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Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



Kingdom of the Netherlands



Embassy
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Hanoi



EMBASSY OF FINLAND
HANOI

Joint Development Partners Statement on Mekong Delta Development

Thank you I am happy to attend this high-level meeting....

On behalf of several development partner organizations (which include ADB, UN, Germany, Australia, IUCN, IFAD, Finland and the Netherlands), I would like to highlight our support to the government for the sustainable socio-economic development of the Vietnamese Mekong Delta. Today, we are grateful to the Dutch for bringing us together. With their considerable experience in delta management, and integrated water resources management, they have made an important contribution to the development of a long-term vision, through the development of the “Mekong Delta Plan”.

We recognize the national and international importance and potential of the Vietnamese Mekong Delta as a highly productive agricultural area; as well as of its ecosystems in supporting biodiversity and productivity. We also acknowledge that the Mekong Delta is one of the most vulnerable areas in the world to the adverse effects of climate change and that its ability to adapt to these impacts will be essential for its sustainable development. There are also more immediate impacts of socio-economic development both within Vietnam and from upstream countries.

This is an important moment in time. Decisions relating to the Mekong Delta’s development taken today and in the short term will have far-reaching consequences for the longer term capacity to influence that development or to respond to climate change.

We collectively endorse the principles on which the Mekong Delta Plan is based and recognize that it provides important building blocks to the long-term development of the Mekong Delta. The MDP, which is in line with recent prime ministerial decisions on the envisioned development in the Mekong Delta, also provides a means to identify projects in current sectoral masterplans that will help to increase the resilience of the delta.

Today, at this important event, we urge the Government to move forward in implementing **an integrated strategy** for the harmonious long-term development of the Vietnamese Mekong Delta. We support the development of a **shared framework** to assess existing development policies, to structure and evaluate sectoral and regional masterplans, as well as to optimize short-term investment decisions, especially in relation to impacts on the hydrological system. The overall objective is to help retain or increase the resilience of the Mekong Delta to cope with socio-economic development needs and climate change related stresses.

Implementing such an integrated strategy would need to take into consideration,

- a long-term vision for the general developmental direction for the Vietnamese Mekong Delta, while recognizing inherent strengths, characteristics, and demographics of the delta and its hydrological system; and
- **Adaptive management of the hydrological system of the delta to maintain or increase its contribution to the resilience** of society, economy and the ecology to deal with the adverse effects of climate change or with socio-economic development.

In implementing such a strategy for a resilient and sustainable delta, the government will need to look at the **trade-offs and development choices that need to be made**. Business as usual will not do in view of the long-term. Decisions that require important trade-offs are necessary in answer to questions such as:

- **Is triple rice cropping a viable strategy in view of downstream water safety, or is water retention upstream the better, and cheaper, alternative?**
- How should the long-term view be mainstreamed into sectoral and provincial master plans? And what consequences does that have on land-use planning?
- **Can salinization in the coastal zone be turned into an opportunity for development of aquaculture? Can we shift from rice to shrimp, or promote changes in crop production?**
- Would there be a larger number of smaller and intermediate urban centers, or concentration in more specialized growth poles around large cities? What choices do we make relating to the locus of industrialization and the infrastructure that goes with it?
- **How can inter-provincial water management strategies be negotiated?**

What about the HOW? Implementing an integrated strategy for the Mekong Delta would need:

- To ensure appropriate institutional arrangements that can strengthen cross-sectoral and interprovincial coordination and planning, interprovincial solidarity, cost-benefit analysis and financing;
- To base investment choices on a sound review of knowledge and data, and joint agreement on problems and solutions to increase the transparency and integration of planning efforts;
- **To consistently apply cost-benefit analysis on a delta-wide scale, and to evaluate the long-term profitability of projects as an essential tool to evaluate investment decisions;**
- To choose projects that take into account the flexibility and resilience of the system with respect to subsidence, sedimentation and water quality or the potential financial burdens for the state;

We need to move forward. There are, as the Mekong Delta Plan shows, projects that are no-regret, that increase the resilience of the system and that answer both short-term and long-term needs. Shifting from large-scale groundwater extraction to surface water use. Investing in water quality. Working on dyke safety or mangrove restoration, addressing the water safety of urban and industrial areas. At the same time there are projects that from a short-term or sectoral perspective make good sense, but that in view of the long-term or in relation to other sectors need to be evaluated. For this a shared framework is needed and should be vigorously addressed.