



Mekong River Commission

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## Mid-Term Review of the MRC Programmes

### Mekong Integrated Water Resources Management Programme

March 2014

## Final Report

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## **ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

AIP	Agriculture and Irrigation Programme
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Cooperation
BDP	Basin Development Plan Programme
CDAP	Capacity Development Action Plan
CCAI	Climate Change Adaptation Initiative
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CF	Core Function
CNMC	Cambodia National Mekong Committee
DMP	Drought Management Programme
DP	Development partner
DSF	Decision Support Framework
EHM	Ecological Health Monitoring
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
END	Environment Division
EP	Environment Programme
FAS	Finance and Administration Section
FMMP	Flood Management and Mitigation Programme
FP	Fisheries Programme
GEF	Global Environment Fund
GIS	Geographical Information System
GMS	Greater Mekong Sub-region
HDI	Human Development Index
HRS	Human Resources Section
IAI	Initiative for ASEAN Integration
ICBP	Integrated Capacity Building Programme
ICCS	International Cooperation and Communication Section
IKMP	Information and Knowledge Management Programme
ISH	Initiative on Sustainable Hydropower
IWRM	Integrated Water Resource Management
JC	Joint Committee
LA	Line Agency (National programme implementing agency)
LDC	Least Developed Countries
LMB	Lower Mekong Basin
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MDG	United Nations Millennium Development Goals
M-IWRMP	Mekong Integrated Water Resource Management Project
MONRE	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (of Thailand)
MONRE	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MOWRAM	Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology (of Cambodia)
MPCC	Mekong Panel on Climate Change
MRC	Mekong River Commission
MRC-IS	Mekong River Commission Information System
MRCS	Mekong River Commission Secretariat
NAP	Navigation Programme
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NIP	National Implementation Programme
NMC	National Mekong Committee
NMCS	National Mekong Committee Secretariat
NPV	Net Present Value

O&M	Operation and Maintenance
OEB	Operating Expenses Budget
OSP	Office of the MRC Secretariat in Phnom Penh, Cambodia
OSV	Office of the MRC Secretariat in Vientiane, Lao PDR
PDIES	Procedures for Data and Information Exchange and Sharing
PIP	Programme Implementation Plan
PMFM	Procedures for the Maintenance of Flows on the Mainstream
PMS	Performance Management System
PNPCA	Procedures for Notification, Prior Consultation and Agreement
POP	Persistent organic pollutant
PWQ	Procedures for Water Quality
PWUM	Procedures for Water Use Monitoring
QA	Quality Assurance
RBC	River Basin Committee
RBM	River Basin Management
RBO	River Basin Organisation
RSAT	Rapid Basin-wide Hydropower Sustainability Assessment Tool
RTWG	Regional Technical Working Group (for basin-wide development scenarios and IWRM-based Basin Development Strategy)
SC	Steering Committee
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SIA	Social Impact Assessment
SIMVA	Social Impact Monitoring and Vulnerability Assessment
SOB	State of the Basin
TbEIA	Trans-boundary Environmental Impact Assessment
TCU	Technical Coordination Unit
TG	Technical Guidelines
TGA	Technical Guidelines for the Protection of Aquatic Life
TGH	Technical Guidelines for the Protection of Human Health
TGWQ	Technical Guidelines for Procedures for Water Quality
TNMC	Thai National Mekong Committee
TOR	Terms of Reference
VNMC	Viet Nam National Mekong Committee
WB	World Bank
WMTF	Water Management Trust Fund
WQMN	Water Quality Monitoring Network
WREA	Water Resources and Environment Administration (of Lao PDR)
WSC	Watershed Committee
WSMP	Watershed Management Project
WUP	MRC Water Utilisation Programme

## BASIC PROGRAMME DATA

Programme	<b>MEKONG INTEGRATED WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT PROJECT (M-IWRMP) 2010 - 2014 – Regional and transboundary components</b>			
Defining Documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Programme Document November 2009</li> <li>Inception Report September 2010</li> </ul>			
Key dates	Prog Doc approved Nov 2009; Inception Report, final version, September 2010	PIP / Budget approved Nov 2009		Prog Completion Plan 31 Dec 2018
<b>Financing</b>	<b>From</b>	<b>To</b>	<b>Amount (USD)</b>	<b>%</b>
Australia	Late 2009	31/12/14	6,900,291.60	45.73%
The World Bank	15/05/2012	31/09/17	8,187,800.00	54.27%
<b>Total budget</b>			<b>15,088,091.60</b>	<b>100%</b>
Expenditure by 31.12.2013			4,186,257.19	
Funds available as of 31.12.2013			10,901.834.41	
Development Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To improve the enabling framework and capacity for IWRM in the LMB countries and strengthen the role of MRC as the facilitator of significant water resources development, guided by IWRM-principles</li> </ul>			
Beneficiaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poor people at the project sites, especially women, children and the most vulnerable</li> <li>Line agencies, River Basin Organisations and national research and planning institutions</li> <li>National Mekong Committees</li> <li>National decision makers</li> </ul>			
Geographical Coverage	Lower Mekong basin: Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam			
<b>Institutional Framework</b>				
Oversight / decision body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Joint Committee</li> </ul>			
Execution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MRCS</li> </ul>			
MRCS oversight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CEO</li> </ul>			
Overall management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Director, Planning Division</li> </ul>			
Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project Steering Committee</li> <li>National Project Committees (NPCs )</li> <li>Coordination Management Meetings</li> </ul>			
Main Line Agencies (in MCs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Line Agencies responsible for water use planning</li> </ul>			
Main implementation mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project Coordination and Management Unit (PCMU)</li> </ul>			
Main linked MRC Programmes and units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BDP, EP, FMMP, ICBP, IKMP, TCU, ICCS</li> </ul>			

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The MRC's Mekong Integrated Water Resources Management Project (M-IWRMP) aims to finalise the pending procedures for water utilisation and technical guidelines and to demonstrate their implementation, to apply IWRM principles and approaches in the region as well as to promote pro-poor development and environment protection. The M-IWRMP also aims to institutionalise IWRM principles across the MRC in a coordinated way that proactively involves all Programmes as well as relevant national authorities. The Project comprises three inter-linked components: Regional, Transboundary and National Components.

The scope of this Mid-Term Review (MTR) of M-IWRMP includes the Regional component (2010-2014) and Transboundary component (2012 - 2017). The use of funds on these components is under the management of the MRCS. The National Component is implemented by the Member Countries with loans to them from the World Bank and technical assistance from the MRCS when necessary.

The Regional Component is financed by the Australian Government and supports the implementation of IWRM at a basin scale through the 5 MRC Procedures for Water Utilisation, Technical Guidelines and the MRC Information System. The funding agreement is valid until the end of 2014.

The Transboundary Component contains 4 Transboundary and 1 Communication Outreach projects to demonstrate IWRM principles on a bilateral basis, addressing transboundary issues at a local level. This component is financed by the World Bank through the MRCS. The budget and project oversight is channelled through the M-IWRMP. The actual implementation is driven by the NMCs like the National Component with advice and input from the M-IWRMP.

M-IWRMP is a Project consisting of projects with 3 outcomes, 61 outputs, 222 activities, milestones, Tasks and some 92 indicators. The M-IWRMP is also planned to be implemented through and by 7 other relevant MRCS Programmes. There are also activities and budget allocations to ICCS and TCU. This sets exceptionally high requirements for implementation, coordination and management.

The PSC could play an important role to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of M-IWRMP, if they worked well and had the right participants. However, in the last three years 68% of participants attended PSC meetings only once. The participation does not show high level of commitment and continuity and it does not build institutional memory. USD 2,753,999.60 has been allocated for Effective Project Coordination, oversight and inter-linkage of components in the Inception Report. For establishing the PCMU and the PSC USD 1,440,000<sup>1</sup> was allocated.

The World Bank funding was available only in the late 2012 due to the Bank's procedures for project formulation. As a consequence the implementation of the transboundary component started late, and the World Bank funding of USD 8 million has been respectively extended until the end of 2017. It is too early to evaluate the implementation of the Transboundary Component. A Joint Single Project Implementation Plan is under development for the four transboundary and one Communication Outreach projects.

According to the Annual Output Report Jan . December 2013 the M-IWRMP has cumulatively spent 63% of the Australian budget and 3% of the World Bank budget. There are many reasons for the underspending of M-IWRMP, not only the delayed start-up of the

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<sup>1</sup> Inception Report September 2010, Annex 2 M-IWRMP Budget

five transboundary projects. There is outstanding clearance of consultancies such as on significant tributaries, on Gender Mainstreaming and Poverty Reduction, the Performance Monitoring and Evaluation, among others. Resignation of staff and delayed recruitment also add to the reasons.

Despite the challenge of staff turnover and coordination through 7 other MRCS Programmes and national project organizations, progress has been made with most of the Outputs, in the Outcome of the Regional Component at the end of the reporting period 2010-2013. The M-IWRMP PCMU has managed to show ability to innovate, and to accomplish significant outputs during the years, even from outside the original logical framework and work plan. Some of them include:

- The contribution to the PNPCA process on the Xayaburi Hydropower project
- The establishment of a Joint Platform (JP) to support the implementation of the 5 MRC Procedures

However, it is not a practice at the MRC to budget estimated time required and record time used per activity, except for the World Bank. It is also not a practice at the MRC to follow expenditure per activity. There is however a budget per activity in the Inception Report of September 2010. When a percentage of completion is reported it is a rough estimate and not based on any time used/time allocated or funds used/funds allocated.

Moreover, the report format is such that it is difficult to find basic information e.g. what the start year of the Project is, and what the start dates of the Australian fund and the World Bank fund are, how much the budget balance is. The numerous indicators do not provide proper guidance for work and reporting. Reporting on deviation from plans is a focused way for management to react when necessary.

The assistance to secure the World Bank funding for the transboundary component contributed to the outcome 2: *Pro-poor transboundary initiatives jointly designed and implemented by the MRC Member Countries*. It also contributed to the objective of the Project which is *to improve the enabling framework and capacity for IWRM in the LMB Countries and strengthen the role of MRC as the facilitator of significant water resources development, guided by the IWRM principles*.

The establishment of the JP is an indicator of an innovative shift over from a receiver of work on the development of the MRC Procedures and the respective Technical Guidelines, towards investigating how to further take the 5 MRC Procedures toward shared understanding and coherent implementation. This was neither in the Project Document, nor in the Inception Report, and it has taken more than two years to have the idea and the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the JP to be approved at the Joint Committee (JC) level.

It remains to be seen how effective the JP can be. The JC already approved the establishment of the JP first in October 2012 with a draft TOR. The TOR have been revised and approved in late 2013 and the JP is expected to hold its first meeting any time in the near future to finalise its own TOR, to define its relationship with the existing Technical Working Groups (TWG) and to make its work plan. Only logistics seems to make it difficult to set the date for the meeting which is also often the case experienced by all MRCS Programmes relating to various issues.

However, there is less than one year time left in this reporting period to achieve Outcome 1, the only Outcome of the Regional Component. The sustainability of the Regional Component will depend largely on how consistently the five MRC Procedures are implemented. The use and usefulness of the ~~Toolbox~~ will also become questionable, if the five MRC Procedures are not implemented consistently.

Since the outputs and outcomes are aligned with the Strategic Plan outcomes and milestones and M-IWRMP is fully integrated to the MRC's Strategic Plan 2011 - 2015, and since the M-IWRMP has made good progress in all its outputs of the Regional Component, it can be reasonably regarded as contributing well to the Strategic Plan, its outcomes and goals 1-4.

As it is a part of basin planning function M-IWRMP has to align with the 7 river basin core functions. Also, implementation of the MRC Procedures is one of the core functions. However, there is a need to focus on preparing detailed plans on moving M-IWRMP to the core functions model.

Capacity building in the regional component as well as implementation of the transboundary projects are relevant activities which M-IWRMP contributes to in the decentralisation process. Implementation of the 5 MRC Procedures at national level is also in the decentralisation plan (1st or 2nd batch of the plan).

As preparation for riparianisation it was decided in the 4th PSC meeting in 2012, that an M-IWRMP Knowledge and Skills (K&S) transfer plan was to be initiated. The M-IWRMP has already submitted a needs assessment for K&S to ICBP and HR. The K&S plan is currently under ICBP and HR responsibility.

As is a practice in the MRC, the coordination for implementation and technical interface between M-IWRMP and other MRC programmes are built on internal agreements, quarterly coordination meetings hosted by the Technical Coordination Unit (TCU), in addition to cooperation on a day-to-day basis. However, such cooperation arrangements are difficult to see from annual work plans or to monitor progress through the regular progress reports. The understanding of the MTR is that contribution to other Programmes' achievement is not a criterion against which Programmes are regularly assessed, and thus work commissioned by others does generally not have the same priority.

Inter-MRCS programme and LMB countries cooperation for implementation of the M-IWRMP is a key approach. Already in the Project Document and the Inception Report the budget of the M-IWRMP is broken down to Component, Output and activity levels with implementation responsibility assigned to 7 other MRCS Programmes and four LMB countries. Around 65% of the total activities of M-IWRMP is for collaborated implementation with seven MRCS Programmes and four LMB countries.

The periodic progress reports (quarterly activities report, six monthly outputs report and annual outcome report of M-IWRMP) are compiled from an M-IWRMP's result-based performance M&E system to which all those MRCS Programmes and the four LMB countries update information about their progress.

However, the MTR found little information about lessons learned from inter-programme cooperation, how it has been experienced, what the contribution of each Programme is, and how inter-programme cooperation works, what sort of shared knowledge there is and what sort of synergy has possibly been achieved.

The promotion of IWRM has been of high relevance and M-IWRMP has made most impacts through introducing IWRM, developing tools, capacity building, meetings, dialogues and discussions. However, given the staff constraints as a common problem in the MRC, the elusive management by PSC, the very long time so far required for something fundamental like the five MRC Procedures to work in practice, the weak evidence of continuity and institutional memory, the sustainability of M-IWRMP becomes questionable.



The reporting period is coming to an end in 2014 with the reality that all the three risks relating to the implementation of the Regional Component identified in the Inception Report have become true. It is necessary to consider this reality in the remaining period and the coming years, whether it is still relevant and feasible to continue attempts to achieve the same objective in the same way. In this connection it is justified to emphasise the need to focus on preparing detailed plans on how M-IWRMP will be transformed into the core functions model.

In 2014 it is paramount to concentrate on the start-up of the JP and the establishment of its functions. This relates to the Output 1.2: Water utilisation procedures and technical guidelines are finalised and implemented on all LMB countries levels. It will be the most tangible result that enables achievement of the other related outputs on a lasting basis, even though it is not likely to be achieved in 2014.

As for the period beyond 2014 it would be valuable to assess, how the national project organisations and the other relevant MRCS implementing Programmes have experienced and benefited from the linkage of three components, the implementation of the M-IWRMP through other relevant MRCS implementing Programmes and what kind of technical assistance the national project organisations will continue to require beyond 2014. The assessment would be a basis for project planning and decision making as the Transboundary and National Components will be implemented beyond 2014 with the funding by the World Bank and management by the national project organisations.

