monitoring and evaluation frameworks for GMWRP as a whole, and for each partner, should be revised to ensure a clearer focus on seeking evidence of influence of policy dialogue such as attitudinal change, discursive commitment, procedural change, policy content, and behaviour change.

## **Learning from policy dialogue initiatives of others**

5. DFAT and its partners should review lessons learned from policy dialogue initiatives of others. For example:

- Stockholm Environment Institute and the Sustainable Mekong Research Network has a strong focus on identifying and engaging with boundary partners that may be individuals, groups or organisations with whom SEI/SUMERNET interacts directly and can anticipate opportunities for influence. SEI/SUMERNET explicitly strategises how to work with these influential boundary partners, but they do not control them.
- IUCN Mekong Water Dialogues established multi-sector, multi-stakeholder national working groups composed of 100% Mekong country citizens, empowered to select key issues for subsequent policy dialogue focus.
- The methods of the global IUCN Building River Dialogues and Governance initiative includes demonstration sites, learning, dialogue, leadership training, and ongoing advisory support.
- Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Network dialogues are part of a new global process that is focusing on ecosystems policy dialogue. The method is to create structured interfaces at various levels on high-priority themes, aiming to influence each of the core constituencies represented in the multi-stakeholder processes – scientists, public and corporate policy authorities, and field practitioners.

## **Specific matters needing attention with existing implementation partners**

**6. Greater Mekong Forum on Water Food and Energy:** Regarding the forum, led by International Water Management Institute, efforts need to be made to ensure the right balance of participants and roles in presenting, leading of the sessions and forum from the region and elsewhere. Some thought should be given to organising each time a pre- or post-forum half day session specifically targeting government policy makers, designed around some key policy issues.

**7. International Water Management Institute:** Need to invest more in the policy dialogue and Coordination for Change (C4C) component, to be carried out by a team of highly competent nationals from the Greater Mekong with a network of political connections at the decision-making level, and ongoing commitment for effective policy lobbying/influence.

**8. International Finance Corporation:** The IFC team needs to be strengthened and would especially benefit from the addition of a senior policy officer/deputy team leader level position, considering its increasing work-load.

**9. Mekong River Commission:** DFAT should continue its past and present intensive effort to press for more meaningful public participation by MRC and help MRC together with other development partners, such as Germany, Switzerland, European Union etc., to ensure that the MRC Procedures for Notification, Prior Consultation and Agreement (PNPCA) and the MRC Council Study are conducted effectively and efficiently to inform transboundary river basin development that will be fair, sustainable and inclusive.

**10. Mekong River Commission:** DFAT should continue to push for the adoption and public release of the lessons learned from the prior notification exercises and help to address identified issues affecting the PNPCA; and should continue to support the understanding of the implementation of the PNPCA as just one part of a broader set of necessary activities that make up a Pre-PNPCA; PNPCA; and Post-PNPCA life-cycle.

**11. Gender:** While considerable progress has been made on gender issues particularly by Oxfam, and through some IWMI investments, and a new gender and hydropower initiative is being kicked off in Myanmar, more can still be done. Implementing Partners (particularly MRC) would benefit from systematically strengthening their own internal organisational gender capacity and giving gender issues greater priority and visibility in the investment of their projects and programs.

**12. Communication:** While the DFAT Greater Mekong Water team may not need to communicate on all aspects of the program on every occasion, this should be balanced against the possible benefits of clearly communicating DFAT's support for a cohesive programme to other development partners, to the citizens of the region and to the Australian tax-payers.

**13.** Implementing partners should work together with the DFAT Greater Mekong Water Team to develop some GMWRP program-level communications products. These would be useful for raising the profile of the program as a whole, as well as communicating some of the key program level messages on water governance to specific target audiences. This would have the added benefit of fostering additional collaboration between the implementing partners.

### **Sustaining Australian engagement in Greater Mekong water governance**

**14. Meaningful coordination:** While recognising diversity among the implementing partners, it is critical to have a better strategy to overcome the existing silo mentality of a diverse group of actors, and is important for a more systematic follow-up and materialisation of the promised actions and collaborations.

**15. Program staff:** DFAT Greater Mekong Water Team staff level of effort and staff turn-over need to be carefully planned for.

**16. Sustaining engagement:** Achieving effective river basin governance and management requires 20-30 year engagements.



## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This evaluative study of policy dialogue approaches of Australia's Greater Mekong Water Resources Program (GMWRP) is commissioned by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). Lessons and recommendations are intended to be integrated into the ongoing management of the program (by both DFAT and its implementing partners) and provide valuable reflections for other governance programs.

Australia has been supporting Mekong societies to manage their water resources since the 1990s. Australia's **DFAT Greater Mekong Water Resources Program (GMWRP) 2014–2019** is a five-year program that aims to strengthen water governance across the region. The strategic focus of the **GMWRP** is guided by the DFAT South East Asia Aid Investment Plan, which frames Australian regional aid investments around two pillars: economic growth and human security. Effective water resources management is critical to water, food and energy security in the region and is increasingly becoming one of the key political-economic issues of the region. It is also central to economic development and local livelihoods. The overarching challenge is to meet the region's growing demand for food, energy and water through use of its abundant resources, while minimising negative social and environmental consequences.

The **GMWRP** covers the Mekong River and its tributaries flowing through China, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam, as well as the other major rivers of the region, including the Ayeyarwaddy, Salween, Chao Phraya, Nam Ou and Red rivers. It focusses on strengthening policy dialogue and constructive engagement of the main actors important to regional water governance: national governments; regional institutions; the private sector; civil society organisations; and local researchers (to strengthen water governance outcomes). The objective of the program is to achieve water governance that is fairer and more effective.

The program's five main pillars include:

**Pillar 1: Effectively managed:** Strengthening the institutional frameworks and capacity of regional, national and local actors to manage their water resources more effectively: **Key partners:** the Mekong River commission (MRC), and Governments of Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, and tripartite collaboration involving e.g. Thailand, Cambodia, Australia and China etc.

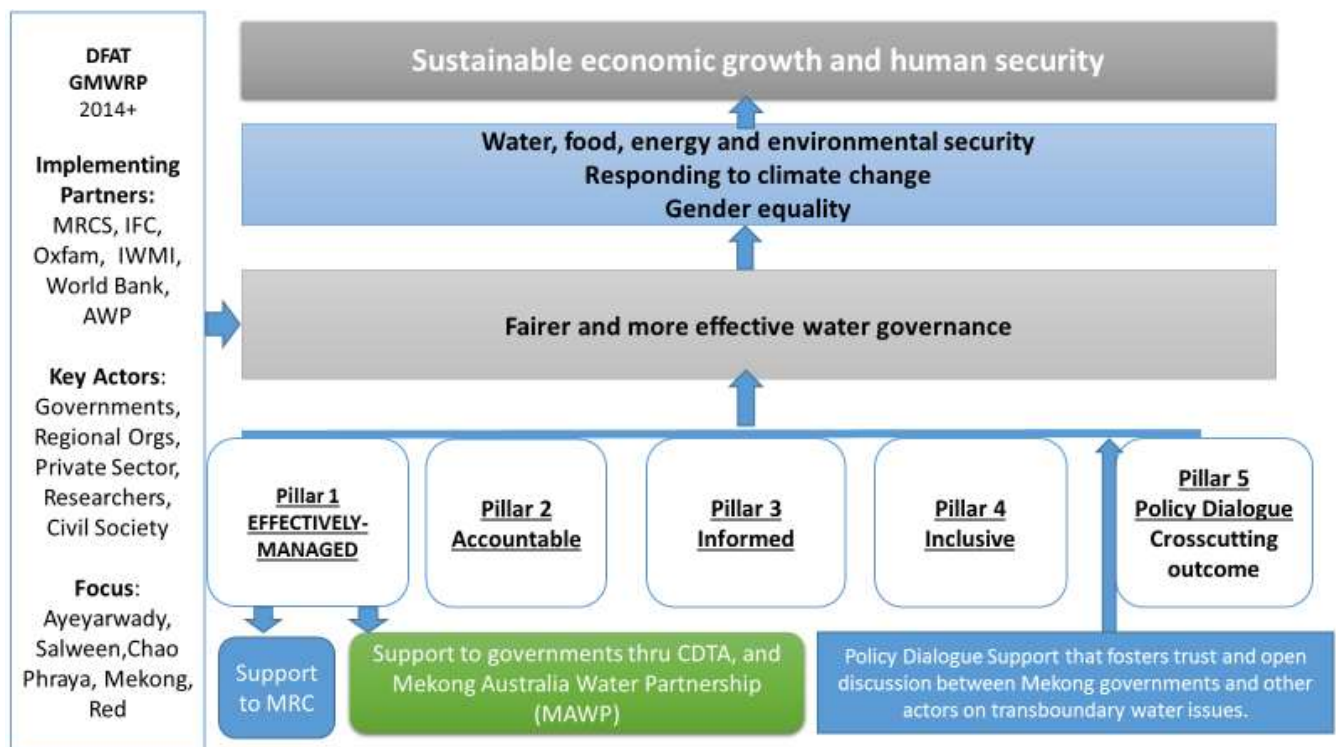
**Pillar 2: Accountable:** Raising the accountability of governments, financiers and private sector; normalising high standards for water investments; and promoting more transparent decision-making: **Key partners:** IFC (World Bank Group), Government of Lao PDR, Government of Myanmar, and relevant private sectors in these two countries. It is focused particularly on improving governance in the hydropower sector.

**Pillar 3: Informed:** Enhancing the availability and influence of research to improve water resources management and water investment decision-making. **Key partners:** International Water Management Institute (IWMI) (through the change coordination team, and 15 Water Land and Ecosystem (WLE) Research for Development (R4D) projects, coordinated out of Naga House (Greater Mekong Centre) in Vientiane, aiming to make regional water governance more informed.

**Pillar 4: Inclusive:** Supporting civil society and local community input into water decisions and management at all levels. **Key partners:** Oxfam Australia, focusing on making regional water-related governance more *inclusive* particularly with respect to gender.

**Pillar 5: Policy dialogue:** Through a crosscutting focus, support policy dialogue that fosters trust and open discussion between Greater Mekong governments and other actors on transboundary water issues.

**Figure 1-1 DFAT Greater Mekong Water Resources Program**



## 2.0 EVALUATIVE STUDY

The purpose of this evaluative study is to inform and improve the effectiveness of the GMWRP policy dialogue approach with both implementing partners and target stakeholders (including governments, civil society, the private sector, financiers and researchers).

### 2.1 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this **evaluative study** are to:

- Test the logic of the GMWRP and the effectiveness of various policy dialogue initiatives by DFAT and program implementation partners;
- Seek out and learn from innovative and successful policy dialogue contributed to by the GMWRP to enable wider replication; and
- Identify other policy dialogue approaches that could be used by GMMWRP partners.

Gender equality and social inclusion issues are investigated as an integral part of addressing other questions of effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and so on. The detailed questions and sub-questions, and the data methods are provided in **Appendix A2** of the work plan.

### 2.2 APPROACH

The evaluation is exploratory, descriptive and includes case studies. A methodology was developed and agreed upon in the work plan at the beginning of the study on November 4, 2016. Beside an extensive review of the relevant literature, the study team apply major methods for data collection and analysis through conducting field observation and key informant interviews at:

- Major regional events in Thailand 7-12 November 2016 – the Greater Mekong Forum, DFAT’s GMWRP Partners meeting, DFAT’s Development Partners Round-Table, and Mekong/Salween /Ayeyarwaddy /Red Water Governance Fellows conference. The key informants included the senior members of MRC, IFC, IWMI-WLE-Naga House, Oxfam Australia, National Mekong Committees, WorldFish Centre, Stockholm Environment Institute, Stockholm International Water Institute, eWater, ICEM, and relevant development partners such as EU, Sweden, Switzerland, World Bank, USA, GIZ, etc.
- In-country visits to Vietnam on November 13-16, Cambodia on November 17-20, and Laos 21-25 November 2016, and Myanmar on November 12 to 16, 2016. The key informants include the DFAT Greater Mekong Water Team, program’s key partners and development partners, e.g. AWP, IFC, the National Mekong Committees, Governments’ agencies in charge of water, environment, energy, natural resources, and agriculture.

