

**FINAL EVALUATION OF THE MRC
INTEGRATED CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMME (ICBP)**

Final Report

March 11, 2016

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ABBREVIATIONS

BDP	Basin Development Plan
CB	Capacity Building
CBP	Capacity Building Project
CCA	Climate change adaptation
CCAI	Climate Change Adaptation Initiative
CD	Capacity Development
CDAP	Capacity Development Action Plan for implementation of MRC Procedures
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CF	Competency Framework
CNA	Capacity Needs Assessment
CNMC	Cambodia National Mekong Committee
CRBMF	Core River Basin Management Functions
DP	Development Partner (donor)
DSA	Daily subsistence allowance
EIA	Environment Impact Assessment
EP	Environment Programme
EU	European Union
FAS	Finance and Administration Section
FE	Final Evaluation
FET	Final Evaluation Team
FMMP	Flood Management and Mitigation Programme
FP	Fisheries Programme
GM	Gender Mainstreaming
GIS	Geographic Information System
ICBP	Integrated Capacity Building Programme
IWRM	Integrated Water Resources Management
JC	Joint Committee
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
LA	Line Agency
LF	Logical Framework
LMB	Lower Mekong Basin
LNMC	Lao National Mekong Committee
MC	Member Country
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MONRE	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment.
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MRC	Mekong River Commission
MRCS	MRC Secretariat
MTR	Mid-term Review
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGOs	Non-governmental Organisation
NIPs	National Indicative Plans
NMCs	National Mekong Committees

NSDP	National Strategic Development Plan
OSP	Office of the Secretariat in Phnom Penh
OSV	Office of the Secretariat in Vientiane
ProDoc	Project Document
PWQ	Water Quality Procedure
RM	Review Mission
RBM	Results-Based Management
SP	Strategic Plan
TNA	Training Needs Assessment
TNMC	Thai National Mekong Committee
TOR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States dollar
VfM	Value for Money
VNMC	Viet Nam National Mekong Committee

PREFACE

This is the Final Report from the Final Evaluation of the Integrated Capacity Building Programme (ICBP), which has been in operation from year 2009 to 2015. The evaluation covers both phases: Phase 1 (July 2009 to June 2013) and Phase II (January 2014 and December 2015), but it does not cover the Junior Riparian Professionals (JRP) project, since this component was recently evaluated separately.

The report is submitted electronically in two files, one for the main text and another for the annexes.

This final evaluation has been commissioned directly from the Mekong River Commission Secretariat (MRCS) ICBP team. The evaluation team members from PEAPROS Consulting JSC, Hanoi are Dr. Göran Nilsson Axberg from Sweden, Team Leader; and Mr. Nghiêm Bá Hưng and Mr Nguyễn Tiến Dũng, Team Members (see Profile of the team, Annex 11).

Preparations, detailed planning and a desk study was carried out in the beginning of October 2015. Field work, in the form of visits and meetings with MRCS, all four National Mekong Committee (NMC) Secretariats and a significant number of national Line Agencies (LAs) took place from October 12 to November 4, 2015, see work plan in Annex 4.

A Draft Report dated 23 November 2015 was sent out for study and comments to a number of ICBP stakeholders in a process coordinated by the MRCS ICBP team. Comments from DFAT were received within the expected two-week time, and comments from VNMC and CNMC were received early February 2016. The comments are now integrated into this Final Report, to the extent the Final Evaluation Team (FET) agrees.

The Evaluation Team would like to thank and acknowledge the contributions from all people we have met, interviewed and discussed with in the course of this work, and the comments received, no-one named and no-one forgotten, see list of people met in Annex 2.

Hanoi and Stockholm 25 February 2016

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The MRC Integrated Capacity Building Programme (ICBP) started in year 2009, formulated to be result-oriented and aimed at developing capacities of MRCS, National Mekong Committees (NMCs) and key national Line Agencies (LAs) from the individual to the organisational levels. Total funding was almost USD 8 million for Phase 1 (July 2009 to June 2013) and the Phase II, the no-cost extension phase (January 2014 and December 2015). Funding came from three development partners (DPs): AusAID¹ (74%) that provided support for the formulation of the ICBP and for the implementation of priority capacity building (CB) activities, GOF² (16%) that funded the Junior Riparian Professional Project (JRP), and NZAID³ (10 % of total) from 2009 to 2013.

This final evaluation (FE) was given the task to assess to what extent the ICBP has been successful in providing the expected impacts in the CB of the MRC organisation as a whole; to determine successes, failures or weaknesses in the implementation; and to identify the key priorities of CB activities to contribute to the next cycle of the MRC Strategic Plan (SP 2016-2020).

Achievements, on the activity/output level, include among others:

- A total of 477 CB events have been organised regionally or by the NMCs. The modalities are trainings, workshops, meetings, participation in study trips or international conferences, exchange visits, and others such as sharing and learning dialogues (SLDs).
- A total number of more than 8,000 “event persons” (69% males) have taken part in the CB events. Through browsing/scanning of participation lists, the FET guestimates that one person on an average have attended three events, which means that more than 2,750 individuals have participated.
- A number of guidelines, manuals and tools have been developed, and used in the training activities. These are suitable for continued use on both regional and national levels in the years to come, but need to get formal approval. Examples are the CB framework, gender manual and toolkits, the Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) Competency Framework (CF), IWRMP training of trainers (ToT) manual and training modules on leadership and negotiation skills.
- A number of internal guidelines for human resource management have been developed as a contribution to organisational capacity development (CD), and for use not only within the MRCS but also for the NMCs. Examples are the guidelines or administrative procedures for orientation of newly employed staff, grievances, sexual harassment, JRP, internship, staff secondment and a guideline for knowledge and skill transfer. Even though many yet lack formal approval, many of the guidelines are in use.

Undoubtedly, all of these outputs must have resulted in positive CD outcomes, but it is almost impossible to assess to what extent the ICBP has been successful with regard to actual capacity improvements in the MRC organisation. The original Logical Framework (LF) from year 2009 clearly reflects objective and outcomes, it also indicates programme outputs, its risks management strategy and prescribes a six-month period to establish a baseline. But still, after six years of operations, the ICBP does not have a functioning Monitoring and

¹ Australian Aid (now called DFAT, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade)

² Government of Finland

³ New Zealand Aid

Evaluation (M&E) system on the outcome/impact level⁴. Conducted M&E and reporting efforts are mainly focusing on input and output levels. Combined with lack of baseline data this is a serious shortcoming of the programme, making it almost impossible for the ICBP itself as well as an evaluator to assess results/outcomes, and draw lessons learnt from the implementation.

In the middle of Phase I the programme developed and introduced an activity-based planning and reporting system to keep track of its activities. With this the programme could well manage activities and outputs of the programme. A clear, coherent and realistic Result Framework and M&E system was also developed to include the outcome level, but no reporting has as yet been made following this system. In any case, these recently developed systems form a good basis for future use at all levels in the MRC organisation.

In summary, main findings by evaluation criterion are as follows:

Outcome/impact: The ICBP has filled a gap that existed and through its many activities contributed to CD in the MRC organisation. Participants are satisfied with the training, often use the new knowledge, but seldom share it with colleagues. The FE found several obvious/concrete outcomes, but since reporting focuses only on activities undertaken, real outcomes and difference to participants cannot be assessed.

Relevance: The objective, outcomes and outputs of the respective Outcome Areas of the ICBP are relevant to CB requirements of MRC and NMCs, and found appropriate to meet demands for implementation of the MRC SP 2011-2015, the Decentralisation Roadmap, the riparianisation process and in line with the policies of the DPs supporting the Programme. Almost all the CB activities, including various guidelines and tools, are relevant to these strategic goals and targets.

Effectiveness: The lack of baselines and a functioning M&E Framework and system on the outcome level makes it very difficult to assess the effectiveness of the interventions. Even so, several success stories were noted. Some NMCs set up a wish-list of training subjects rather than following a results-based approach, resulting in training subjects that do not really contribute to stated outcomes of the ICBP. The evaluation also found that none⁵ of the NMCs had any selection criteria included in the training invitation letters to the LAs. Sometimes NMCs did not receive the right people for the specific training.

Efficiency: A great number (477) of CB activities have been carried out, and a great number of staff from the MRC organisation has attended the CB events (rough estimate 2,750 people). The internal administrative and CB management systems were in place at an early stage of the Programme. Unfortunately, they have not been fully functioned as intended, possibly owing to a multi-function of the national CB teams and high level of staff turnover at both national and regional levels. The FE estimates that the average cost per event was somewhat less than USD 7,000, and the average cost per participant being USD 400. In the opinion of the FE both figures could have been lower.

Sustainability: In spite of the fact that participants to the trainings both appreciate and still use the materials and new knowledge the likelihood of sustainable outcomes from trainings is low. The reason is primarily since CD has focused on individual learning rather than organisational CD. Sustainable outcomes can be expected with regard to developed guidelines, manuals and tools, provided that these products urgently are formally approved and made easily accessible to a wide range of potential users. In fact, this may be the most important and lasting heritage from the programme. There is no exit strategy or exit plan that would safeguard sustainability of results.

⁴ DFAT commented to the Draft Report that MRC has been seriously deficient in this area across most programs for some years now, and that substantial efforts at standardising and improving the quality of M&E have been attempted, but have failed for various reasons.

⁵ In its comments, the CNMC objected to this, stating that they usually mentioned who should attend and what was expected from participants.

For *Phase I* the FE gives the following overall assessment: “Very good work has been carried out, including a great number of training events and other CB activities. In addition, a number of quality documents/products were developed, with several of them still in use and the others never adopted by the intended users. Very little is known about the real effects (or outcomes). Most of the training subjects were relevant with regard to contribution to expected outcomes, but not all. Lack of selection criteria in the training invitation letters from NMCs makes one wonder whether the right people attended the right training. Participants rarely shared the new knowledge with colleagues.”

For *Phase II* the FE formulated the following general assessment: “Continued good work has been carried out, including training events and other CB activities. In addition, a number of quality documents/products have been further developed, now ready for use. Even so, none of the expected Outcomes have been reached in full. Progress was hampered by the slowness of MRC and NMC processes and limited authority of regional programme leaders and staff within the MRC system.”

For both Phases the FE *concludes* that the ICBP has been operated professionally by competent staff; an impressive number of CB events have been organised for a great number of participants; there are positive outcomes from these activities; important and significant guidelines, manuals and tools have been developed and should be used in the future. Owing to staffing gaps the work intensity has gone up and down.

The FET further *concludes* that it is only at the final stage of the programme that the CB management system is developed; support from senior management level of MRC has been limited due to other priorities of the organisation; the NMCSs seems to be overloaded with their routine tasks and have limited capacity in documenting the outcomes; selection of subjects for the trainings and selection of training participants should have been better. The concept of Sharing & Learning Dialogues (SLDs) seems to be very promising.

In reality the CB activities have targeted individual CB and not been organisational as intended.

On the important issue about CD for the future the FE *concludes* that there is a clear demand and need for CD for implementation of the new MRC SP 2016-2020. Actually, the FE believes there is a high risk that the new SP cannot be implemented as intended unless continued leadership, management and technical CD is carried out.

The overarching *recommendation* is that the MRC needs to open up and make all of its knowledge, methods, data and reports published on the public domain. This will improve the MRC image, contribute to wider CD outcomes and help develop the recruitment base of skilled riparian specialists. Second, the FE argues and *recommends* that MRC should demonstrate and be an example of efficient, creative and modern leadership, to “walk the talk”. This requires a shift in mind-set, and targeted CD efforts.

