

**Proposed Mekong Flood Management and Mitigation (FMM)
Newsletter and Awareness Materials:
Proposed first steps towards a Mekong FMM Partnership**

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Background

The basin wide catastrophic floods on the Mekong in 2000, (reminiscent of water levels reached in the great floods of 1961) were a watershed in the lives of Mekong communities and their Governments at the national and local level and a turning point for many institutions that work in the countries of the region on development, environment and disaster management issues. The devastation to livelihoods and assets and unnecessary loss of life, raised questions of whether Mekong communities were adequately equipped and prepared, and what more could be done to reduce vulnerability of assets and livelihoods and increase resilience of communities to catastrophic floods. And yet, when the waters receded, other voices joined the dialogue, and the bounties and benefits of the annual Mekong floods and their contribution to nutrition, livelihoods, lifestyles and development were remembered.

The MRC Flood Management and Mitigation (FMM) Strategy (2001) and Program (2002) was an institutional response to the events, and a significant and welcome initiative to “ improve the preparedness and mitigation to the annual Mekong floods, while harnessing their environmental benefits”. This developmental objective of the FMMP adequately captured the duality of the floods and their impact. So too, the 2nd Vietnam National Strategy and Action Plan for water related disaster mitigation and management 2001 to 2020, recognized that especially for the Mekong River delta, (unlike the coastal provinces of Central Vietnam and the Red River delta of the North) the key governmental strategy is “Living Together with Floods”.

To kick start action, in anticipation of the then ongoing development of the FMM strategy implementation plan, the MRC convened the first Annual Flood Forum in April 2002, to serve as a forum “ to support the riparian countries and relevant international and civil society organizations to communicate and coordinate their policy and action plan towards a better regional integration of flood management and mitigation” By calling the forum both first and annual, the MRC boldly committed itself, as the key regional entity and river basin organization , to make these meetings happen regularly, serve as a lead convener of this stakeholder dialogue and strive to make the forums of value to the needs of the time and at

the same forward looking. The theme of the first meeting “ Flood Preparedness: for the upcoming flood season (2002) and in the medium term upto flood season 2005” was relevant, the mood, particularly among new stakeholders was open and curious, even if it was at times cautious and occasionally suspicious.

A key conclusion emerged to have the AFF as an annual event with a new theme/topic every year. Every Forum would provide a platform to a) present past activities b) present emerging needs c) review progress that each country has made towards regional, balanced and holistic flood management and mitigation.

With MRC in transition, the second Annual Flood forum took place in October 2003 in Phnom Penh with the theme of “Information Flow, Networking and Partnership”. Once again a wide-ranging cross section of stakeholders participated actively.

And today, on the banks of the mighty Mekong in the other capital city in the basin, with a sparkling new headquarters building and new management team in place in the Secretariat, we meet for the third forum. The FMMP is now fully funded, several components well under way, a brand new Regional Flood Center under construction in Phnom Penh, and a rich diversity of preparedness and mitigation programs under way by diverse stakeholders in the basin, representatives of whom are present here.

The Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC) based in Bangkok Thailand, has been pleased to be an active partner of MRC since 2001. In fact in March 2002, following constructive engagement on matters of flood management, ADPC and MRC signed a MoU of cooperation committing both organizations to partner on 5 March 2002. ADPC actively participated in all regional and some national consultations related to the development of the Strategy, its implementation plan and the FMM program itself. Since 2003, it has also served as one of MRC’s implementing partners on the FMMP with its role in implementing the ECHO projects on “ Capacity Building for Flood Preparedness Planning at the Provincial and District levels using MRC information products” (phases 1 and 2) and also in FMMP Component 4 “ Flood Emergency Management Strengthening” over a 3 year period under MRC-GTZ-ADPC cooperative arrangements. We have made a separate presentation on this cooperation in Session of this forum.