A list of persons met and interviewed is provided as an Annex. The information collection using semi-structured interviews is structured around the respondents’ personal and professional experiences and views on the program intervention such as:

- How the program(s) policy dialogue was designed and has been delivered, examining overarching program design, design of individual investments, and human resourcing, results implementation (based on established theory of change), and monitoring and evaluation;
- Exploring with key stakeholders the essential strengths or opportunities and areas for improvement. It was also informed by literature to identify best practices;
- Collecting significant change stories from a variety of stakeholders in a combination of synthesised data to identify lessons learned; and
- Drawing on evidence from both process and theory-based elements detailed above to provide a clear direction for management of DFAT GMWRP going forward. The current reform environment and policy context was considered in the development of recommendations on the future management.

The evaluative study was conducted in accordance with the Code of Ethics including:

- Ensuring all those who participate in the review as informants are provided with clear information about the review and what would happen to the information.
- Confidentiality is assured.
- Data is displayed in ways that do not permit identification of the informant.
- Where negative findings emerge, these are discussed with the relevant partners (as a courtesy) prior to their presentation.

Data, theory and methodological triangulation was applied:

- Data triangulation – the use of a variety of data sources – primary data from interviews, secondary data from literature review, and professional/personal observation and experience;
- Investigator triangulation – the use of different evaluators;
- Theory triangulation – the use of multiple perspectives to interpret the data; and
- Methodological triangulation – the use of a mix of methods.
- As part of additional triangulation, the draft final report incorporates comments from DFAT and partners.

## 2.3 LIMITATIONS

The study team believes that the approach and methodology employed has made for a robust evaluative study of the GMWRP, with a specific focus on policy dialogue approaches. However, there are some limitations as discussed below:

- The evaluative study includes a significant amount of qualitative/perception-based enquiry including interviews and focus groups, and many of the stakeholders consulted as part of the evaluative study have a close association with the GMWRP. In an attempt to be more objective a number of other stakeholders were consulted who are not directly linked to GMWRP such as Sida, World Bank Group, ADB, SEI, SIWI, USAID, Dutch Embassy, GIZ and staff at DFAT posts in Cambodia, Vietnam, and Myanmar. Additionally, where possible the evaluative study team sought data from more than one source, and drew on the secondary data and attempted to collect quantitative data to support perception-based findings.
- It is challenging to adequately evaluate the attribution or contribution of the projects to achieving cross-cutting outcomes, especially policy change, and more effective/fairer regional water governance, which is influenced by so many different factors and contributions of many different actors.
- However, the evaluative study team did benefit from observing the GMWRP consultations and meetings. Participating in the sessions provided useful insights into how partners and DFAT view GMWRP in terms of its purpose and objectives.
- The review was occurring during the end of the year where partners and related organisations are extremely busy with their annual work-plans before the year-end holidays. The Greater Mekong Water Team built a good network and partnership with our key stakeholders and interviewees that helped the evaluative study overcome these constraints.

## 3.0 KEY FINDINGS

The following sections identify key findings of each of the questions in the evaluative study plan.

**Governance program:** GMWRP is primarily a governance program where DFAT has worked closely with a number of partners to make strategic interventions into different regional, transboundary and national water governance arenas. GMWRP is clearly supporting the creation and nurturing of preconditions for positive changes and their institutionalisation by strategic nudging - policies and actions that change incentives, opportunities and institutional frameworks in order to achieve fairer and more effective governance.

**Logic evident in key programmatic elements and achievements:** The overall DFAT GMWRM program approach is commendable. Key elements and achievement of the GMWRP presented below explain the GMWRM program logic of the policy dialogue approaches using relatively small amounts of funding wisely, and is more relationship focused, building trust rather than coming in with big money and ready-made technical solutions.

- Provision of core support (including specialist support, and basket funding of AUD 6 million) to the Mekong River Commission during a period of intensive reform, downsizing and decentralisation, resulting in a more focused organisation now implementing the MRC Strategic Plan 2016-2020, which has a USD 65 million budget that in early 2017 is 90%+ financed.

- Provision of core support to the IFC Hydro Advisory program in Laos, now expanding to Myanmar, that is focused on improving the quality of the hydropower sector particularly with respect to social, environmental and governance performance. Hydropower developer working groups (HDWGs) have been established, and efforts are well-advanced with the adoption by governments of new tools (for Laos and Myanmar) such as River Basin Profiling (Nam Ou in Laos), Cumulative Impact Assessment (in Laos), Strategic Environment Assessment (in Myanmar).
- Provision of core support to Oxfam Australia's regional water governance initiatives, specifically a multi-level Inclusion Project. It contributes to strengthening gender and women's leadership, active participation of women in water civil society groups; civil society to manage water resources and participate in water decision making; Improved skills and capabilities of civil society to influence water decision-making; and convening and promoting policy dialogue.
- Provision of core support to International Water Management Institute's Water Land and Ecosystems Program in the Greater Mekong that has built a portfolio of thirty-three projects across the Ayeyarwaddy, Salween, Mekong and Red river basins. The project teams connect across borders in a peer network that strengthens the regional research and young water professionals for development community, which has a major assembly each year at the Greater Mekong Forum on Water Food and Energy (2011 China, 2012 Cambodia, 2013 and 2014 Vietnam, 2015 Cambodia, 2016 Thailand, and 2017 Myanmar).
- Enlisting the DFAT-funded Australian Water Partnership to further strengthen the Australian contribution by provision of carefully selected Australian expertise to join particular initiatives of Mekong governments. Experience in partnering with Australia's eWater and Australia's Hanoi-based International Centre of Environmental Management across the region, and more recently the AWP in Myanmar, is leading to a rapidly growing new portfolio of Mekong-Australia water partnership work.
- In early 2017 GMWRP has also agreed to provide support to World Bank's future management of a diverse Greater Mekong water resources investment portfolio with Governments of Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and Myanmar valued at approximately USD 165 million.

The specific achievements of individual partners are addressed in Section **Error! Reference source not found.**

The consultants consider this approach has been rightly selected as the most viable strategy for the GMWRP in the Greater Mekong.

**Need for a more uniformed understanding of policy dialogue:** Policy dialogue is defined variously by different agencies, with each describing different processes and outcomes. The capacity for and understanding of policy dialogue among the key implementing partners is also diverse. Some of them understood it as a form of dialogue that is a process guided by a non-partisan facilitator to find common ground on policy issues between parties with different perspectives, points of view, or aspirations; while others understood it more in terms of the form of policy instruments or outcomes delivered. This diversity may arise from different organisational and even individual perspectives of key implementing partners, and may be also partly due to the different steps and time-lines for the detailed formulation of the program documents for each pillar by each of the implementing partners.

While it is not likely that 100% agreement on all aspects will be achieved with such a diverse group, however it would have been useful during the inception period of program implementation to bring the key players together and agree on a common definition and understanding of policy, policy influencing, and policy dialogue as one approach to influencing policy, *to be used for this program* – meaning that in other contexts and other work, IWMI, IFC, Oxfam and MRC can all have different definitions and understandings, but when they are working together as part of the DFAT GMWRP they should be using the same commonly understood definitions.

AusAID (integrated into DFAT) (2013)<sup>1</sup> defines policy as “fundamentally the expression of a set of values or principles that the leadership of an organisation holds to be important in delivering its mandate and in bringing about change.” Policy dialogue, therefore, “is a continuous discussion between interested parties about the relative importance of those values to each party, and about establishing a commonly agreed program of action that properly reflects those values (AusAID, 2013). However, through this evaluative study, we did not find any consistent attempt to document the agreement and monitoring by all the partners on what is important and why, prior to doing something about it.

Other definitions of policy dialogue could be further considered in order to develop a common understanding, which could be done based on e.g. the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2016)<sup>2</sup> and the Overseas Development Institute (2011)<sup>3</sup> definitions which provide a very comprehensive understanding of policy dialogue as a continuous process for policy influencing/advising, lobbying and advocacy through evidence-based and interest and value based approaches using cooperation/inside track and/or outside track. Building on that broad definition, the success of policy dialogue can be measured in terms of both its process and its results, and relevant social and political context.

A successful policy dialogue suggests a sustained interchange of ideas, perspectives and analysis between the DPs and their counterparts, conducted in such a way that the process is focused on a clearly defined purpose or endgame; promotes mutual trust and confidence between parties; generates an understanding of each party’s genuinely expressed values; incorporates evidence; and recognises the political as well as technical dimensions of policy reform.

The seven case-studies in this evaluative study report provide more details about the policy dialogue approaches used by the GMWRP and its partners (see Annex).

**Figure 3-1 Policy dialogue approaches**



(Source: A. Pellini and A Datta, 2010. Monitoring and Evaluation of Policy Influencing, ODI, UNDP Viet Nam).

<sup>1</sup> Bazeley P 2013. Thinking about policy and strategy evaluation-policy-dialogue - Development Effectiveness (ODE), Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), Canberra.

<sup>2</sup> MFA 2015, Opening doors and unlocking potential: Key lessons from an evaluation of support for Policy Influencing, Lobbying and Advocacy (PILA), the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

<sup>3</sup> Harry Jones, 2011, Background Note – A guide to monitoring and evaluating policy influence, Overseas Development Institute.

**Theory of Change (ToC) based on political economy analysis is imperative:** It was found that the DFAT Greater Mekong background paper (providing initial policy economy analysis and summary theory of changes – more ‘fair and effective water, food and energy governance in the GMS’)<sup>4</sup>, overall program design and design of the pillar investments were carried out rather inconsistently, considering the diversity of partners ranging from an inter-governmental organisation, financing institution, research institution and Non-Governmental Organisation with different organisational set-up and practices.

This inconsistency can be addressed by agreeing on the definition of policy dialogue and overall theory of change and developing appropriate monitoring based on these, informed by a regular update (annually) of a more comprehensive policy economy analysis (PEAs) and regular updates/revision of assumptions.

The report commissioned by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) in 2012 provides a very good overview of the use of ‘Theory of Change’ in international development.<sup>5</sup> The Theory of Change (ToC) is increasingly used for evaluation and for program design and to guide implementation, and requires both logical thinking and deeper critical reflection – a deeper reflective process and dialogue amongst colleagues and stakeholders for empowerment and social change.

Learning-by-doing, supported by regular reflection based on a ToC, helps to systematise this knowledge and make it available for broader application. It is therefore imperative that the DFAT Greater Mekong Water Team conduct and biannually or annually revise the political economy analyses (PEAs). PEAs analyse the broader context, including the culture and existing power relations, before placing a demarcated intervention in that context. Assumptions about behaviour, the underlying mechanisms at work and the context that supports an intervention need to be made explicit and supported by evidence as much as possible.

### 3.1 OVERALL APPROACH

In its overall approach, DFAT GMWRP has maintained direct and consistent water diplomacy engagement with Greater Mekong government representatives from Cambodia, China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. In addition, DFAT has contracted relationships with key implementation partners: Mekong River Commission (MRC), World Bank Group - The World Bank (WB) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC), Oxfam Australia, International Water Management Institute (IWMI), and the Australian Water Partnership (AWP). Since 2016 the AWP is providing additional people/companies/resources when requested, with early support to DFAT focused on Myanmar.

The DFAT approach to water-related policy dialogue (as noted above) has been to concentrate – with its contracted partners - on fostering trust and open discussion between Greater Mekong governments and other water-related stakeholders. Partner organisations have their own niches, methods and emphases – MRC being inter-governmental, World Bank working very closely with governments and improving management, IFC working very closely with governments and the private sector, Oxfam Australia predominantly with civil society organisations, IWMI resourcing the regional research community in its diverse engagements.

**The logic of the approach to engagement, and the selection of partners are both considered as being sound and appropriate, but at the same time, very demanding:** The diversity of partners ranging from an inter-governmental organisation, financing institution, research institution, Non-Governmental Organisation and advocacy organisations with different organisational set-up and practices, is both a strength, and a strategic and operational challenge for the program. The diverse governance arrangements and priority inclinations of different partners presents challenges for effective synergy and collaboration to achieve timely policy changes.

<sup>4</sup> AusAID, 2012. AusAID Mekong Water Resources Program – Background Paper, 21 November 2012, AusAID, Australian Government.

<sup>5</sup> Isabel Vogel, (2012). Review of the use of ‘Theory of Change’ in international development, UK Department for International Development (DFID)

The cohesiveness among different pillars and components within each pillar, and with the regional, national and sub-national needs and priorities need to be further improved. The level of synergy and collaboration that is actually achieved within the GMWRP depends a lot on each organisation's inclination and the personality of key team members. For example, Oxfam supported regional and local CSOs and government in the Mekong Delta Study, PNPCA, etc. and worked closely with IFC in Laos in the Hydropower Developers' Working Group meetings, but not so in Myanmar, yet, because of certain sensitivities and challenges. Oxfam could assist the MRC in its MRC Council Study with the gender aspects and public engagement, and IFC team could help Oxfam and WLE in the policy-interface. But this synergy and collaboration opportunity for a better policy dialogue has not been used to maximum effectiveness yet.

