

Stakeholder Consultation

Working with the MRC to plan for Sustainable Basin Development

Vientiane, 12th-13th March 2008

CONCEPT NOTE

BASIN DEVELOPMENT PLAN OF LOWER MEKONG RIVER BASIN

The 1995 Mekong Agreement charges the Joint Committee of the Mekong River Commission (MRC) with the formulation of a “Basin Development Plan (BDP) to promote, support, co-operate and co-ordinate in the development of the full potential of sustainable benefits to all riparian States and the prevention of wasteful use of the Mekong River Basin waters. The BDP would be used to identify, categorize and prioritize the projects and programmes to seek assistance for and to implement at the basin level”.

Planning for the development of the Mekong basin requires a participatory process and the forging of a strong partnership with the basin’s stakeholders. Such a partnership is necessary in order to develop the economic potential of the Mekong river system in a sustainable manner – for domestic use, for hydropower, navigation and flood management. This means seeking to alleviate poverty while considering, in equal parts, the conservation of the basin’s rich riverine ecology and large freshwater fishery and the high reliance of people, particularly the poor, on the river’s natural system.

This process is challenging given the different perceptions amongst the stakeholder groups on what constitutes sustainable development in the Mekong River Basin and the multiple use of the basin water and related resources. Discussing these different views to move forward shared visions and coherent actions for the development of the Basin is very often jeopardized by insufficient information that should be available for access by the stakeholders in a transparent manner.

The basin planning process has generated considerable interest amongst diverse stakeholder groups – Governments of the MRC Member States and their development partners, academics, civil society and the public because of each of the development options put forward by the BDP will have different impacts on the many inhabitant groups of the Basin. Furthermore, the BDP

is to be based on Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), which is itself a process emphasizing stakeholder participation. During BDP Phase 1 (2001-2006) processes were created for local stakeholders' participation in the basin planning process. Nevertheless, these processes require further consolidation. BDP Phase 2 (2007 – 2010) will improve these efforts to genuinely engage stakeholders in a strengthened national, transboundary and regional participatory planning process with a particular focus on expanding the engagement of concerned NGOs and civil society representatives to truly implement the IWRM principles. Strong engagement and meaningful participation of these relevant stakeholders will be crucial to ensuring a transparent and participatory Basin Development Planning process and for the Plan to be accepted, owned and implemented by the member States, together with their development partners and the wider society of the basin.

The MRC Strategic Plan 2006-2010 highlights the importance of Stakeholder participation: "Given the significant potential of water resource developments to affect the lives of the people of the Mekong River Basin, it is essential to build in processes for public involvement and input into MRC activities. Consideration of public opinion and preference is essential for ensuring that identified development options are both appropriate and socially acceptable...". Essential in this participatory process are transparency and openness, which the MRC would like to see as the "key characteristics for the way the MRC will operate. Transparency and openness will be improved through pro-active efforts in communication with the MRC's stakeholders...and are the key part of strategy for promoting regional cooperation and conflict prevention."¹

AThe overarching Programme of the MRC, the BDP Programme serves as the planning component of the Mekong Programme (or Mekong Partnership Programme), which should bring all water and related resources development initiatives in the LMB into an MRC-facilitated coordination framework between the States, the development partner community and other working partners. Against this background, the Mekong River Commission, through the Basin Development Plan proposes to hold a Stakeholder Consultation early on in the implementation of BDP Phase 2, with the aim of renewing the involvement and commitment of relevant stakeholders and the public in the MRC and the BDP process. The Consultation, being the first of a potential series of similar initiatives by the MRC, will provide an open forum for a public consultation and dialogue amongst stakeholder and interest groups on the development opportunities and constraints of the Lower Mekong Basin; on what should be a common IWRM-based strategy to guide the basin development and how all concerned stakeholders can work together toward the common goal of poverty reduction and sustainable development of the

¹ MRC Strategic Plan 2006-2010

Basin. Such a consultation will also help the MRC to solicit suggestions on the processes that can best help build partnerships with stakeholder groups and to maintain their engagement in the BDP process.

This Stakeholder Consultation is also in line with the Agreement with the Development Partner(s) supporting the BDP Programme Phase 2 that requires a consultation for public comment and feedback on the Draft Inception Report of the programme with broader stakeholders (line agencies, academia, NGOs, the private sector, etc.)