ADPC has also been pleased to be an active participant in all three Annual Flood Forums. In the 2002 Forum, our presentation was entitled “ Enhanced Flood Preparedness at Household, Community, Provincial and National Levels”. In the October 2003 Forum we talked of “Regional Capacities and Initiatives for Flood Preparedness and operational flood damage Mitigation”. I was also privileged to co chair the session and sum up issues on “Priorities for regional collaboration”

We are please to have been invited to this Forum to report on “ Implementation of FMMP Component 4 on Flood Emergency Management Strengthening as well as the ECHO funded Capacity Building project” and to co chair the session 6 on “

New Areas of cooperation between FMMP and the member states and partners”, besides make this presentation under Session 5 on “Other partner presentations”.

Having been closely associated with developments with MRC since 2000, and an active dialogue partner of a wide range of agencies and stakeholders in the Mekong countries during this period, I propose to use this session to float a few ideas that have been cooking over these years and whose “time has come”. I believe this can reignite the dialogue and lead us to a sufficient consensus so to move ahead for action over the next few months. I make these proposals in the hope that we can move ahead in this spirit and receive an action taken report at the next Forum in 2006.

Taking Stock: Developments over last 3 years

Three years ago in April 02, the first Annual Flood Forum on the theme of “Flood Preparedness: for the coming season and the medium term” brought together a wide range of stakeholders, officials from National Mekong Committees, National Disaster Management Offices and line Ministries from all four riparian countries, provincial and district officials dealing with flood control and disaster management from Mekong provinces, Civil Society organizations, regional entities, and UN Agencies working on disaster management in the countries. As the Program Area of FMM was new for MRC, many stakeholders were new and dialoguing with MRC for the first time.

Where were we at the time of the first AFF?

The MRC FMM strategy was approved but Strategy Implementation Plan and Program were yet to be developed. An active response in the preparatory phase of the AFF with filled in questionnaires from all sectors: Government, UN Agencies and NGOs which record their immediate (2002 Flood Season) action plans, capacities and identified gaps, as well as medium term (upto 2005) plans. An analysis of lessons learned from 2000 and 2001 seasons as well as identification of gaps, overlaps and synergies in the action plans and discussion on the way forward. A significant discussion on the need for national and local action that apparently went beyond the traditional boundaries of regional action that was MRC’s hallmark. Repeated reminders of the “benefits” of flooding and man made causes of increased impact of the flood. A respect for MRC’s role in forecasting, high expectations from regional and national forecasts, requests for flood risk maps and a determination by other DM partners to make better use of all available products. Questions raised, sometimes in the plenary, and often in the corridor, about the non-desirability of MRCS being involved in issues of Flood Emergency Preparedness and response, arguing that it should stick to its core competencies in flood forecasting. “Why is MRC moving into areas beyond its mandate and beyond the proven competence, especially of the secretariat, in providing timely and accurate forecasts.” A recognition that MRC is an important “player” in disaster management because of its role in promoting Integrated

Water Resource Management (IWRM) at the river basin level. And departing with high expectations, renewed partnerships and new networking but a sober realization that “a Forum such as this is only as good as the activities and outcomes that take place once we have all left this building.”

What has happened since?

Three flood seasons, one significant flood (2002)! Greater engagement by MRC and its FMMP with a wide range of partners and stakeholders at both regional and national level. More accessible forecasts and increased use by partners and local governments in agriculture, livestock and livelihoods sectors well as by operational UN Agencies for their emergency response planning and stockpiling. Innovative efforts by MRC at Flood early warning dissemination. Significant effort by MRC and Red Cross at ‘flood referencing’ in Cambodia. Innovative pilots of local level mitigation and preparedness by local Government and Civil society organizations and UN Agencies including “Safe Area” development in Cambodia, Emergency Kindergartens, safer shelter and “Living Clusters’ in Vietnam and flood proofing of livelihood assets and community social infrastructure in both countries.