The IFC (2016) Progress Report identified the challenge of low capacity in government agencies and the fact that several development partners are targeting the same departments and thus the ability of government agencies to absorb and deliver the necessary elements of the program became extremely challenging<sup>6</sup>. As result, more junior staff with limited knowledge of proposed topics (e.g. cumulative impact assessment and management and environmental flows) have been assigned to work on the project. Moreover, hydropower dam topics are sensitive for the government to address, and the government partner agencies tried to dilute the project objectives, aiming to focus on more general water management tools and not specifically hydropower and the most relevant impacts facing river basins today.

Oxfam has placed particular focus on supporting CSOs and building capacity at the grass roots, and creating spaces for the CSOs at regional, national and local levels to engage in the transboundary and national mega-infrastructure issues (e.g. Xayaburi and Don Sahong Dams Prior Notifications, Lower Se San 2, and the Mekong Delta Study etc.). According to Oxfam's external review (2016), it has the potential to work much more effectively with these partners and stakeholders at regional and national level.<sup>7</sup>

Soon after signing of contracts between DFAT and IWMI/WLE, Naga House moved quickly to prepare and issue a call for Expressions of Interest (EOIs) for projects to address five topic areas (water governance, healthy rivers, river food systems, healthy landscapes and ecosystems, capacity building and professional development) across four basins (Ayeyarwaddy, Salween, Mekong, Red). The call closed in September 2014. All EOIs were then assessed by a roster of independent professionals invited by Naga House. The assessments were undertaken in good time and all EOIs were scored against a range of criteria. Those with the highest scores were selected. There was no separate direct sourcing by IWMI/Naga House. From DFAT's perspective the call, assessment, proposal writing workshop (bringing together all the highest scoring consortia) and contracting was undertaken professionally in a relatively short time. Many excellent proposals were unsuccessful, including from many excellent organisations who were already Naga partners, having led Mekong projects in the prior funding round under Challenge Program on Water and Food. This caused some disappointment. More direct commissioning would have enabled IWMI/Naga House to contract more pre-existing partners. DFAT supported the process that was selected by IWMI/Naga House. There are pros and cons to all contracting processes. In future, a mixture of direct sourcing proven performers and open call might be considered.

Even though the fellowships are principally for capacity building, coaching, mentoring, exposure to regional experience, etc. it is important for them to bear in mind the need for influencing changes as much as possible. The original requirement for each fellow to identify and work with their boundary decision-makers could have been applied more consistently.

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<sup>6</sup> IFC, 2016. Progress Report - IFC Environmental & Social Standards in Water Resources Development in the Mekong Region January – June 2016, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade-funded IFC Advisory Services program,

<sup>7</sup> External Consultants, 2016. External Mid-Term Review of Oxfam's Inclusion Project (2014–2017), Mekong Regional Water Governance Program and Inclusion Project. Oxfam.



The resources available for the policy dialogue work of the coordination for change (C4C) team of WLE were severely affected by the budget cut from IWMI and dollar exchange loss. In addition to this, other factors may have limited ability of the C4C team to achieve policy influence and policy change. The C4C team members might not all have a sufficiently extensive and high level network of political connections at the decision-making level, to provide high level entry points and access to decision-making processes, and might not all necessarily have the right skillset to be an effective policy lobbyist/influencer.

Some R4D projects have limited ability and capacity to communicate or interface with the right “boundary” decision-makers and lack a strategy to engage them regularly to achieve better policy changes. WLE and its 15 MKs deal with boundary partners differently (from extremely limited to highly visible) – e.g. some MKs in Myanmar brought some of their boundary partners with them to the Forum, while others only invited their project teams to come. Different ways of effectively engaging boundary partners can be learned from other regional initiatives such as the SEI-led Sustainable Mekong Research Network (SUMERNET).

Some of the partners viewed that WLE’s policy influencing ability within the broader GMWRP and with other sister programs, and with government agencies is further constrained by the lack of consistent policy dialogue understanding and commitment.

## 3.2 POLICY DIALOGUE CAPACITY

GMWRP is one program with many partners – this is both a key strength of the program, and a major challenge.<sup>8</sup>

### 3.2.1 DFAT Greater Mekong Water Team

The DFAT Greater Mekong Water Team is actively supported by the DFAT Posts including the Ambassadors in Vientiane and other Mekong capitals. The team is highly capable and proactive, and has been instrumental in the development of the program and promotion of the policy dialogue.

The Greater Mekong Water Team has been instrumental in start-up of the Australian partnership and policy dialogue work in Myanmar and in promoting coordination among all implementing partners and all water related Development Partners (See case studies in Annex for further discussion).

DFAT has a strong convening power to organise partners' meetings, donor mapping and collaboration exercises, and fellowship conferences etc.

The staff level of effort and staff turn-over need to be carefully planned for, as the current expertise and efficiency of the policy dialogue and engagements are strongly built around two individuals and their networks.

### 3.2.2 Oxfam Australia

DFAT is partnering with Oxfam Australia to support civil society input into water planning and decision-making. Inclusive water governance is one of five pillars within the GMWRP, and the Inclusion Project is part of Oxfam’s Mekong Regional Water Governance Program.<sup>9</sup> The project has three components, which contribute to three outcomes:

- Gender and women’s leadership; Active participation of women in water civil society groups;
- Strengthening civil society organisations (CSOs) to manage water resources and participate in water decision making; Improved skills and capabilities of civil society to influence water decision-making; and

<sup>8</sup> DFAT GMWRP, 2015. Australia’s Mekong Water Resources Program – Stories from the program, Issue 2 June 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Oxfam Australia, May 2016, Annual Progress Report (1 April 2015 – 31 March 2016), Inclusion Project – Mekong Water Governance Program.

- Convening and promoting policy dialogue; Government agencies and development partners facilitate public participation in reviewing, developing, and implementing water and natural resource management policy.

The program has a strong portfolio of partnerships with about 22 key CSOs actors/partner organisations across the Mekong region. They include national and local partners as well as at the regional level such as Asian Indigenous Peoples Pact, Mae Fah Luang University, Australian National University, and Stockholm International Water Institute.

Oxfam's capacity for governance, policy dialogue, capacity building, youth and women's capacity is in place in spite of the recent departure of a senior/influential team member for the International Rivers. Oxfam has worked closely with its partners to facilitate the participation of CSOs and local communities in different policy spaces (including meetings, forums, and stakeholder consultations) on policy issues at regional and national levels to strengthen the voices of and better understanding of complex issues by the CSOs and communities, and local and national governmental authorities.

However, with their recent success in securing multi-million-dollar funding from Sida for an Asian Transboundary Water governance project will require splitting the time of the key senior team members (program manager and senior water governance advisor etc.).

### **3.2.3 International Water Management Institute**

The GMWRP's major investments to better inform water governance is through International Water Management Institute (IWMI) and the Water, Land and Ecosystems (WLE) Greater Mekong Program. The program builds upon, and is in many respects, a continuation of, DFAT's previous investment in the CGIAR Challenge Programme on Water and Food (CPWF). It supports targeted research that would inform decision-makers and support the capacity of local institutions to provide the evidence-base for sustainable and equitable development of the region's rivers.<sup>10</sup> The WLE Greater Mekong programme focuses on three areas:

- Building knowledge about regional rivers, their ecosystems, their value and governance;
- Fresh and evidence-based approaches for governing rivers and monitoring their health;
- Forging partnerships to strengthen learning and the exchange of information within and across governments, but also with the academic sector, civil society and the private sector.

Its programmatic framework is built upon five 'topic areas': (a) water governance; (b) healthy rivers; (c) river food systems; (d) healthy landscapes and ecosystems; and (e) capacity building and professional development. These are organised around a nucleus comprising the 'Coordination and Change' (C&C) project.

The 14 research for development (R4D) projects focusing on four transboundary river basins: the Salween, the Ayeyarwaddy, the Mekong and the Red, were identified and funded following the open call for Expressions of Interest. The WLE R4D's stakeholder and partner engagement has focussed on consolidating the 'formal' partnership base and broadening the programme's 'informal' network of relationships that can serve to advance the programme's goals and as an uptake audience. 80 partners - about 22% of which are international partners, and the remainder regional are either directly contracted or sub-contracted to the programme. There are currently 55 fellows distributed across the four projects. 58% of these are women. Across all of the fellowships projects, 44% of fellows are Myanmar, 33% are Vietnamese, while the remainder are Thai, Lao, Chinese, Cambodian and a single international fellow.

Engagement is organised around small roundtable meetings at project levels, national level engagements and, finally, the programme's annual Greater Mekong Forum on Water, Food and Energy.

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<sup>10</sup> WLE, 2016. Progress Report April 1, 2015 – 31 March 2016

The WLE also runs ‘Opportunity Fund’ projects intended as (a) a small grants facility to allow it to take advantage of some opportunities; (b) to allow for rapid assessments or research of some emerging strategic issue; and/or (c) to enable new relationships to be forged with new strategically important partners.

The R4D project partners often find it challenging to interface with the policy-makers. The WLE communication function is called upon to support and address these gaps. Internal cohesiveness is supposed to be promoted by the Coordination for Change (C4C) team in the Greater Mekong Centre/Naga House. The original design was for some stronger regional specialists in the WLE team. However, the initially proposed six thematic leaders (regional positions) were not brought on board as planned, and as a result, most of the team members are from outside of the region.

The WLE budget cut and the devaluation of the AUD versus USD meant that IWMI (and the Naga House team) had less funds to implement the program. DFAT supported the decision by IWMI/Naga House to not pass on the cuts to already contracted project teams. To have done so would have been damaging to the reputation of IWMI/WLE/Naga House and Australia. A consequence is that Naga House has had less funds to use in the C4C unit and outreach to policy arenas has been less than Australia had expected.

WLE in the Greater Mekong could look at what WLE has in Latin America, where the use of short targeted documentary films has allowed effective policy influence, bringing the key issues in water management directly to the eyes and ears of the policy-makers in parliaments.

WLE convening power for the annual Greater Mekong Forum is strong and tends to be getting even stronger judging from the rapidly growing interest from the researchers and practitioners from across the Greater Mekong and other parts of the world. The growing interest in the Forum from overseas participants, and the willingness to pay registration fees to attend, are good signs. Given that the language of the Forum is English, attention should be given to ensuring strong participation from people from the region.

Again, after many years of capacity development, it is critical to design and conduct the forum with a more “regionally empowering” look and the themes and form of presentation and deliberation need to move beyond “sharing of research results and networking” to more policy deliberation and informed decision-making setting.

It is also noticeable that the Forum does not attract higher level policy makers (either from government or the private sector) and some thought should be given to an appropriate forum or session for policy makers, designed around some key policy issues.

### **3.2.4 International Finance Corporation**

DFAT is partnering with the International Finance Corporation (IFC) in implementing the Accountable Water Governance programme. IFC has implemented it in collaboration with the Mekong governments (Laos PDR and Myanmar) and the private sector to jointly contribute to raising the accountability of government and the private sector, and normalise better standards for water investments and more transparent decision-making. Its main outcome would be the share of new private sector investments in the hydropower sector in the Greater Mekong region in adhering to good industry practice on E&S standards is increased.<sup>11</sup>

The programme began in Lao PDR in 2014 and expanded further to Myanmar in January 2015. The Programme has placed significant emphasis on contributing to policy change and has drafted new and improved existing policies/guidelines to ensure that integrated water resources management and issues facing the hydropower sector are incorporated into regulatory frameworks.

The Accountable Water Governance programme has supported the establishment and operation of the Hydropower Developers’ Working Group (HDWG) since 2013 in Lao PDR and 2016 in Myanmar. This is an innovative platform for companies to influence policy, network, and identify solutions to improve sustainability and business operations.

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<sup>11</sup> IFC, Environmental & Social Standards in Water Resources Development in The Mekong Region, Report: January- June 2016

As far as the policy dialogue capacity is concerned, a strong team has been mobilised for the program activities aiming at addressing the sustainability challenges of the hydro sector in Lao PDR through building capacity and enabling adoption of good international industry practices on environmental and social standards.

Starting from 2016, the Myanmar-specific program began its implementation phase. The Team Manager was consequently relocated from Vientiane to Yangon. She has been extremely effective and instrumental in the policy dialogue and engagement works with relevant stakeholders from the government, private sectors and other sister programs within the GMWRP.