The Stakeholder Consultation should be seen as a constructive concrete step that the MRC is taking to address concerns and recommendations for the MRC and its Draft Strategic Plan 2006-2010 made at the Mekong Region Waters Dialogue, co-convened by IUCN, Thailand Environment Institute (TEI), International Management Institute (IWMI) and the M-POWER water governance network on 6-7 July 2006 in Vientiane, Lao PDR. It is part of the MRC intention to organize annual consultation with stakeholders in the LMB. It is hoped that as the result of this and other initiatives, long-term partnerships and technical capacity will be built and strengthened between the BDP Programme/MRC and civil society groups to facilitate open and constructive dialogues for the sustainable development of the Basin.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

- To introduce the MRC Basin Development Plan Programme Phase 2 to the Stakeholder groups and seek their inputs to complement the Draft BDP 2 Inception Report, as well as to enhance their engagement in the BDP process and in the work of the MRC in general.
- To initiate discussions and share views on development opportunities in the LMB, aiming at mobilizing countries and stakeholders in preparing a Basin Development Plan, as called for in the 1995 Agreement, which will equitably utilize some of the common Mekong water and related resources to achieve equal socio-economic benefits for all countries while preserving the rich River basin riverine system. This will focus on
 - (i) Understanding the Socio-economic development in the Mekong River Basin and implications on the River's water and related resources;
 - (ii) Discussing the opportunities and constraints of further development of Mekong water resources and their potential contribution to poverty reduction in the Basin.
 - (iii) The role of development scenarios in Basin development planning and process to formulate, assess and build consensus on basin-wide development scenarios;

- (iv) Use of assessment and management tools in BDP (DSF, IBFM and others), and
- (v) Moving toward a shared IWRM-based strategy to guide Basin development
- To build partnerships between the MRC/BDP Programme and stakeholder groups for a fruitful BDP process and sustainable development of the Basin.

EXPECTED RESULTS OF THE STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION:

- Participants openly share views on opportunities and constraints and possible options for sustainable development in the Mekong River Basin
- Participants have better understanding of the MRC and BDP Programme including its expected outputs, the planning process and tools to be used in this process.
- Participants provide inputs to the implementation of BDP Phase 2 and its Inception Report, especially on (i) the planning cycle and tools to be used; (ii) directions for an IWRM-based strategy for the Basin development and management and (iii) how BDP Phase 2 could proactively engage stakeholders in the BDP planning process.

TIMING AND VENUE OF THE STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION:

The Stakeholder Consultation will be held on 12-13 March 2008 at the Lao Plaza Hotel, Vientiane, Lao PDR.

HOSTS OF THE STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION:

The MRC/BDP Programme will host and arrange for the facilitation of the Stakeholder Consultation. Support from interested local River Basin Committees/Organizations, International Organizations, NGOs and academia will be sought for relevant presentations and facilitation of discussions as appropriate.

INDICATIVE PROGRAMME OF THE STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

Being the first exchange with stakeholder groups, this Consultation, amongst other objectives, should provide stakeholder groups with sufficient information about the BDP programme of the MRC and the intended IWRM-based Basin Development Plan. This information is essential to facilitate any future discussions and dialogues as the planning process evolves. Therefore, it is recommended that the Stakeholder Consultation will be structured around important issues in the formulation of the BDP and for the MRC in general. These issues, which are emphasized in the BDP Phase 2 Programme document and its Inception Report, include (i) the need to build a

common understanding on potentials and constraints for the development of the Lower Mekong basin, (ii) enhancing information sharing and transparency in the use of tools for assessing these development options, (iii) building common strategies that are based on IWRM to guide the basin development and (iv) establishing processes to ensure that concerns of different stakeholder groups are taken into consideration by Governments of the member states and those who will implement the Basin Development Plan. These will be crucial for the Plan to be accepted by these concerned stakeholders who will also support its implementation.

The following indicative programme is subject to further consultations and agreements with NMCs, MRC programmes and other stakeholders.

PROGRAMME SESSION AND DETAILS

SEE ATTACHED AGENDA.

MEDIA, DISPLAY AND OTHER COMMUNICATION WORKS

There will be a display accompanying this Consultation, which will showcase the work being done by the MRC and other partners through explanatory posters and a range of documentation. All partners will be invited to have a display booth at the event. In addition, partners will also be invited to take the opportunity to introduce new publications or documentaries during lunch time and Reception dinner.

Media will be invited to the event and there will be a press release and opening statements released to the press. There should be people on hand to be available for interviews and they should be prepared to answer what might be difficult questions. We need to be aware that if some NGOs are asked there may be negative comments about national development policies and the MRC.

PROPOSED LIST OF INVITEES: Please ask from Ms. Somchit Luanghot, Programme Secretary.

PRESENTERS AND FACILITATORS: Please see attached agenda.

ORGANIZATION

The BDP Regional team together with ICCS and partner organizations which include IWMI, WorldFish, M-Power, and WWF will take the lead in organizing this Stakeholder Consultation. A task force will be established to coordinate the programme, presentations, list of participants and other issues.