A second AFF in October 2003, with the theme of “Information Flow, Networking and Partnership” marked by enthusiastic and active participation in large numbers. A recognition that this was “one key step among many towards a building and maintaining a professional network of FMM practitioners, scientists and partner organizations” A strong recognition of other hazards in the riparian countries beyond the annual riverine floods, i.e. Drought as well as floods on the tributaries and flash floods in certain sub catchments. A call for action to MRC (Secretariat and National Mekong Committees) and others (NDMOs, other ministries, national river basin organizations, provincial and local authorities, other DM sector organizations and NGOs, Media, Education, Universities and research organizations, international organizations present – WMO, ESCAP, UNDP, WHO, and the private sector) to pay attention to floods and these other hazards. Calls for new institutional arrangements i.e. FMM Task forces within each country, and national flood forums and improved communication between forums through and email newsletter. Starting FMM newsletters especially in the riparian languages. Link MRC with Typhoon Committee and ASEAN’s ACDM and Regional Program on DM. Receiving reports on Action taken since the previous forum. Overall high expectations, often bordering on demands but a sober recognition that “we stakeholders present place these demands on ourselves and must be catalysts for action within our countries and organizations”

Where do we stand today?

A fully funded MRC FMMP, with three components under implementation since 2004. An energetic Secretariat, a soon to be operational Regional Flood Center. A range of other active local level programmes in the riparian countries on early

warning, flood preparedness, flood proofing and mitigation, and building community resilience, being implemented by a range of stakeholders, several of whom are present here today. And continued high expectations on tangible outcomes, both from our political leaders as well the people of the basin in whose name we act.

Unmet needs and continuing Challenges

While being proud of progress made, we must recognise how much more we need to do, if we are not to be found wanting and harshly judged when the next major flood or drought strikes.

It is useful to be reminded of the **continuing systemic weaknesses**, as identified earlier. They are:

- Overall disaster management capacities and systems in all 4 countries are under-resourced and under-staffed at all levels, from the national, through provincial and district, to commune, village, community and household level.
- Limited capacity at National, and in particular at Provincial and District Disaster Management offices to understand, interpret, and effectively use advanced flood forecasting and hazard information;
- Limited exposure to good practices in Flood Preparedness Planning;
- Weakly developed or no mechanisms of trans-boundary province to province dialogue for flood preparedness;
- Poor capacities for undertaking preparedness and mitigation planning at the local level
- Excellent existing “pilot” initiatives but that gaps remain in building on and up scaling or replicating these initiatives. For example, innovative and appropriate materials have been developed by emergency organizations in one country, but they are not widely shared with other organizations or other countries

Some **continuing programmatic challenges** identified even at earlier forums are:

- Improving dissemination of the flood forecasts we prepare

- Operationalising improved flood preparedness and response capacity and programs at village, commune, district province and national levels
- Enhancing institutional capacity in all responsible institutions at all these levels
- Increasing the importance of these subjects in University curriculum and research programs in institutions in the basin
- Responding to the expectations of a comprehensive program on flash floods and droughts
- Improving communication and coordination at national level and across countries, particularly between bordering provinces
- Improving communication, networking, coordination and operational partnerships between stakeholders

Achieving synergies of the Flood Management and Mitigation Program with other Programs

The MRC FMM Strategy and Program is often at pains to emphasize that the Flood Mitigation and Management Program is a MRC program. Yet the holistic approach to floodplain management (including areas like emergency response preparedness and land use planning where MRC has no track record) in the strategy and program design, and the magnitude of the program budget compared to the total budget for flood preparedness and mitigation, makes it perhaps the most significant intervention on the subject in the basin.

The interest and engagement of all Disaster Management stakeholders (NDMOs, Red Cross Societies, UN Agencies, technical institutions, etc) as reflected in their active interest and participation in the consultation workshops and their keenness to be associated in the implementation, defacto gives it a character of an incipient Mekong Flood Mitigation and Management Program, with a significance and impact far beyond the traditional MRC set of institutions. This fact must be recognized by the MRC and its donors and must underpin its implementation.

At the same time one understands the necessary caution exercised by both MRC and at times its donors in maintaining the distinction, both for institutional role clarity, effective program management and accountability.