IFC is working an extension in Laos to achieve finalisation and acceptance of some key policy and legislative related pieces such as the Nam Ou river basin profile and revision of the draft Water Law etc., and expanding workload in Myanmar. The IFC team needs to be strengthened and would especially benefit from the addition of a senior policy officer/deputy team leader level position, considering its increasing work-load.

### 3.2.5 Mekong River Commission

DFAT has been supporting the Mekong River Commission (MRC) for quite a long time since late 1990s. GMWRP's support to MRC has been provided under the programme Pillar 1 whose expected outcome is *the institutional frameworks and capacity of regional, national and local actors to manage their resources more effectively* is strengthened. DFAT's interventions also seek to plug critical resource gaps and improve institutional arrangements in each of the Mekong countries.

Given the scale of planned investment and its importance to food production, power generation and local livelihoods, supporting the MRC remains important for the pursuit of sustainable development and the maintenance of regional stability. Australia's support to the MRC includes implementing the MRC's five procedures governing shared water use in the Mekong Basin. Implementation of these procedures aims to normalise mechanisms for sharing water data across borders, consulting on new dam projects on the Mekong River and monitoring water flows and quality across borders. An agreed regional approach to managing this transboundary river is critical for sustainable development, a coordinated approach to flooding and natural disasters as well as managing the transboundary impacts of development.

The MRC has been undergoing reform recently under which many of its core functions are moving to national governments and their bureaucracies. These reforms are designed to free the MRC to focus on policy dialogue, implementation of procedures and supporting guidelines for shared water resources, and basin development planning and impact assessment from a regional perspective.

Given this more focused role, Australia provides support to:

- Core support of MRC (including specialist support, and basket funding of AUD 6 million) during a period of intensive reform, downsizing and decentralisation, resulting in a more focused organisation now implementing the MRC Strategic Plan 2016-2020;
- improving the MRC's exchange with civil society organisations, research institutions and private sector developers target implementation of the procedures governing regional shared water use;
- MRC efforts to link its work and policy engagement to Greater Mekong Subregion initiatives and relevant parts of the ASEAN agenda.

As far as the capacity for the policy dialogue and influencing, according to the MRCS senior managers, the policy dialogue understanding and expertise in MRCS is limited. The capacity for implementing communications and policy dialogue, as well as outreach to and engagement with a broad range of stakeholders needs to be improved after the recent adoption of the MRC 2016-2020 Strategy.

The role of the Senior Management including CEO, four Directors and Chief of policy and strategy officer is critical for the policy influencing and effective support to improving transboundary governance.

improved communication and engagement with CSOs and community dialogue approaches on the one hand, and dialogue with the private sector on the other hand would add value to the MRC and its program. Due to its lack of expertise, MRC needs to use other partners such as Oxfam, and IFC, etc. but the JC and Council and countries acceptance of this is still unclear.

In the new era of a scaled-down MRC Secretariat, and decentralisation of many functions to the country levels, some clarification is needed as to the level or responsibility of MRCS versus the NMCs for the communications with and engagement of different stakeholders in each country in the various MRC related processes.

The PNPCA and MRC Council Study are two major themes and pathways to influence positive policy changes for improved regional water governance and sustainable development. The key stakeholders and DPs' perception on the relevance of MRC - one of the oldest transboundary river basin organisations - depends on the way the MRC and its member countries deliver these important tasks.

Implementing Partners are able to respond quickly when issues emerge or when they are invited to advise the government actors. But when several critical priorities are happening at the same time, such as the MRC Council Study, series of PNPCA processes, and looming prior notifications from Lao PDR, Cambodia and Thailand, capacity is stretched.

Strengthening capacity by systematic reflection on which policy dialogue strategies and activities may work and are effective in realising the organisation's objectives, is a generally underutilised approach.

### **3.2.6 Ability to put gender equality on political agendas**

Not all pillar leads have explicitly set their target to place gender issues on the public and political agenda. Oxfam has worked on awareness creation and training on specific issues among different target groups and collaborated with IFC etc. in conducting training and awareness workshops. IWMI-WLE projects and the fellowships program have strong gender components. The extent to which the interventions contributed to real improvements for women remains to be seen.

### **3.2.7 GMWRP communications and influence to other investment**

Overall the GMWRP does not have a strong unified brand, and has not invested in promotion of public recognition of GMWRP as an entity or even so much of DFAT as a key donor to the Mekong.

While this approach is appreciated in the region, it might not necessarily help GMWRP garner additional support back in Canberra. The individual brands of the pillar leads, are more recognisable, and their communications more prominent. For example, the IFC pillar has made significant efforts in communications, and many relevant news stories can be found on the website.<sup>12</sup>

Many of the MKs under WLE are also very active in communications, for example as part of the Myanmar Healthy Rivers Initiative (MHRI), ICEM (with assistance from project partners) has published a series of informative posters on community participation in river health monitoring. The poster presentation was displayed at the 2016 Greater Mekong Forum in Water, Food and Energy, and can be downloaded from the ICEM website.

<sup>12</sup>[http://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/industry\\_ext\\_content/ifc\\_external\\_corporate\\_site/hydro+advisory/news/all+news](http://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/industry_ext_content/ifc_external_corporate_site/hydro+advisory/news/all+news).

Government of Australia partnership via the Australia-Bank Facility Phases 1 and 2 includes substantial water resources related support targeting sustainable development of Vietnam's Mekong Delta – augmented by further partnerships focused on the delta, with The Netherlands in the Mekong Delta Dialogue, and Germany's GIZ via Australian support for GIZ to deliver the Integrated Coastal Management Program. Strong collaboration with the World Bank was developed over many years through a series of Mekong IWRM projects in MRC, as well as in Lao PDR, Vietnam and Cambodia. Through collaboration with the government of Vietnam and the World Bank, DFAT is now able to influence major Delta infrastructure investment lending by the World Bank. Similar collaboration is rapidly being developed in Myanmar.

Even though DFAT is a relatively new player in Myanmar (by comparison the Dutch and the WB have already been working together there since 2012), through their very proactive engagements, DFAT has very rapidly become the centre of efforts to coordinate work in the water sector in Myanmar. Myanmar will be a focal country for joint Australian-Dutch work in the water sector under a broader international MoU signed between the two countries, and a tripartite Australian-Dutch-WB coordination body is being established with a clear ToR. There is an ongoing discussion about jointly setting up an International Water House, which the evaluative study team believe would be a very positive development.

The World Bank appreciates the Australian support both in the Mekong and in Myanmar – recognising it is so important for them to have partners helping their clients in ways that they cannot – providing experts and fast on-demand support to the government – while what the World Bank has to offer is financing capacity, as they try to build up their clients' ability to execute and manage projects. Both the Dutch and the World Bank concur that the quality of DFAT people is outstanding – not only technically but in having the right understanding.

The creation of AWP and its use as a vehicle to provide DFAT assistance in the Greater Mekong – initially in Myanmar- will provide significant opportunities for smaller Australian companies to get involved in the region.

The Greater Mekong Water Team has worked closely with the CAVAC program in Cambodia (involving key water Ministries – MAFF and MOWRAM, and local communities) managed by the Phnom Penh Post - which is demonstrating practical ways of delivering functioning irrigation systems to Cambodian agribusiness and farmer communities – assisted by national policy reforms supported by technical assistance delivered through ADB – managed by Vientiane Post.

The GMWRP worked with the DFAT Posts in Phnom Penh and Beijing, in implementing the Cambodia Australia China Irrigation Dialogue (CACID). It successfully enabled dialogue between previously disparate groups in Cambodia irrigation development. This dialogue was initiated because of the perceived lack of co-ordination between the Cambodian agencies, the Chinese funding agency, the Chinese construction companies and the grass roots irrigator and the NGO's working at the local level. This lack of co-ordination means that often large-scale investments in irrigation are not realising benefits at local, provincial, basin or national scales.

### **3.2.8 Monitoring, evaluation and learning**

The implementation of the water policy dialogue work was monitored separately by all implementing partners and the DFAT Greater Mekong Water Team. It is important to properly identify and document/share emerging lessons. For instance, WLE Greater Mekong is reported to have a knowledge management system and process in place to support program management, but not the water policy dialogue work. Similarly, IFC counts the number of women and men participating in training courses – but is only now embarking on an attempt to understand the real outcomes of such training (after repeated prodding by the DFAT Greater Mekong Water Team).

Tacit knowledge, the informal knowledge about how and why things work, is an essential part of an organisation's capacity and its ability to stay relevant under changing circumstances. Learning-by-doing, supported by regular reflection based on a well-developed ToC with clearly spelled-out assumptions, helps to systematise this knowledge and make it available for broader application.

Without a common agreement on policy objectives and clear policy targets, it is difficult to have meaningful policy outcome evaluation at both pillar and overall programme levels. Some more thought needs to be given to improving M&E approaches in this regard.

There is an obvious need for a better and sound monitoring and evaluation for learning. It requires that all implementing partners take their own M&E system more seriously and consider accountability, both downward to their constituency and upward to their donor, as a critical element of their own good governance. They need to adjust their reporting requirements accordingly focusing more on outputs, outcomes and impact, rather than on controlling inputs or activities.

Moreover, the policy dialogue works must clearly deliver a result such as placing key policy issues on the agenda yield tangible change such as attitudinal, discursive commitment, procedural change, policy content, and behaviour change for the good-faith engagement and deliberation, policy changes and improvement in the law, policy, strategy or programme implementation; and evidenced of fairer and more effective water governance. For example, the policy dialogue around the PNPCA process should lead to a much improved and inclusive PNPCA that clearly leads sustainable development outcomes.

### **3.2.9 Comparative advantages**

DFAT has had its Greater Mekong Water Resources Program for a decade. Persistence and consistency are two of its biggest comparative advantages. DFAT and USAID are currently seen as two major DPs focusing on policy dialogue for fairer water governance. DFAT is, however, considered to be more coherent in its approach to policy influencing, lobbying and other forms. DFAT has both bilateral as well as regional relationships with the countries. Bilateral MoUs with all countries make engagement in tricky transboundary issues relatively easier for Australia, because DFAT is already recognised as a bilateral partner in each country. In addition, Australia is recognised as having something to offer in the area of water-food-energy-environmental security, and water resources management and governance.

## **3.3 INNOVATIONS THAT COULD BE INCORPORATED**

### **3.3.1 Joint communications products**

On the one hand, GMWRP is lacking in whole-of-program communications materials, and is not as well known in its entirety as its component parts are. At the same time, it is seemingly quite difficult to generate regular collaboration between the different pillars.

In this regard, one area of “low hanging fruit” may be to get all four pillars to work together with the DFAT team to develop some GMWRP program-level communications products. These would be useful for raising the profile of the program as a whole, as well as communicating some of the key program level messages on water governance to specific target audiences. The actual process of developing these common messages, with the knowledge that they will enter the public domain jointly branded as coming from all the pillar lead organisations and DFAT together, would almost certainly create some interesting discussions and debates between the pillars, and help them to identify areas of agreement and common interest (rather than focusing on their differences). This could be a starting point to generate further collaboration.

### **3.3.2 Organising more focused dialogue processes**

To date, GMWRP has made limited use of formal dialogue processes. Dialogue can be enlightening, challenging and even threatening. The primary purpose is for each person to learn from the other so that each can change and grow. The contribution of dialogue processes to capacity development can be considered in a number of ways:

- What new information, knowledge, perspective or understanding each participant acquired, based on his/her participation.
- How the participant shared and communicated the above with colleagues in his/her workplace after returning from the dialogue?

- What the participant is doing differently as a result of his/her participation in the dialogue.
- How many and what types of contacts and interactions has the participant had with other participants in the 3-6 months after the dialogue, that he/she would not otherwise have engaged in?

Beyond capacity development, the main objective of dialogues should be to achieve some policy influence, in a specified area, around a specific policy issue/need.

### **3.4 LESSONS FROM SIMILAR PROGRAMS**

#### **3.4.1 Adding to the IFC work with hydropower developers**

A number of financial institutions that are providing loans to support construction of hydropower dams in Mekong tributaries in Lao PDR are hiring independent third party monitors to follow-up on the effective and timely application of environmental and social safeguard policies and procedures; implementation of resettlement plans including livelihood development of resettled communities; and environmental management plans to mitigate environmental impacts.

For the banks, this is a way of managing reputational, political, and economic risk. For the DFAT GMWRP this could clearly be seen as an additional/alternative pathway to “fairer and more effective water governance”, through the application of best practice approaches by both the dam developers and the dam financiers.

Building on the IFC work with hydropower developers, DFAT GMWRP could e.g. organise a round table with dam financiers to share experiences in this type of work to date, in order to identify priorities for action moving forwards.