Other *recommendations* are, among others: stronger emphasis placed on sustainable development and the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG’s) in MRC SP 2016-2020⁶, including connected CD activities; as soon as possible establish a base-line on current capacities in the full MRC organisation, including early identification of capacity gaps, especially at NMCs and relevant LAs; implement the recently developed results framework and M&E system to track CD on both regional and national levels; and continue building a network of collaborating organisations in the region and world-wide with the intention to supplement and increase MRC capacity to address and find solutions to sustainable development, climate change and other issues.

To support implementation of the new SP the FE *recommends* that the MRC focus on the following CD areas: Leadership skills, Change management, Communication, Water diplomacy, Understanding of the 1995 Mekong Agreement and MRC Procedures, M&E, and

⁶ MRC Strategic Plan 2016 – 2020, Draft final, September 2015

Human Resource Development (HRD). This is in addition to the technical training that the MCs are expected to carry out.

During the remaining 1.5 months of ICBP operations the programme is strongly recommended to set up a simple exit plan aiming at sustaining as much as possible of programme results, and immediately implement the same.

It is fair to note that several of the recommendations above are already thought of as elements of the new SP, or even in pipeline of being implemented.

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction of the intervention being evaluated

The ICBP⁷ was established in 2009 to support the building of capacities of the MRC organisation⁸ to achieve the goal set out in the 1995 Mekong Agreement. So far, two phases have been implemented:⁹

Phase 1: ICBP 2009-2013

The ICBP, formulated to be result-oriented, operated from July 2009 to June 2013 aimed at developing capacities of MRC, NMCs and key national LAs from the individual to the organisational levels, to increase their effectiveness in ensuring the sustainable development of the Mekong and related resources. Three (3) DPs provided funding support to ICBP Phase I:

- NZAID¹⁰ that used to support the two phases of the MRC Gender Mainstreaming (GM) Project (1996-1998; and 2004-2009); and the ICBP from 2009 to 2013;
- Government of Finland that funded the Junior Riparian Professional Project (JRP);
- AusAID¹¹ that provided support for the formulation of the ICBP and for the implementation of priority CB activities.

The ICBP Phase I had the following goal and objectives:

Goal: The MRC, NMCs and prioritised national LAs have significantly increased their effectiveness in ensuring the sustainable development of the Mekong and related resources.

Objective: MRC, NMCs and prioritised national LAs demonstrated an increased level of capacity to contribute to the MRC objectives as follows:

- To increase the organisational level capacity of the MRC and NMCs towards achieving the MRC objectives as set out in the 1995 Mekong Agreement and in subsequent SPs;
- To achieve the necessary (quantitative and qualitative) level of competent human resources at MRC, NMCs and at the prioritised national LAs; and,
- To create the enabling environment that both the MRC and the Member Countries (MCs) can together achieve MRC's mission effectively.

The expected four Outcomes of Phase I are listed in section 4.2 below. A Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the ICBP Phase I was carried out in year 2012 (for a discussion on MTR findings and recommendations see section 5.1 below).

⁷ The current ICBP evolved from its predecessor called the Integrated Training Strategy and Programme and a series of relevant assessment and projects such as the Independent Organisational, Financial and Institutional Review in 2007, the JRP Project, the Internship and Exchange Project, the MTR of the GM Project and MRC Staff Training Activities.

⁸ The term "MRC organisation" is used in general to include all organisational units within the MRCS and NMCs. Relevant government LAs collaborating with MRC Programmes are under the coordination responsibility of respective NMCs.

⁹ Major parts of this section of the report are with slight editing copied from the TOR of the Evaluation.

¹⁰ New Zealand Aid

¹¹ Australian Aid (now called DFAT, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade)

Phase 2: ICBP 2014-2015

With the completion of ICBP Phase I and following the recommendations of the MTR and ICBP Steering Committee the Programme continued into a 'no cost' extension, Phase II (2014-2015). This was in order to complete the remaining outputs from ICBP Phase I, using unspent funds from DFAT (formerly AusAID) and the Government of Finland, the latter earmarked for continued support in implementation of the JRP Project.

Basically, the new phase of the programme was aimed for:

- Further implementation of the on-going outputs in Phase I in order to fully achieve the ICBP's milestones as set in the MRC SP 2011-2015;
- Addressing the emerging CB needs from the riparianisation and decentralisation process of the MRC core functions, and for implementation of the MRC Procedures; and
- Improving the M&E system and mechanism to ensure measurement and reporting the outcomes and impacts of the MRC CB activities.

The ICBP Phase II has the following goals and objectives:

Goal: The MRC, NMCs and LAs have significantly increased their effectiveness in implementation of the decentralisation plan and carrying on the decentralised core river basin management functions and contribution to effective implementation of the 1995 Mekong Agreement and to sustainable development of the Mekong and related resources.

Objective: To apply the standardised CB process and framework to support MRC Core Functions, Decentralisation and Riparianisation.

1.2 Purpose, objectives of the Evaluation

As required in the TOR, this independent final evaluation (FE) should consider both phases (Phase I and II) of ICBP implementation. As the 2 phases have slightly different goals, objectives and outcomes, the evaluation of the attainment of results should be treated separately. The objectives of the evaluation were to:

- Assess to what extent the ICBP has been *relevant, efficient, effective, and sustainable* in providing the *expected impacts* in the CB of the MRC organisation as a whole;
- Determine what are successes, failures or weaknesses in the implementation of ICBP activities where success stories and lessons learnt can be drawn upon;
- Identify the key priorities of CB activities for the MRC SP 2016-2020 where CB support for staff of MRCS, NMCs and LAs is seen to play a major role for implementation of the decentralisation of core river basin management functions (CRBMFs) and the transition to the riparianisation of MRC operation.

More specifically, the FE should look into:

1. The MRCS staff who have improved their skills and knowledge through the support of ICBP;
2. The national stakeholders who participated in the ICBP and improve their skills and knowledge in IWRM, gender mainstreaming, and other soft skills;
3. The use of toolkits and frameworks produced by ICBP at the organisational, programme and national levels;

4. The effectiveness of the coordination system and mechanisms to facilitate and support CB activities e.g. MRC gender working groups, national gender focal points, the national IWRMP trainers team, etc.

As the JRP Project recently had been evaluated, it was not addressed in this final ICBP evaluation. However, short comments are made in this report, and an extract from the JRP evaluation included in the Annexes.

Detailed Terms of Reference for the evaluation are presented in Annex 1.

1.3 Main methodologies used

The Team has followed the methodology well described in the TOR. In addition, the approach and methodology were derived from the preliminary analysis of the specific critical issues (see Annex 4). Understanding the critical issues and the context in which the MRC operates has helped transform the findings into practical recommendations.

The work of the FE was divided into three phases: Desk Phase, Field and Interview Phase, and Synthesis and Reporting Phase.

The FE Team applied methodologies that should deliver a review that is impartial, credible and useful:

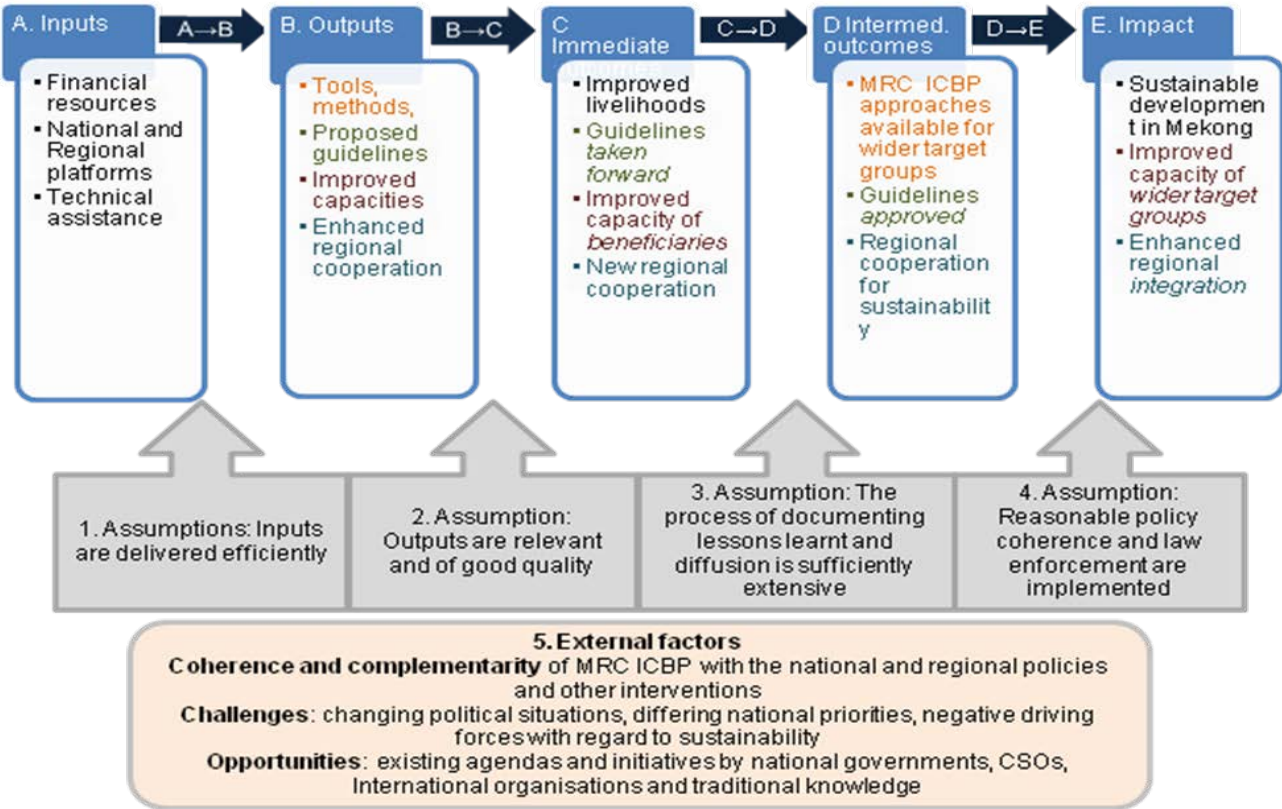
- The evaluation was planned and conducted in ways that enhance the likely utilisation of both the findings and the review process itself to inform decision makers and improve performance. This approach is often called Utilisation-Focused Evaluation (UFE).
- The Team addressed the key review issues and more specific questions specified in the TOR, supported by the OECD/DAC Evaluation Quality Standards, and further specified through discussions with the ICBP regional team.
- Building on triangulation, the Team applied an interactive consultative approach involving a broad range of stakeholders primarily at national levels, to obtain their views and opinions and to test initial conclusions and recommendations, leading to validation and enhanced ownership of the review results, conclusions and recommendations for the future.
- Starting in the inception period, the FE carried out an e-survey using the Survey Monkey web-based tool. The survey, with 5 closed multiple-choice questions and 3 open questions was directed to 100 stratified randomly sampled participants of MRC training events, receiving 19 respondents on the closed and 13 respondents on the open questions, which must be regarded low (see Annex 5 for details).
- A 'Theory of Change' (ToC) approach was adopted, drawing from the Team's experience assessing and evaluating 'uptake pathways' on programmes and projects aiming at institutional change and CB.
- Throughout the work the team had internal meetings for discussions and agreement upon findings, conclusions and recommendations.