Recognizing limitations in overall disaster management capacities in the riparian countries, there have been sustained efforts at several levels to upgrade these capacities and also to demonstrate the value of preparedness and mitigation while developing locally relevant techniques and approaches. This wide range of other

(often multi hazard) programs in the riparian countries initially may appear to overlap with the FMMP but in reality there is a great potential for synergy.

Some significant **regional initiatives** in disaster management specifically covering the riparian countries are ASEAN Regional Program on Disaster Management (ARPD), ADPC's Asian Urban Disaster Mitigation Program, Disaster Reduction Program for Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam, DIPECHO plans of action for South East Asia, South East Asia Regional Disaster Management Committee of Red Cross, Typhoon Committee, UNDAC teams, and WHO/EHA program for Enhancing Emergency Management in the Mekong countries.

Significant **national programs** are, for example, the 5 year strategy document (2001-2006) of Cambodia's National Center for Disaster Management (NCDM), the Strategy Plan until 2010 of the National Disaster Management Office in Laos (NDMO), Vietnam's 2nd plan of action on water related disasters (2002-2020). Thailand's Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation is likely to produce a strategy later in the year. Each country has also established/is establishing national Disaster Assessment teams and information systems. The Red Cross movement with its extensive volunteer base has both disaster response and community based disaster management programs in all four countries.

UNDP has supported Disaster Management **capacity building** projects in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Vietnam and a diagnostic study in Thailand in the 1990s. There are other significant donor funded initiatives in Disaster Management in the countries (e.g., NDM partnership in Vietnam, pipeline World Bank Natural Disaster Mitigation Program in Vietnam and NDRM initiative by World Bank in Cambodia, AusAID, ECHO and USAID funded community based projects on Disaster Preparedness with various NGOs, UNICEF program on childcare centers during floods, WFP Food for Work programs aimed at micro mitigation projects)

There is also a range of activities on FMM **beyond capacity building** in the region. ESCAP has been working on flood control and management issues for several decades and has produced several publications and guidelines on the subject. Also, WMO and UNDMTP and ADPC have each produced publications on related subject.

A series of seminars and workshops have been held on the theme. ADPC has run regional and national training courses on Urban Flood Mitigation and Flood Risk Management.

Several of the regional and national programs mentioned above have **flood early warning, preparedness and mitigation** as key themes, and specific focus of national and community based projects. Specific projects have been implemented by ESCAP, National Red Cross societies and IFRC, ADPC as well as by international NGOs (Action Against Hunger, CARE, CECI, Church World Service, Development Workshop, Lutheran World Federation, Oxfam, Save the Children Alliance, World Vision) and their NGO partners.

Flood Management activities and concerns in the riparian countries are not restricted to the lower Mekong basin. The Red river basin in Northern Vietnam, typhoon induced flooding in Central Vietnam and Southern Thailand, Chao Phraya flooding in Thailand and flash floods are related to Mekong floods and are common concerns. Experiences of these floods and related interventions have a bearing on and lessons to be learned from for the FMMP during its implementation.

It is self evident that the FMMP needs to situate itself within this wider context and derive full benefit from and achieve synergies with all of these past and ongoing programs. Duplications are to be avoided and the regional approach of MRC with respect to floods in the Mekong Basin has to fill the gap that is left by other, mainly national initiatives, or by rather non-hazard specific regional ones.

So too other players, several of who have worked in the area of disaster management for a long time, also need to make imaginative and effective links with the MRC FMMP. This needs a more effective mechanism than an annual forum alone.

Towards a Mekong Flood Management and Mitigation Partnership

Perhaps the time has come to more seriously consider the notion of a more formal Mekong FMM Partnership. Such a mechanism would attempt to promote dialogue, networking and collaborative activities, while recognizing that each agency with its core competence and area of interest would continue to “manage” their respective program. Such a mechanism could serve initially as a loose network that is aimed at information exchange, development of synergies, and active bilateral and trilateral partnerships among its “members”.