#### **3.4.2 Alternative approaches to Research for Development**

##### **3.4.2.1 SEI/SUMERNET**

Since its inception in 2005, Sustainable Mekong Research Network (SUMERNET) has established a successful and expanding regional research network with expertise in several policy areas critical to sustainability of the Mekong Region. SUMERNET aims to inform and influence policy-making in the Greater Mekong towards more socially inclusive and gender-responsive sustainable development. SUMERNET is a collaboration of more than 50 research and policy-making institutions with a strong track record of research that can serve the basis for effective policy on natural resources management.

In 2014, SUMERNET launched its Phase 3 to focusing on three research themes: Climate-compatible development; Ecosystem services for local development; and Sustainable regional economic integration. In December 2014, a total of seven research projects were selected. The minimum requirement is that at least two organisations, from at least two different countries within the Greater Mekong, participate in each research project. Projects will be for a duration of about 20 months.

SUMERNET researchers on the whole are perhaps somewhat older and more advanced in their careers than many of the WLE fellows (which is deliberately targeting younger scholars) and some of the researchers working on R4D projects under WLE. Consequently, they may have better access to policy and decision-makers.

SUMERNET has a strong focus on identifying and engaging with boundary partners that may be individuals, groups or organisations with whom SUMERNET interacts directly and can anticipate opportunities for influence. SUMERNET explicitly strategises how to work with these influential boundary partners, but they do not control them.



### **3.4.2.2 Mekong Water Dialogues**

The Mekong Water Dialogues program ran from September 2008 until December 2014, implemented by IUCN and funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland. The goals of this program were extremely similar to those of GMWRP – to improve governance in the water sector in the Greater Mekong – but with a much more modest budget – a total of only 3.3 million euro divided amongst activities in the 4 countries of the LMB, and regional activities.

As the main vehicles for achieving governance/policy influence, MWD established National Working Groups (NWG) in each country. These were multi-stakeholder bodies with representatives from government, civil society, academia and the private sector. These bodies jointly identified the key governance issues to be worked on in each country. Those issues that were identified as high priority by more than one country were also worked on at the regional level. The NWGs were empowered to authorise MWD funds to commission simple research and review studies on key topics to inform their deliberations. They were also provided with additional training on some issues.

In the context of MWD all NWG members followed a common consensus understanding of governance developed through workshops and discussion, that it is about how different types of decisions get made, who gets to be involved in making those decisions, who is responsible for implementing those decisions, and who is held accountable for their ultimate outcome. Some of the useful features of MWD to consider are:

- Supporting multisector/multi-stakeholder national working groups (composed of 100% nationals, no foreigners), who are empowered to select the key issues to be worked on in their country, who are then provided with additional training and exposure to best practices in those issues; are able to commission studies on the issue and who are then then to discuss and debate the results to finally agree on the policy measures to be taken. Then through their own positions, organisations and networks, each and every member acts as a conduit to provide policy entry points and policy influence.
- Identifying key issues at country level first, and only taking a sub-set of these issues up to the regional level when the same issue is identified in multiple countries, rather than starting by identifying issues at the regional level.
- Working with a common understanding of governance across the different sectors and in four different countries.

### **3.4.2.3 Mekong University Wetlands Network**

The Mekong Wetland University Network is a group of lecturers and researchers specialising in various aspects of wetlands biology, ecology and management drawn from 21 universities across the Mekong Region. Mahidol University in Thailand and Can Tho University in Vietnam, are key drivers of the network. For the last 12 years, they have carried out an annual short wetlands training course in the field, particularly targeting improving knowledge and skills of junior lecturers from each of their own institutions. They also work together to develop joint research projects which often have important policy recommendations, such as recent research on assessment and monitoring of water pollution from agricultural chemicals in a selection of wetlands across the region.

## **3.4.3 Considerations for Oxfam's Inclusion Project**

### **3.4.3.1 More effective use of media**

One way in which local groups can help get their messages to the attention of policy makers is through strategic use of the media to generate public interest in and support for their cause.

In the early 2000s a relatively small local group in Chiang Khong District of Chiang Rai Province was eventually successful in getting the Thai government to halt the blasting of rocks and rapids in the Mekong River for a Chinese backed Navigation Improvement Program. They achieved this to some extent with a concerted campaign of very effective use of local, national and international media – organising a series of media workshops and site visits that made it much easier for journalists to write informed articles.

More recently, Thai Public Broadcasting Service (Thai PBS) the only truly independent and publicly funded broadcasting service in the region, started a program of Citizen Journalism – training local people to report on local issues and how they were addressing them, and airing their reports on national TV.

In a so far less successful example, Thai Civil Society organisations from the Mekong Provinces lodged a case against Thai investment in the Xayaburi dam with the Thai courts, based on the fact that no transboundary impact assessment was done for the dam, which did not follow the requirements of Thai Law, before EGAT signed the Power Purchase Agreement.

Working with media to support them to report policy issues of concern more effectively; and supporting court cases that challenge policy decisions, are therefore two additional approaches that could be applicable under the pillar of inclusion. However, it has to be very strategic, considering the restricting political environments prevailing in the countries.

### **3.4.3.2 Community fisheries approaches**

There has been significant experience with different forms of community managed areas in the Lower Mekong Basin that can be of use to the other target basins in GMWRP. In the early part of the 2000s, a number of community-based approaches to conservation were piloted including community-based protection of the water-bird colony at Prek Toal in Cambodia, and village- protected Fish Conservation Zones in deep-water pools in southern Lao. Community-managed wetlands have also been piloted for example at Goot Ting marshes in northeastern Thailand. These pilots demonstrated that community-based management could be a viable approach to conservation, and one with potential to empower local communities and deliver livelihood benefits as well.

During the second half of the 2000s, these pilot approaches were further replicated. Community fisheries management approaches are now relatively well established in Lao PDR and increasingly so in Cambodia, with support from CEPF, EU and other donors. The lessons learned from this decade of experience were recently reviewed, and the primary conditions for success were found to be “a commitment to participatory process, clear land tenure regimes, community institutions capable of equitably representing their ‘constituencies’ and of negotiating their interests, and an interest in conservation, whether through benefits of sustainable harvest, or economic gain through direct payments” There is now a need for CSOs to refine these approaches to internalise these lessons, and to amplify them widely.

The Oxfam Inclusion pillar is also implementing its own approach to community fisheries. It has opportunity to work, share and exchange with the pool of experience and lessons learned from similar approaches elsewhere in Cambodia. For example, IUCN has recently completed a 4-year EU Funded program on Community Fisheries in target areas of the Tonle Sap, working with the Fisheries Action Coalition Team (FACT).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> FACT is one of several partners of Oxfam within the NGO Forum on Cambodia.

### 3.4.4 Alternative approaches for government/inter-governmental dialogue

#### 3.4.4.1 BES-NET trialogues

Closely aligned with the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), the Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Network (BES-Net) is a capacity sharing 'network of networks' that promotes dialogue between science, policy and practice for more effective management of biodiversity and ecosystems, contributing to long-term human well-being and sustainable development. BES-Net focuses on thematic and methodological issues such as Ecosystem-based Adaptation to Climate Change, Land Degradation and Restoration, Pollination and Food Production, Indigenous and Local Knowledge and Biodiversity Finance.

The face-to-face capacity building activities of the Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Network (BES-Net) – the BES-Net Trialogues – are multi-stakeholder dialogues focusing on specific policy questions at the national and regional levels. The Trialogues bring together the three BES-Net communities into clear and constructive dialogue; hence the name 'trialogue'. They create fora allowing for a full flow of information passed on and exchanged by the various participants who take part in the BES-Net trialogues. They create small but effective science-policy-practice interfaces at various levels and on various themes to provide policy recommendations that reflect the cross-pollination of ideas between participants on the topic at hand, best practices, latest science and challenges at hand in a specific policy context. By facilitating fruitful discussions among these three communities, the trialogues will contribute to addressing specific policy issues to help unlock shifts in the development trajectory of societies towards sustainability. The first round of Trialogues are regional 3 day events gathering around 45 participants from up to 5 different countries and co-facilitated by a global facilitator and a local facilitator. The outcomes of the Trialogues are envisaged to influence the three BES-Net constituencies in furthering the integration of biodiversity management in development programs. The Trialogues intend for the full participation of the three communities of policy; practice; and science; knowledge holders, and for the cross-pollination of ideas from one group to the other to, as a group, come up with policy recommendations.

BES-NET is only just embarking on its trialogue processes, so there are no lessons learned yet – but as a major global process, it may be worth tracking the lessons it generates, and reviewing them for applicability in GMWRP.

#### 3.4.4.2 Building River Dialogues and Governance

Building River Dialogues and Governance (BRIDGE) is a global program of IUCN funded by SDC working in Latin and South America; Africa; and Asia. In Asia, the main focus of BRIDGE is the 3S (Srepok, Sesan, Sekong) tributary rivers of the Mekong. BRIDGE is now at the start of its third three-year phase (2016-2018)

BRIDGE supports the capacities of countries sharing river or lake basins to implement effective water management arrangements through a shared vision, benefit-sharing principles and transparent and coherent institutional frameworks. Its goal is to enhance cooperation among riparian countries by applying water diplomacy at multiple levels.

BRIDGE works through 5 key implementation strategies:

- Demonstration – using demonstration and testing of how to make cooperation operational in a basin through confidence and trust building, shared learning and joint action in building national and transboundary water governance capacity;
- Learning – using training and capacity building for multiple stakeholders, including municipal and civil society actors, as well as high-level national officials in water governance, international water law and benefit sharing to enhance knowledge and understanding;
- Dialogue – applying demonstration actions and learning events to catalyse new dialogues on technical, development, and political matters for consensus building;

- Leadership – supporting empowerment of champions for transboundary water cooperation and better water governance who can effectively advocate for mobilisation of water diplomacy;
- Advice and Support – providing advice and technical assistance on demand to governments and stakeholders, including legal and institutional frameworks.

BRIDGE in the 3S Rivers alone already has some interesting lessons that may be useful for DFAT GMWRP – but the 3S is only one of 8 regions where BRIDGE is working – there are undoubtedly many other interesting lessons from the other sites around the world as well.

Given that BRIDGE is funded globally by SDC, and given that SDC is a major Development Partner in the Mekong with whom DFAT frequently interacts, perhaps the idea should be considered of DFAT and SDC jointly organising a sharing and exchange workshop on “pathways to policy influence” between GMWRP and BRIDGE. At the very least, the BRIDGE 3S Project manager should be invited to give a presentation to a DFAT GMWRP Partners meeting, and the different pillars of the program should be made aware of the wealth of useful information to be found on the 3S basin website.

**Figure 3-2 BRIDGE in Latin and South America, Africa and Asia**

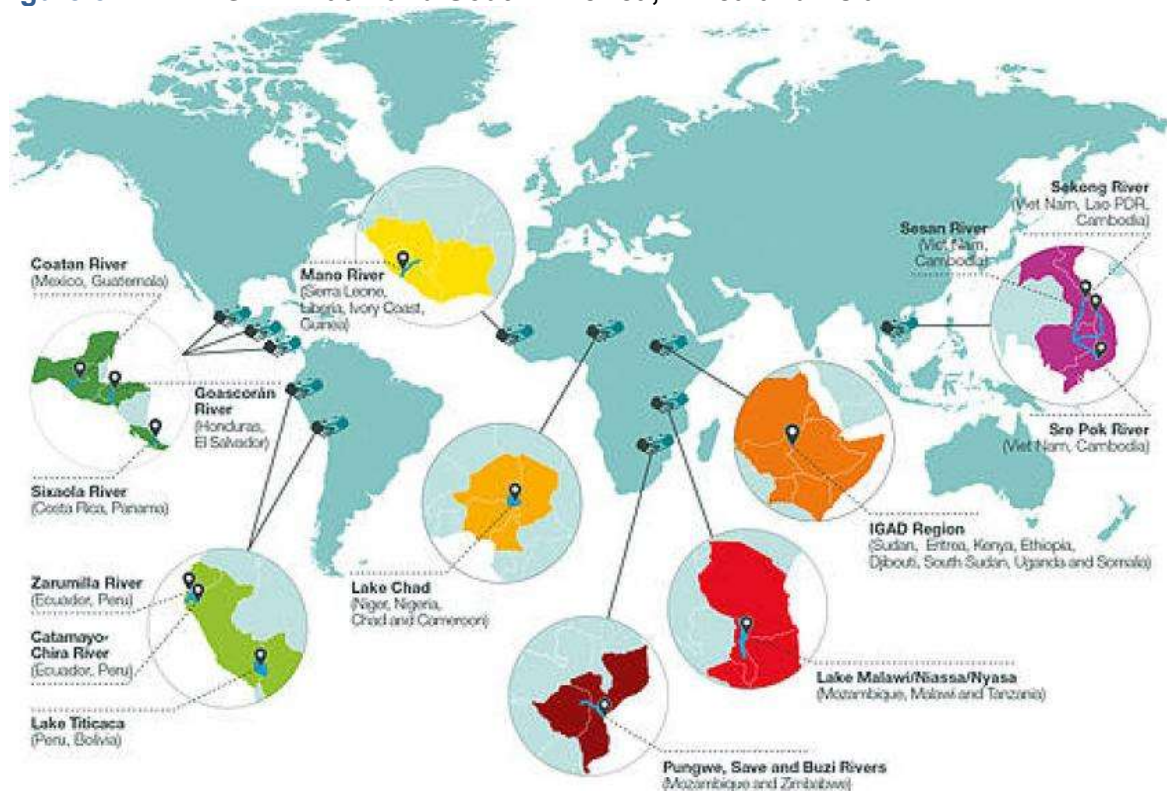


Photo: ©

(Source: IUCN Water Program)

## 4.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluators have conducted a full analysis and case studies of the likely factors and range of causes that have led to the situation. The factors enabling progress or achievement and factors that inhibit them, were considered. They were generated from a range of data sources and validated consistently through the evaluative study process. Based on rounds of interviews and clarification sessions with key partners and stakeholders, literature review (including relevant program documents and M&E reports, and international literature), and personal observation, the evaluators have gathered evidence and a credible basis for forming findings, conclusions and recommendations. The findings, implication and recommendations are presented according to the four major questions of this evaluative study.