The TOR states that the FE should be "providing the **expected impacts** in the CB of the MRC organisation...". To this Team the terms "outcomes" and "impacts" have different meanings: Outcomes relate to attributable likely or achieved short and medium term effects of an intervention or change that has occurred as a result of a programme, whereas Impact focuses on the achievement of wider intended and un-intended effects in the longer term, often with difficulties to clearly attribute a change to a specific programme/project such as the ICBP. It is usually expected that a programme should also contribute to long term national,

regional and global goals on cross-cutting objectives such as poverty reduction, human rights, gender equality, etc. Reviewing Outcomes and Impacts becomes easier if indicators are already set, and measuring carried out. The FE focused on finding attributable CB outcomes rather than CB impacts.

Theory of Change

Figure 1 Tentative Theory of Change MRC CB programme



The FE found that there is no clear Theory of Change (ToC) earlier developed for the ICBP. So, in the process of understanding the role, tasks and vision for change of the ICBP the evaluation team developed a tentative ICBP ToC of its own, as presented in Figure 1. This was then used in the course of work as a framework for the evaluation and used as a yardstick for determining how far the CB process has reached.

Generally speaking, the FE is after its detailed investigations and conducted field work of the opinion that the ICBP and the MRC organisation is somewhere at position 3 “Immediate Outcomes” in the chart of Figure 1.

Detailed information on the approach, methods and work plan of the FE are presented in Annex 4.

2. PROGRAMME DESIGN AND SCOPE OF WORK

2.1 ICBP in a wider perspective

Serving capacity building needs of the MRC organisation

The Mekong Basin Vision is: An economically prosperous, socially just and environmentally sound Mekong River Basin. The MRC has formulated the following Vision: A world class financially secure, internationally Basin Organisation serving the Mekong countries to achieve the Basin Vision. The MRC Mission is: To promote and coordinate sustainable development and management of the water and related resources of the Mekong River Basin for the countries' mutual benefits and the people's well-being.

The general task of the two phases of ICBP was to design appropriate CB approaches and provide CB services to address priority organisational development needs of the full MRC organisation. The Programme should contribute to increasing the organisational level capacity towards achieving the MRC objectives as set out in the 1995 Mekong Agreement¹² and MRC SPs. This should be done by applying a standardised CB process and framework to support MRC Core Functions and the Decentralisation and Riparianisation processes.

The MRCS is an operational arm of the organisation comprising about 180 staff based at two Secretariat offices in Phnom Penh, Cambodia and Vientiane, Lao PDR. Its focal points in the four countries, the NMCs, coordinate work of relevant LAs at the national level. MRCS also acts as a regional knowledge hub on several key issues such as fisheries, navigation, flood and drought management, environment monitoring and hydropower development, organised into MRC Programmes.¹³

There are ongoing processes within the organisation to become less dependent on the Development Partners (DPs) and international staff, to gradually increase Member Country's (MC) funding to the MRC organisation in order to be self-sufficient by year 2030, and to decentralise MRC core river basin management functions to the MCs, called the riparianisation and decentralisation processes. It is widely recognised that this cannot happen without a clear focus on capacity development (CD), enabling and ensuring self sufficiency through stronger national and regional capacity to manage water resources. The ICBP was designed to support the riparianisation process and expected to set out a "bold new path for building capacity within the Secretariat, the NMCs and their Secretariats and the respective national LAs that the MRC works with in order to accomplish its mission of achieving IWRM across the basin."¹⁴

Early 2011 the MRC endorsed two key strategies, the IWRM, and the Strategic Plan (SP) 2011-2015. The IWRM-based strategy provides regional and transboundary perspectives for basin development planning, representing over a decade of collaboration between MCs on their shared understanding of the river's opportunities and risks associated with development. The SP for the 2011-2015 period was formulated to support the implementation of the IWRM-based strategy as well as providing a platform for the MRC's plan to decentralise core functions of the MRC Secretariat to the national level. One of the outcomes of the ICBP Phase I was that "MRC, NMCs and prioritised national LAs have the necessary technical competencies to integrate IWRM principles and gender aspects into policy making, planning and implementation".

¹² The Agreement for the Cooperation on the Sustainable Development of the Mekong Basin, signed in April 1995.

¹³ Most of the information in this sub-section is taken from the MRC web-site <http://www.mrcmekong.org> as of 11 Nov 2015.

¹⁴ Quote from the opening address of Mr. Jeremy Bird, MRC CEO at the Second Regional Consultative Workshop on ICBP Implementation Plan, Vientiane, Lao PDR, 14 September 2009.

ICBP was expected to provide CB services to support the decentralisation of the MRC Core Functions (CF), which serve the MRC's long-term purpose of transboundary river basin management and planning and are performed on a routine basis¹⁵. Their primary role is to support the four MCs in their regional cooperation to implement the 1995 Mekong Agreement. Following a decentralisation plan, the core functions will gradually be taken over by the MCs. The four MRC Core Functions are:

- CF 1: Secretariat, Administration and Management.
- CF 2: River Basin Management, with seven functions within this overarching Core Function:
 - CRBMF 1: Data acquisition, exchange and monitoring.
 - CRBMF 2: Analysis, modelling and assessment.
 - CRBMF 3: Planning support.
 - CRBMF 4: Forecasting, warning and emergency response.
 - CRBMF 5: Implementing MRC Procedures.
 - CRBMF 6: Promoting Dialogue and Coordination.
 - CRBMF 7: Reporting and Dissemination.
- CF 3: Capacity and Tools Development.
- CF 4: Consulting and Advisory Services.

Since its establishment in 1995 the MRC has adopted a number of rules and procedures, referred to as CRBMF 5 in the above list of core functions. The Procedures should provide a systematic and uniform process for the implementation of the 1995 Mekong Agreement. These are:

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

MRC for Sustainable Development

The UN has conducted the largest consultation programme in its history to gauge opinion on what the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) should include. While the Millennium Development Goals¹⁶ (MDG) were considered targets for poor countries to achieve, with finance from wealthy states, now every country will be expected to work towards achieving the SDGs. Adopted by all UN nations including the MRC MCs, the SDGs¹⁷ provides a renewed, universal set of goals, targets and indicators that UN member states are expected to use to frame their agendas and political policies over the next 15 years. This should also be the case for the MRC Organisation, especially so since sustainable development is a

¹⁵ Core River Basin Management Function Decentralisation: part 1. Regional Roadmap for Decentralisation (Version 1.2, dated 06 November 2013). Also mentioned in MRC SP 2016-2020.

¹⁶ Established following the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in 2000, with 8 Goals to be achieved by 2015.

¹⁷ Adopted by the UN General Assembly on 25 September 2015 after three years of discussion and consultation. It contains 17 goals and 169 targets.

main theme of the 1995 Mekong Agreement and the MRC “slogan” is “For Sustainable Development”. Surprisingly, the draft MRC SP 2016-2020 does not mention the SDGs.

Developed with “concise and action-oriented” principles, the SDGs suggest actions and targets to be undertaken and achieved by 2030 in the following development areas (among others):

Poverty reduction:

- Promote sustainable agriculture ... and other pro-poor measures to achieve food security and end hunger (Goal 3).
- Create sound policy frameworks, including guarantee of significant resources, at the national and regional levels, based on pro-poor and gender-sensitive development strategies, to support accelerated investment in poverty eradication actions (1.a; 1.b).

Gender:

One of the expected Outcomes of ICBP Phase I was that “Gender is **mainstreamed** within the MRCS and all IWRM work of the MRC, NMCs and prioritised national LAs is made gender responsive”. To compare, the new SDGs have the following sub-goals on gender:

- Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels (5.c).
- Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life (5.5).
- Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women (5.b).

Good Governance:

- Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all forms (16.5).
- Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels (16.6).
- Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels (16.7).
- Implement IWRM at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate (6.5).
- Protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes (6.6), through expansion of international cooperation and CB support to developing countries (6.a) and strengthening the participation of local communities (6.b).
- Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts.

Right-based approach:

- Men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services (1.4).
- Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, access to ownership and control over land, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws (5.a).

Equality:

- Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws (5.a).
- Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels (5.c).

Recognising that the 1995 Mekong Agreement clearly states sustainable development as a goal for the collaboration, it is the opinion of this FE that all the above SDG goals (and maybe others) need to be addressed within the MRC framework and organisation. In the opinion of this FE this requires continued and intensified capacity development work in

cooperation with many other organisations in the region dealing with sustainable development.

This issue is further discussed in section 5.3 below.

2.2 Capacity building vis-à-vis capacity development

In the past decades of relationship between DPs and developing countries, capacity for the latter has always been the topic of discussion.

One issue that has brought about ceaseless debates and arguments is around the terms *capacity development (CD)* vis-a-vis *capacity building (CB)*. Even often used interchangeably, they should need profound understanding in terms of meanings and implications.

UNDP defines CD, in a broader term, is “*the process through which individuals, organisations and societies obtain, strengthen and maintain the capabilities to set and achieve their development objectives over time*”. It also argues that CD refers to the process of creating, using, management and retention of capacities, established from existing capacity assets, rather than a course of actions or activities undertaken in a period of time to create organisation’s capacities from the little or from scratch. CB addresses the latter case.

Capacity is often reflected at three levels that guide the development process:

Environment/societal level describes a broader system within which individuals and organisations function. Capacities at this level include policies, legislation, power relations and social norms that enable or hamper the existence and performance of individuals and organisations.

Organisational level of capacity comprises the internal functions and mandates, procedures and frameworks, policies and arrangements that determine the operation and delivery of an organisation. It enables the coordination and synergy of individual capacities to achieve goals. If these elements are well-resourced, well-aligned and well-adapted to changing environment, the capability of an organisation to perform will be greater than that of the sum of its parts.

Individual level of capacity refers to the skills, knowledge, experience and attitude of the staff, expressed in their behaviour in the work place. Some of these are acquired through formal training and education, others through learning by doing and experience.

The objectives of the ICBP indicate an orientation that is more on the environmental/social and organisational levels than on the individual level: “to increase the organisational level capacity of the MRC and NMCs ...”; “to create the enabling environment ...”; and “to achieve the necessary (quantitative and qualitative) level of competent human resources ...”. Recognising this, for ICBP it would have been better using the term Capacity Development (CD) than Capacity Building (CB).

Success story 1

Application of project proposal writing skills in project development (MONRE – Lao NMC):

Mr. Bounsoung Boupha is the Deputy Head of Division, Department of Inspection of Ministry of Natural Resource and Environment (MONRE) of Lao PDR.

In 2014, he had a chance to participate in a Project Proposal Writing Skill training course organised under ICBP for LNMC LAs. After going back to work, with the systematic knowledge and skills of result-based work planning, which he found very useful from the course, he successfully drafted two project documents assigned by the Department:

- Extended project on “Inspection of State Land Lease and Concession” (2016 – 2020), (US\$ 158,000).
- Project on “Strengthening Inspection Work in MONRE” (2016 – 2018), (US\$ 170,000).

Both project documents have been approved by the Ministry, now waiting for fund disbursement for implementation.

Capacity training under ICBP:

The ICBP has used a number of CB modalities/activities such as:

- Longer term CB through the JRP project, internships, staff secondment and support to higher education.
- Shorter training and other CB activities: trainings, workshops, dialogues, exchange visits, study tours, participation in conferences such as the World Water Week, World Water Forum, International River Symposium, partnership with Murray Darling Basin Authority (MDBA), participatory development work, e.g. Gender and M&E, participation in external courses, and e-learning.

The list below shows that most of the capacity enhancement effort has focused on individual (managers and staff) level:

For MRCS:

- Development and introduction of various technical tools and manuals, management process and procedures.
- Training of leadership including different knowledge (visioning) and soft skills (communication, negotiation, motivation, ...).