## **Recommendations specific to the M-IWRMP**

*#2.1.1: The number of indicators should be drastically reduced to ensure focus, clarity and prompt implementation.*

*#2.1.2: Consideration should be given to using more traditional management terms such as Project Work Plans, Objectives, Tasks, Activities, Personnel, and Deliverables that more clearly and unambiguously define what is required to meet objectives.*

*#2.2: Although the M-IWRMP cannot choose participants to meetings and conferences the PCMU, the MRC and the donors should deliver a recommendation to NMCs and MCs that the choice of attendees for meetings and conferences should ensure a high level of continuity of personnel responsible for projects. Attendees should be limited to those who will contribute most to achievement of the project objectives.*

*#2.3.1: Time spent by personnel on projects should be measured by timesheet and the expenditure of that time should be compared with budget and schedule, with variances reported to senior management.*

*#2.3.2: Reportage of variances should be by exception so as to improve prompt remedial action (deviation reports).*

*#2.3.3: Time spent on projects should be broken down and monitored by Project, Task and Discipline, following normal industry procedures.*

*#2.3.4: Time spent should be linked to the project schedule so the rate of expenditure can be monitored and variances reported.*

*#2.3.5: A normal industry standard software package should be used to monitor progress, with clearly defined milestones embedded in the schedule.*

*#2.3.6: Variances from budget and schedule should be explained with actions listed to bring back the project to budget or schedule.*

*#2.3.7: Revision of budgets should require approval at a high managerial level and should take place simultaneously at predetermined annual dates so that their overall impact can be assessed.*

*#2.3.8: Meetings and conferences should be planned and budgeted on an annual basis.*

*#2.3.9: Meeting and conference expense costs should be monitored and variances reported with explanations for under- or over-expenditure.*

*#2.3.10: Direct costs such as accommodation, subsistence, travel, printing, shipping, etc., should be listed and budgeted. Variances should be reported with reasons and explanations for such.*

*#4.1 It is recommended that during 2014 efforts are concentrated on the start-up of the JP and the establishment of its function. This relates to the Output 1.2.*

*#4.2 It is recommended that an assessment is carried out in 2014 of the experience, commitment and needs of the national project organisations as well as the experience and needs of the other MRC Programmes in the present institutional setup of the M-IWRMP in order to learn and to decide on the structure and the implementation of the M-IWRMP beyond 2014.*

*#4.3 It is recommended that after 2014 the PCMU of M-IWRMP would be merged to the TCU to continue provision of technical assistance to the Transboundary and National Components as so far, taking into account the result of the assessment above in #4.2. Later the staff would be transferred to the core functions. The work assigned to other Programmes and units would be included in their work plan and reported by them.*

## **Recommendations on issues common to all Programmes (Chapter 5)**

*#5.1:*

*There is no obvious reason why programmes, after the delays so far, should try to spend all the funds available by the end of this programme period. It is recommended that funds that are not spent through normal reasonable programme implementation should be saved so as to safeguard funding for the transition period from programme based to core function based funding of the operations.*

*#5.2:*

*With regard to meetings and workshops, it is recommended that:*

- MRC should revise the rules covering per diems for meetings and workshops as soon as possible*
- Already during the remaining programme period, MCs should cover the costs for national coordination meetings*
- MRC should move to the practice that MCs cover the travel costs of their participants to regional meetings and workshops*

- *Regional meetings and workshops should be held as a rule at MRC premises in Vientiane or Phnom Penh*
- *NMCs should be provided with the equipment for video conferences.*

**#5.3:**

*With regard to capacity building, it is recommended that:*

- *MRC should revise the rules covering per diems for training events as soon as possible*
- *Capacity building should not be carried out unless a needs assessment has been completed and there are detailed plans for how capacity building will be carried out and the results monitored*
- *Plans should be made as soon as possible for decentralizing capacity building at national institutions and LAs*

**#5.4:**

*The MRC staffing policies should be amended so as to build a strong cadre of staff.*

**#5.5:**

*MRC should arrange meetings to the extent possible through video conferences and arrange meeting only on the most important issues. This should make it easier to arrange the meetings.*

**#5.6:**

*With regard to planning and monitoring, it is recommended that:*

- *The planning and monitoring system based on the logframe approach should be simplified and the focus of reporting should be on outcomes, not activities and outputs which are not very useful for MRCS management or MCs and DPs. Activities and outputs can be monitored at the programme management level. Consideration should be given to developing short and concise deviation reporting for MRCS management*
- *The logframe approach should not be applied at the strategic level and strategic documents should be kept focused and separate from action plans and implementation*
- *MRC should develop the accounting system so that expenditure figures can regularly be obtained against outcomes and outputs.*

**#5.7:**

*It is recommended that plans for transforming MRC into an organisation based on core basin management functions be given high priority so that the proposals could be presented early enough to the DPs so they can decide on basket funding already from the beginning of 2016. Plans for decentralization would accompany the transformation plans.*

**#5.8:**

*It is recommended that consideration be given to establishing a Trust Fund for financing high level research and studies regarding basin wide or transboundary issues of the Mekong Basin<sup>2</sup>. MRC has the vision of becoming a world class International River Basin Organisation. Therefore it should base its decisions on world class information.*

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<sup>2</sup> The MTR learned that some years back there were discussions about establishing a Trust Fund at the Asian Institute of Technology, AIT, but the idea fell through. The MTR is not aware of the details. However, this proposal is not related to the previous ideas and this would be a Mekong specific TF. This TF need not be large in size.

## FOREWORD

The Mekong River Commission (MRC) was established by the 1995 Agreement on Cooperation for Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin, signed by the governments of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam. The MRC uses a Strategic Planning approach and implements its main functions through a series of Development Partner (DP)-financed Programmes and the work of three organisational Sections and one Unit within the MRC Secretariat (MRCS).

The current Strategic Plan runs from 2011 to 2015 and MRC is presently carrying out a total of 12 Programmes. The MRC has commissioned a coordinated mid-term review (MTR) of the current Strategic Plan together with eight of these Programmes (the other Programmes having been covered by other reviews or not needing a mid-term review). At the same time, Danida commissioned a review of Danish support to the MRC (2011 to 2015). Both the Strategic Plan MTR and the Danida review were carried out in December 2013. The MTRs of the 8 Programmes were carried out during January and February 2014. This report covers the MTR of one of these Programmes, the Mekong Integrated Water Resources Management Project (M-IWRMP).

The main objectives of the MTR for the 8 Programmes as specified in the Terms of Reference (TOR) were:

- 1) *Review the present state of the implementation of the eight Programmes against the goals, outcomes, and milestones set forth in the respective Programme Documents 2011-2015;*
- 2) *Assess the contribution of each of the eight Programmes towards the achievement of the relevant outcomes and desired results as specified in the Strategic Plan 2011-2015 (MRC SP);*
- 3) *Assess how effectively the milestones of Annex B of the MRC SP that are allocated to each Programme are being addressed;*
- 4) *Assess how effectively the coordination mechanism/arrangement between programmes work in achieving their shared outputs/outcomes;*
- 5) *Make recommendations on how to improve the performance of the Programme implementation, in particular on prioritisation for the Programmes implementation during the remainder of the current planning cycle, taking into account emerging opportunities and challenges, as well as budgetary and other resource constraints at the MRC.*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The Programme Mid-Term Review team would like to acknowledge and express their sincere appreciation and thanks for the invaluable support and collaboration provided by the MRCS CEO, Technical Coordination Unit and other sections, the National Mekong Committees, Line Agencies, Development Partners, Programme teams and some other stakeholders. A full list of people met is provided in Annex 1.

*Tauno Kääriä, Mikko Punkari and Anh Thu Tran Minh (Team A), Steve Gossage and Jorma Koponen (Team B), and Teemu Jantunen (quality assurance and backstopping).*

# **1 INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1 Context**

The Programmes MTR is carried out in the context of:

- Rapid national and regional economic growth with expanding demands for energy (e.g. hydropower) and infrastructure.
- Plans to considerably increase agricultural irrigation.
- Pressures on environmental and ecological sustainability of the Mekong.
- Persistent rural poverty in parts of the river basin.
- Regular droughts and severe floods that affect the Lower Mekong Basin (LMB) countries.
- Concerns about climate change impacts.

The MRC Programmes are designed to address such issues. However, following the declaration of the first MRC Summit the vision is for a changed MRC. It is envisaged becoming financially sustained by the Member Countries by 2030. This will require a more streamlined and lean organisation. At the same time, referring to international models of other river basin organisations (RBO), there are plans to move from the Programme approach to a %Core Functions+ approach, with decentralisation of these to Member Countries (MC) as appropriate.

In addition to assessing the progress made in the Programmes and the contribution they have made to the Strategic Plan 2011-2015 (SP), the MTR also considers the consequences of these wider developments as MRC is in a period of major transition. Furthermore, the Programmes MTR is influenced by the draft reports of the Strategic Plan MTR and the Danida review which have been made available to the MTR team.

The MTR has particularly taken into account the proposal to fast track the transition from Programmes to core functions by the end of 2015 and achieving financial self-reliance already by 2020, which seem to be gaining wide support among the development partners. These developments would have a major impact on the priorities of the Programmes already in the present programme period and they would entail reduced donor financing starting from 2016 and phasing out of their financial support by 2020.

This is the first time there has been a MTR covering the majority of Programmes. This has provided an opportunity to assess whether there have been common features in the successes or delays and difficulties in the Programmes and to make general recommendations for improved performance.

## **1.2 Methodology**

The coordinated mid-term review of the 8 MRC Programmes was carried out by two sub-teams with one of 3 experts working from the Office of the Secretariat in Vientiane (OSV) and focusing on the 5 programmes based there, and the other of 2 experts working from the Office of the Secretariat in Phnom Penh (OSP) and focusing on the 3 programmes based there. The Programmes reviewed were the Basin Development Plan Programme (BDP), the Mekong Integrated Water Resources Management Project (M-IWRMP), the Initiative on Sustainable Hydropower (ISH), the Climate Change and Adaptation Initiative (CCAI) and the Environment Programme (EP) based in OSV; and the Information and Knowledge

Management Programme (IKMP), Flood Management and Mitigation Programme (FMMP) and Fisheries Programme (FP) based in OSP.

The team reviewed the changing development context in which MRC functions, as well as the institutional context which is facing a major transition with movement toward core functions and an RBO model, including decentralisation, as well as greater member country financing and ownership with the foreseeable reduction in development cooperation funding in the future. To provide a common organisational basis for the 8 Programmes a brief assessment of MRC was carried out using the 7-S Framework (developed originally by McKinsey Consultants).

In reviewing each of the Programmes the two sub-teams followed the same basic process and used the same basic tools. This involved:

- Review of documentation.
- Individual and group interviews of key Programme and MRC staff using interview guide questions / checklists.
- Individual and group interviews of key National Mekong Committee (NMC) staff, Line Agency staff, development partners (DP) and other key stakeholders. The sub-teams prepared coordinated interview guide questions for these, with the OSV sub-team covering all Programmes in Laos and Vietnam, and the OSP sub-team covered all Programmes in Cambodia and Thailand.
- The sub-teams came together for a week to share and triangulate their findings and develop a common approach and basic recommendations.
- Individual team members then focused on specific Programmes for further compilation, updating and analysis of data, synthesis of findings and development of recommendations, in particular to assess:
  - The present state of the implementation of each Programme
  - The contribution of each Programme to the outcomes of the SP, and
  - Each Programme against the MRC core functions.
- The initial key findings and recommendations were discussed and developed further through Programme debriefing meetings and follow up work.
- Individual Programme MTR reports were prepared by respective team members, cross checked by their colleagues and quality assured before submission of the first draft.

### **1.3 The Mekong Integrated Water Resources Management Project**

The MRC's Mekong Integrated Water Resources Management Project (M-IWRMP) is a continuation of a successful MRC Programme, the Water Utilization Programme (WUP) 2000 - 2008. The M-IWRMP aims to finalise the pending procedures for water utilisation and technical guidelines and to demonstrate their implementation, to apply IWRM principles and approaches in the region as well as to promote pro-poor development and environment protection with emphasis on transboundary or basin-wide nature. The M-IWRMP also aims to institutionalise IWRM principles across the MRC in a coordinated way that proactively involves all Programmes as well as relevant national authorities. The Project comprises three inter-linked components: Regional, Transboundary and National.

The scope of this Mid-Term Review (MTR) includes the Regional component (2010-2014) and Transboundary component of M-IWRMP (2012 - 2017). The use of funds on these components is under the management of the MRC. The National Component is implemented by the Member Countries with loans to them from the World Bank and technical assistance and coordination from the MRC when necessary.

## **2 PROGRAMME ASSESSMENT**

### **2.1 Programme rationale / design logic**

As stated in the Inception Report September 2010 the IWRM approach recognises the transboundary consequences of development decisions by sector agencies in the sovereign riparian countries in the Mekong Basin and that the MRC as an intergovernmental river basin organisation relies on the endorsement of approaches by its Member States. IWRM is defined as follows:

IWRM is a process that promotes the coordinated development and management of water, land and related resources, in order to maximise economic and social welfare in a balanced way without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems. IWRM emphasises integration of the management of land and water resources, of surface water and groundwater, of upstream and downstream uses, of sectoral approaches, of economic production and environmental sustainability, and of the state and non-state stakeholders. (Global Water Partnership 2000)

It is also stated in the Inception Report that addressing IWRM through the three levels of regional, transboundary and national initiatives in a combined Project, the M-IWRMP offers a number of advantages over separating them into stand-alone activities that . once merged . add-up to an institutionalised IWRM framework.

The Inception Report continues that it (an institutional IWRM framework) promotes a consistent and coordinated approach to implementing IWRM in the Lower Mekong Basin that links policy, institutional and capacity development directly to the support of sustainable infrastructure investments, ensures coherence between national and basin level actions; and promotes concrete/ active transboundary cooperation activities. It offers opportunities for institutional learning across all three levels and incorporates lessons to ensure sustainability.

The National Component aims to inculcate IWRM principles at the national level through focussed support to the MRC Member Countries. This component includes projects financed with loans from the World Bank directly to the MRC Member Countries, except for Thailand with its own sources of funding. The role of the M-IWRMP in this National Component has been to provide technical assistance to the NMCs to formulate their proposals for World Bank loans, to coordinate and integrate with the other two components for synergy and sharing experience. The National Component is excluded from the scope of this MTR.