## 4.1 KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

The DFAT GMWRM has achieved commendable results including:

- Assuming a leadership role and providing inspiration for other development partners to support the MRC reform, providing core support and creating a basket funding system during a period of intensive reform, downsizing and decentralisation; as well as support to development and implementation of MRC key procedures and guidelines.
- Providing programmatic and technical support to the Governments of Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and Myanmar for their water and energy sector development through DFAT's core support to the World Bank's future guidance of a diverse Greater Mekong water resources management investment portfolio.
- Establishing mechanisms that may lead to improved performance of the hydropower sector particularly with respect to social, environmental and governance safeguards. Hydropower developer working groups (HDWGs) have been established in Lao PDR and Myanmar, and efforts are well-advanced with the adoption by governments of new tools such as River Basin Profiling (Nam Ou in Laos), Cumulative Impact Assessment (in Laos), Strategic Environment Assessment (in Myanmar).
- Strengthening the focus on gender issues and women's leadership, including active participation of women in water-related civil society groups; supporting civil society water resources management and participation in water decision making; Improved skills and capabilities of civil society to influence water decision-making; and convening and promoting policy dialogue.
- Creating a portfolio of thirty-three projects (CPWF plus current WLE portfolio) across the Ayeyarwaddy, Salween, Mekong and Red river basins, a peer network that strengthens the quality of regional research and establishment of a young water professionals for development community; as well as a major assembly each year at the Greater Mekong Forum on Water Food and Energy (2011 China, 2012 Cambodia, 2013 and 2014 Vietnam, 2015 Cambodia, 2016 Thailand, and 2017 Myanmar).
- Bringing-in the DFAT-funded Australian Water Partnership to strategically deliver carefully selected Australian expertise to join particular initiatives of Mekong governments.

## 4.2 LOGIC AND EFFECTIVENESS

DFAT has applied diverse policy dialogue/influencing approaches with a number of partners to make strategic interventions into different water governance arenas. It is supporting the creation and nurturing of preconditions for positive changes and their institutionalisation by strategic nudging - policies and actions that change incentives, opportunities and institutional frameworks in order to achieve fairer and more effective governance. The approach to engagement of relevant development partners, government agencies, and CSOs in Myanmar provides an exemplary policy dialogue model that can be replicated in other countries.

Based on the results of the study, four groups of recommendations are made:

### 4.2.1 Contextualising policy dialogue

The capacity for and understanding of policy dialogue among the key implementing partners is diverse. It is important that the concept of what is policy and what is policy dialogue is more uniformly understood and reflected in project documents.

1. **Clarifying** - *DFAT should bring implementing partners together to agree as far as possible on a common definition and understanding of policy, policy influencing, and policy dialogue to be used for the whole program.*

Considering the diversity of partners ranging from an inter-governmental organisation, a financing institution, a research institution and a Non-Governmental Organisation with different organisational set-up and practices, there are some understandable differences in PEAs, ToCs, and actions for change, as well as the monitoring/reporting/learning frameworks of each pillar. PEAs have to be regularly updated to assist the implementing partners and GMWRP to not only respond quickly when issues emerge or when they are invited to advise their constituency (government and other boundary partners), but also to proactively plan for emerging issues and achieve better coherence of their actions under duress.

2. **Thinking and working politically** - Political economy analyses should be annually updated in a two-step process – first for individual outcome areas (and implementing partners) then for the program as a whole, facilitated by DFAT in the annual joint meeting of implementing partners, which should be a longer 1-day meeting.
3. **Focusing** - GMWRP should through consultation with key implementing partners, identify a short-list of priority policy issues in which the program would like to exert some influence, and should together with partners, convene a series of dialogue events on these issues.

It is equally important for the GMWRP and its partners to improve knowledge about how and why things work, and to focus more on outputs, outcomes and impact, and build organisational capacity and ability to stay relevant under changing circumstances.

4. **Measuring and learning** - Monitoring and evaluation frameworks for GMWRP as a whole, and for each partner, should be revised to ensure a clearer focus on seeking evidence of influence of policy dialogue such as attitudinal change, discursive commitment, procedural change, policy content, and behaviour change.

#### 4.2.2 Learning from policy dialogue initiatives of others

There are some good and relevant modalities and approaches that DFAT and its implementing partners can learn from and/or adapt.

5. *DFAT and its partners should review lessons learned from policy dialogue initiatives of others, for example:*
  - SEI has a strong focus on identifying and engaging with boundary partners that may be individuals, groups or organisations with whom SUMERNET interacts directly and can anticipate opportunities for influence. SEI/SUMERNET explicitly strategise how to work with these influential boundary partners, but they do not control them.
  - IUCN Mekong Water Dialogues established multi-sector, multi-stakeholder national working groups composed of 100% Mekong country citizens, empowered to select key issues for subsequent policy dialogue focus.
  - The method of the global IUCN BRIDGE initiative includes: demonstration sites, learning, dialogue, leadership training, and ongoing advisory support.
  - BES-NET dialogues are part of a new global process that is focusing on ecosystems policy dialogue. The method is to create structured interfaces at various levels on high-priority themes, aiming to influence each of the core constituencies represented in the multi-stakeholder processes – scientists, public and corporate policy authorities, and field practitioners.

#### 4.2.3 Specific matters needing attention with existing implementation partners

The following are specific recommendations that DFAT and its implementing partners may wish to consider:

6. **Greater Mekong Forum on Water Food and Energy** has been well known as a regional platform for networking and exchange/sharing of knowledge. It is critical to design and conduct the Greater Mekong Forum with a more “regionally empowering” look. The themes, forms of presentation and deliberation need to move beyond “sharing of research results and networking” to a more policy deliberation and informed decision-making setting. It is also noticeable that the Forum does not attract higher level policy makers (either from government or the private sector). Efforts will need to be made to ensure the right balance of participants and roles in presenting, leading of the sessions and forum from the region and elsewhere, and some thought should be given to organising each time a pre-or post-Forum half day session for policy makers, designed around some key policy issues.
7. **IWMI/WLE** need to invest more in the policy dialogue and coordination for change (C4C) component, to be carried out by a team of highly competent nationals from the Greater Mekong with a network of political connections at the decision-making level, and the right personality/attitude/commitment for effective policy lobbying/influence.
8. **IFC:** The IFC team needs to be strengthened and would especially benefit from the addition of a senior policy officer/deputy team leader level position, considering its increasing work-load.

MRC is the only transboundary river basin organisation with a legal and political mandate in the region. DFAT has been instrumental in supporting the MRC for a considerable time. The perception of its relevance is still being questioned by various key stakeholders, so with regards to policy dialogue approaches with MRC, it is important that:

9. **MRC:** DFAT should continue its past and present intensive effort to press for more meaningful public participation by MRC and help MRC together with other DPs, such as Germany, SDC and EU etc., to ensure that the PNPCA and the MRC Council Study are conducted effectively and efficiently to inform transboundary river basin development that will be fair, sustainable and inclusive.
10. **MRC:** As part of this, DFAT should continue to push for the adoption and public release of the lessons learned from the prior notification exercises and help to address identified issues affecting the PNPCA; and should continue to support the understanding of the implementation of the PNPCA as just one part of a broader set of necessary activities that make up a Pre-PNPCA; PNPCA; and Post-PNPCA life-cycle.

#### **Gender:**

11. **Gender:** While considerable progress has been made on gender issues particularly by Oxfam, and through some IWMI investments, and a new gender and hydropower initiative is being kicked off in Myanmar, more can still be done. Implementing Partners (particularly MRC) would benefit from systematically strengthening their own internal organisational gender capacity and giving gender issues greater priority and visibility in the investment of their projects and programs.

**Communication:** The individual brands of the pillar leads, are more recognisable, and their communications are more prominent than that of DFAT and the GMWRP. For example, the IFC pillar has made significant efforts in communications, and many relevant news stories can be found on their website.

12. Whole program’s communication and publicity should be balanced against the possible benefits of clearly communicating DFAT’s support for a cohesive programme to other development partners, to the citizens of the region and to the Australian tax-payers. While the DFAT Water team may not need to communicate on all aspects of the program on every occasion, this should be balanced against the possible benefits of clearly communicating DFAT’s support for a cohesive programme to other development partners, to the citizens of the region and to the Australian tax-payers.

13. Implementing partners should work together with the DFAT Greater Mekong Water Team to develop some GMWRP program-level communications products. These would be useful for raising the profile of the program as a whole, as well as communicating some of the key program level messages on water governance to specific target audiences. This would have the added benefit of fostering additional collaboration between the implementing partners.

#### **4.2.4 Sustaining Australian engagement in Greater Mekong water governance**

DFAT has a strong convening power to organise partners' meetings, donor mapping and collaboration exercises, and fellowship conferences etc. The coordination among the partners is done through regular partners' meetings, however, the follow-up and materialisation of the coordination and collaboration promises must be strengthened.

14. **Meaningful coordination:** While recognising diversity among the implementing partners, it is critical to have a better strategy to overcome the existing silo mentality of a diverse group of actors, and move towards stronger togetherness. It is important for a more systematic follow-up and materialisation of the promised actions and collaborations.
15. **Program Staff:** DFAT Greater Mekong Water Team staff level of effort and staff turn-over need to be carefully planned for, as the current profile expertise and efficiency of the policy dialogue and engagements are strongly built around two extremely proactive and engaged individuals and their networks.
16. **Sustaining Engagement:** Achieving effective river basin governance and management requires 20-30 year engagements.

### **4.3 QUALITY CONTROL AND QUALITY ASSURANCE**

#### **4.3.1 Report explains extent that evidence supports the judgments**

The key findings were shared and clarified regularly with the Greater Mekong Water Team, and concerned Implementing Partners and interviewees. The basis of the findings and related conclusions were communicated clearly to them through both face to face meetings, skype call. The preliminary results of the design assignment are to be presented and discussed with the key partners and Mekong Posts during the first months of 2017, including at GMWRP program partner steering committee meetings.

As the information is brought together from a range of sources, the evaluators have made considerable effort to communicate it as a coherent whole. In addition to sharing the views across respondents, and representatives of relevant special sub-groups (DFAT and implementing partners), the evaluators triangulated the findings against the documents (background papers, program/project documents, progress report, M&E reports) and personal observation and experience.

#### **4.3.2 Alternative points of view are presented and considered where appropriate**

Alternative views have been heard and seriously considered. Key stakeholder views such as those of the implementation partners have been given sufficient attention, and balanced by other partners, DFAT or other important stakeholder views.



## APPENDIX: CASE STUDIES

### Case 1: GMWRP policy dialogue

The DFAT Greater Mekong Water Team uses various mechanisms to continuously discuss issues and promote policy dialogue. These include but are not limited to: annual DFAT's partners' meeting; bi-annual project steering committee meetings (with Oxfam Australia, IWMI-WLE and IFC); and the recently established Mekong Development Partners' roundtable attended by key development partners – China, USA, Japan, Australia, European Union, Germany, Sweden, World Bank Group, ADB.