For NMCs and LAs:

- Introduction training of IWRM-based Basin Development Plan (BDP) and GM manuals and toolkits.
- Training of leadership and management.
- Training of various soft skills (negotiation in transboundary water resource management, communication, dispute settlement, meeting management ...).
- GM skills in technical areas.
- Skill training on work planning and management, including M&E.
- English language skill training including minutes and report writing in English.

Capacity development in the future:

The whole MRC system is in a preparation process towards implementation of the SP 2016-2020. It entails a shift in the structural setting at the regional level (from programme-based approach to core function management), speeding up the riparianisation process with

increased water resource management tasks to be handed by MCs. Working in such an institutional change context with reduced human resources having increased roles and functions, CD needs must be addressed, possibly including the following areas and topics:

For national level:

- Institutional capacity to adapt the organisational setting to fit the structural change at regional level.
- Better understanding and application of the 1995 Mekong Agreement, IWRM-based Basin Development Strategy (BDS) and other tools and procedures in practice.
- Technical capacities to organise and undertake the riparianised tasks in line with the decentralisation process.

For regional and national levels:

- Leadership capacities, including knowledge and skills to manage the change process, to materialise the Vision, Mission and Core/Common Values of the organisation in actual work planning and implementation tasks, and to mobilise co-worker enthusiasm and commitment to the work with required high productivity.
- Capacity in diplomatic relations and coordination via the improved knowledge and skills in water diplomacy (cross-culture relations, negotiation, conflict settlement, international water law, and others).
- Capacity in human resource development and management.
- Capacity in result-based work planning and management including the development and functioning of the M&E system for results.
- Capacity in information and communication, including the establishment and management of the knowledge system.

This list of competency requirements and CD needs was in part suggested by interviewees in the FE work, and in part by the FE Team itself.

Utilisation of Mekong capacity training institutions:

In the past years, various international, regional¹⁸ and national training institutions have been mobilised by MRC and MCs for their respective CD efforts. In the new CD period, Mekong training institutions (including universities and training centres of respective sectors) should be utilised to provide services as appropriate. Such institutes include, among others: Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), Khon Kaen University (Thailand), Mekong Institute (MI), Earth-Right School Mekong (ERSM), Mekong Development Research Institute (MDRI), Mekong Dialogue Institute, Mekong Youth Union Training Centre, and Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) office in Bangkok.

2.3 Logframe and M&E System

In this section the FE attempts at answering the question “Is the Logical Framework of the Programme and its design clear, coherent and realistic?”

In the designing stage of the ICBP programme, there were good intentions in development of an M&E system to keep track of the implementation and achievement of the programme. This was clearly illustrated in the Programme Document of May 2009, where it was also stated that it was necessary to establish baseline data within six month of implementation of the programme.

The Logical Framework (LF) of the programme clearly reflected objective and outcomes, it also indicated programme outputs and its risks management strategy for attainment at output

¹⁸ Asian Technology Institute (AIT), MDF Training and Consultancy ...

level. The LF did not identify activities, which is understandable as it should have room for flexibility to address the real needs.

However, this good intention was not realised into practice as the programme implementation failed to further develop the LF into a more detailed M&E framework during its start-up phase as well as to compile baseline data. It is necessary to mention the effort of the implementation team in the period 2010 to 2012 to develop a web-based M&E system to keep track of the results of the CB activities from the beginning of the programme. The designed system included an M&E framework and a manual for implementation. However, it was not possible to put the M&E system into operation.

And still, after six years of operations, the ICBP does not have a functioning M&E system on the outcome/impact level. Its monitoring and reporting efforts are focusing on the input and output levels. This lack of a functioning M&E on the outcome/impact level is a serious shortcoming of the programme. The lack of an implemented outcome monitoring system and baseline data make it almost impossible for the ICBP itself as well as the FE to assess results/outcomes, and draw lessons learnt from the implementation of the ICBP.

It may be worthwhile to note the overall monitoring and evaluation context within MRCS. Still, after years of operations under a new programmatic approach, the MRCS does not have a functioning M&E system on the outcome/impact levels though it applies rigorous monitoring or reporting of the implementation of the activities as per its strategic plan and subsequent annual plans.

In the middle of Phase I the programme developed and introduced an activity-based planning and reporting system to keep track its activities. According to this set-up every activity implemented by the NMCs will need to submit an Activity Level Plan (ALP)¹⁹, where they would describe the activity in detailed with specific budget estimate and sex-disaggregated list of participants. In principle, these ALPs would be the specification of the agreed items in the annual plan. However, it happens very often that the ALPs are changed and differ from the annual plan without justification. Anyhow, with the ALP system in place the programme can well manage the record of activities and outputs of the programme.

During Phase II, and with consultant help, the regional ICBP team in consultation with the four NMCSs developed an M&E Framework including national output indicators for each member country, allowing for reporting also on the outcome level. The FE regards this system being clear, coherent and realistic. The framework and M&E system has been introduced to the NMCs, but so far only limited reporting has been made following this system. In any case, it forms a good basis for the NMCs to monitor CD activities on the national level in the coming SP period.

¹⁹ Among 13 programmes under operation at MRC, only ICBP apply this

3. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

3.1 Overall assessment

Phase I:

The FE found that throughout the implementation of Phase I from 2009 to 2013, the ICBP had made good progress on the activity and output level. The FE also found some evidence of outcomes and impacts at both regional and national levels, in particular regarding the JRP and Gender Mainstreaming (GM) activities.

A major shortcoming of the Programme is that there is no baseline data describing capacities of ICBP target groups, neither at the beginning of Phase I (as would have been expected), nor at any other time over the six year programme period. The so called IWRM Competency Framework (CF) from 2012²⁰ lists a number of competences needed for the MRC organisation, but there is no assessment of the actual capacity situation.

A number of high quality guidelines and toolkits were developed during Phase I, used and much appreciated, in particular the gender materials, gender training of trainer (TOT) project, the IWRM TOT Manual and the training in negotiation skills. In addition, a conceptual guideline for CB work was developed together with a result-based M&E manual²¹ and a web-based M&E system. Both set of products were introduced in year 2012 for use but never adopted by intended users.

The FE regards the concept of Sharing and Learning Dialogues (SLDs) on MRC Procedures as a most interesting approach. Actual dialogues have been conducted both on the regional and the national levels (in Thailand the national SLD was conducted in combination with the Joint Platform workshops).

Several internal guidelines for HR management issues were developed during Phase I. All of them seem to be in use, but the only such guideline that is officially approved is the Administration of Grievances.

Because of lack of a functioning M&E system on the outcome level very little is known about the outcomes or effects of the activities of the ICBP, neither for Phase I nor for Phase II. Anyhow, some concrete outcomes were recorded in the FE interviews with ICBP participants in the MCs, as reported below under criteria Outcomes/Impacts and Effectiveness.

From the beginning the intention was that the ICBP should coordinate all CB activities of all MRC programmes. This has not been done, probably since the other programmes "lived their own life" and wanted to carry out their technical training activities without help or coordination from the ICBP specialists. The CB framework, first drafted in Phase I, could have been of great help to the other MRC programmes. Later on, during Phase II, the ICBP regional team continued to revise the CB framework and presented it to the MRC programmes. Awaiting the new MRC structure, the CB framework has only been piloted with gender training in the EP and CCAI programmes. The CCAI had also organised a follow up workshop after one year implementation of their staff gender action plans, developed at the end of the training course. However, the result of this workshop will not be available until after this FE mission.

To this FE it seems that the ICBP lost momentum in and around year 2013. During the transition period from the Phase I to Phase II, the ICBP regional office had to spend time to develop the new programme document for 2014-2015. In addition, the programme had to adapt its work to the MRC's emerging organisational needs and contribute to the formulation

²⁰ MRC Module-Based IWRM Competency Framework, May 2012, jointly developed by BDP, M-IWRMP and ICBP.

²¹ Developed by the MRC Technical Coordination Unit (TCU)

of the new SP, the Basin Development Strategy (BDS), the council study, and organisational restructuring, all causing delays in programme implementation.

As somewhat elaborated in section 4.2 below the FE finds that none of the four expected outcomes from Phase I have been attained in full. The FE summarises Phase I as follows:

Very good work has been carried out, including a great number of training events and other CB activities. In addition, a number of quality documents/products were developed, with several of them still in use and the others never adopted by the intended users. Very little is known about the real effects (or outcomes). Most, but not all, of the training subjects were relevant with regard to contribution to expected outcomes. No or few selection criteria in the training invitation letters from NMCs makes one wonder whether the right people attended the right training. Participants rarely shared the new knowledge with colleagues.

Phase II:

In principle, with the objective being “To apply the standardised CB process and framework to support MRC Core Functions, Decentralisation and Riparianisation” the task for Phase II was to continue and finish the job not carried out in full during Phase I.

From start of Phase II the ICBP got a renewed momentum. Staffing gaps were filled (but not to full capacity) and earlier drafted development work on CB guidelines, result framework and M&E system were taken up again with an ambition to finish the work, get them approved and used.

This is also what has happened. The training activities have continued, primarily in the MCs and in some countries on a lower activity level than before, and guidelines have been developed and improved, however still in a review process towards approval.

At both the regional and national levels ICBP staff has participated in the important work of formulating CB needs and activities to be included in SP 2016-2020, the SP implementation plan and the NIPs, the National Indicative/Implementation Plan(s). The result of this work is discussed in section 5.2 below. It is, however, the opinion of this FE that the development of capacities for implementation of the SP with its decentralisation and riparianisation targets should have had a stronger role in the final texts. This is since there is an obvious risk that the decentralisation will fail unless the right capacities are maintained and built up in the MCs.

The FE general assessment statement for Phase II is:

Continued good work has been carried out, including training events and other CB activities. In addition, a number of quality documents/products have been further developed, now ready for use. Even so, none of the expected Outcomes have been reached in full. Progress was hampered by the slow MRC decision making processes and limited authority of regional programme leaders and staff within the MRC system.

Overall Conclusions (both phases):

- Professional CB and RMB not implemented in all activities.
- No baselines established, and no functioning M&E on outcome/impact level.
- ICBP staff knowledgeable about their work and the necessary, tools are in place.
- Many, maybe all, of the ICBP products can and should be used in the future.
- There have been good intentions and work done, but owing to staffing gaps the work intensity has gone up and down.
- There is no functional CB management system.

- The decision making processes at both regional and national levels have been slow.
- Support from high level of MRC has been low.
- The NMCs seems to have limited capacity or overloaded with their routine works or no interest in documenting the outcomes.
- The NMCs have not always chosen the “right” subjects for the trainings, i.e. not always supporting MRC SP, IWRM application and the riparianisation and decentralisation processes as intended.
- Selection of training participants should have been better.
- In reality the CB activities have targeted individual CB and not the intended organisational development.
- The concept of SLDs seems to be very promising.
- The FE is of the opinion that the support to study trips and international conferences could have been much more efficient.

3.2 Feedback from participants of ICBP training events

The result of the e-survey is based on the answer of 19 respondents, out of the 100 sampled participants of ICBP training activities, who were randomly selected from available participation lists. Because of the poor reply rate the results have little or no statistical value, but may anyhow give an indication on participants’ opinions.

The answers were given to the five levels of capacity training, including: The usefulness of the training services and the applicability of the trained knowledge and skills; the reference of the training contents; the impact of the training on the organisation environment; and the overall satisfaction of the training (See the questionnaire in Annex 5).

More than half of the respondents agreed that the development and training services provided by ICBP are useful to them individually. And nearly 16% of those answering saw the services as very useful, benefitting themselves and their organisations.