The Regional Component is financed by the Australian Government and supports the implementation of IWRM at a basin scale through the 5 MRC Procedures for Water Utilisation, Technical Guidelines and the MRC Information System. The MRC Procedures are as follows in the order of approval by the MRC Council:

- Procedures for Data and Information Exchange and Sharing (PDIES) . in 2001;
- Procedures for Water Use Monitoring (PWUM) . in 2003;
- Procedures for Notification, Prior Consultation and Agreement (PNPCA) . in 2003;
- Procedures for the Maintenance of Flows on the Mainstream (PMFM) . in 2006 and;
- Procedures for Water Quality (PWQ) . in 2011

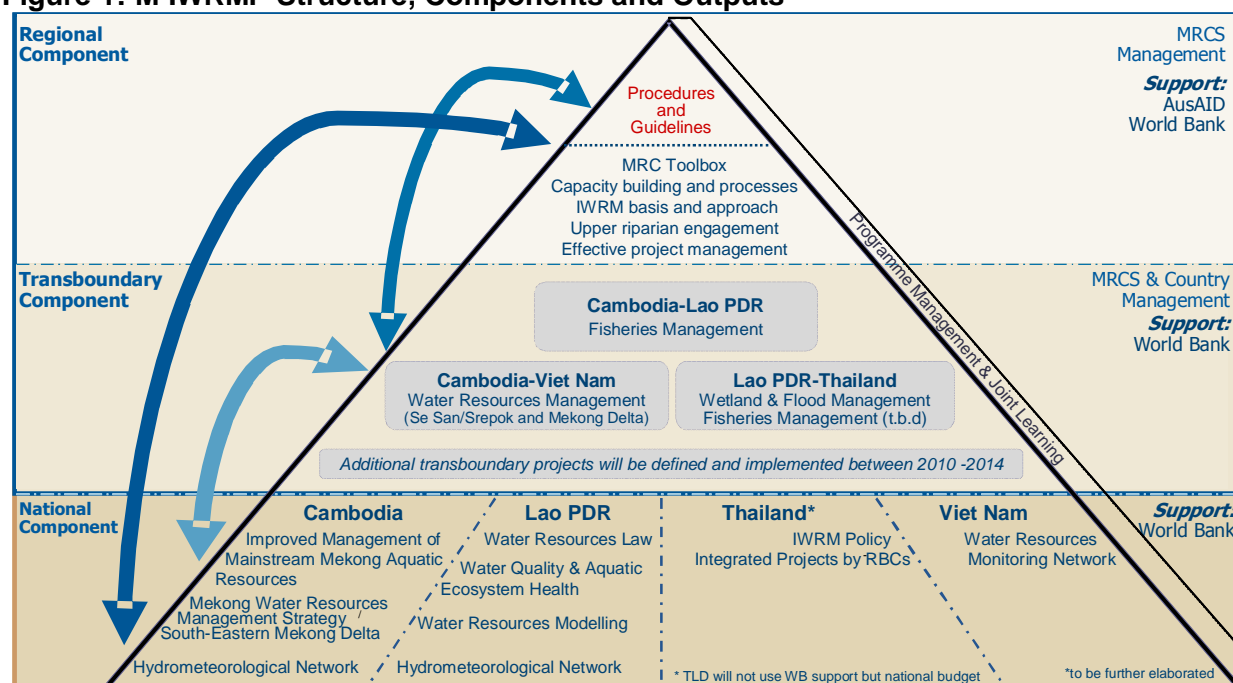
The Transboundary Component contains 5 projects (four Transboundary and one Communication Outreach projects) to demonstrate IWRM principles on a bilateral basis,



addressing transboundary issues at a local level. The Project's pro-poor and gender mainstreaming activities will be a primary focus in this component. This component is financed by the World Bank through the MRC. The budget and project oversight is channelled through the M-IWRMP. The actual implementation is also driven by the NMCs with advice and input from the M-IWRMP.

The objective of the M-IWRMP is *to improve the enabling framework and capacity for IWRM in the LMB Countries and strengthen the role of MRC as the facilitator of significant water resources development, guided by the IWRM principles*. It is planned to be achieved through the three Outcomes which result from the implementation of the three interlinked components: the regional, transboundary and national components as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1: M-IWRMP Structure, Components and Outputs**



Source: Inception Report September 2010

There are 15 outcome indicators (6 outcome indicators was under regional component, 4 outcome indicators was under Transboundary component, and 5 outcome indicators was under the National component) to verify whether the three outcomes are achieved. Under each outcome there are outputs to be undertaken.

Furthermore, under each output there are activities to be carried out. In the Inception Report 2010 activities are also called projects.

For the regional component alone i.e. outcome 1, there are 6 outputs and 30 activities to be carried out with 32 output indicators developed to monitor outputs. When taking into account all three components i.e. three outcomes the number of output indicators is 70.

In addition, M-IWRMP is assigned 5 milestones or additional deliverables from the MRC Strategic Plan 2011-2015 and the Basin Development Strategy Plan 2011-2015 which require altogether 27 strategic actions and supporting evidence.

Moreover, the M-IWRMP is planned to be implemented through 7 other relevant MRCS implementing Programmes and MRC units ICCS and TCU. In the Inception Report there were also activities and a budget allocation to ICCS and TCU and the other MRCS implementing Programmes. This adds to the complexity of the structure of the M-IWRMP and sets exceptional requirements for implementation, coordination and management.

M-IWRMP is a Project consisting of projects with 3 components, 3 outcomes, 61 outputs, 222 activities, milestones, Tasks and 92 indicators. Not only is the amount of work and indicators overwhelming, the hierarchy of terminology is confusing. In the Inception Report 2010 activities, outputs and projects are mixed up as synonyms (e.g. page 21 and page 49) and on page 33 outputs are also called sub-projects. In the MRC Strategic Plan 2011 . 2015 an output is equal to a milestone (e.g. page 104). There is a need in the MRC to harmonize and rationalize the terminology.

Reports with the mixed up terminology together with the numerous indicators are difficult to read and to understand. A reporting system of a hundred indicators keeps everybody focused on activities and forgetting about the things that matter most, the goal and the purpose of the work, impacts and effectiveness. It prevents people from seeing the forest from the trees. To produce thick reports against all the 92 indicators is also a heavy duty and largely a waste of expert time.

*Recommendation #2.1.1: The number of indicators should be drastically reduced to ensure focus, clarity and prompt implementation.*

*Recommendation #2.1.2: Consideration should be given to using more traditional management terms such as Project Work Plans, Objectives, Tasks, Activities, Personnel, and Deliverables that more clearly and unambiguously define what is required to meet objectives.*

## **2.2 Institutional/ organisational setup and management**

At the MRC the organisation of M-IWRMP is a compact Project Coordination and Management Unit (PCMU) comprising of a few experts. The PCMU manages the implementation and budget of the regional component through 7 other MRC Programmes. It also manages the budget of the transboundary component and provides technical assistance to the transboundary and national components which are implemented by the Member Countries (MC).

On a day-to-day basis the management of the 5 transboundary projects is undertaken by teams made up of staff from the M-IWRMP, NMCs and the relevant line agencies. Technical and project management support is offered by the PCMU. Interaction between the PCMU and the MCs is facilitated by National M-IWRM Project Coordinators appointed from each of the NMCs. The project has also been supported by a number of expert consultancies providing inputs into specific aspects of the work.

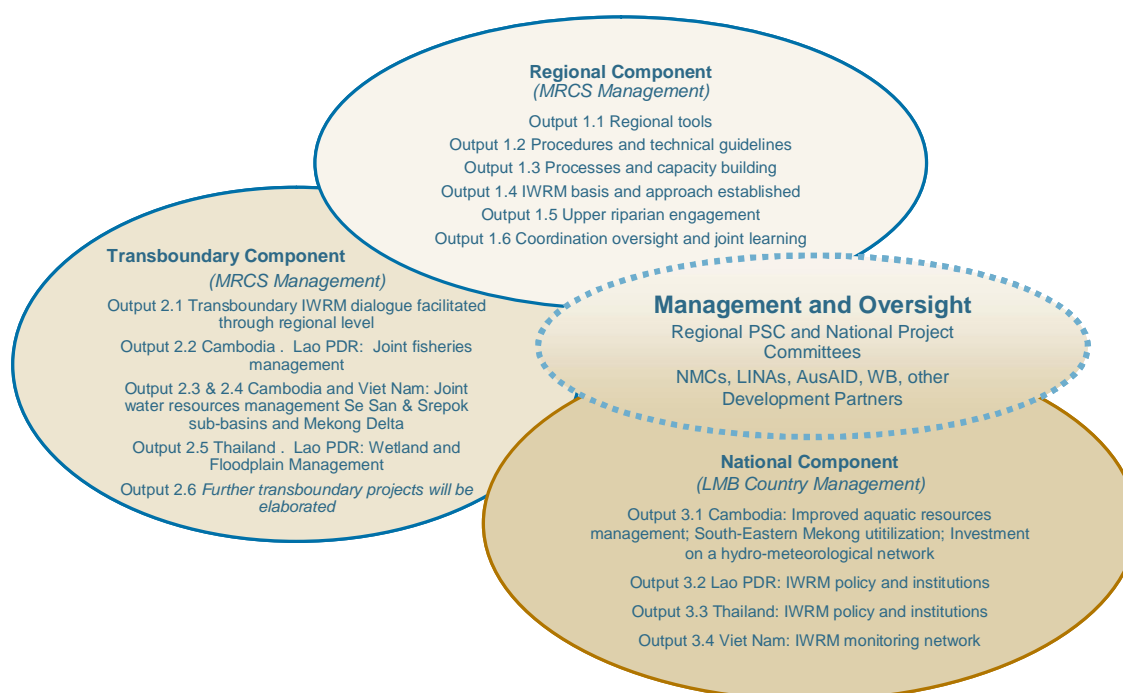
The three inter-links components and their respective activities are coordinated for coherence and effectiveness by a multi-tiered layer of management entities comprising of the Project Steering Committee (PSC) at the Project level, National Project Committees in each of the Member Countries and Coordination Management meetings.

The MRCS Coordination and Management meetings are to be held every three months in order to ensure an efficient information exchange on the national and transboundary activities and their status. A question needs to be raised whether a meeting is needed for the

exchange of information or would there be more simple means to that end with modern technology.

The Project Steering Committee covers all three components of the Project guiding, supporting and supervising the PCMU in implementation. A diagram of M-IWRMP components, outputs and management is presented in the Project Document as in the following Figure 2. The interlocking sets are illustrative but management is off to one side and as an organisational structure it is hard to understand how it works in practice, why the PCMU of M-IWRMP is not there in the diagram and where it should be located, why there are overlapping areas between the components and what they include, what the reporting lines are, how responsibility is shared, who makes decisions on what.

**Figure 2: M-IWRMP components and management**



Source: Inception report of M-IWRM, P.29, September 2010

In the large and complex matrix organisation above with lots of compartmental boundaries the PSC provides guidance to the Project to ensure consistence and linkage between the regional, transboundary and national components with the full involvement of all MCs, their implementing agencies as well as relevant MRCS Programmes. The PSC also provides guidance to ensure the Project's quality and the management of risks to the achievement of the Project's objectives, endorses the annual work plan and approves any revisions of the Project Implementation Plan. Thus the PSC plays an important role to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of M-IWRMP, if they work well and have the right participants. The PSC is to meet regularly, generally twice a year or at higher frequency when it is essential for project success.

The MTR team familiarised itself with minutes of three sequent PSC meetings, the 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> taken place in 2011, 2012 and 2013 in different countries. In these three meetings there have been altogether 77 participants. Out of them only six persons have taken part regularly in all three meetings, 19 persons have attended two meetings and 52 have attended only once. Figure 3 below illustrates the situation.

**Figure 3: Turnover of participants in M-IWRMP PSC Meetings 2011 - 2013**

Notes: These were the only minutes of meetings available to the MTR team

Source: Minutes of the M-IWRMP Project Steering Committee meetings 3-5.

The result above shows little evidence of any champion for the Project's success, little interest, commitment, continuity and possibility for institutional memory at the Project Steering Committee level, which otherwise could be of active support to the implementation of M-IWRMP. In this connection the budget of USD 1,440,000 allocated for establishing the PCMU and the PSC as well as the budget of USD 2,746,000<sup>3</sup> allocated for Effective Project Coordination, oversight and inter-linkage of components raise questions.

*Recommendation #2.2: Although the M-IWRMP cannot choose participants to meetings and conferences the PCMU, the MRC and the donors should deliver a recommendation to NMCs and MCs that the choice of attendees for meetings and conferences should ensure a high level of continuity of personnel responsible for projects. Attendees should be limited to those who will contribute most to achievement of the project objectives.*

## 2.3 Current state of implementation

The M-IWRMP was originally designed to take place in five years 2010 - 2014 with funding from both Australia and the World Bank, Australian fund for the regional component and the World Bank for the transboundary and national components as illustrated in Figure 2 above. The World Bank funding was, however, available only in the late 2012 due to the Bank's procedures for project formulation. As a consequence the implementation of the transboundary component started late, and the World Bank funding of USD 8 million has been respectively extended until the end of 2017.

According to the Annual Outcome Report Jan - December 2013 the M-IWRMP has cumulatively spent 63% of the Australian budget and 3% of the World Bank budget. Some of the Australian budget was spent on developing project proposals for the World Bank funding, transboundary component. As at the time of the report the Project was going to start the last

<sup>3</sup> Inception Report September 2010, Annex 2: M-IWRMP budget

year of the reporting period 2014, budget spending was clearly behind schedule and there seems to be funds remaining.

With fixed costs amounting to 40.30% and operational costs 59.70% the use of funds was found effective and efficient in the Financial Report 2010 . 2012. The Financial Report was prepared on request of the 5<sup>th</sup> PSC meeting on March 13, 2013, particularly on the use of funds per (cost) category as well as per Output, highlighting the use of the funds by Member Countries and the MRC Secretariat.

It was also stated in the Financial Report 2010-2012 that the analysis of expenditure per category is constrained by the way Solomon Codes have been set up for the Project. In order to have reports per output or activity a spreadsheet programme was written to reassign, as far as possible the spending on the project outputs. Spending on one Solomon Code may have to be assigned to more than one output. It was a conclusion in the Financial Report that the analysis of the spending per output and per category is consequently to some extent subjective.

Aus-AID has expressed a possibility to extend the funding agreement until the end of 2015. At present the total budget by Australia is USD 6.9 million which is recorded into the Solomon (MRCS financial system)<sup>4</sup>. The figure has changed during the years with the fluctuation of the exchange rate AUD-USD. The AusAID grant is AUD 7 million.

There are many reasons for the underspending of M-IWRMP, not only the delayed start-up of the five transboundary projects. There is outstanding clearance of consultancies such as on significant tributaries study, on Gender Mainstreaming and Poverty Reduction, the Performance Monitoring and Evaluation, among others. Resignation of staff and delayed recruitment also add to the reasons<sup>5</sup>. Staff constraints have been reported repeatedly.

Despite the challenge of staff turnover and coordination through 7 other MRCS implementing Programmes and national project organizations, progress has been made with most of the Outputs in the Regional Component at the end of the reporting period 2010-2013. Despite the requirements of 92 achievement indicators, the M-IWRMP has shown ability to innovate and managed to accomplish significant outputs during the years, even from outside the original logical framework and work plan. Some of them include:

- The contribution to the PNPCA process on the Xayaburi Hydropower project
- The establishment of a Joint Platform (JP) to support the implementation of the 5 MRC Procedures
- The completion of the Significant Tributaries Study
- The formulation of the 5 transboundary project proposals to the World Bank
- The securing of the World Bank support for 8 million US dollars
- The suite of IWRM tools are being continually updated, made available and world-widely assessable through a toolbox

It is too early to evaluate the implementation of the Transboundary Component. Following the funding decision in 2012 a World Bank Support Mission took place during Jan-Feb 2013. As a result one of the five transboundary projects has been classified as a Communication Outreach Project and all Transboundary and Communication Outreach Projects must develop a Joint Single Project Implementation Plan for three years period with one year detailed activities and budget planning.

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<sup>4</sup> Minutes of the 5<sup>th</sup> PSC meeting 13 March, 2013 Bangkok, Thailand

<sup>5</sup> PCMU document December 9, 2013

However, the work to formulate the 5 transboundary projects was done earlier with significant input from the M-IWRMP. The first two of the transboundary projects were approved by the PSC in their 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting on October 4, 2011 in Siem Reap, Cambodia:

- 1) Transboundary cooperation between Cambodia and Vietnam on Integrated Water Resources Management in the Sesan and Srepok Sub-basin, and
- 2) IWRM based transboundary Fisheries Management on the Mekong and Sekong Rivers in Cambodia and Lao PDR.