Within the region there are at least two relevant models in relatively compatible (and therefore easy to comprehend) subject areas. They are Natural Disaster Mitigation Partnership (NDM Partnership) in Central Vietnam and Greater Mekong Sub-region Academic and Research Network (GMSARN). Other international models could be the International Flood Network (IFNet) and the Provention Consortium.

NDM Partnership arose from the serious typhoon season flooding in 1999 in the provinces of Central Vietnam, and the recognition that while there was need to build on the active coordination and sufficient resource flows in the relief and even reconstruction phase. On the contrary there was insufficient attention, resources and even information sharing and coordination when tackling the more needed, and potentially beneficial and cost effective investments on mitigation.

Through patient nurturing by wise institutional architects and a few Government, UN Agency and donor “champions”, NDM partnership has slowly taken on a definite institutional form. It is now a 21-member partnership led by the Ministry

of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) of the Government of Vietnam, UNDP and the Royal Netherlands Embassy. Its key objectives are: a) to improve coordination and resource allocation b) to ensure DRM concepts and practice are an integral part of development planning process c) strengthen national research capacity d) develop concrete regional and/or river-basin development plans e) to support bottom up approach through awareness raising and local capacity building

The GMSARN consists of 9 universities and research institutions at national and regional level based in the GMS countries, supported by ADB and administered by a Board of Advisors and Executive Committee. Its Secretariat is based at the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) Activities cover research and training initiatives among all or some of the member institutions.

Introducing the idea more formally at this Forum will enable an initial consideration today and a more careful dialogue over the next few months to confirm whether this is needed and if so how is a consensus built around its possible initial contours.

Key role of MRC in the proposed FMM Partnership

Given that the flooding is regional in scope and trans-boundary in nature, MRC as a dedicated, intergovernmental river basin organization for the Mekong, together with its distinguished track record of flood forecasting and mapping capacities, and with a core FMM Program makes it eminently logical for the Commission to be lead agency in such a partnership to undertake a flood mitigation and management program.

The interest and engagement of all Disaster Management stakeholders (NDMOs, Red Cross Societies, UN Agencies, technical institutions, the consultation workshops and their keenness to be associated in the implementation, de facto gives legitimacy to the FMMP as a Mekong Flood Management and Mitigation Program, with a significance and impact far beyond the traditional MRC set of institutions. It is this expectation of leadership, and the core role it plays in organizing and convening these forums that well equips it to play a nodal role in the proposed partnership.

Key Partners of a Mekong FMM Partnership

Clearly there are the following possible categories of partners in such an initiative:

National Disaster Management Offices
National Mekong Committees
Provincial and District Disaster Management Committees
Red Cross Societies and IFRC

Non-Government Organizations working on Flood Management
Mass organizations working on Flood Management
Mekong River Commission
UN ESCAP
UNDP
UNOCHA
WHO
WFP
Asian Development Bank
Asian Disaster Preparedness Center
Universities in the Basin working on Flood Management
Donors interested in the Basin working on FMM

A short elaboration on some of the key partners are given below:

National Disaster Management Offices

NDMOs are the lead organizations for Disaster Management in each country. They are poised to play a key role in flood emergency management, but have limited resources at their disposal.

- In Cambodia, the National Center for Disaster Management is affiliated with the Council of Ministers;
- In Laos, the National Disaster Management Office is under the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare.
- In Cambodia and Lao PDR they also serve as secretariat for inter-ministerial National Disaster Management Committee.
- In Vietnam the Dept of Dyke Management and Storm and Flood control in the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural development serves as the NDMO while also being the secretariat of the Central Committee for Storm and Flood Control (CCFSC).
- In Thailand the newly set up (in Oct 2002) Dept of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation is in the Ministry of Interior. It is the secretariat of the national Civil Defence committee

The NDMOs of Cambodia and Lao PDR have weakly developed internal capacity but are strongly positioned and recognized to play coordinating and leadership role in Disaster Management, UNDP has supported Capacity Building programs for Cambodia (1997 to 200) and Lao PDR (1996 –2001) and in Vietnam supported the development of the Disaster Management Unit and the Disaster Management Information System (DMIS). UNDP supported an assessment in Thailand (1994) Other international donors and UN Agencies are supporting capacity development activities NDMOs. Also each NDMO is implementing a number of projects with Red Cross societies, INGOs and regional institutions. Vietnam has a Water-related Disasters national action plan (First in 1994 second in 2002). All four NDMOs are members of NMC with varying degrees of involvement and have been participating in MRC National and Regional Consultation Workshops and Annual Flood Forums.