Nearly half of the answering participants appreciated the training method in terms of the balance between theory and practice. Between one fifth and one fourth of the respondents saw the possibility or chances to apply the knowledge, skills or techniques introduced or practiced in the training events. But very few of them acknowledged that they actually applied what was gained from training. Such a limited outcome may be attributed to the absence of workable mechanism conducive to the application of knowledge and skills after the staff returns from training. This is further discussed in Chapter 3 below.

A great majority of the answering participants found the introduced documents (manuals and guidelines, toolkits and templates) useful or very useful as a regular and valuable source of reference.

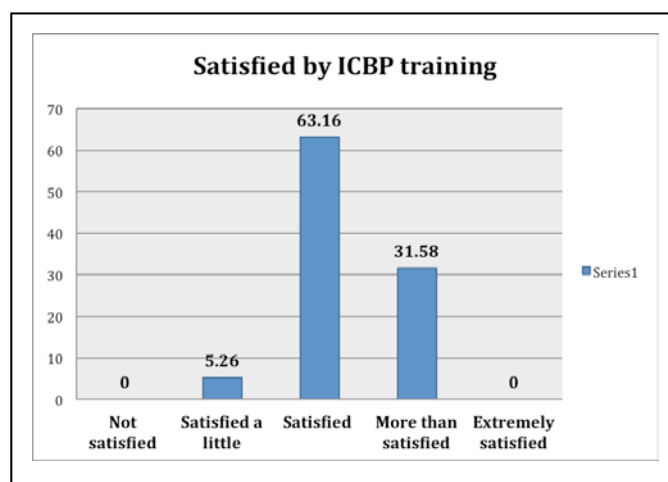


Figure 2: Satisfaction of ICBP training

At a higher level, most of the answered respondents (over 83%) saw the changes taking place at different levels as a result of the influence of training, with some having effect on their respective organisations (over 15%) and stakeholders (over 10%).

Overall, as shown in Figure 2, almost all the answering trainees expressed their satisfaction with nearly one third expressing high satisfaction with the training provided by ICBP.

The detailed results of the e-survey are presented in Annex 5²².

3.3 Assessment by DAC evaluation criteria

The FE was tasked to assess the overall performance of the ICBP in pursuing its strategic goals and operational plans, yield important lessons learned for the preparation of the next 5-year SP, and assess the effectiveness of the funding from DPs to MRC.

3.3.1 Outcome and Impact

This section addresses positive and negative changes produced by the programme, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended. This involves the main impacts, outcomes and effects resulting from the programme. The examination includes positive and negative impact of external factors. Questions to be answered under this criterion are listed in Annex 1 (TOR) and Annex 4 (Methods used). These focus around ICBP goal achievement, contribution to MRC goals on IWRM, difference made to beneficiaries and NMC/LA satisfaction.

It is important to bear in mind that not all activities of the ICBP can be measured on results base only. The very existence of some of the activities like networking has important value in its own right; although networking can also be carried out in an objective oriented way (with whom, by when, how, with what results?) or the results can be seen only in the long-run such as fundamental policy changes. Some of the training sessions cannot even be measured in the short term on quality basis but on quantity basis only. It is also important to mention that evaluation of the outcomes and impacts may be considered only if there is proper base line information (as repeatedly stressed in this report), but even so it would have been difficult to clearly attribute changes to CB and knowledge and information sharing.

The FE has focused its investigation work on finding out the applicability of the knowledge and skills provided in the trainings, the actual use of the new skills and participant's satisfaction with the training provided. The ICBP has not carried out any follow-up activity to find the answers on these factors.

As mentioned above in section 3.2 the e-survey showed that participants are satisfied with the training and often use the new knowledge. In the interviews with participants in the four countries participants also gave testimony to concrete outcomes from the CB activities (see examples in section 3.3.3. Effectiveness, below).

The FE found that the knowledge sharing effect from the CB activities is minimal. Very few of the interviewed participants had made any effort to share the new knowledge with their colleagues in the home organisation. Obviously, the CB had made a difference to the individual but not to the organisation.

Unfortunately, the FE found that the CB has been directed to individual improvements rather than organisational CD.

It would be expected that the ICBP experience and professionalism should be reflected in the new MRC SP 2016-2020, but very little on that is found in the SP text.

²² Even though this survey have very limited value owing to the low reply rate, the e-survey details are presented in Annex 5 to encourage and serve as a basis for similar surveys in the future.

Conclusions:

Clearly, ICBP has filled a gap that existed and through various activities contributed to CD in the MRC organisation. There are several obvious/concrete outcomes in place. However, since reporting focuses only on activities undertaken, and there is only limited result-based management, for many or most of the activities real outcomes and difference to the participants cannot be assessed. The more long-term impact is even harder to assess. A major lesson learned is that a base line and a functioning M&E system on outcome level really is needed in a programme/project of this nature, from the beginning.

Possibly, the ICBP should have had a totally different approach to CB in the MRC organisation than individual capacity improvements. For real change in an organisation there need to be a critical mass of individuals who have gained the new knowledge in order for the organisation to change and develop its capacity.

3.3.2 Relevance

The relevance of a programme or project could be expressed as the extent to which the objectives are consistent with beneficiaries' requirements, country policies and needs, global priorities and DPs' policies. Or, in other words, the extent to which the supported activity is suited to the priorities and policies of the target group(s), recipient(s) and DP(s). The detailed questions, formulated for this part of the evaluation and presented in Annexes 1 and 4. The focus is around consistency with MRC strategic goals, country needs, DPs' policies, the logical framework and theory of change.

The FE finds that:

The objective, outcomes and outputs of the respective Outcome Areas of the ICBP Programme Document (2009-2013) are relevant to CB requirements of MRC and NMCs, at both institutional and individual levels. The revised objective, outcomes and outputs for Phase II in ICBP Programme Document (2014-2015) are found appropriate to meet the CB demands for implementation of the MRC SP 2011-2015, Decentralisation Roadmap (2013, for period 2016-2030) and the riparianisation process. They are also in line with the policies of the DPs supporting the Programme.

Almost all the CB activities designed and undertaken in the implementation process are relevant to these strategic goals and targets. The various guidelines and tools, approved or in development process²³, their use by MRC programmed and NMCs, and the various skills training courses undertaken by regional and national offices²⁴, have served these strategic purposes.

However, it was found that in various cases the CB activities selected in the annual workplans, submitted from NMCs, are not always relevant to the defined Outputs, and thus far from contributing to the Programme Outcomes. These activities are often of routine nature (work planning), social events (celebration functions related to women or professional work), equipment procurement, or skill training topics outside the CB/competency needs²⁵.

Conclusions

In the course of Programme implementation, many and most of the support activities have proved relevant, contributing to enhancing capacities of the MRC and NMCs and national LAs for carrying out their development goals and objectives.

²³ As shown in Annex 6: List of Capacity Building Relevant Guidelines & Tools.

²⁴ Listed in section 2.2: Arguments for capacity development.

²⁵ As defined for managers and staff of respective levels in Programme Documents (2009-2013) and indicated in the Outcome 3 areas of Programme Document (2014-2015).

Also in that process, several ICBP products (guidelines, manuals, tools)²⁶ have been suggested and drafted in an effort to carry out CB/CD activities in a more focused and professional manner. Unfortunately, several of them have not been completed or approved for official use.

In the implementation of SP 2016-2020 with MRC and NMCs operating in a function-based structure, more and renewed CD work is needed. For NMCs and their LAs, increased organisational and professional capacities are required to carry out their riparianisation function as well as decentralised tasks that will be defined in their NIPs. For managers and staff at both regional and national levels, additional and renewed knowledge and skills are needed in the transitional period and in the new organisational environment. They include, among others, skills in leadership and management, change management, communication and information, IWRM, water diplomacy, negotiation and conflict resolution; knowledge on 1995 Mekong Agreement and MRC Procedures, etc.

3.3.3 Effectiveness

The FE is in this section concerned with how much of the programme's results have been attained, and if the programme's specific objectives and outcomes have or are expected to be reached. A list of detailed evaluation questions were formulated, as presented in the TOR Annex 1 and at the end of Annex 4. In summary, the questions dealt with output contribution to outcomes, application of programme products, effectiveness in the delivery and management of the CB activities and evidence of achievement of objectives.

The FE found that a great number of CB activities have been carried out during the six years of ICBP, as summarised in a table in the section addressing Efficiency below.

Again, the lack of baselines and M&E Framework and system makes it very difficult to assess the effectiveness of the interventions. However, some concrete outcomes were reported to the FE Team, as follows:

- The gender manual and toolkits are used and much appreciated in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam, but not in Thailand. GM had been carried out in several MRC Programmes, in particular in the environmental programme (EP) and the climate change programme (CCAI), in the NMCs and several LAs. In part, this change can be attributed to the ICBP gender activities.
- Other training modules have been used on national level, such as the IWRM Training of Trainers (TOT) manual and the training package on negotiation skills, in both cases much appreciated.
- IWRM Competency Framework (CF) has been used for VNMC restructuring (development of a position-based system), whereas the NMCs of Lao PDR and Cambodia expressed interest in the same.
- Satisfaction with the trainings and testimony of use of the new knowledge were expressed by participants during the interviews.
- The leadership training was much appreciated and the new skills reportedly used.
- Produced guidelines for HR and Finance and Administration are in use within MRCS.

Other, more trivial, observations include:

The proposal writing course in Lao PDR resulted in actually formulated and approved projects.

²⁶ Prominent among them are: CB Support Guideline initiated in 2009 and revised in 2013 and 2015, CB Framework drafted in 2012 and 2015, the M&E Web based information system tried in 2012, and the ICBP M&E Framework drafted in 2014-2015.

Participation in an international conference resulted in a follow-on invitation to another international conference (Thailand).

The FE observed that some NMCs set up a wish-list of training subjects rather than following a results-based approach, resulting in training subjects that do not really contribute to stated outcomes of the ICBP. The evaluation also found that none of the NMCs had any selection criteria included in the training invitation letters to the LAs. All NMCs informed that the LAs decide on participants to send and sometimes they did not get the right people for a specific training.

Conclusions

There are some outcomes from the programme, but this should have been monitored from the very beginning.

The FE also concludes that CB professionals in the future are needed both within MRCS and at NMCs to support CD for SP 2016-2020 and NIP implementation. Improvements need to be made both in the selection of CB topics and the selection of trainees.

Success story 2

Using IWRM Competency Framework (CF) in designing position-based system (MONRE – VMNC):

VNMC was an active agency responding to the (position-based) staff structuring plan designed by its Ministry (MONRE) under the Government's Public Administration Reform (PAR) Master Programme (2011-2020).

Implemented in early 2014, VNMC used the IWRM CF (drafted by MRC in 2012) as a basis to review the job profiles and competency gaps of its staff. On that basis, a system of competency framework for staff categories and Job Descriptions (JDs) of all the 30 posts of VNMC was designed.

It was submitted to and approved by the Ministry late same year.

The experience was shared with other agencies of MONRE. The initiative also attracted the interest of other NMCs (Laos and Cambodia) and their intention to do the same.

3.3.4 Efficiency

In this section the FE is concerned with costs, quantity, quality, timeliness and outputs in relation to the inputs. This requires comparing alternative approaches to achieving the same outputs, to see whether the most efficient process has been adopted. Comparison is made against what was planned.

The questions raised are presented in detail in Annexes 1 and 4. They focus on work plan realism, implementation modalities, achievements and financial management.

With regard to efficiency the FE found the following:

Cost-efficiency question:

Table 1 shows that over the whole 6-year Programme, more than 8.000²⁷ "event persons" have undergone CB training, with the rate of male participants often higher (around 69%) than females in all periods. The Cambodian, Laotian, and Vietnamese NMCs have a higher number of participants attending CB activities, and Vietnam having a better gender balance (43.5%). The Thai NMC has the least number of reported staff participating in CB activities.