The three others were approved in the 4<sup>th</sup> PSC Meeting on May 25, 2012. These are:

- 3) Transboundary cooperation between Cambodia and Viet Nam on Integrated Water Resources Management in the Mekong Delta,
- 4) Transboundary cooperation for River Basin Management between Lao PDR and Thailand in Xe Bang Hieng Basin-Lao PDR and Nam Kam Basin-Thailand, and
- 5) Transboundary cooperation between Cambodia-Tonle Sap and Thailand-Songkhla on lakes management)

A lot of work has been done. However, it is not a practice at the MRC to budget estimated time required and record time used per activity, except for the World Bank funding. And as mentioned above it is also not a practice at the MRC to follow expenditure per activity either, even though there is a budget per activity in the Inception Report of September 2010. When a percentage of completion is reported it is a rough estimate and not based on any time used/time allocated or funds used/funds allocated.

Moreover, the report format is such that it is difficult to find basic information e.g. how much the budget balance is, what the start dates of the Australian fund and the World Bank fund are, what year the start of and end of the Project is. It is not essential for management and stakeholders to know what is done, what is going on, what is not yet done and how much has been spent in the current year but how much the budget balance is and whether we are getting where we want to go. The numerous indicators do not provide proper guidance for work and reporting. Reporting on deviation from plans is a focused way for management to react when necessary.

Financial follow-up per cost type of the Solomon system does not give a basis for monitoring effectively the achievement of outputs and outcomes which is the basis for planning. Also the ninety two performance indicators do not serve the purpose of effective monitoring and evaluation as they do not give a sufficient focus and an easy tool for monitoring.

The Microsoft Dynamics SL Accounting Software (formerly Solomon) in use at the MRC is a modern accounting software that can be configured to generate appropriate reports per outcome and output to monitor and manage financial performance per activity. Cost follow-up and financial reporting should be both per cost type and per Programme outcome and output.

*Recommendation #2.3.1: Time spent by personnel on projects should be measured by timesheet and the expenditure of that time should be compared with budget and schedule, with variances reported to senior management.*

*Recommendation #2.3.2: Reportage of variances should be by exception so as to improve prompt remedial action.*

*Recommendation #2.3.3: Time spent on projects should be broken down and monitored by Project, Task and Discipline, following normal industry procedures.*

*Recommendation #2.3.4: Time spent should be linked to the project schedule so the rate of expenditure can be monitored and variances reported.*

*Recommendation #2.3.5: A normal industry standard software package should be used to monitor progress, with clearly defined milestones embedded in the schedule.*

*Recommendation #2.3.6: Variances from budget and schedule should be explained with actions listed to bring back the project to budget or schedule.*

*Recommendation #2.3.7: Revision of budgets should require approval at a high managerial level and should take place simultaneously at predetermined annual dates so that their overall impact can be assessed.*

*Recommendation #2.3.8: Meetings and conferences should be planned and budgeted on an annual basis.*

*Recommendation #2.3.9: Meeting and conference expense costs should be monitored and variances reported with explanations for under- or over-expenditure.*

*Recommendation #2.3.10: Direct costs such as accommodation, subsistence, travel, printing, shipping, etc., should be listed and budgeted. Variances should be reported with reasons and explanations for such.*

## **2.4 Achievement of Programme Outcomes**

The assistance to secure the World Bank funding for the transboundary component can be considered as contributing to the corresponding outcome 2: *Pro-poor transboundary initiatives jointly designed and implemented by the MRC Member Countries*. It can also be considered as contributing to the objective of the Project which is *to improve the enabling framework and capacity for IWRM in the LMB Countries and strengthen the role of MRC as the facilitator of significant water resources development, guided by the IWRM principles*. The delayed commencement of the transboundary component was mainly due to the procedures for project proposals of the World Bank.

The establishment of the Joint Platform (JP) is an indicator of an innovative shift over from a receiver of work on the development of the MRC Procedures and the respective Technical Guidelines, towards investigating how to further take the 5 MRC Procedures toward shared understanding and coherent implementation. This was neither in the Project Document, nor in the Inception Report, and it has taken more than two years to have the idea and the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the JP to be approved at the Joint Committee (JC) level.

However, it remains to be seen how effective the JP can be. The JP aims at looking for ways to improve the implementation of the 5 MRC Procedures which have been the task unaccomplished by 5 separate Technical Working Groups (TWG). How have the TWGs worked and how much has been the turnover of participants in the TWG meetings? Will the

JP members attend meetings more regularly than the PSC members? This is beyond the control and mandate of the M-IWRMP.

The JC already approved the establishment of the JP first in October 2012 with a draft TOR. The TOR have been revised and approved in late 2013 and the JP is expected to hold its first meeting any time in the near future: to finalise its own TOR, to define its relationship with the existing TWGs and to make its work plan. Only logistics seems to make it difficult to set the date for the meeting which is also often the case experienced by all MRC Programmes relating to various issues. One country can keep on hold the whole approval process.

For example, it was recorded that at the 35<sup>th</sup> JC Meeting in April 2012, three countries agreed on a regional workshop on the PNPCA process, but one country needed more time for internal discussion. The workshop dates could only be finalised after this. The topics to be discussed included lessons learnt so far from implementing the PNPCA, but this would not only focus on the proposed Xayaburi Hydropower Project<sup>6</sup>. The workshop has so far not been held.

There are still a lot to be done. In the Annual Outcome Report 2012 it was stated that *there are challenges to realising the overall Outcome. The Technical Guidelines for the Procedures for the Maintenance of Flows on the Mainstream and for the Procedures for Water Quality are still under discussion. All 5 MRC Procedures are being implemented to some extent.*

*Though, implementation of the MRC Procedures remains patchy and does not yet fully support the intentions of the 1995 Mekong Agreement. The tools and the Procedures have not been inculcated into routine water resources management within the Mekong River Basin at either regional or national levels. A common understanding of the intentions of the Procedures as well as the interpretation of some issues like the definition of the wet and dry seasons, and the definition of significant tributaries remain elusive. The initial implementation efforts . sometimes on a learning-by-doing basis . have also outlined that new approaches may be needed to make the Procedures more practical and to support the intentions of the 1995 Mekong Agreement.*

The PCMU has responded to these challenges by shifting the focus of the Project effort towards building an IWRM-based framework that links all the MRC Procedures, and by establishing the JP between the existing TWGs charged with the on-going development and implementation of the MRC Procedures. Since all the 5 MRC Procedures will be discussed at the JP, there are more issues on the table at the same time. As a consequence there might be more chances for trade-offs and agreement than discussing a single Procedure at a time in different TWGs as it has been so far. It is now very much up to the Member Countries for the M-IWRMP to achieve its Outcome.

The MTR team took notes:

*%The Guidelines overlaps with our national laws. Transboundary Environmental Impact Assessment (TbEIA) is an example of such overlapping issues. We are drafting pilot projects for TbEIA and waiting for the agreement on the location+.*

*%The PWQ Technical Guidelines have not been approved but agreed to. The chapter on emergency response is pending. It is a new thing in the region, there is no agreement on geographical scope, no other issues.+.*

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<sup>7</sup> 4<sup>th</sup> PSC Meeting 25 May 2012, Vientiane, Lao PDR



And for example, at the 4<sup>th</sup> PSC Meeting in, 2012, the MRC Secretariat was requested *to carefully consider some terminology in the Concept Note on integrating the Procedures, in particular the term %water allocation+should be avoided, since the 1995 Mekong Agreement did not intend to allocate water but is about benefit sharing.*

The JP would address the above matters further. A clarification by the M-IWRMP: the term %water allocation+is about reasonable and equitable allocation of ~~surplus water~~to different river reaches that could be explored, and this is to some extent inherent in the Procedures for Maintenance of Flows on the Mainstream.

However, there is less than one year time left in this reporting period to achieve Outcome 1, the only Outcome of the Regional Component. The sustainability of the Regional Component will depend largely on how consistently the five MRC Procedures are implemented. The use and usefulness of the %Toolbox+will also become questionable, if the five MRC Procedures are not implemented consistently.

### 3 CONTRIBUTION TO THE MRC STRATEGIC PLAN AND WIDER IMPACT

#### 3.1 Contribution to the MRC SP milestones, outcomes and goals

In general the 8 Programmes MTR agrees with the SP MTR that while the SP is a strategy document for the organisation, it is not currently used as a guide or as an implementation tool. Programmes are driven by their own outputs and outcomes described in their programme documents, which are only to a limited degree related to the SP. Furthermore, in the interviews programmes expressed the SP milestones process as an unnecessary additional burden in the reporting, the use of which they did not quite see.

The M-IWRMP is an exception to the above general finding since it has been fully integrated into the MRC's Strategic Plan 2011 - 2015. In the Annual Outcome Report 2011 this includes aligning of project outputs with the Strategic Plan milestones. Then in the same report the links between the M-IWRMP outcomes and 5 MRC Strategic Plan milestones are illustrated. The use of output, outcome and milestone again guides reporting and causes confusion.

From the MRC's performance management system, Programme milestone search (July 19, 2013) the M-IWRMP is assigned the lead role to achieve 5 milestones from the Strategic Plan and the Basin Development Strategic Plan. This requires 27 strategic actions to be undertaken with the support of other MRC Programmes. This adds up to the complexity of the performance management system.

In the following, the MTR assesses the achievement of the M-IWRMP 2010-2014 against the 5 SP milestones. The assessment provides an illustration of the likelihood that the milestone would be achieved within this reporting period, in spite of the fact that the monitoring tool has provided a specific date for the achievement of the milestone, which is shown in the tables below. The milestone date has been revised in several cases which is also shown.

SP Milestone	Due date	Linkage to M-IWRMP	Rating <sup>7</sup>
<b>MIWRM01:</b> Technical guidelines of the PMFM and PWQ on water flows and water quality monitoring prepared and approved for implementation	By 2013	Output 1.2 The Procedures and technical guidelines are finalized and implemented by line agencies and NMCs	

This SP milestone MIWRM01 is linked directly to Output 1.2 of the Regional Component of M-IWRMP. The M-IWRMP has worked hard on this Output & Milestone and showed an

#### <sup>7</sup> Rating system

No	Rating statement	Notes	Notional response needed	Rating
1	On track and likely to be achieved or mainly achieved by the end of Programme.	Satisfactory to highly satisfactory. Notionally, from about 80% to 100%	Continue.	1
2	Behind schedule and likely to be only partly achieved by the end of Programme.	Partly satisfactory. Notionally, from about 25% to 75%	Increase effort to rectify shortcomings.	2
3	Unlikely to be achieved to any significant or satisfactory degree.	Unsatisfactory to highly unsatisfactory. Notionally, below about 20%	Urgent corrective action needed.	3
4	Completed			
5	Unable to assess: no information, or the Output was cancelled for some reason.	N/A (meaning %not available+or %not appropriate+)	Make assessment and take appropriate action or n/a.	N/A

exemplary ability to innovate by introducing the idea of the JP as discussed earlier in Chapters 2.3 and 2.4. It is however beyond the mandate of the M-IWRMP and the MRC to finalise the Procedures and the Technical Guidelines and not possible to achieve this milestone during the remaining year 2014.

SP Milestone	Due date	Linkage to M-IWRMP	Rating
<b>MIWRM02:</b> Improved implementation of the MRC Procedures for enhanced coordination among the LMB countries on the operation of tributary dams	By 2011 but updated to 2013	Outputs 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 Concerning: i) Refine and develop regional water resources planning and management tools and knowledge base, including basin models, quality assurance mechanisms, building consensus among LMB countries on significance of tributaries, etc. ii) Finalize technical guidelines of some Procedures, and improve implementation of all the Procedures iii) Strengthen processes and build capacity for the implementation of all Procedures, Guidelines and tools	

The milestone MIWRM02 is partly being achieved. In regard of Output 1.1 the study of Significant Tributaries was completed in 2013 after discussions and debates on the definition of %significant+and %insignificant+among others, which is a remarkable achievement.

Relating to Output 1.3 the M-IWRMP has concentrated on building capacity of relevant staffs through the implementation of a Capacity Development Action Plan (CDAP). This has included a series of Sharing and Learning Dialogues (SLD) workshops in all the MCs and a Regional one. Participants in the workshops would sharing experience through which they would have opportunities to reach a common understanding about the role MRC Procedures in transboundary IWRM and cooperation.

However, as the whole milestone is also linked to Output 1.2 above it will not be achieved in the remaining period of 2014.

SP Milestone	Due date	Linkage to M-IWRMP	Rating
<b>MIWRM03:</b> Strengthened implementation of MRC Procedures	Continuously	Output 1.3, 1.2 Processes and capacity for the implementation of Procedures/Guidelines and tools	

Strengthening implementation of MRC procedures is to be undertaken on a continuous basis. As also linked to Output 1.2 this milestone can only be partly achieved.

SP Milestone	Due date	Linkage to M-IWRMP	Rating
<b>MIWRM04:</b> A targeted IWRM capacity building programme linked to the MRC's overall initiatives and complementary to national capacity building activities developed and implemented	Continuously <sup>8</sup>	Output 1.3 Closely linked to MIWRM03, concerning: i) Build capacity to implement the MRC procedures, technical guidelines and MRC toolbox; ii) Prepare annual progress reporting mechanism to strengthen IWRM basis; iii) Establish mechanism to translate lessons learnt in the report on implementing procedures and technical guidelines; and iv) Notify JC on issues material to implementation of the procedures and technical guidelines	

Relating to the milestone MIWRM04 it is not clear what the MRC's overall initiatives mean. Also there is discrepant information about the status of this milestone. On one hand in the Sixth-Monthly Output Report Jan. Jun 2013 dated 21 October, 2013 it was stated that it was not ready to report about yet. On the other hand the activities i)-iv) relating to Output 1.3. above had been reported earlier in the Quarterly Report Jan-Mar 2013 to be completed in the range of 40% - 85%.

SP Milestone	Due date	Linkage to M-IWRMP	Rating
<b>MIWRM05:</b> Capacity Needs Assessments for the implementation of the MRC Procedures in Member Countries designed and undertaken	By 2011	Part of Output 1.3 Build capacity to implement the MRC procedures, technical guidelines and MRC toolbox	

This milestone has been fully achieved as Capacity Needs Assessments have been undertaken and National Capacity Development Action Plans completed.

The status of the SP Milestones 2011-2015 is described in more details in the M-IWRMP Annual Outcome Report 2013.

### 3.2 Decentralization, Integration and Riparianisation

Decentralisation of tasks of the MRC to the Member Countries is considered as part of a sustainability plan. The countries will incorporate the tasks into their national plans. Development Partners can then provide bilateral projects directly to the countries. However, it is well known that all the four countries are not at the same level of technical and financial capability to undertake tasks from the MRC.

As it is a part of basin planning function M-IWRMP has to align with the 7 river basin core functions. Also, implementation of the MRC Procedures is one of the core functions. However, there is a need to focus on preparing detailed plans on moving M-IWRMP to the core functions model.