Provincial and District Disaster Management committees

Each of the 4 riparian countries has Provincial and District level Disaster Management committees. These are mandated by law and policy in Cambodia and Lao PDR. In addition, Cambodia has the newly created commune councils. In Vietnam, there are Provincial Committees for Floods and Storms Control (PCFSCs) and in addition there are district and commune level structures. In Thailand the Governor of each province is responsible for Disaster Management. However, in several provinces, the provincial/district DMOs are not distinct offices, with staff specifically assigned to the Disaster Management roles, and other provincial/district level government officials perform the role of Flood Emergency Response and Management. There is a clear need to capacitate these committees to undertake their responsibilities on flood emergency response and management. They are perhaps the key target audience of several of the initiatives on capacity building and system development under the FMMP and several other national level programs.

National Mekong Committees

Strong national committees exist in each of the 4 riparian countries. They are the lead mechanism in each country for all MRC programs. Membership of the NMCs is drawn from all key ministries and departments involved in Water Resource management in the country and different aspects of sustainable development.

Red Cross Societies and IFRC

Each of the four countries has well established national Red Cross Societies with a fairly well developed structure at province, district and branch, drawing on an extensive base of Red Cross volunteers. All four are close partners of the NDMOs. For example, Cambodian Red Cross (CRC) is the only non-Government agency on the NCDM in Cambodia. All four are involved in post disaster response and are well respected both by the community and the local Government. The Red Cross societies have formal and informal tie-ins to the national and local Government.

IFRC has a Regional delegation in Bangkok as well as country delegations in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam. In addition American Red Cross in Cambodia and Danish Red Cross in Vietnam and Japan Red Cross in Laos and Vietnam have specific bilateral programs. South East Asia Regional Disaster Management Committee has members from all four riparian countries and all 4 have participated in the Annual Flood Forums and Regional workshops under FMM Strategy development. Under the OFDA funded Program of MRC (Component One of FMMP) American, Cambodian and Lao Red Cross are involved in implementation of community pilots for flood referencing and dissemination of early warning.

Non-Government Organizations

Several NGOs are working on issues of Disaster preparedness and mitigation, in the 4 riparian countries, including specific work on floods in the lower Mekong Basin, including Emergency assistance. Of particular note is the work of Oxfam,

CARE, World Vision, Save the Children, Action Against Hunger, Concern Worldwide, PACT, Canadian Center for International Studies and Cooperation (CECI) and Development Workshop. Of these, several have a presence in all three countries Cambodia-Lao PDR-Vietnam, and make a conscious effort to take a regional approach. Several have regional offices in Bangkok, Thailand. Of significance is that these NGOs are working on issues of rural development and situate their disaster preparedness and mitigation work in the context of wider programs of poverty reduction, rural livelihood strengthening and building of community capacity and resilience. All work through a network of National and Local offices and local NGO partners. There is also willingness and interest in engaging with Governmental partners, especially with provincial, district commune and village level.

Several of these NGOs use the MRC website to monitor flood levels in the Mekong and in some cases are transmitting this information to the local community. Several had participated in the Regional Consultation Workshops on FMM and the Annual Flood Forum (AFF) in Phnom Penh in 2002 and 2003. They had also responded in the preparatory phase of the AFF with their action plans, which record their capacities and gaps.

