



Social Implications of Water Resources Development (WRD)

Putting people centre stage

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Outline

- Introduction and context
- Understanding WRD and its social implications
- Assessment and future directions for water resources development in the Lower Mekong Basin

Context and Introduction to the Lower Mekong Basin

*In recent decades the LMB has undergone **unprecedented** social, economic, and environmental change - - with **global processes** and the food, fuel, economic and climate **crises interacting** with development **in complex and uncertain ways**, life for the regions **poor and vulnerable** is increasingly **risky and uncertain**.*



Context and Introduction to the LMB

- Despite significant advances, two of the four LMB countries are still on the UN LDC list
- Water resources underpin the livelihoods, food, health and wellbeing of many tens of millions of people in the LMB
- Rural populations in all countries rely heavily on natural resources for their subsistence and income
- Any threat to these resources will be disproportionately felt by the poorest groups – this much is well known, less well known is the implication for Water Resources Development of an explicit focus on poverty

Water resources development

Definition:

*refers to the infrastructure, governance, and management measures required to control fresh water to **meet human and environmental needs.***

The main challenge then is **'How to best share water resources with competing uses and between users and the environment'**

Understanding WRD Implications

With ambitious plans for water resources development in all four countries of the LMB it is important to recognise that:

*The issues are **not confined** to the **design, construction and operation** of the infrastructure, but **embrace the social, environmental and political choices** on which the human aspiration to development and improved wellbeing depend.*

Nature of Implications

Thus, the nature of social implications of WRD are:

- **Complex** (multi-scale and sector interactions)
- **Dynamic** (occurring in a context of change)
- **Uncertain** (complex, dynamic interactions create uncertain outcomes)
- **Contested** (differing perspectives, values & politics)

How to plan for the unexpected?



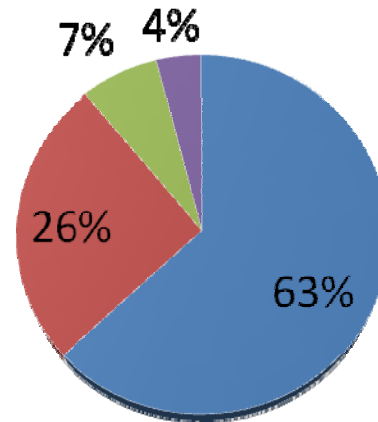
Differing purpose of dams in Asia

- Energy
- Irrigation
- Water supply
- Flood control

May be conflicting

Breakdown by purpose of Dams in Asia (Source ICOLD 1998)