<sup>8</sup> According to the file Alignment Prog-SP Milestones 27.1.2014. In the Sixth-Monthly Output Report Jan-Jun 2013 the deadline was by 2013

Capacity building in the regional component as well as implementation of the transboundary projects are all relevant activities which M-IWRMP contributes to the decentralisation process. And implementation of the 5 MRC Procedures at national level is also in the decentralisation plan (1st or 2nd batch of the plan).

Initially in the Road Map activities of the M-IWRMP can be seen fit into the following core functions:

- CRBMF 2 Analysis, Modelling and Assessment: 2.1.4 Development and Maintenance of MRC %Toolbox+
- CRBMF 5 Implementing MRC Procedures: 5.1.1 Establish and strengthen the platform for coordinated implementation of MRC Procedures and 5.1.2 Regional reporting on implementation of all MRC Procedures
- CRBMF 7 Reporting and Dissemination 7.5.1 Report against results based monitoring of MRC programme activities

Guidelines will be provided to the Programmes to align to the core functions when the new structure of the MRC is known. Reorganising to core function is more a subject of structure, funding and management than of programme activities many of which will continue in the new set-up.

As preparation for riparianisation i.e. gradually replacing international staff with regional staff it was decided in the 4<sup>th</sup> PSC meeting in 2012, that a M-IWRMP Knowledge and Skills (K&S) transfer plan was to be initiated. As those of other MRC Programmes the plan includes an assessment of skills and knowledge in the NMCs around IWRM, training and coaching especially with national coordinators, reviews and assessments of the skills and updates of the plan repeatedly during 2012-2015 as necessary. The M-IWRMP has already submitted a need assessment for K&S to ICBP and HR. The K&S plan is currently under ICBP and HR responsibility.

### **3.3 Inter-Programme coordination**

As a practice in MRC the coordination for implementation and technical interface between M-IWRMP and other MRC programmes are built on internal agreements, quarterly coordination meetings hosted by the Technical Coordination Unit (TCU), in addition to cooperation on a day-to-day basis. Especially in the case of M-IWRMP inter-programme cooperation is a key approach.

Already in the Project Document and the Inception Report the budget of the M-IWRMP is broken down to Component, Output and activity levels with implementation responsibility assigned to AIP, BDP, EP, FP, FMMP, ICBP, IKMP, ISH, NAP. Half of the activities are assigned to co-responsibility of more than one Programme.

In total the budget allocation to the other Programmes was USD 4.6 million which equalled to 52% of the budget for the Regional Component in the Inception Report. The work to be commissioned to the other Programmes included development of regional water resources planning and management tools, finalisation and implementation of the water utilisation procedures and technical guidelines, capacity building for IWRM implementation, among others.

A Project result-based performance M&E system has been developed by M-IWRMP as an activity planned under Output 1.6 Effective Project coordination, oversight and inter-linkage

of components. This M&E system is in use with all relevant MRCS implementing Programmes and LMB countries regular data input about their progress. Periodically the relevant MRCS implementing Programmes update their Activities Progress into the M-IWRMP Spreadsheet Database System for M&E, and reporting. Then M-IWRMP produces its global reports (such as QAR, SOR, and AOR) accordingly.

IWRM is a crosscutting issue and thus M-IWRMP needs to work with all other programmes which makes the work complicated and sometimes bureaucratic and has developed a monitoring system of its own. Plans should be made to safeguard the crosscutting approach in the core functions system, however, in some much more simplified model.

The MTR found little information about lessons learned from inter-programme cooperation, how it has been experienced, what the actual contribution of each Programme is, how inter-programme cooperation works, what sort of shared knowledge there is, what sort of synergy has possibly been achieved and can be developed.

At the 5<sup>th</sup> Project Steering Committee Meeting 13 March 2013, it was reported that a Terms of Reference for improving coordination within the Secretariat had been prepared and agreed by all involved Programmes, and that efforts to better coordinate were being stepped up. This indicates that needs for improvement has been identified and work is being undertaken to improve inter-programme coordination.

The MTR team took note:

*We have a programme officer working full time on the PWQ. When we have organized a workshop or meeting to discuss PWQ we send a bill to M-IWRMP. We don't attend M-IWRMP PSC meetings.+*

The MTR took note that the M-IWRMP is also considered as a tool for the MRC to implement the Strategic Plan by and through its Programmes. M-IWRMP is also about staff management skills. The M-IWRMP evaluates the level of understanding of other Programmes staff and their actual application of IWRM in the countries, once a year with questionnaires.

### **3.4 Relevance and likely impact and sustainability**

As planning with the principle of taking into account all other related sectors, not only water and technology in isolation, IWRM is highly relevant for impact and sustainability. It is not something self-evident and a standard of good practice everywhere yet and definitely not in the Member Countries. There is substantial need for a systematic change of planning in isolation to one that integrates other sectors as well as the whole watershed and river basin.

*In Vietnam the MTR team took note that the M-IWRMP has supported the revision of the water law (2012). For the first time in history, all sector experts have been brought together to negotiate about water management issues. This is the most complicated program in the MRC and it usually has only a coordinating role between the other programs... It is difficult to operate in four countries, all having different political systems and therefore dialog is very complicated....The program can be a good forum for data exchange.+*

The MTR team also took note in Vietnam that *transboundary problems are among the most important issues of the Project. These include: 1) Identification of the most important*

*problems and surveys; 2) Capacity building efforts to solve the problems and develop databases; and 3) Compilation of joint management plans (World Bank component)+*

The promotion of IWRM has thus been of high relevance and the M-IWRMP has made some impact introducing IWRM, developing tools and providing capacity building. However, given the staff constraints as a common problem in the MRC, the elusive management by PSC, a long time so far required for something fundamental like the five MRC Procedures to work in practice, the weak evidence of continuity and institutional memory, there is only a weak foundation to support results of the M-IWRMP beyond this reporting period.

Moreover, there is less than one year time left in this reporting period to achieve Outcome 1, the only Outcome of the Regional Component. The sustainability of the Regional Component will depend largely on how consistently the five MRC Procedures are implemented. The use and usefulness of the %Toolbox+ will also become questionable, if the five MRC Procedures are not implemented consistently.

## 4 THE REMAINING PROGRAMME PERIOD

The reporting period is coming to an end in 2014 with the reality that all the three risks relating to the implementation of the Regional Component identified in the Inception Report have become true: 1) LMB Countries are not fully committed to the 1995 Mekong Agreement and its implementation 2) MRC is not empowered to finalise the pending procedures and technical guidelines 3) the three Project Components become disconnected due to delays in preparation of national and transboundary components. It is necessary to consider this reality in the remaining period and the coming years, whether it is still relevant and feasible to continue attempts to achieve the same objective in the same way.

In 2014 it is paramount to concentrate on the start-up of the JP and the establishment of its function. This relates to the Output 1.2: Water utilisation procedures and technical guidelines are finalised and implemented on all LMB levels. It would be the most tangible result that would also enable achievement of the other outputs on a lasting basis, and yet, time is running out for achieving tangible results from the JP during the present reporting period even if it will be convened,

As for the period beyond 2014 it would be valuable to assess, how the national project organisations and the other MRC Programmes have experienced and benefited from the linkage of three inter-links components, the implementation of the M-IWRMP through other relevant MRCS implementing Programmes and what kind of technical assistance the national project organisations will continue to require beyond 2014. The assessment would be a basis for project planning and decision making as the Transboundary and National Components will be implemented beyond 2014 with the funding by the World Bank and management by the national project organisations.

Linking regional, transboundary and national components and project implementation through 7 other relevant MRCS implementing Programmes and units is a challenging task to manage. So far there is inadequate evidence to justify the linkage. The linkage was justified in the Inception Report as:

*%o promote a consistent and coordinated approach to implementing IWRM in the Lower Mekong Basin that links policy, institutional and capacity development directly to the support of sustainable infrastructure investments, ensures coherence between national and basin level actions; and promotes concrete / active transboundary cooperation activities+and*

*%o offer opportunities for institutional learning across all three levels and incorporates lessons to ensure sustainability+and*

Besides, the consistent implementation of the 5 MRC Procedures is also not yet there, which could help realise the justifications of the linkage.

An assessment of the linkage as above would help justify whether to continue with the same structure and institutional setup of the M-IWRMP as it is also necessary to take into account the MRC's plan for merging into core functions. End of reporting period would be an appropriate connection to start the process even a decision on the timing of the merge has not yet been made.

After all that have been assigned to be implemented by other Programmes and units what have been undertaken by the PCMU of M-IWRMP is of project management and report writing which can be continued within the TCU. The PCMU of M-IWRMP would fit first to the TCU and later to the core functions. Belonging to the TCU the present staff of the M-IWRMP



would continue to coordinate the work of the other Programmes as it has been now doing with the TCU hosted quarterly coordination meeting in place. The work assigned to the other Programmes and units (TCU and ICCS) would be included in their work plan and periodic reports.

*Recommendation #4.1 It is recommended that during 2014 efforts are concentrated on the start-up of the JP and the establishment of its function. This relates to the Output 1.2.*

*Recommendation #4.2 It is recommended that an assessment is carried out in 2014 of the experience, commitment and needs of the national project organisations as well as the experience and needs of the other MRC Programmes in the present institutional setup of the M-IWRMP in order to learn and to decide on the structure and the implementation of the M-IWRMP beyond 2014.*

*Recommendation #4.3 It is recommended that after 2014 the PCMU of M-IWRMP would be merged to the TCU to continue provision of technical assistance to the Transboundary and National Components as so far, taking into account the result of the assessment above in #4.2. Later the staff would be transferred to the core functions. The work assigned to other Programmes and units would be included in their work plan and periodic reports.*

## 5 COMMON ISSUES TO PROGRAMMES

This is the first time that there has been a MTR covering the majority of Programmes. This has brought up issues which are not programme specific, which are common to several or all programmes and which otherwise are important from the point of view of the programmes.

The following considerations are based on foreseeable or very likely developments, such as:

- The transition from programme based operations to core river basin functions
- Decentralization of activities that are not necessary to undertake at the regional level
- Changes in the planning process of MRC
- Reduced donor funding starting from 2016
- Possible cessation of donor funding for programmes after 2015, and consideration of basket funding based on core functions
- Pressure to reach self-financing of MRC by MCs already in 2020.

The present 12 Programmes are funded by the development partners. There are no financial contributions from the member countries to the Programmes. Some of the programme budgets indicate a figure for national or member country contributions but that is understood to be a contribution in kind. Details of those contributions have not been presented and the use is not accounted for.

The total funding for the programmes for the period 2011-2015 is USD 100.9 million. By the mid-term point at the end of June 2013, 40% of the funds have been spent. Over the years 1995-2015 the donor financing of the programmes amounts to USD 323 million.

In general the original programme budgets have been revised down in 2012 and 2013 because of slow implementation during the first two years. In order to plan for full utilisation of the original planned expenditure, the budgets for 2014 and 2015 have been revised sharply up. One programme has prepared a long list of new activities for the remaining period but many of those activities seem artificial and cannot easily be related to reaching the objective of the programme.

The SP MTR concluded that *it is doubtful that all programmes can complete implementation and spend all their funds by the end of 2015. If, as it is currently planned, programme funding in the next SP period is replaced by core funding on a basket basis, then there will be unspent funds available from the present SP period that may be available for core funding, if the donors agree to such an arrangement.* After a closer review of the programmes the Programmes MTR agrees with this conclusion, unless funds are spent very carelessly.

In this situation the MTR was unable to make any recommendation on shifting funds from an *overfunded* programme to an *underfunded* programme. There was no obvious *underfunded* programme at the time of the review.

### *Recommendation #5.1:*

*There is no obvious reason why programmes, after the delays so far, should try to spend all the funds available by the end of this programme period. It is recommended that funds that are not spent after normal reasonable programme implementation should be saved so as to safeguard funding for the transition period from programme based to core function based funding of the operations.*

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According to the SP MTR *“DPs are considering significant reductions in funding in the 2016-2020 period with some existing donors phasing out funding to MRC from 2020.”* This was confirmed by the interviews that the Programmes MTR had with donors. Not only would there be a reduction in funding but donors would not be willing to continue funding on a programme basis after 2015, not even on a no-cost basis where unspent funds could, as usual, be used for an extension. Furthermore, there was a growing sentiment that the target of self-financing of MRC by the MCs should be advanced to 2020. There seems to be preparedness to consider basket funding on a core function basis.

This would mean quick and radical changes which should be taken into account already in the remaining programme period. Moving from programmes to core functions will also significantly affect the financial situation of the MRC as programmes have contributed an 11% overhead payment for administration and management. The more savings that could be accrued during the remaining programme period, without hampering the results of the programmes, the more funds there would be available for buffering the transition period into a core functions model.

Moving into the core functions model in MRC's operations also entails decentralization of activities that need not be carried out on a regional basis.

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With these considerations in mind the MTR made a rough assessment of the programmes in order to see where possible savings could be made. It was revealed that in most programmes the largest budget item was for meetings and workshops. Funds have been earmarked for covering the costs of a very large amount of national and regional meetings and workshops. This is an area where considerable savings could be made without hampering the objectives of the programmes.

First of all, there is a need to scrutinise carefully the need of all the meetings. The interviews revealed that it seems that many meetings are not fully justified from the point of view of programme implementation. Also, with modern technology there should be much less need for physically gathering to a meeting. NMCs should have the necessary equipment for holding video conferences.

Furthermore, in the course of decentralization national coordination meetings are certainly items that can and should already have been decentralised and covered from national budgets of the MCs.

In addition, MRC should as soon as possible change the rules and bring the rate of per diems down from the UN level closer to the level of national rates in the region. This already would bring down the costs and accrue savings. Also the interviews revealed that it is widely believed that the attractive per diem rates of MRC compared to the national rates and local salaries may be an incentive for arranging meetings that are not always fully justified. Changing the rules would end these rumours.

And finally, MRC should move to the widely accepted practice in international organisations that participating countries cover the travel costs of their participants to meetings and workshops. The organisation covers other meeting costs. Regional meetings should always be held in MRC premises in Vientiane or Phnom Penh. This would make it much easier for Lao PDR and Cambodia to cover the travel costs of their participants. In addition, there would be considerable savings in the costs of participation from MRCS. The international practice should be adopted that whenever meetings are held outside the premises of the organisation the host country covers the meeting costs.

*Recommendation #5.2:*

*It is recommended that:*

- *MRC should revise the rules covering per diems for meetings and workshops as soon as possible*
- *Already during the remaining programme period, MCs should cover the costs for national coordination meetings*
- *MRC should move to the practice that MCs cover the travel costs of their participants to regional meetings and workshops*
- *Regional meetings and workshops should be held as a rule at MRC premises in Vientiane or Phnom Penh*
- *NMCs should be provided with the equipment for video conferences.*

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Another large item in the programme budgets is capacity building. The MTR is of the view that there could be considerable savings in this area as well. There could be cost savings in the benefits to the participants if the rules would follow what is proposed with meeting costs. While the MTR is not disputing the notion that particularly the poorer countries may need capacity building there are certain questions to be raised about it.

First of all, is it the role of a regional organisation like MRC to provide capacity building to national institutions and agencies in the member countries? Capacity building at MRCS and NMCs is not questioned. There are differing views on the question but the question alone should be a reason for seeing capacity building as one of the first items to be decentralized. The MCs would have to cover the costs in any case after self-financing and capacity building on a national basis would most probably cost-wise be more efficient.