Proposed initial activities for a Mekong FMM Partnership

While continuing to discuss the need and contours of such a mechanism, it is suggested we can move ahead with specific activities. These are stand alone in their own right, have close linkages with the FMMP and are formulated based on specific suggestions at earlier forums. If at a later date a decision is made to move ahead on such a partnership, these activities can then be recognized as initial or preparatory activities.

To initiate efforts for these activities, the existing resources and momentum of the MRC FMMP and its partners can be drawn upon and built up from. Four initial activities are proposed:

- National FMM Forums in Mekong Provinces
- Mekong FMM Newsletters
- FMM Awareness Materials
- Mekong FMM website

Each one of these proposed activities is described below along with suggestions on how to initiate them.

National FMM Forums in Mekong Provinces

The purpose of these dialogues would be similar to that of the Mekong Annual Flood Forum, but would focus on the Mekong provinces in each country.

The objective would be to take stock of experiences and lessons learned from management of floods in earlier years with a view to improve practices in the other participating provinces and districts. The forum would be an opportunity to learn about and learn from the work done by:

- Provincial and District DM Committees and commune DM teams
- Red Cross activities on Flood Management
- Provincial, District and commune units of peoples organizations (i.e. Youth, women, farmers and veterans organizations) in areas of Flood management
- Work of NGOs and CBOs in innovative programs related to early warning, public awareness, safety of children, hazard mapping, and mitigation

An additional objective would be to forge personal and institutional networking and relationships among practitioners at this level

Participants at these forums would be practitioners working in these institutions from the Mekong provinces.

The forum should be organized in one of the provinces and move by rotation to other provinces in subsequent years. In the initial year, the Forum could be organized by the key organizations that have a stake in flood management i.e. the National Disaster Management Committee, the National Mekong Committee and the National Red Cross Society along with their counterparts in the host province. Over a period of time a greater role may be taken by the provincial organizations.

These forums should be held in the language of the country and region, with a report being produced in this language. This could be supplemented by an English summary, which serves as input to the AFF, but that should not be its primary purpose and driver.

Mekong FMM Newsletters

The proposed newsletters are intended to serve as a platform to exchange news and experience of all work being done in the Mekong Basin on Flood management and mitigation, both under the MRC FMMP, as well as beyond. It would recognize the range of work on early warning, preparedness and mitigation for floods, as well as traditions of living with floods, and be a vehicle for practitioners in the basin and beyond to learn about and from each other. Like the proposed national forums, it would focus on the work being done at provincial, district and commune levels, by DM committees and peoples organizations, the Red Cross and other NGOs and CBOs, both on work done using local and national resources, as well as donor funded projects.

The target readership of the newsletters are defined primarily by the work of those being reported on, namely, DM and development practitioners in the basin working at the provincial, district and commune levels both in local government, Red Cross, NGOs and CBOs. Obviously there is also a wider circle of interested, supporting and stakeholder institutions at the national and regional level.

To kick start the effort and maintain a dialogue and exchange among regional stakeholders such as those attending the AFF and beyond, the newsletter could be produced in English. However very rapidly, and preferably from inception, national newsletters in the national FMM newsletters in the national languages should also be planned.

At the regional level, the MRC Secretariat and its Regional Flood Center should form a core and treat this as an activity under the Component 1 of the FMMP. Key regional partners in this could be the Regional DM Committee of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC). Both these entities have expressed interest in this initiative. To moving this ahead, these three agencies could therefore be asked to constitute a task force to plan the next steps including the establishment of an editorial board and plans for a pilot issue.

For the national newsletters, it is self evident that the three concerned national entities proposed above for organizing national forums i.e. the National Disaster Management Committee, the National Mekong Committee and the National Red Cross Society should take the lead supported by the regional entities.

The national newsletters would not be a mere translation of the regional newsletter, nor need it be an entirely independent venture. A similar theme could be taken up by both the regional and national newsletters, with a shared content of 30 – 50 percent.

As proposed for the regional newsletter, a task force of the 3 entities could be constituted to plan the next steps including the establishment of an editorial board and plans for a pilot issue.