The annual DFAT's Implementing Partners meeting is convened to provide opportunity for the Mekong Water Team and Partners – MRC Secretariat, IFC, WLE, Oxfam, and other Australian partners including eWater Solutions, and ICEM, to meet, report and agree upon the collaboration and joint efforts for policy changes (attitude, commitment, policy content, and behaviour changes).

The evaluative study team attended a meeting that took place as a side event at the WLE Greater Mekong Forum on 7 November 2016 in Bangkok. DFAT organised the meeting as most of its implementing partners were gathered in the city for the annual Greater Mekong Forum on Water Food and Energy. The annual meeting lasted for about 3 to 4 hours and was facilitated by the Mekong Water Team in a very interactive and informative manner on the key "context change" such as i) significant change to the political economy, ii) water policy change opportunity, iii) regional architectures; and, iv) State and Civil Society Relations. These analytical processes allowed the program and implementing partners also to assess the consequences or implication for the program and their investment projects.

The exchange of views on key political economy prevailing in the region further confirmed the need for conducting and reviewing Political Economy Analysis (PEA). Only some of the GMWRP Implementing Partners have conducted PEAs or reviewed it periodically. This should be done more consistently. Firstly, each key partner could undertake their own individual PEA as it applies to their pillar. Or secondly the program could do it as a whole. Ideally it could be a two-step process with the completed individual PEAs shared and discussed and used to formulate a whole program updated PEA through a workshop.

A critical regional development discussed was the exponential increase in China's grants and investment in Cambodia and Laos as it potentially makes these countries less reliant on aid from western nations and development banks, and less keen on serious efforts to improve governance. The implication for the GMWRP and its sub-investment projects is how to wisely spend available limited budget to achieve higher visibility and stronger water governance impacts in this context. The emergence of a new regional mechanism, namely the Lancang Mekong Cooperation, was also discussed at length at the partners' meeting. By establishing another collaboration mechanism in addition to the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, China is increasingly seen to take the leading role and shape the rules of cooperation and more specifically, to make sure that external actors are more excluded from Greater Mekong inter-government policy dialogue.

The deliberation on the growing restrictiveness of working environment for CSOs' policy influencing and lobbying in the Mekong Countries further evidenced the usefulness of the partners' forum to explore ways and means to cope with this negative development.

While the DFAT's Partners Meeting was well organised and facilitated and hence found to be useful, in updating each other on significant changes and their implications, the evaluators and some of the partners/interviewees felt that the meeting format is too compressed. Some of the partners felt that while the Greater Mekong Water Team have made their best efforts, some partners (not all) do not want to work with other partners (e.g. Oxfam is reluctant to work with IFC in Myanmar; there is some resistance in MRC to working with Oxfam, etc.). Some of the participants thought that these meetings should be more frequent (realistically probably twice/year) and should be longer – a full day (or sometime even more) to be able to explore issues in more depth – and in particular to identify areas of synergy and collaboration between partners. A case in point is while the MRC Secretariat and Oxfam had collaboratively identified the need for Oxfam's support in gender mainstreaming and public participation in the MRC Council Study process, the representatives of the MRC government members in the Joint Committee were not totally convinced.

While recognising diversity among the implementing partners, it is critical to have a better strategy to overcome the silo mentality and seek stronger understanding and appreciation of different roles and approaches.

The evaluative study team observed the active and important role played by the Australian Ambassador and First Secretary based in Lao PDR, and the Senior Water Resources Specialist based in Bangkok, as well as the Ambassadors in other Mekong countries, in promoting policy dialogue in bilateral and multi-stakeholder meetings and fora with governments, civil society organisations and the private sector.

In some places, it is understood that there could be tension between DFAT bilateral programs and the Regional Program. In this case, Yangon Post appears very fully on board, and very supportive and involved in the work of the regional program. This is similar to the situation in Laos and Thailand, where posts are also fully on-board. Hanoi and Phnom Penh posts have had high rates of turnover but current relationships are said to be professional and fully supportive.

## **Case 2: Myanmar-Australia Water Policy & Practice Cooperation**

In October 2015 Australia signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Myanmar National Water Resources Committee, agreeing to provide support to Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), Hydrometeorology and River Basin Planning. Subsequently Myanmar invited specific Australia support to assist the government implement the Ayeyarwaddy Integrated River Basin Management (AIRBM) Project, funded by the World Bank through a loan of US\$ 100 million and implemented by Secretariat of the National Water Resources Committee (NWRC), situated within the Directorate of Water Resources and Improvement of River Systems in the Ministry of Transport and Communications. The AIRBM Project is designed as a multi-phased approach (series of projects) to strengthen integrated, climate-resilient, management, conservation and development of the Ayeyarwaddy River Basin.

The first thing the additional assistance was requested for was for Australia to assist design and implement an Ayeyarwaddy State of the Basin Assessment (SOBA) to assemble and structure the existing knowledge base. After the SOBA, there will be an Ayeyarwaddy Basin Scoping Study – exploring development and conservation options – which will inform the negotiation of a 'master plan' to be prepared for (and endorsed by) the multi-ministry National Water Resources Committee.

The level of importance given to water issues can be seen in the fact that the new government dismantled all previous committees – but first re-established the NWRC in June 2016, with it subsequently meeting in August 2016. It is headed by the Vice President and has both Union and Regional Ministers as members – but it will still be a slow process to build and strengthen this institution. The technical part below it that informs the decision making is crucial. At the moment, an institutional review of NWRC is ongoing as an activity within AIRBM Project. DFAT should consider the results of that review in relation to targeting some future assistance.

What seems to be missing at the moment is an understanding of the overall value and importance of freshwater catch fisheries in the Ayeyarwaddy. By comparison, in the Mekong, recognition of the value and importance of capture fisheries has been an extremely important area of knowledge in the ongoing debates over development of the basin. It is important that a similar understanding is developed in the Ayeyarwaddy, before major development decisions that would undermine fisheries productivity are locked-in.

Overall, the DFAT team sees their job as helping Myanmar to get the best out of all the other investments, and have set aside an amount up to AUD 3 million if required to provide support as and when necessary – in addition to other GMWRP water-related supports to Myanmar through IFC, Oxfam Australia and IWMI-WLE.

The Australian Water Partnership (AWP) provides the mechanism for mobilising additional Australian expertise under the overall oversight and funding from DFAT. For DFAT, AWP provides a more flexible supply mechanism to provide high quality people in some spaces other than through ADB and WB TA – the team seems not too worried about visibility – feeling confident that Australia’s contribution will be recognised and appreciated, without needing to be too loud about it. AWP can bring in high quality public sector policy and management experience – people who have been involved in the evolution of water policy and management in Australia over the last several decades. What is important are not the specific solutions that Australia decided on, to its own water sector challenges – but the process by which this was done; the types of issues raised and the mechanisms for addressing them; and the lessons learned along the way from all of this. The early signs in Myanmar are that AWP will provide an effective vehicle for this type of support.

In addition, a twinning arrangement with the Murray-Darling Basin (MDB) was launched in August 2016 – already manifest in hydraulic modelling training, study tours etc. The Australian contribution also includes support for the Myanmar Young Water Professionals Programme. In Myanmar, there is a missing generation of capacity; therefore, this young professional investment is very important.

The team has also co-led the formation of a Water Resources Panel with the Governments of Myanmar-Netherlands-Australia and the World Bank Group, created to provide a dialogue platform and conduit to/from the Myanmar National Water Resources Committee. DFAT has also initiated the exploration of an international water house in Yangon for water knowledge exchange.

Via other GMWRP pillars, Australia is linking strongly to multiple ministries and CSOs engaged in water-food-energy-environment policy and practice. Initiatives such the Ayeyarwaddy State of the Basin Assessment (led by the AIRBM Project) and the Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA) of the hydropower sector (led by a coalition of the energy and environment ministries, and IFC) are strategic deliberative governance interventions. The overall DFAT approach in Myanmar, including the drawing in of AWP, is commendable and provides a model that can be replicated in other countries.

### **Case 3: Mekong River Commission ‘Prior Consultation’ Processes**

The Mekong River Commission (MRC) acts on behalf of the Lower Mekong governments – Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam – through the 1995 Agreement on the Cooperation for the Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin to ‘cooperate...in the sustainable development of the Mekong River Basin...in a manner to optimise...benefits...and to minimise harmful effects’. The Agreement was an important milestone in Lower Mekong water governance. Since the 1990s MRC has negotiated basin-wide water resources management procedures and guidelines intended to ensure informed and transparent choices about reasonable and equitable utilisation of shared Mekong River Basin waters. They include the Procedures for Notification, Prior Consultation and Agreement (PNPCA), approved in 2003; and a guideline for implementation of the PNPCA, approved in 2005. In addition to PNPCA, there are four other procedures agreed for: data and information exchange and sharing; water use monitoring; water quality; and maintenance of flows on the mainstream.

The PNPCA obliges Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam to jointly review any major developments proposed for the Lower Mekong Basin. The provisions in the PNPCA and other procedures, in addition to the already specified roles of the MRC Joint Committee and Council, are intended to provide a mechanism for consensus-building and proactive dispute prevention or minimisation. The applicable PNPCA process – ‘notification’ only, or ‘prior consultation’ (even if not ‘agreement’) – depends on whether water use proposed by the notifying country is on the Mekong mainstream or a tributary; whether it involves use of water in the wet or the dry seasons; and whether it involves transfer of water within the Mekong River Basin (intra-basin use) or to outside of the Mekong River Basin (inter-basin diversion). PNPCA is an exemplar of the continued struggle by MRC to balance ‘no right to veto’ and ‘no unilateral right to develop without due consideration of other rights’.

AN effective PNPCA could create transparency and ensure that water resources’ development in Lower Mekong countries is well considered. The PNPCA should provide opportunities and a forum within and between countries to communicate and share information about Mekong River mainstream and tributary development. Key to the spirit of the agreed PNPCA text is the expectation that what is being discussed is proposed use. Hence, there should be no key contracts, such as power purchase and concession agreements, concluded before consultations have been completed. The proper sequence is to have genuine consultations with neighbours before there is irreversible commitment for a project to proceed.

Xayabouri and Don Sahong hydropower projects were the first tests of the full PNPCA in action. Following the prior consultation (PC) consultant engineers and fish specialists followed up with extensive studies and redesign of the Xayabouri. This added an additional US\$400 million to the construction cost, which was intended to add a greater degree of confidence about fish passage, sediment control structures, seismic safety and improvement of navigation locks. For Don Sahong, it is acknowledged by the Government of Lao PDR and the project developer that MRC design guidance has been central to project design and the associated environmental and social management plans, with regard to: navigation, sediment transport and river morphology, water quality and aquatic ecology, safety, and fish passage. At the time of writing, the third implementation of PNPCA ‘prior consultation’ is underway, for the proposed Pak Beng hydropower project.

Australian funding was used for the Xayabouri and Don Sahong PNPCA processes. For Pak Beng, funding comes from the MRC new 'basket fund', augmented by additional backup from Australia and Germany. Australia has also been supporting the establishment of an MRC Joint Platform that aims to improve the understanding and implementation of all the Procedures. These processes are major tests of the MRC – and member country – capacity and willingness to engage in substantive policy dialogue. PNPCA implementation was reviewed by MRC member countries at a workshop in Bangkok in early 2016, with suggestions made for improving the MRC process before-PC, during-PC, and after PC. Many of these suggestions have been taken on board in the roadmap for the Pak Beng PC.

The EIAs undertaken for the Xayaburi, Don Sahong and Pak Beng Hydropower Projects submitted for Prior Consultation process did not include thorough assessment of transboundary considerations. Under the MRC's framework, development of proposals (technical guidelines) for a transboundary EIA (TbEIA) process has been stalled for over a decade now. Due to the absence of such agreed transboundary EIA guidelines, the project developers have opted for complying with the national laws and guidelines of the country-owned project. The GMWRP should consider to strongly support a joint effort in making sure these long overdue TbEIA procedures and guidelines are adopted and implemented, and other social and environmental tools and standards are adopted and implemented in Lao PDR and other countries.

More attention should now be given to the Pre-PNPCA aspects (e.g. including TbEIA, identification of stakeholders to be consulted, preparation, review, translation and dissemination of necessary documents, and even pre-prior notification, etc.) and Post-PNPCA aspects (e.g. including following up on key issues raised in the PNPCA, design changes, operational changes, environmental and social mitigation plans, M&E, etc.).