Second, the MTR did not find hard evidence on the outcomes of capacity building activities although admittedly it did not have a chance to assess all the activities undertaken. The improvement of the capacity has generally not been assessed or measured. It seems that capacity building activities may also not have been planned in the most effective way. Only in a few cases has a capacity building needs assessment been carried out but at a late stage so that only few activities have been based on the results of the needs assessment. The MTR did not find broad evidence that capacity building efforts would have changed the working patterns of people in the LAs although there are also cases in some Programmes where the programme did list areas of improvement in reporting, quality of project proposals from the LAs etc. Thus there are questions about the outcomes of capacity building and a need to focus those activities more clearly.

The interviews revealed that there are also some questionable practices in carrying out capacity building activities. There have been occasions where only one or two of the participants to a training course have ever before had experience in the subject matter of the training, and perhaps only one or two, if any of the participants continue in the said field when back in the country. This is a waste of funds. Another programme complained that generally speaking the basic level of the participants to the training course was so low that they could not benefit anything from the course, with a few exceptions.

The programmes do not have a chance to screen the participants beforehand. Participants are chosen by the NMCs but the selection process is not transparent. The MRC Programming Manual is however clear on capacity building activities: *The programme*

*manager/officer should ensure that only suitable candidates are selected for training measures, in consultation with the NMC and the line agencies.+*

*Recommendation #5.3:*

*It is recommended that:*

- *MRC should revise the rules covering per diems for training events as soon as possible*
- *Capacity building should not be carried out unless a needs assessment has been completed and there are detailed plans for how capacity building will be carried out and the results monitored*
- *Plans should be made as soon as possible for decentralizing capacity building at national institutions and LAs*

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A third area where one could seek for savings in the programmes is consultancies, which also represent a large chunk of the programme budgets. Consultants are, however, most often hired for a substantive input in the programmes and therefore cuts in consultancy services would have a direct impact on the substance of the programmes.

Savings could be sought by replacing international consultants by regional ones but according to interviews there have occasionally been difficulties in finding qualified regional consultants. Also the fees of the most qualified regional experts are close to the international level.

Considerable savings could be obtained if the tasks now undertaken by outside consultants would be performed by MRCS or NMCS staff members. The profile and qualifications of staff members are, however, at present generally not such that they could undertake the assignments of the consultants. Their tasks are largely related to programme management and administration rather than specific substantive topics.

Also the personnel policies of MRC are not conducive to building up the required expertise within the secretariat. Recruitment of staff members from the region is not done on an open basis. NMCs have a central role in proposing staff members to be recruited and the selection process in the countries is not transparent.

Furthermore, the 1995 Agreement sets a limit to the service period of riparian staff and contracts are made only on a 3-year basis. In addition, there is an annual not so transparent performance assessment of all staff members. These features of the personnel policy do not provide the type of job security that would attract best qualified people to seek employment at MRCS.

*Recommendation #5.4:*

*The MRC staffing policies should be amended so as to build a strong cadre of staff.*

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Generally speaking the overall progress of the programmes has been clearly less than planned. There are several reasons for the slow progress. In some programmes there was a spill-over of activities from the previous phase to the early period of the present phase which delayed the start of the present phase implementation. Other programmes experienced shortage of funds in the beginning of this period. Progress in others was blocked for other reasons.

However, one common feature in the programmes is slow management processes which also the SP MTR noted. The SP MTR noted that ~~the~~ *the requirement of unanimity in decision*

*makingō and the comprehensive role of the NMCs in consultation, approval and clearance of multiple aspects of MRC work.*+The Programmes MTR studied this issue further.

After wide national and regional consultations MRC approved the Programming Manual which describes an efficient and effective programme management process. The starting point for MRC interventions should be the needs and priorities of the riparian Governments. The linkage to national concerns is crucial, according to the Manual.

Therefore, and in order to safeguard that the needs and aspirations of the MCs are duly taken into account, the identification, preparation and formulation of programmes must be carried out in a consultative and interactive manner which involves all the NMCs and through them the relevant LAs in national and regional consultations on several occasions in the process.

The Programming Manual foresees several levels and steps of consultations but at the same time warns programme preparation teams of *%workshop anticipation+(stakeholders expect to participate in a workshop); %workshop tourism+(inappropriate participants in terms of level of responsibility, technical expertise, English language skills, etc.); and %workshop fatigue+(key people are obliged to attend too many workshops).*

The result of the preparation phase is a Proposal which is presented for approval. The Manual notes that according to *%Article 18 of the 1995 Agreement, every new programme or intervention to be undertaken by MRC has to be endorsed by the MRC Joint Committee and approved by the MRC Council*+. The Council approval represents the formal agreement by the MRC governing bodies that the CEO may seek funding and technical assistance for the Programme. Once, the Programme is approved, the detailed arrangements like developing a detailed project documents and grant agreements are the responsibility of the MRC Secretariat.

After a Programme is approved at the council level, programme management is clear. *%MRCS is the Executing Agency of all MRC Programmes and is responsible for the planning and overall management of programme and project activities, reporting, accounting, monitoring and evaluation of the programme or project*+. Once a programme/component/project has been approved and funding arrangement are in place, the execution of the programme/project is under the direct responsibility of the designated Programme Manager/Officer.

The Programming Manual spells out the role of NMCs and LAs in the implementation of programmes. The Manual does not see that NMCs would have any consultation role in the implementation of programmes, obviously because the programme has been approved at the highest level and implementation has been delegated to MRCS. Why should NMCs then demand a consultative role in details of the implementation process, as they have done, which is a heavily delaying factor?

The Programming Manual does not speak of a programme Steering Committee but as most programmes have established on the role of finding a compromise in a programme implementation matter should be with the Steering Committee which represents both MCs and DPs, rather than reverting to lengthy and expensive national and regional consultation processes.

Another delaying factor in programme implementation is the difficulty to arrange meetings in practice. This may be related to the large number of MRC programmes and related large amount of meetings (too many meetings at the same time).

*Recommendation #5.5:*

*MRC should arrange meetings to the extent possible through video conferences and arrange meeting only on the most important issues. This should make it easier to arrange the meetings.*

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The Programming Manual introduced the logical framework approach as the official planning procedure in MRC. All programmes and their components must be designed using this format. The Manual explains the logical thinking process one has to go through in designing a programme. Work plan is a separate planning and management tool from a logframe. According to some interviews the logframe approach was introduced at the insistence of DPs. The logframe is also the basis for monitoring progress in the programmes.

The logframe approach was developed for better preparation and monitoring of development projects and programmes. However, a very mechanical application of the logframe tends to direct the attention of programme managers more to the level of activities and outputs rather than the more important level of outcomes and impact. This is apparent from the difficulties the programmes in general have in reporting on the outcomes of the programmes.

The logframe was developed for the project level but MRC has applied it also to the strategic level in SP 2011-2015. The result was that the strategic focus was blurred by the details of the logframe outcomes, outputs and indicators. This made it difficult to grasp the nature of the SP 2011-2015 document which was testified not only by the MTR team but also by many programme staff members according to the interviews.

The introduction of the logframe at the SP level also made the monitoring system very complicated and heavy. The SP matrix was developed on top of the programme matrixes and the result was that there were over 2000 indicators that programme officers had to follow and report on. When this was realized the number of indicators was cut down to ~~only~~ over 1000. Programme officers have complained about the heavy, cumbersome and time-consuming system.

There are plans for a simplified planning system of MRC. The basis for the planning would be the Status of the Basin report which should be developed into a high quality baseline report. The strategic choices would be presented in a development scenarios report which should present opportunities and risks. The scenarios report should be the basis of high level strategic decision making which would result in a Strategy document on basin development and management. The strategy would be implemented through an Action Plan which would include the necessary regional action and that of MRC as well as national actions as far as the basin and transboundary activities are concerned.

According to the interviews there are plans to introduce the logframe approach also to the Strategy document to be prepared. In view of the MTR this project level tool should not be applied to the strategy level. The scenarios and Strategy documents are high level documents to be considered at the ministerial level. At that level the focus of the document should be very clear and should not be blurred with details of outcomes, outputs and indicators. The logframe approach could be used in a not so heavy way on the action plan level. It should be noted that the logframe is not an organisational management tool once MRC moves into the core functions set-up.

In the progress reports the programmes describe the achievements made and estimate the progress in terms of an estimated percentage of implementation. The estimate is not based on clear factual steps but it gives an indication of what the programme ~~feels~~ feels. While this seems an acceptable way of estimating progress, in the absence of clearly measurable

steps, it would be also helpful if the programmes would also include an estimation of whether the result can be achieved within the planned programme period.

As regards monitoring through expenditure figures, the MRC accounting system cannot produce expenditures against planned outcomes and outputs. Expenditures are of course not linear during the implementation period but such expenditure information would give an additional indication of the progress made and possibilities of achieving results by the end of the budget period. Now MRC can only produce expenditure figures based on the budget lines of the Solomon accounting system. Some programmes maintain a manual record of expenditures against outcomes and outputs which in this time and age seems rather primitive.

There is a need to develop reporting on funds allocated from one programme and implemented by another one. Now it is difficult to trace the use of funds or assess the results achieved.

*Recommendation #5.6:*

*It is recommended that:*

- The planning and monitoring system based on the logframe approach should be simplified and the focus of reporting should be on outcomes, not activities and outputs which are not very useful for MRCS management or MCs and DPs. Activities and outputs can be monitored at the programme management level. Consideration should be given to developing short and concise deviation reporting for MRCS management*
- The logframe approach should not be applied at the strategic level and strategic documents should be kept focused and separate from action plans and implementation*
- MRC should develop the accounting system so that expenditure figures can regularly be obtained against outcomes and outputs.*

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As there is a strong likelihood that DPs will not continue financing of MRC on a programme basis after 2015 MRC and the programmes should give high priority to concluding the preparations on moving to the core functions set-up. The plans should be ready early enough for the DPs to assess whether they will be willing to continue their support on a basket funding basis and can have funds released already in the beginning of 2016.

The recruitment of a consultant to undertake an institutional study for the core functions set-up should be concluded as soon as possible because it is very possible that the new set-up will require also institutional changes.

The organisational units that will carry out the core functions should have their mandates and terms of reference as well as the longer term work plans and detailed annual work plan for 2016 with the corresponding budgets ready at an early stage. In the view of the MTR that should be a sufficient basis for the DPs to consider basket funding.

*Recommendation #5.7:*

*It is recommended that plans for transforming MRC into an organisation based on core basin management functions be given high priority so that the proposals could be presented early*



*enough to the DPs so they can decide on basket funding already from the beginning of 2016. Plans for decentralization would accompany the transformation plans.*

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The move towards core basin management functions is a step in the direction of MRC taking an RBO role. Comparable RBOs in Europe for instance do not undertake deep going assessments or research work. The RBOs use the information developed by universities and research institutions in the countries or internationally.

It is clear that sustainable management of the Mekong basin requires much more research and information than is presently available to MRC. However, the universities and research institutions in the region are not at present undertaking such research and developing the information and may not have the required funds to do so. It is likely that a self-financed MRC would not have the funds to undertake the work.

In order to address the issue, MRCS should in the new structures develop knowledge management services that would collect all the internationally available information on the river and the basin and keep that information available for MRC and the MCs and others.

In addition, consideration should be given to the establishment of a Trust Fund (TF) for research on the side of MRC. DPs could support the TF while their financing for the MRC core functions would diminish. The TF would be based on basket funding but those who have special budget funds for climate change or other particular issues could earmark their funds within the TF. MCs would of course also be welcome to contribute to the TF as would other donors such as the WB, ADB etc. The TF need not be overly large. All contributors would be on the decision making Board while the TF would be managed by MRCS.

MRCS as well as the regional countries (including China and Myanmar) could apply for funds for their own basin wide or transboundary research needs. Universities and research institutes could also apply for funds by submitting a research plan on subjects covering the basin or transboundary issues.

In approving proposals preference would be given to those where two or more regional universities or research institutions would be involved and further preference would be given if international universities or institutions would be partners in the research. This approach would over time develop the regional capacities and knowledge. The information would be available to all on an open platform. MRC would decide how it would wish to make use of the information.

*Recommendation #5.8:*

*It is recommended that consideration be given to establishing a Trust Fund for financing high level research and studies regarding basin wide or transboundary issues of the Mekong Basin<sup>9</sup>. MRC has the vision of becoming a world class International River Basin Organisation. Therefore it should base its decisions on world class information.*

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<sup>9</sup> The MTR learned that some years back there were discussions about establishing a Trust Fund at the Asian Institute of Technology, AIT, but the idea fell through. The MTR is not aware of the details. However, this proposal is not related to the previous ideas and this would be a Mekong specific TF. This TF need not be large in size.

## **MAIN DOCUMENTS REVIEWED**

Project Document November 2009  
Inception Report September 2010  
Annual Outcome Report 2011  
Annual Outcome Report 2012  
Financial Report 2010 . 2012 dated April 12, 2013  
Sixth-Monthly Output Report Jan-Jun 2010  
Sixth-Monthly Output Report Jan-Jun 2011  
Sixth-Monthly Output Report Jan-Jun 2012  
Sixth-Monthly Output Report July-December 2012  
Sixth-Monthly Output Report Jan-Jun 2013  
Minutes of Project Steering Committee Meetings 3-5

## **ANNEX 1: List of people met**

### **Mekong River Commission Secretariat (OSV)**

- Hans Guttman, Chief Executive Officer, MRC Secretariat.
- Sourasay Phomavong , Director, Technical Support Division, MRC Secretariat.
- Vitoon Viriyasakultorn, Technical Coordination Advisor, Technical Coordination Unit, MRC Secretariat.
- Santi Baran, Senior M&E Specialist, Technical Coordination Unit, MRC Secretariat.
- Nguyen Nhu Hue , Policy Coordination Officer, ICCS, MRC Secretariat.
- Chavalit Vidhauamon, Senior Aquatic Ecology Specialist, MRC Secretariat.
- Hans Guttman, Chief Executive Officer, MRC Secretariat.
- Henrik Larsen , International Technical Advisor, MRC Secretariat.
- Kongmeng Ly, Water Quality Programme Officer, MRC Secretariat.
- Nguyen Nhu Hue, Policy Coordination Officer, ICCS, MRC Secretariat.
- Nguyen Van Duyen, Coordinator (Environment Programme), MRC Secretariat.
- Phattareeya Suanrattanachai, Socio-economic Specialist, MRCS.
- Phetsamone Southalack , MRC Secretariat.
- Piriya Uraiwong , Project Coordinator (MIWRMP), MRC Secretariat.
- Piseth Chea, Information Management Programme Officer, MRC Secretariat.
- Praivan Limpanboon, Participatory Planning and Institutional Specialist, MRC Secretariat.
- Ros Hoy, Capacity Development and Monitoring Specialist, MRC Secretariat.
- Simon Krohn, International Technical Advisor, MRC Secretariat.
- Sophearin Chea, Programme Officer (MRC Procedures and Policies ICCS), MRC Secretariat.
- Thim Ly , Officer, MRC Secretariat.
- Ton Lennaerts , Chief Technical Adviser, BDP, MRC Secretariat.
- Vathana Prum, Senior P, M&E Specialist, MRC Secretariat.
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## ANNEX 2: Terms of Reference

### SECTION III

#### TERMS OF REFERENCE

##### Consultancy for Mid-term Review of the MRC Programmes

<b>Project Title:</b>	<i>Mid-term Review of the MRC Programmes</i>
<b>Programme:</b>	<i>Technical Coordination Unit</i>
<b>Type of service:</b>	<i>Special Service Contract</i>
<b>Hiring Unit:</b>	<i>Mekong River Commission Secretariat (MRCS)</i>
<b>Reports to:</b>	<i>Technical Coordination Advisor of the MRCS</i>
<b>Duration:</b>	<i>A maximum of 276 person days (5-6 persons), over 4 months from October 2013 to January 2014</i>
<b>Starting date:</b>	<i>1 October 2013</i>
<b>Duty station:</b>	<i>Home-based, and MRC Secretariat offices and capital cities of four Member Countries</i>

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#### 1. INTRODUCTION

In accordance with the decision of the MRC Council made in 2011 that approved the MRC Strategic Plan for 2011-2015, an independent mid-term review of the implementation of this Strategic Plan is to be undertaken in 2013.