In view of anticipated resource constraints and the sheer logistics of such a venture, it is proposed that a beginning be made in two of the four countries, with the other two coming on board in a subsequent year or at their own pace. Choice of first two countries could be based on the interest of the national Mekong committee on a first come basis.

FMM Awareness Materials and Campaigns

In some ways this is apparently the easiest to move ahead on. A wealth of interesting public awareness material has been produced on the subject of flood preparedness and mitigation. The Red Cross societies in each of the countries and the Federation, the National Disaster Management Offices, international NGOs like CARE, OXFAM, World Vision, Save the Children, and others as well as their partner national NGOs and local CBOs have done excellent and innovative work in designing and producing educational and public awareness material comprising posters, calendars, booklets, films, songs and even folk theatre. ADPC has designed and run courses on Disaster Risk Communication and implemented some pilot activity. Countries have also formulated five-year strategies for Disaster Risk Communication.

The MRC FMMP already has built into its design and components several specific public awareness activities. A good beginning can be made in ensuring that using the core of the already programmed activities under FMMP components, an effort can be made to use past material without reinventing the wheel, while link with other planned activities under other programs to achieve the proverbial bigger bang for the buck. So too active engagement with the National Mekong and DM Committees to maximize their involvement and leverage their connections with the state owned and private media.

Dialogue may also be initiated to launch harmonized basin wide or national FMM campaigns in each country's Mekong provinces, probably in the month before the flood season, supplemented by additional activity before each anticipated peak.

Harmonizing campaigns can also lead to shared ownership of the campaign and the demonstration of the working partnership between the NDMO, the NMC and the National Red Cross Society. This will also result in increased visibility and demonstration of their role and value in an area of national and local priority.

Mekong FMM website

When these ideas were first discussed, the notion of starting a FMM website was mooted. It was felt this a relatively easy way to showcase the diversity of work on the subject. Very quickly it was realized that the bulk audience of such a site would be from outside the riparian countries and perhaps even the wider region.

However given the use of the MRC site to disseminate the regional flood forecast, and its increased use by a cross section of stakeholders, it was felt useful to have a companion site showcasing the work on FMM, drawing from the work of various stakeholders and from the material that would be gathered while preparing the newsletters.

Further it was noted that there is a great paucity of material in the riparian language websites on this subject. Thus even launching a website on FMM in each of the 4 riparian languages would be a contribution to developing a widely accessible source of information on the subject for use by a variety of stakeholders. This idea should be considered further by the MRCS and its RFC as well as by the task forces set up to plan the national newsletter.

Looking Ahead: Next Steps

What then are ways to move ahead? Clearly a more wide ranging consultation, and assessment of priority needs, coupled with a building of consensus on next steps and taking action on things we agree to move ahead on

This forum itself has a wide and representative cross section of the constituent stakeholders of a future Mekong FMM Partnership.

Even if there is caution in pursuing such a grandiose idea as a Partnership, there is clearly support for moving ahead on some of the proposed actions from among the proposed menu of forums, newsletters, awareness materials and website. There is also an emerging dialogue and consensus building process among key protagonists of this idea within MRCS, ADPC and the Federation, as well as some of the National Mekong Committees and NDMOs, Red Cross societies and partner NGOs.

Discussions will continue to take place on the wider idea of the Partnership even as action is initiated on some activities. Discussions and informal consultations will be organized over the next few months in each of the countries on this paper with a view to revising the ideas and converting it into a more focused set of

actions with commitments and resources identified. ADPC and MRCS will take the initial lead in facilitating this discussion.

Therefore during this forum please provide feedback, both in plenary and working group sessions, and perhaps more importantly in the coffee and lunch breaks. Let the feedback centre on both areas you endorse and areas you disagree with. Please provide your thoughts and ideas on what else needs to be done and why it should be prioritized. And identify areas where your institution or you as an individual would like to contribute or take a lead.

And most importantly, this dialogue and action for partnership is at a very early stage. So continue to provide feedback, reactions and volunteer commitments even days, weeks and months from the date of this presentation.