- Irrigation
- Multipurpose
- Hydropower
- Other

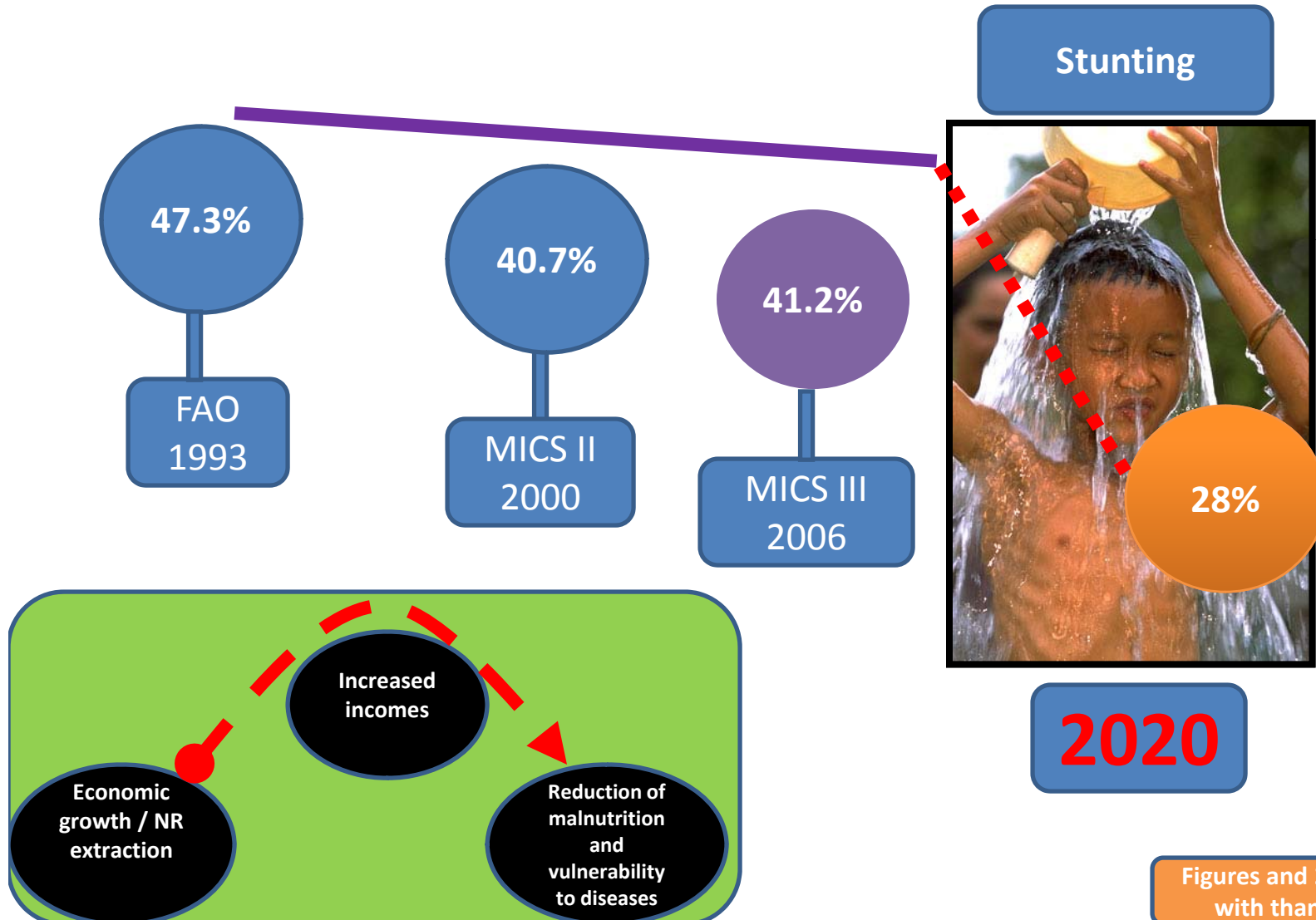


Assumptions?

To meet demands for:

- Economic development
- Poverty reduction

“Why has ‘poverty reduction’ not improved nutrition as anticipated ? ”



Figures and 2020 target for Lao PDR with thanks to Dr. Jutta Khran

Assessment Focus

Conventional wisdom on WRD has, using a 'balance sheet' approach, focused on:

- **Impacts/risks** (weighing up costs to one group and benefits to other sections of society) – largely pitting the rights of a small, usually local minority against a 'greater national good'.
- Impacts and mitigation.

Imbalances of power are central here, making it difficult to ensure equitable development?

Assessment Focus

WRD has also traditionally focused on:

- **Trade offs** that is exchanging one set of 'development goods' for another e.g., **power V food.**

But; in the **context of poverty reduction**, or when considering WRD in areas of widespread poverty, **or** poverty differentials between nations, **can/should poor people's food be traded off?** Is there a 'greater good'?

Reconciliation and future directions

‘Where poverty is widespread, [WRD] needs to have a strong development dimension, at a minimum this should include mechanisms for addressing imbalances in access to water and food and establishing recognised and secure entitlements for the poor’ (Molle et al 2007).

- Ensure poverty reduction is seen as a goal of development rather than poverty as a side effect of development.

Reconciliation and future directions (1)