²⁷ Not including the number of the four MCs in the 2009-2012 period. Note that the number of individuals is much less since many participants have attended more than one training.

Table 1. Number of participants²⁸ in capacity building regionally and nationally

Organisation	2009 - 2012 ²⁹		2013		2014 - 2015		TOTAL
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
CNMC			223	92	264	87	666
LNMC			342	65	424	330	1161
TNMC			27	61	134	150	372
VNMC			95	126	347	214	782
REGIONAL	2037	1502	508	301	500	421	5269
TOTAL	2037	1502	1195	645	1669	1202	8250

Most of the CB activities, as shown in Table 2 fall in the training and workshop category (27% and 28 % respectively), counting for nearly 55% of the total capacity strengthening effort. The total number of meetings counted for nearly one fourth (23%) of all training events.

More than half of the CB activities (over 57%) were undertaken in the early phase of the Programme (2009-2012). Though the disaggregate figure is actually available, it was found from the interview visits, and supported by the figure shown in Table 1, that the majority of the CB activities were undertaken by the NMCSs.

Table 2. Number of ICBP capacity building events (activities) regionally and nationally

Period	Trainin g	W- shop	Meetin g	Int'l conf.	Visits	Other s	Sum
2009- 2012	82	84	61	11	12	26	276
2013	12	18	19	2	1	34	86
2014- 2015	28	31	29	7	3	17	115
Total	128	133	109	20	16	77	477

Regarding financial matters, the FE found that a very high proportion of the skills training courses and workshops were organised outside cities with additional cost for travel, DSA and lodging³⁰. Such a common phenomenon poses a question of cost-efficiency of the budget invested against the rate of return, especially when very limited or no cost-efficiency follow-up actions of these activities were found. A rough estimate from the FE is that the average cost per event was somewhat less than USD 7,000³¹, and the average cost per participator USD 400. In the opinion of the FE both figures could have been lower with a stronger cost-saving attitude in the MCs.

²⁸ The figures provided in all periods are not absolutely correct, due to missing of segregated and total number of participants in different events.

²⁹ No figure of NMNCs was provided in this period.

³⁰ Such an arrangement mobilises and keep more participants in place as argued by Lao, Cambodia and Vietnam NMNCs, whilst Thailand prefers to find new venues for these events.

³¹ 8,250 participants in 477 events. Total cost USD 3.3 million (sum of budget lines for training (DFAT and NZ) and training/workshops + English courses (Finland JRP), see Annex 10.

Many of the meetings were of routine nature of NMCs, using financial support from ICBP budget. The FE is of the opinion that many of these meetings are just regular meetings that cannot be justified as contributing to ICBP programme objectives or expected outcomes. Such meetings should not have been included in the NMC ICBP workplans or activity level plans.

Reviewing the six-month reports of several years and especially the Annual Outcomes Reports throughout 2011-2013, it was found that, whilst budget for training accounts for nearly half of the total budget, the reporting is mainly of descriptive nature, listing the activities implemented and output produced without mentioning unit costs, e.g. average costs for training events and cost for each training participant.

The FE has not found any assessment of CB activity effectiveness or implementation quality. FE sources of information on this subject are the (informal) reflections of individual participants during the field interviews and the limited value e-survey.

The reasons pertaining to the above-described issues could be the following:

Poor Programme implementation management:

In the two Programme implementation periods (2009-2013 and 2014-2015), though a more or less result-based work planning framework was suggested and the ICBP management has made successive efforts to introduce outcome-oriented work plan tools, they received limited cooperation from MCs, probably due to the multi-functions of the national ICBP teams. There was uncompleted development and discontinued use of the M&E system in Phase I at the regional level and possibly inadequate capacity at national level for CB³². The newly developed M&E framework in 2014-2015 has been introduced too late to be fully functional. In summary, there has not been an efficient control over the actual implementation of Programme activities, outputs and outcomes.

Over several months and even years the Programme has suffered from being short of professional capacity in the regional ICBP team. The table in Annex 6 shows significant gaps in the staffing of the team. This is in particular evident within and around year 2013, with negative effects on Programme performance. Among others, the Programme did not have a Programme Coordinator from July 2013 to January 2014, and lacked an International Technical Advisor (ITA) from late December 2012 to December 2014.

Limited support from senior management:

The Programme Office has been housed at the Human Resources Section (HRS) for too long, instead of being placed more appropriately to reflect Programme objectives to serve the full MRC organisation down to MC LAs³³. The FE is of the opinion that this has diminished support from senior management.

The role of the Programme Steering Committee is clear from the Programme Implementation Plans (PIP), including the tasks to approve the PIP and annual work plans, and monitoring and evaluation of overall Programme performance. The FE observed that there is no evidence of formal approval of the final annual work plans by the Programme Steering Committee³⁴, only a kind of endorsement of draft AWP.

Funding:

³² Which was recommended for correction by the Mid-term Review.

³³ There has been long discussion and debate on this, including the recommendation of the Mid Term Review, whether to house the Office at Planning Division or at the Office of CEO.

³⁴ Though there is endorsement of annual work plans in the annual Steering Committee meeting, as explained by VNMC.

The Government of Australia (DFAT) was the biggest contributor to funding of the ICBP, committing over 74% of the total fund. Finland came next with its fund (16% of total) supporting the successful JRP programme, followed by New Zealand (10 % of total), which finished its support in June 2013 with all budget spent.

At the reporting time (15 October, 2015) with 2.5 months left until programme closure the total budget expenditure was close to 95% (see summary table for years 2009-2015 in Annex 10).

Conclusions:

A great number of relevant CB activities have been carried out, and a great number of staff from the MRC organisation has attended the CB events.

As a result of efforts by the Programme management team, the internal administrative system for controlling Programme activities were in place at an early stage. Unfortunately, it has not been used as intended, possibly owing to the high level of staff turnover and multi-functions of the ICBP teams at national level (NMCSs) and the limited support from top-level management at regional level (MRCS).

A lesson is that activity and budget result-oriented work planning, M&E and reporting system need to be functioning at all levels to ensure effective control of Programme efficiency.

3.3.5 Sustainability

The sustainability criterion relates to whether the positive outcomes of the programme and benefits of an activity are likely to continue after DP funding has been withdrawn. For top scoring a programme/project need to be environmentally, socially and financially sustainable.

The major factors influencing the achievement and non-achievement of sustainability of the programme are as follows:

Ownership: The FE found that the beneficiaries, i.e. the MRCS, the NMCs and priority LAs, were involved in the formulation and design of their CB activities from the beginning. Several workshops on ICBP CB contents and working methods were held in 2009 with a broad attendance. In FE opinion, this has promoted ownership and eventual application of acquired knowledge and skills.

Continued capacity development: The FE is not convinced that the MRC management is committed to pursue implementing CB when external funding has ceased at the end of 2015. There is no exit strategy or exit plan that would safeguard sustainability of results; the institutional sustainability of the programme is not there in the organisational restructuring of MRC; and the national implementing agencies, both NMCSs and LAs, have so far done little to get the much needed national or DP budgets/resources to maintain and further develop the capacity actions initiated.

Likely sustainable outcomes: The likelihood of sustainable outcomes is low when it comes to conducting training. This conclusion is drawn regardless of the fact that participants to the trainings both appreciate and still use the materials and new knowledge. The reason is primarily since CD has focused on individual learning rather than organisational CD. There is a higher likelihood of sustainable outcomes when it comes to use of the guidelines, manuals and tools developed under the programme, provided that these products urgently are formally approved and made easily accessible to a wide range of potential users. This may be the most important and lasting heritage from the programme.

Staff turnover: Current rate of staff turnover all over the MRC organisation raises concerns with regard to possibilities of retention of corporate knowledge and skills gained out of CB activities. It is to this FE surprising that the MRC organisation, in which staff turnover is a regulated must, does not have special mechanisms or an operational knowledge management system for systematic "lessons learnt" to maintain institutional heritage/memory.

Conclusions:

- Sustainability of results must be regarded as low.
- Immediate action need be taken to safeguard sustainability of some of the results, primarily of the guidelines, manuals and tools developed.
- An exit plan for immediate implementation is urgently needed, see recommendation in Chapter 6.
- Likewise, an exit strategy is needed to be included in the MRC SP Implementation Plan for the period 2016 - 2020.
- Collection of success stories could be a way to demonstrate a higher degree of sustainability.

Success story 3

An inspiring teacher of gender knowledge at Cambodia NMC:

For 6 years now Dr. Kang Kroesna is well known as an enthusiastic gender trainer of staff from CNMC and LAs.

Whilst in the current position as Dean of Faculty of Agricultural Technology and Management (ATM) of the Cambodian Royal University of Agriculture (RUA), she has been working for several years as a gender consultant for Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology (MWRM), and a member of the Gender Group at Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF).

In the past six years, Dr. Kroesna was selected by CNMC to give training in many gender courses. Her training, at both basic and advanced levels, has inspired many participants to bring gender knowledge into their professional work, with several of the participants becoming the gender focal points of their respective LAs.

The ICBP Gender Toolkits (in English and local languages) was used by her for the training.

During the field interviews of the evaluation team Dr. Kang Kroesna was named with high appreciation by several LA officers.

3.4 Gender issues

The support of ICBP to GM is assessed using questions dealing with degree of GM in ICBP, MRC SP and MRC programmes, plus the use of ICBP gender mechanisms and tools within MRCS and MCs (see Annex 1 and 4).

GM activities under ICBP are not found visible in the different MRC sector programmes³⁵ to the degree required in the Programme Document. The FE is of the opinion that mainstreaming is not carried out in the MRC Programmes. At the most, the programmes collect and present gender disaggregated data.

In contrast, gender training and other activities are quite active in MCs, with different intensities.

In Cambodia, gender training has been undertaken regularly in the past six – seven years (between 1-2 courses/yr) for gender focal points or contact persons appointed at all LAs. The training (designed for basic and advanced levels) has been conducted by experienced

³⁵ Most MRCS Programme Coordinators claimed that they were consulted in development of Toolkits of their respective areas, but actual gender mainstreaming work was undertaken within the realm of their professional system. It is at their discretion to cooperate with ICBP in this work.

trainers, using the ICBP Gender Toolkits (in English and local language³⁶) as an important source of reference. As a result, gender aspects was reported integrated into different areas, especially in planning and development work of agriculture, water and fishery at national and subnational levels.

VNMC adopted the GM concept in the early years of ICBP implementation, and is the first MC having Gender Toolkits translated into the local language (in 2013) for intensive use in mainstreaming work. In recent years, VNMC has established a team of 12 gender trainers from different training and research institutions. With support from the ICBP and in cooperation with other development partners (UN HABITAT, Gender and Water Alliance) the gender awareness/integration training was conducted in most LA sectors (ministries and their training institutes), the focal points of some are established as members of their respective Boards for Women Advancement³⁷. Particularly, Gender Toolkits are used in policy development in the fishery sector. They are also used as a source of integration in various researches and studies (i.e. climate change impact “on women and children” researches undertaken in the 2 Mekong Delta provinces of Soc Trang and Kien Giang, and a study of Mekong area-wide flood mortality impact with women and children segregation).

In Lao PDR, GM was reported to have trained a pool of focal points appointed by the LAs. The training was intensified from 2014 after the Gender Toolkits were translated into the local language. Except for the case of the fishery sector, no evidence of gender integration in other LAs was reported.