In parallel with the mid-term review of the Strategic Plan 2011-2015, another mid-term review is planned for eight out of thirteen programmes of the MRC. Of which three programmes, i.e. Fisheries Programmes (FP), Integrated Knowledge Management Programme (IKMP), and Flood Mitigation and Management Programme (FMMP) are located at the Office of the Secretariat in Phnom Penh (OSP), other five programmes, i.e. Mekong Integrated Water Resources Management Project (M-IWRM), Climate Change and Adaptation Initiative (CCAI), Environment Programme (EP), Initiative for Sustainable Hydropower (ISH), and Basin Development Plan Programme (BDP) are located at the Office of the Secretariat in Vientiane.

To allow for an independent review, **two review teams composed of 2 or 3 consultants will be established to separately conduct a mid-term review of the 5 programmes at OSV and 3 programmes at OSP under this consultancy services.** Each review team will be led by an international consultant who will assume overall responsibility of the review and of the production of the review reports as stipulated hereinafter. The staff of the Technical Coordination Unit under the Office of the CEO will participate in the exercise and provide inputs for the reports as and when needed.

This document sets out the expectations for this mid-term review and terms of reference of the review consultants.



## 2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### 2.1 The Mekong River Commission

The Mekong River Commission (MRC) was established by the 1995 Agreement on Cooperation for Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin signed between the governments of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam. The MRC provides the institutional framework to implement the Agreement. In accordance with this Agreement, the Mission of the MRC is: *“To promote and coordinate sustainable management and development of water and related resources for the countries’ mutual benefit and the people’s well-being.”*

The MRC consists of three permanent bodies: The Council, the Joint Committee (JC) and the Secretariat (MRCS). The MRCS is the technical and administrative arm of the MRC. It provides technical and administrative services to the MRC’s Council and Joint Committee to achieve the MRC’s mission.

National Mekong Committees (NMCs) act as focal points for MRC in each of the Member Countries and are served by respective National Mekong Committee Secretariats. The MRC Secretariat and its programmes work with the national agencies in each Member Country through the coordination of the respective NMC Secretariat.

MRC maintains regular dialogue with the two upstream countries of the Mekong River Basin, China and Myanmar, as well as with its development partners.

### 2.2 The MRC Strategic Plan 2011-2015

The MRC Strategic Plan for the fiscal years of 2011 through 2015 is the consensus of the MRC’s Member Countries and also reflects the feedback received during 2009-2010 from the stakeholders and partner organisations on the key challenges and opportunities facing the Mekong River Basin as well as on collective actions that are needed to address the challenges and to capitalise on the opportunities. The process for the preparation of this Plan is detailed in the Strategic Plan document.

The MRC strategic goals for 2011-2015 are aligned with the organisation’s two main focus areas for this strategic planning period, namely:

- supporting for the implementation of the IWRM-based Basin Development Strategy to address the urgent needs and priorities for the integrated management of water and related resources of the Mekong River Basin; and
- transition towards the implementation of the MRC core functions and increased Member Country contributions to the delivery of these tasks.

The framework of this Strategic Plan 2011-2015 comprises a long-term goal supported by an overarching 5-year Goal, four Specific Goals and one Organisational Goal for achievement in the five-year period. The four Specific Goals are for basin management and development, while the Organisational Goal is related to efficient transition of the MRC as an organization towards its core functions and full riparianisation of the Secretariat.

**Long-term MRC Goal:** “Member Countries manage water and related resources of the Mekong River Basin in an effective, equitable and sustainable manner”

**5-year Goal** for 2011-2015: Member Countries implement basin-wide IWRM approaches in national water and related sector frameworks and development programmes for sustainable and equitable development

**Specific Goal #1:** Application of IWRM-based basin development and related sector strategies and guidance

**Specific Goal #2:** Operational systems for basin-wide monitoring, impact assessment, modelling, forecasting and knowledge management to support effective decision making

**Specific Goal #3:** Efficient dialogue and coordination processes between basin countries and other stakeholders for effective regional cooperation.

**Specific Goal #4:** Capacity developed for IWRM policy adoption and implementation within the framework of the MRC mandate.

**Organisational Goal #5:** Efficient organisational transition of the MRC for implementation of its core functions and full riparianisation of its Secretariat.

These goals are strongly aligned with the MRC's core functions.

This Strategic Plan 2011-2015 embodies a more results-oriented focus with each of the Strategic Goals accompanied by a set of outcomes, implementation targets and indicators for performance management and evaluation. Priority actions to achieve each Strategic Goal are also outlined. The Goals of this Strategic Plan 2011-2015 emphasise the continuation of the important role of the MRC in providing support to its Member Countries for the full implementation of IWRM and of MRC core functions, and, in particular, the river basin management (RBM) functions and related capacity building.

The MRC Strategic Plan 2011-2015 includes two implementation annexes that were approved by the Joint Committee in March 2011 subsequently after the Council's approval of the main body of the Plan in January 2011. These annexes define the main activities to be taken up and associated milestones to be achieved during the period (*Ref: Annex B to Implementation Matrix of the MRC Strategic Plan 2011-2015*), and also define key indicators (*Ref: Annex A to Performance Measurement of the MRC Strategic Plan 2011-2015*) to be taken up into the M&E system that has been being developed by the Technical Cooperation Unit (TCU) under the Office of the CEO (OCEO).

The existing thirteen programmes of the MRC cover key water and water-related sectors such as flood management and mitigation (FMMP), hydropower (ISH), agriculture and irrigation (AIP), watershed management (WMP), navigation (NAP) and fisheries (FP), as well as cross-cutting themes such as environment (EP), information and knowledge management (IKMP), Mekong integrated water resources management (M-IWRMP), climate change adaptation (CCAI), and integrated capacity building (ICBP). Within this structure the basin planning function through the Basin Development Plan Programme (BDP) uses acquired knowledge and services of other programmes to build a basin-wide perspective of sustainable development and management options. Activities under programme on drought management (DMP) are currently limited.

**The Strategic Plan is implemented collectively through these thirteen programmes and the corporate services units/sections of the MRC Secretariat in close collaboration with Member Country agencies. For most Programmes, a Programme Document, Programme Implementation Plan or Inception Report for the whole 5-year period as well as annual Work Plans have been prepared. Generally, the Programme Documents are, to some extent, aligned with the Strategic Plan 2011-2015 at the goal level.**

### **2.3 The IWRM-based Basin Development Strategy**

The IWRM-based Basin Development Strategy (BDS), which was prepared in parallel to the MRC Strategic Plan 2011-2015, sets out the development opportunities within the Basin and the Strategic Priorities (and associated Actions to address these) that should guide basin development and management. It sets out a vision for guiding and developing the basin's water-related resources within the acceptable limits. A roadmap for the Strategy's implementation is set out in the Basin Action Plan, which is comprised of the Regional Action Plan and four National Indicative Plans, prepared during 2011-2013.

The alignment between the MRC Strategic Plan 2011-2015 and this Strategy is between about 122 of the 130 milestones set for the MRC Programmes in Annex B of the MRC Strategic Plan and the Strategic Actions within the BDS. Efforts have been made to align the existing and planned activities of the MRC programmes with the Strategic Priorities and Actions as established in the BDS.

## **3. OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAMME MTR REVIEW**

The objectives of the Programme MTR Review are to:

- 1) Review the present state of the implementation of the eight Programmes against the goals, outcomes, and milestones set forth in the respective Programme Documents 2011-2015;
- 2) Assess the contribution of each of the eight Programmes towards the achievement of the relevant outcomes and desired results as specified in the Strategic Plan 2011-2015 (MRC SP);
- 3) Assess how effectively the milestones of Annex B of the MRC SP that are allocated to each Programme are being addressed;
- 4) Assess how effectively the coordination mechanism/arrangement between programmes work in achieving their shared outputs/outcomes;
- 5) Make recommendations on how to improve the performance of the Programme implementation, in particular on prioritisation for the Programme's implementation during the remainder of the current planning cycle, taking into account emerging opportunities and challenges, as well as budgetary and other resource constraints at the MRC.

Among other things, the 2 Programme MTR teams will identify and document lessons learned with a particular focus on lessons that might improve the internal coordination across MRC Programmes regarding specific actions that should be undertaken to improve Programme implementation and coordination. The Programme performance will be measured against the indicators of the Programme's results framework as indicated in the Programme Documents and

subsequent documents such as the Programme Implementation Plan and M&E Framework. Focus for the review will be on the linkages between programme output and outcome indicators with the SP outcomes.

**Depending on the nature of each programme, some specific issues for the review may be required. The specific issues or requirements for each of the eight programmes are provided in the Annexes.**

The review must provide evidence based information that is credible, reliable and useful. The 2 Programme MTR teams are expected to follow a participatory and consultative approach ensuring close engagement with MRC Secretariat and the MRC Programmes, national counterparts in particular the NMCs and their Secretariats and selected key national line agencies as implementing entities in each Member Country, MRC's Development Partners, and other key stakeholders. The 2 Programme MTR teams are expected to conduct field missions to the two locations of the MRCS Office and to the four Member Countries. The 2 Programme MTR teams should make efforts to interview at a minimum 2-3 organisations and individual representatives for each of the stakeholder groups of the MRC as outlined above.

The 2 Programme MTR teams will review all relevant sources of information, such as Strategic Plan 2011-2015 and its implementation annexes, the IWRM-based Basin Development Strategy and the draft BDP Basin Action Plan, the MRC's annual reports, MRC Programme Documents and Programme Implementation Plans or Inception Reports, results-based M&E documents, independent programme reviews and evaluations, draft roadmap for MRC's core river basin management function decentralisation, riparianisation plans, knowledge and skills transfer plans, and any other materials that the MTR teams consider useful for this evidence based review. A list of relevant documents can be found in the last section of this TOR.

#### **4. SCOPE OF THE PROGRAMME MID-TERM REVIEW**

Review areas covered by the mid-term review shall include, but not necessarily be limited to, the following:

##### ***4.1 Concerning the present state of implementation of the eight programmes:***

- a) The overall outputs produced against what were planned based on programme documents, and progress towards outcomes achieved so far and the contribution to attaining the programme goals;
- b) The programme achievements from the perspectives of the four Member Countries, with particular focus on integration and up-take at policy and technical levels; and
- c) Pending issues faced during the course of the programme implementation and their reason(s).

##### ***4.2 Regarding the contribution of eight programmes towards the achievement of Strategic Plan 2011-2015:***

- a) Assess Programmes' achievements that contribute towards the Strategic Plan; and

- b) Review implementation as well as inter-programme coordination arrangements put in place vis-à-vis alignment of programmes to the Strategic Plan, and provide recommendations for improvement.

***4.3 Prioritisation of the remaining period of the eight programmes, based on the findings under 4.1 and 4.2:***

- a) Identify gaps in the MRC programmes' designs and workplans vis-à-vis the Strategic Plan's result areas;
- b) Recommend re-prioritisation of outputs of the eight MRC programmes including proposal for consolidation of programme portfolio towards the core river basin management functions;
- c) Review current programme funding, as well as earmarking towards programme outcomes, and assessment of realistic funding perspectives; and
- d) Make proposal for resource re-allocation, and identify additional priority funding requirements, if needed.

## **5. REVIEW METHODOLOGY**

The programme mid-term review will be conducted by two review teams, each team will comprise two or three independent consultants. Additional consultants may be needed to review specific technical issues on a short term basis if required. Both programme mid-term review teams are expected to communicate and share information with the SP MTR team to ensure consistency in the review approaches. Findings and recommendations should be based on sound evidence and analysis, and clearly documented in the Programme Final Reports. Analysis leading to evaluative judgements will be clearly elaborated. The limitations of the methodological framework should also be presented in the Final Report.

The 8 Programme Final Reports will cover assessment of the programme implementation with respect to the indicators and targets set in the programme logframes. The review will also provide an analysis of the programmes performance in the categories listed above, and provide recommendations for improving performance.

The Review will capture and integrate the perspectives of the four MRC Member Countries, the Development Partners, the MRC Secretariat and some key other stakeholder groups regarding the implementation of the programmes. A step-wise, participatory and consultative process will be adopted.

A separate process of reviewing the MRC Strategic Plan 2011-2015 will be initiated in parallel with this MTR of the 8 programmes. The SP MTR process is also coordinated by the TCU. The SP MTR will assess whether SP outcomes as stated in the Strategic Plan 2011-2015 are achieved, covering all aspects related to the SP implementation, management, and finance. The SP Mid Term Review will provide recommendations for necessary changes or adjustments in SP implementation and management to better achieve SP outcomes. The results from the SP MTR will determine how the organization as a whole achieves the Strategic Plan outcomes and goals. It is planned that members of the SP MTR will also take part in the Programme MTR as needed to ensure consistency in the review approach and framework.

## 6. REVIEW PROVISIONAL TIMELINE AND DELIVERABLES

Activity / deliverable	Timeframe
Review of 8 programme documents and relevant documents and preparation of Inception Report by MTR team	First two weeks of October 2013
Approval of Inception Report	Mid October 2013
Mission to the MRCS offices and Member Countries by the MTR team	October-November 2013
Interim Report produced	Mid November 2013
Draft Final Report produced	Mid December 2013
Comment period on Draft Final Report	Mid December 2013 to mid January 2014
Final Report produced	End of January 2014
Presentation of Final Report to Member Countries by MRCS	January 2014

### **Inception Report**

The Inception Report should outline the MTR team's interpretation of the terms of reference and describe the timing and methodology the team intends to apply. The Inception Report will define the scope, design and associated technical instruments as well as a specific implementation plan. The Inception Report will include an evaluation matrix outlining all of the channels of enquiry the team intends to pursue. The purpose of the Inception Report is to demonstrate the MTR team's interpretation of the terms of reference, and to come to an agreement with the MRCS (through the Technical Coordination Unit) on how the review will be conducted, how the contribution to the achievement of outcomes will be ascertained, and what the final product will look like.

### **Interim Reports for Individual Programmes**

After the field missions, the MTR teams will produce interim reports for the 8 programmes under review outlining its preliminary findings. This will form the basis of a MRCS senior staff briefing of the preliminary findings of the review.

### **Final Reports for 8 Individual Programmes**

The Final Reports will address each of the review areas outlined in Section 4: Scope of the Mid-term Review. Supporting data and analysis will be annexed to the report when considered important to complement the main report. Recommendations will be addressed to the different stakeholders and prioritized: they will be evidence-based, relevant, focused, clearly formulated and actionable.