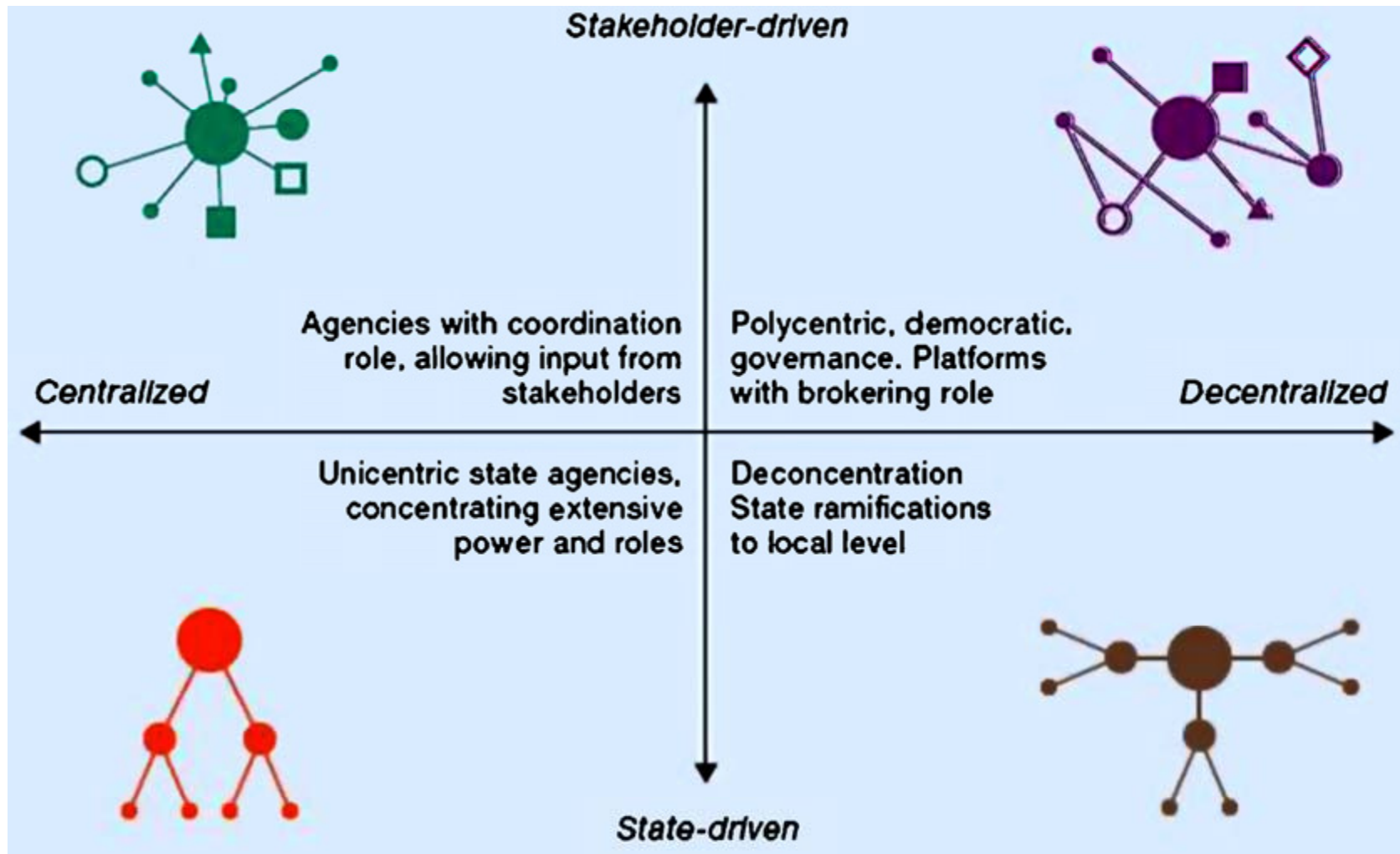
Water resources development 'involves the most precious element on earth, and that, of course involves power: who wields it, how to share it, which ways the state may better balance it' (Kader Asmal, Chair, WCD).

Thus, the mandate of WRD is by nature political, and values, agendas, power and participation need to be assessed and deliberated, going beyond existing apolitical assessments.

Reconciliation and future directions (2)

- Conduct a basin wide poverty assessment with a focus on what makes people poor, ensuring that WRD goes beyond impacts and trade offs, to assessing and addressing poverty and vulnerability.
- Integrate poverty assessments into the formulation of water resources development policies, and into the planning of water resources development programs and projects.
- Conduct an assessment of rights, risks and responsibilities with an explicit focus on effective participation and representation - support the emergence of patterns of participatory governance that deliver these objectives.

River basin governance



Typology of river basin governance (Molle et al., 2007).

How do we listen/encourage effective participation?





Thank you!

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