According to the CB activity lists provided the FE by the ICBP regional team, the TNMC has funded a total of 54 gender awareness and knowledge training and other activities in the period 2009 to 2012 in cooperation with the Department of Women's Affairs and Family Development. In these exercises other training materials than the ICBP gender toolkits were used. In fact, the ICBP gender toolkits were not translated into Thai Language until this year (2015). There is no evidence on the introduction or use of the ICBP Gender Toolkits by the NMC and its LAs for mainstreaming purpose³⁸. In the course of the FE interview trip, one more training session on gender awareness, undertaken in 2014, was mentioned, but a training with such content is not included in the TNMC activity list made available to this FE.

Conclusion:

GM in the MRC organisation seems to be the most developed part of ICBP, apart from the JRP. The Gender Toolkits developed for nine IWRM sectors in 2000 and those established for MRC management areas³⁹ in the following years, with the versions of key areas translated into all MC languages, provide a good set of reference materials for advocating and continued mainstreaming of gender work in the MRC system.

It is inspiring that gender factors have been integrated in the important IWRM sectors in all the MCs, and even going to sub-national level (in Cambodia and Vietnam) linking to poverty alleviation efforts.

³⁶ Translated into Cambodian Language in 2015.

³⁷ As network members of the National Committee for the Advancement of Women in Vietnam.

³⁸ Gender work in Thailand is under the responsibility of Department of Women's Affairs and Family Development, with focal point network established in all government agencies and provinces.

³⁹ In Policy and Decision Making Processes, Programme and Project, Activities and Field Implementation, Human Resources Development and management ...

4. ASSESSMENT BY GOALS AND OUTCOMES

4.1 Contribution to MRC Strategic Goals 2011-15

In this section the FE tries to assess the ICBP contribution in the form of CB services for the implementation of the current MRC SP for the period 2011 to 2015.

MRC Strategy Goal 4:

"Capacity developed for IWRM policy adoption and implementation..."

Outcome 4.1: Organisational and institutional capabilities strengthened

- Yes maybe, but no real evidence found
- Manual for IWRM Training of Trainers Manual developed and used
- No information on IWRM policy adoption, but some participants state policy influence

Outcome 4.2: Sound leadership and strengthened management

- Mainly improved at individual level (MRC, NMCs) (as result of Leadership training)
- Management training on different subjects conducted
- Several HR management guidelines produced

Outcome 4.3: Staff capacities improved

- Most training fall in this category. No real evidence for actual improvements, but they should be there

Outcome 4.4: Enhanced knowledge sharing

- Somehow enhanced, mainly via individual/unit initiatives
- Sharing and Learning Dialogues (SLDs) is a most interesting initiative
- Very limited sharing of guidelines, manuals, tools and knowledge from the trainings
- Guideline for knowledge transfer produced

Conclusions

ICBP has contributed to the attainment of the strategic goals of MRC SP for the period 2011-2015. The FE is of the opinion that this contribution could have been significantly higher with a stronger senior management support to CB, more effective decision making and a more proper placing of ICBP in the MRCS organisation.

4.2 Achievement of ICBP Outcomes

This section addresses main outcomes achieved and their effects resulting from the Programme in the respective Phases (2009-2013 and 2014-2015 respectively). The

assessment is examined for each specific outcome area, considering both internal and external factors.

A general observation from this FE is that the formulation of the expected outcomes could have been much better. As written in the two Programme Documents (ProDocs), the ambition level is placed unrealistically high. Further analysis on this is presented in Section 5.2 (Issues and Lessons).

Achievement of Phase I (2009 – 2013) outcomes:

Outcome 1: MRC, NMCs and prioritised national LAs have the necessary technical competencies to integrate IWRM principles into policy making, planning and implementation.

This outcome is only reached to some extent. The FET could note some results from of introduction training using IWRM-related documents⁴⁰ for MRCS and MNCs in the early stage of ICBP implementation (2010-2012).

It was found that IWRM-related technical CD⁴¹ was not handled by the ICBP. In reality the MRC programmes have their own technical/professional CD services with no or little coordination with or advise from the ICBP. At this stage, it is not possible to assess LAs' competences to integrate IWRM principles into policy making, planning and implementation.

In the Result Framework of Phase I ProDoc (2009-2013) measurable indicators were identified as follows: (i) improved capacity of management and professional staff of MRC, NMCs and prioritised national LAs in integrating IWRM principles, and (ii) the quality of their technical outputs in IWRM. However, there is no sign of these indicators used in reporting or follow-up.

Outcome 2: MRC and NMCs (including their Secretariats) have the necessary organisational capability to effectively coordinate and support the achievement of MRC objectives.

A series of guidelines and toolkits⁴² for HR management work were developed in years 2009-2013. However, though some of these tools have been reported partly implemented at the regional level, most of them have not been formally approved⁴³, hence cannot be made public and introduced to the full MRC organisation for use.

This outcome is not fully achieved.

Outcome 3: Gender is mainstreamed within the MRCS and all IWRM work of the MRC, NMCs and prioritised national LAs is made gender responsive.

GM work is well undertaken with a number of guidelines and toolkits produced, but the actual CB activities in the MCs vary in terms of intensity and result. There is no evidence on GM undertaken by ICBP in all IWRM work of MRCS and its programmes. At the national level, gender responsiveness is integrated in a number of LA areas. The integration process is ongoing with a momentum in need to be sustained.

⁴⁰ MRC Module-based IWRM CF, MRC Module-Based IWRM Training Module, Manual for Training of Trainers in IWRM in the Mekong Basin.

⁴¹ In the areas of: Addressing the opportunities and consequences of the ongoing developments (including development in the Lancang-Upper Mekong Basin), expansion and intensity of irrigated agriculture for food security and poverty alleviation, improvement of sustainability of hydropower development, adaptation to climate change, acquisition of essential knowledge to address uncertainty and risk, of the identified development opportunities, integration of basin development planning considerations into national systems (IWRM Basin Development Strategy-January 2011).

⁴² They include: Internship Guidelines (2011), Orientation Toolkits (2012), Guideline on Administration of Grievances (2013), CB Support Guidelines (2013) and a guideline on procurement.

⁴³ Except for the Guideline on Administration of Grievances.

Results within this outcome area can partly be attributed to ICBP energetic activities and funding, and partly to ICBP-external initiatives in the MCs.

Outcome 4: *An effective integrated and sustainable CB mechanism is established and functioning to support the work of MRC.*

The various CB manuals (CB Support Guidelines and CB Framework) have indirect impact in this outcome area, but they were only drafted in the last year of the Phase, and have not yet been approved for use.

In summary, this outcome was not achieved in Phase I. To this FE there seems to have been a hesitance from the MRC programmes in adopting the ICBP CB framework and relevant guidelines. The result could have been better if the development and implementation of these tools and systems had had a stronger support from MRC senior management.

Systematic documentation, archiving and publishing of all HR and CB/CD management materials is essential to serve as the lasting heritage of the programme. This work should be included in the exit plan.

Achievement of Phase II (2014-15) outcomes:

Outcome 1: *CB Guidelines and tools was improved and applied in all MRC CB activities.*

A CB Support Guidelines was improved in 2015 and the CB Framework was drafted in 2015 and still under improvement⁴⁴. Further guidelines⁴⁵ were also developed in 2015.

An M&E Framework⁴⁶ was developed by the ICBP during 2014-2015, but it remains to be seen if it will be used.

Gender tools developed in the early Phase continue to be applied in key line sectors of NMCs. During Phase II all toolkits have been translated into the national languages.

This FE concludes that improvements of the CB Guidelines and tools have been made but we do not believe that they are applied in all MRC CB activities. Accordingly, Outcome 1 is not fully reached.

Outcome 2: *Partnership with coordination and tracking system for CB especially on IWRM, River Basin Management and relevant aspects were strengthened and applied to track the trainers as well as trainees database and for M&E purpose.*

There is no evidence of a tracking system developed and functioning. The work to develop a database of trainees and trainers (and their training institutions) has been started by ICBP for the purpose of having a systematic database system for future use and reference. However, this important task gains no interest from NMCs, nor from the MRC programmes since they do not inform the ICBP on technical trainings, trainees, resource persons or collaborating organisations. Outcome only partly reached.

Outcome 3: *MRC and MCs (NMCs and LAs) have competent staff to facilitate and coordinate CB to support the decentralisation of core river basin management functions and to achieve the remaining milestones in the MRC SP 2011-2015.*

The ICBP regional team is competent for this type of work, but with the staffing gaps it does not have full capacity to address all CB facilitation and coordination tasks. Sufficient professional and competent staff to handle CB coordination and support CB activities needed

⁴⁴ Details still need to be inserted related to MRC new organisational structure.

⁴⁵ Guidelines on Exchange Visit and Staff Secondment (2015), Knowledge and Skill Transfer Guideline (2015).

⁴⁶ It provides a tool for the MCs to develop national output indicators to measure their achievements and contribution to regional outputs and outcomes.

for the decentralisation process and completion of MRC SP 2011-2015 milestones⁴⁷ have not been found within the MRC programmes.

There are also a number of competent CB managers and staff at national levels (NMC/LA).

Indicators and standards for competent staff have been suggested by ICBP to support capacity retention and staff recruitment purposes. But this initiative was not followed-up.

The FE concludes that Outcome 3 is only partly reached.

A big problem is that now that ICBP is phasing out, competent CD staff will not be retained. Looking forward, professional CD staff is still needed at all levels of the MRC organisation. This requirement does not seem to be met judging from indications from the on-going SP and annual planning process.

⁴⁷ They include: (i) Focus on delivery of Specific Goal 3 (outcomes 3.1, 3.2 and 3.4 in particular) and Specific Goal 5 in the current SP; (ii) Improve outcome monitoring. Strengthen the results based culture in the MRC by piloting outcome reporting of Specific Goals 3 and 5; (iii) Analyse programme funding gaps and surpluses and reallocate to Specific Goals 3 and 5 in 2015; (iv) Amend MRC staffing policies to build a strong cadre of staff. Staffing policies and procedures need to be changed allowing a flexible interpretation of Article 33 in the 1995 Mekong Agreement; (v) Identify and appoint drivers of change to deliver the institutional reform that is taking place over the coming 7 years.

5. DISCUSSION AND LESSONS LEARNT

5.1 Follow up of Mid-Term Review 2012

A Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the ICBP Phase I operation (2009-2013) focused on the five DAC evaluation criteria, plus gender and the use of results-based approaches in programme implementation. It was reported in February 2012. Findings and recommendations are summarised in the TOR for the current evaluation, Annex 1.

The MTR found that the ICBP objectives appear highly relevant, had low effectiveness owing to results behind expectations and a lack of monitoring data on the level of both outputs and outcomes. Staffing constraints including high level of staff turn-over had played an important part in delaying many of the activities, and policy support from senior management had not always been sufficient. With no baseline data available and broad indicators impacts were not possible to evaluate. The training approach faced multiple constraints including issues of selection of trainees. The medium term effects of most training were unclear to the MTR.

The MTR recommendations were to identify the CB priorities in the line with the MRC SP; to change the location of ICBP in the MRCS organisational structure; to raise ICBP's status; to enhance the ability of the programme to manage for development results and to use results based management; to enhance the approach to gender by incorporation of gender aspects in the designing phase of programmes and focus on NMCs and LAs; to refine the JRP project; and to plan for continuation of ICBP beyond 2013 in order to ensure longer term support to the MRC CB process.

The findings of the current FE are much the same as the MTR findings 3.5 years earlier. Much of the recommendations are also still valid, with the exception of the gender work where significant progress has been made. This FE concludes that many of the problems still facing the ICBP were identified early in the process, and much more could have been done to follow up on MTR recommendations.