For further information about the MRC 'Prior Consultation' Processes:

<http://www.mrcmekong.org/>

<http://www.mrcmekong.org/publications/topic/pnpca-prior-consultation>

<http://www.mrcmekong.org/news-and-events/news/official-announcement-regional-stakeholder-forum-on-the-council-study-and-the-pak-beng-hydropower-project/>

<http://www.mrcmekong.org/topics/pnpca-prior-consultation/pak-beng-hydropower-project/>

#### **Case 4: Oxfam community water management**

The overall goal of the Inclusion project is to realise sustainable livelihoods for Mekong communities by promoting the greater inclusion of civil society in water resource governance and decision making.

Oxfam is supporting five community-based water management initiatives that mobilise communities and support them to work on regional water governance issues affecting them locally. They focus on community fisheries in Cambodia and Lao PDR, participatory irrigation in Vietnam, and lake and island resource management in Myanmar. There is a strong focus on consideration of gender and supporting women's participation, voice and leadership.

Support to the Karen Environmental and Social Action Network's (KESAN) aims to build the capacity of community learning facilitators and conduct community research learning processes to mobilise and empower community members to negotiate resource management regimes for a lake and island in the Salween River. While focusing on the local governance aspects, KESAN is also aware of the need for higher-level government recognition and support. A positive discursive commitment among the local politicians has been achieved. Dr Aung Naing Oo, the deputy speaker from Mon State Parliament, Myanmar, reflected that "KESAN's project has highlighted the mutual benefit and importance of politicians supporting civil society organisations and connecting with the community. While making policies, government needs to consult with civil society to get their suggestions which will help to make right decisions for people". While this approach is extremely valuable, it is equally important to also conduct a clear analysis of the current policy and legislative context and present a clear articulation of which laws and regulations would allow (or alternatively stand in the way of) official recognition of a community-based management systems of the lake and island which recognises them as common resources of the community. If a clear legal option exists, then that should be promoted. If an appropriate legal option does not exist, then lobbying is necessary for key reforms.

For further information about the Oxfam Mekong Inclusion Project:

<https://www.oxfam.org.au/what-we-do/infrastructure-people-and-environment/save-the-mekong/mekonginclusion/>

## **Case 5: R4D Myanmar Healthy Rivers Initiative**

The Myanmar Healthy Rivers Initiative is being implemented from 2015 – 2017 in close partnership with the Watershed Division of the Myanmar Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment Conservation, in collaboration with a number of universities, community and civil-society organisations. As a pilot, the MHRI is demonstrating the utility of River Health Reporting in informed and inclusive decision making in the Ayeyarwaddy and Salween river basins. MHRI is just one project within a portfolio of thirty-three projects across all GMWRP targeted river basins in the IWMI's Water Land and Ecosystems (WLE) Program in the Greater Mekong.

The logic of the initiative is that a river system is 'healthy' when its character, biodiversity and functions are sustained over time. An 'unhealthy' system is one where such a balance does not exist.

The initiative aims to answer the questions: What ecosystem services provided by rivers are valued by communities and sectors? How is the health of the river, and the provision of these services, changing over time? The project is using a range of techniques – from analysis of satellite imagery to community based monitoring – to tailor a framework suitable for the Myanmar context where conventional river monitoring is rarely available. MHRI is implementing at three sites in the Salween, and three in the Irrawaddy.

Key knowledge partners include International Water Management Institute (IWMI), International Centre for Environmental Management (ICEM), Myanmar Institute for Integrated Development, and the Ecosystem Community Conservation and Development Initiative (ECCDI). Oxfam's Inclusion Project has provided additional resources for gender training.

MHRI explores innovative opportunities for monitoring river health from both space (remote sensing, global data-sets) and from the riverbank, through community-led citizen science techniques. Government counterparts were reportedly excited about the idea of "healthy" rivers – they had never thought about it before. Involving different river user groups in the project additionally serves to empower stakeholders at all levels, from government sectors to community users, to engage in debate on river development and planning from a foundation of scientific evidence.

The project initially conducted participatory mapping and community health, seasonal calendars, etc. to create a good baseline of key issues and ecosystem services. These participatory approaches were new for many of the government officers involved, as well as for local people, who had only ever experienced top-down decision-making.

The MHRI aims to provide a framework within which local people can raise issues to local authorities. A first step in this respect is for the community to document events or 'symptoms' that they observe in the rivers they depend upon. Buy-in from local people tends to occur around things they are already concerned about, such as sand mining.

A strong set of tools is being used, and this will contribute to knowledge gaps and demonstrate what could be possible. It remains a challenge, however, to ensure that local communities will continue to monitor river health after the project is complete.

The work at the three Ayeyarwaddy sites could provide valuable inputs to the Government of Myanmar's AIRBM Project processes – and be an example of how top-down and bottom-up approaches can be combined. The work at the three Thanlwin sites could also be combined with some of the Oxfam work through the Karen Environmental and Social Action Network, to inform a more cohesive approach.

For further information about the Myanmar Healthy Rivers Initiative:

[https://wle-mekong.cgiar.org/essential\\_grid/mk-23-rivers-for-life-and-livelihoods-classification-of-river-health-in-the-salween-river/](https://wle-mekong.cgiar.org/essential_grid/mk-23-rivers-for-life-and-livelihoods-classification-of-river-health-in-the-salween-river/)

<https://wle-mekong.cgiar.org/projects/mk24/>

<http://myanmarhealthyivers.org/>

<http://www.mmiid.org/content/myanmar-healthy-rivers-initiative>

Complementary river health initiatives are also being funded by the DFAT GMWRP in the Mekong and Red river basins.

[https://wle-mekong.cgiar.org/essential\\_grid/mk22-balancing-river-health-and-hydropower-requirements-in-the-lancang-river-basin/](https://wle-mekong.cgiar.org/essential_grid/mk22-balancing-river-health-and-hydropower-requirements-in-the-lancang-river-basin/)

[https://wle-mekong.cgiar.org/essential\\_grid/mk-25-developing-an-operational-framework-for-river-health-assessment-in-the-mekong-river-basin/](https://wle-mekong.cgiar.org/essential_grid/mk-25-developing-an-operational-framework-for-river-health-assessment-in-the-mekong-river-basin/)

[https://wle-mekong.cgiar.org/essential\\_grid/mk-27-inclusive-development-paths-for-healthy-red-river-landscapes-based-on-ecosystem-services/](https://wle-mekong.cgiar.org/essential_grid/mk-27-inclusive-development-paths-for-healthy-red-river-landscapes-based-on-ecosystem-services/)

[https://wle-mekong.cgiar.org/essential\\_grid/mk-26-river-food-systems-from-villagers-perspectives-in-the-mekong-delta/](https://wle-mekong.cgiar.org/essential_grid/mk-26-river-food-systems-from-villagers-perspectives-in-the-mekong-delta/)

### **Case 6: Oxfam gender impact assessment for hydropower development**

Oxfam is supporting CSOs to actively participate in the production and promotion of social and environmental standards and safeguards, for example, in promoting the use of the Gender Impact Assessment Manual by hydropower developers and regulators.) and to work collaboratively with the private sector and government to reduce the impact of hydropower projects on communities, and women in particular. In Vietnam, the Centre for Social Research and Development (CSR D) is using the manual as an entry point to its engagement with Electricity Vietnam (EVN). CSR D is working with a local group of academics, researchers and government officials with expertise in environmental and social impact assessment to pilot and adapt the manual for Vietnam. EVN now has a better understanding of the different impacts experienced by men and women, which were previously ignored. Working collaboratively with EVN has been a significant shift for the CSR D, which had previously taken an adversarial approach to dealing with EVN and local hydropower project developers and operators. For further information about the Oxfam Gender Impact Assessment Manual for Hydropower:

<https://www.oxfam.org.au/what-we-do/infrastructure-people-and-environment/save-the-mekong/gia-manual/>

### **Case 7: IFC raising hydro environmental & social standards**

Developing hydropower sustainably is a challenge. Since 2014, with the support of DFAT GMWRP, IFC has been working to bring more accountability to the private and public sector to improve hydropower governance in the Greater Mekong.

IFC's goal is to raise environmental and social standards in the hydropower sector. Their approach is comprehensive: IFC advises companies on how to improve their systems and business operations; they are working with officials to strengthen the sector through improved policy and regulation; and they are building clients' knowledge on how to lower environmental and social risks. Strengthening collaboration between the public and private sectors through dialogues is an essential component of their strategy.

IFC's advantage is its unique relationship with the private and public sectors leveraging long-term change and creating new markets. IFC offers its global expertise to government agencies to help strengthen policy and guidelines that mainstream good international industry practices of environmental and social standards while helping companies improve their internal systems and do business more sustainably.

After only 3 years, the Lao PDR-born program replicated in Myanmar to support the government with advancing sustainability in their hydropower sector. Since then, the program has continued to expand to countries with hydropower potential and opportunities to improve sustainability including Nepal and Pakistan.

**Working group that works:** In Lao PDR, one way the IFC leverages the private sector is through the Hydropower Developers' Working Group. Established in late-2013, HDWG comprises of representatives from hydropower companies, vendors and suppliers working in or planning to invest in Lao PDR. Quarterly meetings give the working group an opportunity to table issues that affect their work and business seminars expose hydropower companies to the environmental and social standard dimension of their work.

HDWG was central to the review process of the Small Hydropower Development Regulation. With private sector input, the government of Lao PDR was able to understand the positive and negative aspects of small hydropower development and develop a regulation that is practical and feasible.



In 2016, HDWG established in Myanmar. With over 40 companies signing up for membership, the interest among the private sector to drive change in Myanmar's hydropower sector was eminent. Still in its early stages, HDWG Myanmar is prioritising the issues it plans to tackle in the hydropower sector. The popular model has been adapted in Pakistan and will continue to grow to countries where the private sector has an interest to improve environmental and social sustainability of the hydropower sector.

**Stronger policy, better governance:** The stepping stone of good governance is policy and regulation that is practical and feasible for the private sector to implement. In countries, such as Myanmar, the hydropower sector does not have the policy, regulations and guidelines in place to help improve governance and ensure sustainability. In Lao PDR, policy and regulations often need updating and strengthening. This is where IFC helps.

Central to water governance in Lao PDR is the development of a new Water Law. Led by the World Bank Group, the Water Law took over 4 years to develop and is now in the final stages of completion for submission to the National Assembly later this year. Central to the Water Law is the incorporation of a water rights regime.

Guidelines and regulations that support improved environment and social practices are also underway in Lao PDR. The World Bank Group and the Lao government supported the development of the Policy on Sustainable Hydropower Development, while working on several other guidelines including cumulative impact assessment and improving social and environmental obligations for hydropower projects in the concession agreement process.

IFC understands that to achieve environmental and social sustainability, knowing river basins' characteristics is essential. In Lao PDR where there are knowledge gaps or a lack of data available on river basin environments, river basin profiles are important. This year IFC is finishing up the first Nam Ou River Basin profile that will be delivered to officials and companies to inform them of the basics for further development of river basin management plans on the rivers they are developing.

In 2015 IFC entered Myanmar in partnership with the Ministry of Energy and Electricity and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation to help develop stronger policy and guidelines as in Lao PDR. Taking lessons learned with them, IFC's team began their work with capacity building on environmental and social standard raising. In October 2016, IFC and the Myanmar government took their partnership to the next level and commenced a country-wide strategic environmental assessment (SEA) that will be a tool for decision makers to be more informed on the sustainability risks and opportunities of hydropower development

**Changing perspectives basin-wide:** IFC is working to change the approach to understanding how hydropower development impacts river basins. IFC promotes a cumulative, or landscape approach to its work that aims to understand how all projects in one river basin collectively affects the environment and social aspects.

**Getting all players in one river basin on board isn't easy:** This is why IFC is working to build capacity on the benefits of understanding cumulative impacts of hydro development and helping with guidelines on this topic in Lao PDR and in Myanmar. By understanding riverine development from a basin-wide or landscape approach, governments can improve planning of upstream and downstream developments.

**Getting the private sector engaged at the start:** From capacity building to policy development, IFC takes a lead in getting the private sector to the discussion table. In the case of developing environmental and social impact assessment guidelines in Myanmar or cumulative impact assessment guidelines in Lao PDR, IFC ensures that the private sector is present to discuss and help shape policy and guidelines to ensure that they are realistic and implementable.

For further information about the IFC Hydro Advisory initiative: [www.ifc.org/hydroadvisory](http://www.ifc.org/hydroadvisory).