

## Concept note

# Water-Food Security in Cambodia and the Vietnam Delta

### Introduction

Around 60 million people live in the Lower Mekong Basin, of which 40 per cent live in a 15 km-wide corridor along the Mekong mainstream. One third of the population has water related activities as their main occupation and approximately 20 per cent have no second or alternative occupation. The Lower Mekong countries are currently considering hydropower as a solution for their increasing energy needs. The hydropower development has triggered an increasing competition for water resources in the Mekong River Basin that inevitably will affect the food source /production /security of the local population.

The 1995 Mekong Agreement was signed by Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam. The Agreement encourages the Parties to cooperate for equitable and reasonable use of the Mekong Basin and its resources. The Mekong River Commission (MRC) was established to coordinate the decision-making of the riparian states and to implement the 1995 Agreement. The MRC Secretariat's role as a technical advisor to the riparians has been successful in terms of knowledge management as well as data and information sharing. However, in regard to the planned hydropower dams on the Mekong mainstream, it has proved a challenge for the MRC to implement the 'Procedure for Notification, Prior Consultation and Agreement' (PNPCA) on planned measures, and to accommodate the rapidly emerging dam-building scenarios within its current planning instruments.

Hence, the hydropower development in the Mekong and its consequence for livelihoods and local development is unclear yet evolving with major plans, resources and infrastructure investments. It is obvious that it introduces a trade-off in terms of Water-Food-Energy. In a regional workshop in Chiang Rai, March 2013, the Shared Waters Partnership (SWP- implemented by SIWI & UNDP) concluded that there are considerable risks and vulnerabilities pertaining to food security in the Lower Mekong Basin. Ground research was presented that elaborated the consequences of the foreseen alterations and the therewith associated decline in fish production, and to some extent agricultural production as well. In combination with the overall increased pressure on land and water resources, there is an obvious threat to food security in the Lower Mekong Basin. Two issues stand out and will be further scrutinized in these workshops: Firstly, the risk of major decline in fisheries in Cambodia as the Tonle Sap system may turn less productive. Secondly, Vietnam will face significant challenges to manage its delta sustainably in the case of alteration/reductions of water flow, facing salt water intrusion which will affect agriculture and also lead to a decline in fisheries.

Overall, emerging research indicates that the threat to food security in the basin (under the dam building scenario) is more serious than what was previously thought, and that alternative scenarios to safeguard food security are not readily available. This observation has far-reaching policy consequences, and research is unanimous on that the impact will be considerable if no policy measures are taken very soon. Moreover, the impact is of the magnitude that there will be serious changes in local food security, the political economy of food production and its trade in the region. Ultimately, these workshops will call attention to this fact, identify in more detail which threats we are facing, and discuss how they can be met.

As many believe that large scale dam-building in the region is to already be considered as a fact, the need for policy responses are urgent. There is not any single or simple solution to this multi-faceted problem, but rather multi-dimensional ones across a wide range of issues and sector. The Organisers foresee that the themes listed below are of immediate relevance. We anticipate papers will be forthcoming.

1. Water access and available land resources, and its impact on food production.
2. Fish production decline and spawning impediments.
3. Health effects and forced changes in dietary patterns.
4. Impact on the irrigation system and agricultural production livelihoods.
5. Regional food trade needs, incentives, capacity and/or potential.
6. Strategies and alternatives to contemporary food production.
7. Socio-economic effects and coping strategies.

### Workshop proposal

In order to put the searchlight on this both crucial and strategic issue, SIWI/UNDP with its partners Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI), and Can Tho University will organise two national workshops in Can Tho, Vietnam and Phnom Penh, Cambodia, respectively. The national workshops will highlight the challenges that the two countries may face in terms of food security. For Cambodia, the impact of an altered hydrology by mainstream dams construction and its disruption on the migration and recruitment of biologically and economically important fish/aquatic species in the region may turn painful. This is the case especially for population groups that are vulnerable, i.e. those dependent on fishing and/or having no alternative livelihoods. In the Mekong delta in Vietnam, there is a significant concern that the Mekong mainstream dams will increase the risk of salt water intrusion, and reduced sediment may decrease soil productivity as well as the nutrition necessary for fish. Both the Tonle Sap and the Delta areas are ecologically sensitive and under high resource extraction pressure already.

The Workshop will provide a one and a half-day meeting with international experts, regional and national researchers, and a wide range of practitioners and policymakers in order to address critical issues on food security. It offers opportunities to present, attend and discuss in high-quality and interactive sessions. If you are interested in presenting at the workshop please see the abstract guidelines in the 'Call for papers'.

### Workshop structure

The Workshops will emphasise targeted and useable knowledge of food security risks and opportunities in Cambodia and the Mekong Delta in Vietnam. Keynote speakers will provide the backbone of the scientific knowledge to set the stage while presenters will share the knowledge in various aspect of food security. During the sessions, contributors and participants will access state-of-the-art data in the field and be encouraged to discuss in response to available scientific analysis. Local knowledge and realities will also be fed into the broader discussion through participatory methods such as local mapping, scenario discussions, and interactive sessions. The introduction of

similar international case studies and alternative response scenarios will allow for deeper understanding of the water-food security nexus.

#### Workshop Outcomes

The outcome of the workshop is foreseen to be an increased understanding among key stakeholders of the food security challenge in the basin and how that challenge interlinks with energy and water concerns. Workshop participants will also gain specialised knowledge and contact networks that will allow them to more effectively engage on these issues at the local and national level. Participants and workshop partners will also gain deeper understanding of the current gaps and food security risks in the Mekong basin.

#### Workshop participants (30-40 participants)

- Local Stakeholders (Directly and Indirectly Affected)
- NGOs & Civil Society Organisations
- Regionally based universities & research institutions
- Private Sector
- Municipalities & government authorities
- Development partners
- Local & international media

#### *Organiser*

- Mekong Delta Development Institute, Can Tho University
- Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI)
- Shared Waters Partnership (SWP), UNDP/SIWI