5.2 Issues and lessons

This part highlights and analyses the issues and pitfalls occurred in the design and implementation stages of the Programme that affect the achievement of its outcomes and objectives. It also suggests the lessons that need consideration as MRCS and NMCs move into a new period with changing role and functions taking place in the entire MRC system.

Issues

Formulation of Outcomes: As analysed in Part 4.2 (Achievement of ICBP Outcomes), the Programme has neither nor partly fulfilled its task to enhance the "organisational capacity" (of MRC) and "technical competencies" (of MRC programmes and NMCs). In effect, ICBP is only successful in developing capacities on the individual level, of managers and staff of MCs.

Such a limited result poses a question of whether the setting of Programme objective and outcomes has been too ambitious or unrealistic in the MRCS political environment at the time of Programme development.

Positioning of ICBP: Another reason contributing to the limited achievement of important Programme outcomes may also be the positioning of the ICBP under the MRCS HR Section. In the opinion of this FE this organisational arrangement has greatly affected the implementation of the ICBP especially in the area of Organisational Development (OD), CB services to MRC programmes and the adoption of other ICBP outputs (guidelines and tools for HRM and CB).

Improper M&E system: There has not been a proper result-based M&E and reporting system in place to serve Programme implementation management purpose, including the CB area. At the country level, the indicators focused on output level. At regional level, there were

indicators to measure the achievements of outputs, outcomes and objective, but ICBP has not been able to measure the degree of outcome and objective fulfilment. Though initiated in the ProDoc and suggested in the Programme implementation plans, followed-up by successive efforts of the Programme team, a functional M&E system has not until recently been established in the ICBP.

The baseline data on organisational and staff capacities was not established in the early implementation period (as required in the ProDoc), making it difficult for tracking and evaluation of the CB activities/outputs undertaken and produced both on the regional level and in the MCs.

HR retention and sustainability: At the time of evaluation, the FE team found that the rate of change and mobility of professional staff in MRC programmes. Clearly, current MRCS HR management policies⁴⁸ on contract length have negative effects on continuity of work and institutional memory. To some degree, staff mobility is also a continuity problem in some of the NMCSs.

Lessons learned

The following lessons to bring forward into the new MRC SP period are noted:

First, *do not repeat the mistake of not having a baseline.* A professional and well organised baseline data system is needed and should be developed at the earliest stage during the transition period in the first half of year 2016, not only on staff but also on organisational competences, in both cases related to the riparianisation and decentralisation. It will provide the basis for identification of result indicators for any CD effort, and serve as the benchmarks for evaluation of results.

Second, *a functioning M&E and reporting system, adopting the result-based management approach, should be developed and used from the beginning.* It will include a full set of result elements (as indicated in a Theory of Change framework), and their success indicators, developed on the basis of political commitment and SMART criteria. Such a system will help effectively track the progress of activities and evaluate the attainment of results, suggest necessary correction measures and be accountable to stakeholders.

Third, *MRCS and NMCs should be proactive to expand the cooperation and coordination with other stakeholders and programmes.* This will create momentum and open entry points to integrate with other on-going CD interventions.

Fourth, to ensure the effectiveness in staff CD, there is a need to *establish a standardised and workable system of participant selection.* It will help select the right people for the right and relevant CB activities, meeting transparent, accountable and objective requirements.

Fifth, to support real change for the organisation, *a Theory of Change approach should be adopted* in the CD area. It means that training and other modalities should not be spread thinly to individuals over the MRC organisation. Instead, each priority organisation needs to have a critical mass (reaching a sufficient number of participants) to start a change process.

Sixth, *strong leadership, and sound management and support of senior management* are essential to ensure the successful implementation of any CD programme. That would have empowered ICBP to move beyond providing training, to address issues across the organisation and focus more on organisational development.

Lastly, change the mindset from a “capacity building” to a “capacity development” concept.

⁴⁸ MRC regulates that riparian professional staff can work with MRCS for a period of maximum 2 terms (3 years per term). Vietnam allows its people to serve only 1 term. Longer than that will be considered on a case by case basis.

5.3 Needs for implementation of MRC Strategy 2016-2020

The FE team studied the newly formulated MRC SP 2016-2020 document in order to respond to the third evaluation task the TOR: “Identify the key priorities of CB activities for the next SP (2016-2020) where CB support for staff of MRCS, NMCs and LAs is seen to play a major role for implementation of the decentralisation of core river basin management functions (CRBMFs) and the transition to the riparianisation of MRC operation”.

With regard to human resources (HR) and CB (or rather CD) the FET found that it is recognised that implementation of the new SP requires a change in mind-set with regard to how the organisation should work and how the individual co-worker should contribute. There will be an increased use of riparian consultants, with the engagement of international consultants only on part- or short term. There will also be targeted recruitment and CB activities.

External expertise need be engaged to increase productivity with short and long term secondments from within the full MRC organisation as one of the means to fill this need.

CD should be included in the plans on the regional level. On the national level the different MCs should, if needed, seek DP(s) bilateral support, e.g. for knowledge and skills needed in order to take over core functions and the technical training needed to fulfil requirements for quality monitoring activities. CB and CD activities should be included in the national plans including the NIPs.

There are several risks identified in the SP, connected to human resources and CD. Mitigation measures to reduce risks related to limited resources and capacity at national level to implement MRC decentralisation are: MCs should seek bilateral DP(s) help for CD activities; MRCS will provide targeted CD services for priority needs; and close monitoring of SP/NIP implementation.

There is also an identified risk of insufficient leadership and management capacity for the implementation of the new SP. Suggested mitigation measures are: MRCS CEO and senior management to take on a strong role; employ a change manager at least for the transition period; MRC Council and Joint Committee (JC) set clear milestones and mechanisms for the implementation; and effective planning and reporting.

The FET concludes that the new SP indeed is a big shift, with a changed MRC culture. Although difficult to implement, the planned change is a necessity and an opportunity for the future. The new SP requires very competent staff where each will take on a broader spectrum of working tasks with higher productivity than today. The leadership will be extremely important, and adoption of new and modern leadership skills will be a necessity. This includes skills in water diplomacy (negotiation, conflict resolution, international water law); use of M&E for progress and outcome monitoring, and for institutional learning. A very good human resource management function will be needed, including well managed CD activities. The content of the 1995 Mekong Agreement and the five MRC Procedures need to be well understood by all involved individuals, down to the person in charge of taking e.g. water quality samples.

Recommended topics for CD in the 2016 to 2020 period are found in section 6.2 below.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 General

The overarching *recommendation* of this FE is that the MRC needs to become less secretive. Much more, or all, of MRC knowledge, methods, data and reports need be published on the public domain. This will improve the MRC image, contribute to wider CD outcomes and help develop the recruitment base of skilled riparian specialists.

Second, the FE argues and *recommends* that MRC should demonstrate and be an example of efficient, creative and modern leadership, to “walk the talk”. This requires a shift in mind-set, as also pointed out in the new strategy, and targeted CD activities.

Other overall recommendations are:

1. Stronger emphasis should be placed on sustainable development and the implementation of the SDG's in MRC SP 2016-2020. This include CD activities addressing poverty reduction, gender, good governance, rights-based approach and equality, all in a basin-wide perspective and as discussed in section 2.1 above.
2. MRCS to focus on CD activities that support the implementation of core functions (as stated in the new SP) and effective leadership.
3. Continue collecting and recording base-line data on current capacities in the full MRC organisation.
4. Implement the recently further developed ICBP monitoring framework and M&E system to track CD outcomes at organisational level, on both regional and national levels.
5. Early identification of capacity gaps, especially at NMCs, to be included in NIPs.
6. NMCs in driving seats for implementation of NIP CD plans (on the national level).
7. MCs seek DP(s) support bilaterally, in particular for CD of technical knowledge and skills needed to carry out decentralised core functions.
8. Continue building a network of collaborating organisations in the region and world-wide with the intention to supplement and increase MRC capacity to address and find solutions to sustainable development and climate change issues.

6.2 Capacity Development in the new Strategy

To ensure effective implementation of the SP 2016-2020 with the new requirements, the MRC organisation should apply a results-based approach to CD, adopting a Theory of Change approach and combining practical knowledge with applicable skills. The new strategy, including reduced staff at the MRCS, requires very competent leaders and co-workers who each cover wider competence areas and have higher personal productivity than up to now.

The FE *recommends* that the MRC focuses on the following CD areas:

Leadership skills: (i) Making vision, mission, core values concrete and well understood, communicating, imparting and make them practical to staff; (ii) mobilising and motivating staffs and their enthusiasm for work; (iii) work in a multicultural environment, plus several of the topics below.

Change management: The ability to mobilise and encourage the staff involvement in the change/transition process in a well-organised plan; creating consensus and proper handling of potential resistance.

Communication: The ability to disseminate messages and to make decisions understood. Skills within the MRC and NMCs to inform and improve the image of the organisation (to partners, media, and a broader public).

Water diplomacy: Including the skills in negotiation, conflict resolution in combination with knowledge of the MRC five Procedures⁴⁹ and international water law.

Good understanding of the 1995 Mekong Agreement and Procedures, IWRM principles in MRC system down to lowest level.

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E): Knowledge and skills in the use of result-based management (RBM), combined with skills in developing SMART⁵⁰-oriented result indicators, tracking of progress, assessment of results and learning from successes and mistakes.

Human Resource Development (HRD), including knowledge and skills in HR development planning, staff and talent attraction and retention, merit-based staff assessment and performance appraisal.

6.3 Exit plan and strategy

Now that ICBP is phasing out there is a need for immediate action to sustain results gained so far. The FE *recommends*:

- Create an information data base by systematic placing of all documents in archive (library) and on web-site(s):
 - Hard copies, well structured and key-worded, to libraries and archives of MRCS and the NMCs.
 - Soft copies, well structured, to be placed on compact discs or other permanent media. Copies to be distributed to all MRC programmes, NMCs and priority LAs (maybe 10 CDs to each organisation, with focus on LA participants to ICBP CB activities).
 - Quickly approve and upload all guidelines, manuals, toolkits and other relevant documents on the MRCS and NMC web-sites.
- Tell everyone (market the information data base):
 - All participants of conducted CB activities, in all four countries, should be noted over e-mail or other information channels where and how to get access to the documents.
 - Other relevant organisations, such as institutions listed at the end of section 2.2 above.
- Develop a Completion Report that meets both MRC and DPs' requirements.
- Start this recommended work immediately, else there will be no time left to do it.
- Include capacities during the coming half-year transition period to follow-up on recommendations from this FE, e.g. by prolonging the contract of the Planning, Monitoring and Communication Programme Officer.

It is also *recommended* that the MRC now, in connection with the development of its Plan for implementation of SP 2016-2020 include an exit strategy in the plan. An exit strategy (or plan) is in essence a sustainability plan. Thinking in exit terms will help setting deadlines for

⁴⁹ Procedures for (i) Data and Information Exchange and Sharing; (ii) Water Use Monitoring; (iii) Notification, Prior Consultation and Agreement; (iv) Maintenance of Flows on the Mainstream; and (v) Water Quality.

⁵⁰ Specific, Measurable, Agreeable, Resources, Time-bound.

important events, decisions and activities that must be undertaken before end of the strategy period in order to attain and sustain the strategic goals before time and funds run out.

The FE *recommends* that the exit strategy and plan include analysis of “best” and “worst” case scenarios for the “new MRC”, i.e. with different levels of MC engagement, with and without strong core support to MRCS, and with and without recruitment of experienced senior specialists. Examples from both the region and around the globe could be used to develop these best and worst case scenarios, and to set out main points of action for the different “what if” cases, including how to sustain the CD results achieved so far.