The specific tasks for the Programme MTR Team with the associated timeframe and number of days are set out in the table below:

Tasks for the Programme MTR Teams	Timeframe	Number of Days (estimated) For 2 teams	Total No. of Day\s (estimated)
Desk review of relevant documents	October	3 days x 6 persons	18
Meet and prepare workplan (inception report) with MRCS (MRCS Senior Management Team, TCU, the SP	October	7 days x 6 persons	42

MTR Team, and 8 programmes under MTR)			
Meet and interview 8 MRC Programmes/Sections	Oct. ó Nov.	5 days x 6 persons	30
Meet and interview MRC Member Countries and key stakeholder groups	Oct. ó Nov.	10 days x 6 persons	60
Prepare interim mid-term review reports (8 programme reports)	November	5 days x 6 persons	30
Prepare and incorporate comments for final mid-term review reports (8 reports)	December	10 days x 6 persons	60
Prepare and provide briefing on the preliminary and final findings of the MTR of 8 programmes.	Dec.-Jan.	3 days x 6 persons	18
Prepare and facilitate regional consultation to share findings of the MTR of 8 programmes with the countries	January 2014	3 days x 6 persons	18
Total Number of Days			276

## **7. REVIEW TEAM COMPOSITION AND QUALIFICATIONS**

Each Programme MTR Team will consist of two or three individuals, one of whom as team leader will assume overall responsibility for the review & for the production of the review reports/deliverables. The team should comprise members with the following qualifications and should have as many of the competencies outlined below as possible:

### **7.1 Consultant as organisational development expert:**

- Advanced degree in organisational development, law, political science, economics, public administration, environmental policy and management, social sciences, behaviour change or related subject;
- At least 15 years of accumulated professional experience related to international technical cooperation, preferably in water or water-related institutions such as international river basin organisations;
- Demonstrated experience with results-based management evaluation methodologies;
- Strong and proven experience in conducting independent evaluation of large, multi-sector, multi-country and complex cooperation programmes;
- Substantial experience in strategic planning;
- Experience in international water resources management;
- Knowledge of the Mekong Basin development context is required;
- Knowledge of the Mekong River Commission is an asset;
- Experience in preparation of reports for similar assignments;
- Excellent report writing skills in English;
- Excellent facilitation, interpersonal and cross-cultural communication skills.

### **7.2 Consultant as Results Based M&E specialist:**

- Advanced degree in social sciences, project cycle management, performance management, development management and planning or other related field;

- 10 years of experience in designing and implementing monitoring and evaluation of development projects/programmes and/or similar organisation-level systems; with a strong emphasis on performance management or results based management and ongoing application of lessons learnt;
- Strong and proven experience in conducting independent evaluation of large, multi-sector, multi-country and complex cooperation programmes;
- Substantial experience in strategic planning;
- Experience of applying performance management in the countries of the Lower Mekong Basin;
- Knowledge of the Mekong Basin development context is required;
- Experience in international water resources management is an asset;
- Knowledge of the Mekong River Commission is an asset;
- Experience in preparation of reports for similar assignments;
- Excellent report writing skills in English.

### ***7.3 Consultant as Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) specialist:***

- Advanced degree in integrated water resources management, natural resources management, environmental policy and management, or related subject;
- At least 10 years of accumulated professional experience related to international river basin planning and management in transboundary context;
- Demonstrated experience in results-based management evaluation methodologies;
- Strong and proven experience in conducting independent evaluation of large, multi-sector, multi-country and complex cooperation programmes;
- Substantial experience in strategic planning;
- Knowledge of the Mekong Basin development context is required;
- Experience in international water resources management is an asset;
- Knowledge of the Mekong River Commission is an asset;
- Experience in preparation of reports for similar assignments;
- Excellent report writing skills in English.

### ***All Review Team Members:***

- Demonstrated skill in integrating document- and interview-based assessment and evaluation;
- Excellent verbal and written command of English;
- Good regional knowledge of the Mekong region;
- Immediate availability to undertake the Mid-term Review including travel to the Mekong region.

### ***7.4. Specific Tasks for Team Leader:***

- a) Lead and coordinate programme mid-term review team members and ensure their effective collaboration;
- b) Desk review of relevant documents, to the extent necessary to be able to draft an annotated outline mid-term review paper, to provide other mid-term review team members with data and information, and to conduct analysis at regional level;
- c) Familiarise with the hierarchy of goals, outcomes and outputs set forth in the MRC Strategic Plan 2011-2015 and the relevant programmes under the mid-term review, as well as their prioritisation;



- d) Collaborate with the SP MTR team and provide inputs as needed to ensure consistency in the review approach and framework;
- e) Capture and integrate the perspectives of the four MRC Member Countries, the Development Partners, the MRC Secretariat and some key other stakeholder groups regarding the implementation of the relevant MRC Programmes;
- f) Compile interim mid-term review reports and facilitate regional consultation;
- g) Incorporate comments and issue final draft mid-term review report, and de-brief with MRCS.

#### **7.5 Specific Tasks for Results Based M&E specialist**

- a) Participate and work closely with the mid-term review team leader and another team member;
- b) Desk review of relevant documents, to the extent necessary to be able to draft an annotated outline mid-term review paper, to provide other mid-term review team members with data and information, and to conduct analysis at regional level;
- c) Familiarise with the hierarchy of goals, outcomes and outputs set forth in the MRC Strategic Plan 2011-2015, and the relevant programmes under the mid-term review, as well as their prioritisation;
- d) Provide specific inputs in reviewing achievements/progress made based on indicators and milestones specified under the outcomes of relevant programmes;
- e) Collaborate with the SP MTR team and provide inputs as needed to ensure consistency in the review approach and framework;
- f) Capture and integrate the perspectives of the four MRC Member Countries, the Development Partners, the MRC Secretariat and some key other stakeholder groups regarding the implementation of the relevant programmes;
- g) Provide inputs to the team leader in compiling interim mid-term review report and in facilitating regional consultation;
- h) Work closely with the team leader to incorporate comments and issue final draft mid-term review report, and de-brief with MRCS.

#### **7.6 Specific Tasks for IWRM specialist**

- a) Work and collaborate closely with the mid-term review team leader and another team member;
- b) Desk review of relevant documents, to the extent necessary to be able to draft an annotated outline mid-term review paper, to provide other mid-term review team members with data and information, and to conduct analysis at regional level;
- c) Familiarise with the hierarchy of goals, outcomes and outputs set forth in the MRC Strategic Plan 2011-2015, and the relevant programmes under the mid-term review, as well as their prioritisation;
- d) Provide specific inputs in reviewing achievements/progress made in IWRM related activities/outputs under the outcomes of relevant programmes;
- e) Collaborate with the SP MTR team and provide inputs as needed to ensure consistency in the review approach and framework;
- f) Capture and integrate the perspectives of the four MRC Member Countries, the Development Partners, the MRC Secretariat and some key other stakeholder groups regarding the implementation of the relevant programmes;
- g) Provide inputs to the team leader in compiling interim mid-term review report and in facilitating regional consultation;

- h) Work closely with the team leader to incorporate comments and issue final draft mid-term review report, and de-brief with MRCS.

## **8. REPORTING LINE**

The consultants recruited for this assignment report to the Technical Coordination Advisor under the Technical Coordination Unit (TCU).

## **9. LIST OF RELEVANT DOCUMENTS**

Most of the following documents are available on MRC's website. Draft reports will be provided to the review team accordingly.

- 1) 1995 Mekong Agreement
- 2) MRC Strategic Plan 2011-2015 & its implementation annexes
- 3) MRC Work Programmes 2011, 2012, and 2013
- 4) IWRM-based Basin Development Strategy for the Lower Mekong Basin, 2011
- 5) Draft Strategy and Action Plan for Riparianisation of MRCS
- 6) Mid-term Review Report of the MRC Strategic Plan 2006 to 2010
- 7) Guiding Principle Document 2010 for the MRC RBM&E system
- 8) Relevant MRC Programme Documents, Programme Implementation Plans, and Annual Programme Work Plans for 2011, 2012 and 2013
- 9) Programme Annual Outcome Reports, Six monthly Output Reports and Quarterly Activity Reports
- 10) Independent programme and project reviews and evaluations, if any
- 11) Report of the Independent Organisational, Financial and Institutional Review of the MRCS and the NMCs, January 2007
- 12) Statement of the International Conference delivered to the MRC Summit 2010
- 13) Mekong2Rio, Transboundary River Basin Management: Addressing Water, Energy and Food Security, 2012
- 14) Regional Action Plan for the implementation of the regional component of the IWRM-based Basin Development Strategy, draft February 2013
- 15) Regional Roadmap for MRC core river basin management function decentralisation, draft April 2013

## **10. Annexes**

- Annex 1: Specific requirements to be reviewed under CCAI
- Annex 2: Specific requirements to be reviewed under EP
- Annex 3: Specific requirements to be reviewed under M-IWRM
- Annex 4: Specific requirements to be reviewed under FP

## **Annex 1: Specific requirements to be reviewed under Climate Change and Adaptation Initiative (CCAI)**

In line with the scope of mid-term review indicated under Section 4 in the Terms of Reference, under CCAI the Programme MTR team is specifically required to review the following issues:

- The implementation and operation of the CCAI,
- The overall progress of CCAI implementation during the period January 2011 to mid-2013, focusing on
  - Effectiveness and efficiency of Programme planning, implementation and management during the review period;
  - Key programme achievements and lessons learned;
  - Main concerns regarding future Programme implementation and sustainability;
  - Alignment of the Programme with the MRC Strategic Plan 2011-2015.
- Progress of the programme in terms of programme impact (goal) and outcomes, outputs and major activities against the planned outputs and indicators.; this also particularly in light of the key issues that MRC is addressing at present (e.g. knowledge gaps; governance; decentralization and building in-country capacity for riparianization of key functions).
- Stakeholders participation in the programme and the level of local ownership
- The quality and the extent to which the information products, tools and knowledge generated by the CCAI are being used by the MRC Member Countries, their national Climate Change-related agencies as well as other MRC Programmes.
- The effectiveness of the management of the programme through its work plans and budgets and in terms of capacity and staffing. Review the contributions and involvement of both riparian and international staff in meeting both the managerial and technical outputs of the Programme.
- The adequacy of financial management, including financial reporting, follow-up of audits, etc.
- Activity and financial reporting (including annual meetings, steering committee meetings, programme meetings and progress reports) to the MRC, national line agencies, and development partners. Make recommendations for improvements, including in the format for progress reporting.
- CCAI's engagement and coordination with other MRC programmes and projects and the extent to which the programme remains relevant to the broader LMB development strategy in light of it being a cross-cutting initiative.
- Partnership and interaction with other CCA initiatives in the region with a view to benefit from synergies and avoidance of duplication.
- Identify and document any important parts of the CCAI, which have not been implemented; recommend means to address these.
- The risks and assumptions stated in the LogFrame and identify future risks and measures to respond to them.

- Formulate recommendations for the programme toward the end of Phase 1 (end-2013 to end-2015) in relation to:
  - Improvements in planning, implementing and managing the Programme;
  - Focus and priorities toward the end of Phase1 (end-2013 to end-2015);
  - Capacity building for the CCAI teams at both regional and national levels.

## **Annex 2: Specific requirements to be reviewed under the Environment Programme (EP)**

In line with the scope of mid-term review indicated under Section 4 in the Terms of Reference, under EP the Programme MTR team is specifically required to review the following issues:

In addition to the Programme Document the MTR team should also assess and monitor EP's implementation according to the EP Inception Report where an updated version of the M&E framework is presented. This is the M&E framework applied by EP for its implementation.

### **Annex 3: Specific requirements to be reviewed under Mekong-Integrated Water Resources Management Project (M-IWRMP)**

In line with the scope of mid-term review indicated under Section 4 in the Terms of Reference, under M-IWRM the Programme MTR team is required to specifically review the following issues:

A.

1. Overall progress of the three-component Project concentrating on the review of regional and transboundary components (the national component of the Project will not be evaluated in this MTR) in comparison with a baseline for assessing perceptions of the value and benefit of the Procedures among the Secretariat, NMCs and Line Agencies;
2. The progress with implementing the Regional Component activities, focusing on whether the enabling framework will be achieved when the Project closes.
3. Analysis and identify the causes behind the slow or insufficient implementation of some Procedures (PWUM, PDIES, PNPCA) including slow finalization of Technical Guidelines supporting implementation of PMFM, PWQ.
4. Project Outputs against SMART criteria (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timebound).
5. The preparation process and implementation of the bilateral projects under transboundary component in which how the links between the trans-boundary projects and Regional and National Components (though not review national component) could be enhanced at both project management and technical levels.

B.

1. The extent to which the 5 trans-boundary projects are reflected in the National Indicative Plans (NIPs) being developed under the Regional Action Plan developed by BDP.
2. The challenges in project implementation, and measures taken by the PCMU and PSC to overcome the major concerns and risks.

C.

1. The extent to which the project Outcomes, Outputs and Activities respond to the current and emerging needs and concerns of the Member Countries.
2. Making recommendations for improving the implementation of the Regional Component into the 2nd half of the project to better secure the Project Outcomes.

In addition, the Programme MTR Team at OSV should also:

1. Assessing capacity of and ways applied by the PCMU at the MRCS in working/coordinating with the other relevant MRCS Programmes and Member Countries, particularly within the complex implementation environment and the policy, legal and technical complexities and implications of finalising the Technical Guidelines.
2. Assessing capacity of NPMU at the four NMCs and relevant line agencies in Member Countries in implementing the Project.
3. Assess the perceptions of the MRCS Programmes and Member Countries with respect to the value, purpose and benefits of the Procedures, and the extent to which the Procedures are perceived to support the core principles and objectives of 1995 Mekong Agreement.
4. Identify the challenges of aligning the Procedures with national policies and their uptake into the national legislation.

#### **Annex 4: Specific requirements to be reviewed under Fisheries Programme (FP)**

In line with the scope of mid-term review indicated under Section 4 in the Terms of Reference, under FP the Programme MTR team is specifically required to review the following issues:

1. The FP Document or FP-PIP (2011-2015) is very comprehensive and ambitious proposing around 120 tasks under 25 activities. The programme MTR team should make wise recommendations on prioritisation for the Programme's implementation during the remainder of the current planning cycle, taking into account emerging opportunities and challenging issues, as well as budgetary and other resource constraints of the FP.
2. Provide practical recommendations on adjustments of activities and tasks designated under each outcome and output of the FP-PIP 2011-2015 based on the current emerging opportunities and issues (e.g. Xayaburi dam development in the Mekong mainstream in Lao PDR and irrigation weir development on the floodplains of the LMB).
3. Reviews and adjustments of FP-PIP 2014-2015 will specifically address FP knowledge and skill transfer plan as a cross-cutting issue in programme (re-) planning and implementation and also consider the MRCS decentralization plan and process.
4. Explore synergies and provide advice on potential options for harmonizing programme implementation with other MRC programmes;
5. Identify where programme design needs adjusting/reorienting in order to increase its effectiveness in reaching the target groups. This includes proposals to adjust the programme objectives and strategy, activities, budget and inputs, organizational/institutional set-up and implementation plan.