The Fourth Mekong Dialogue

Water-Food-Energy-Climate Nexus: Revisiting Development in Mekong Region

Hosted by

Mekong Program, Asian Research Center for International Development,
Mae Fah Luang University
Institute of Developing Economies -Japan External Trade Organization (IDE-JETRO)

Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung Southeast Asia Regional Office

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Mae Fah Luang University Bangkok Office

27 Panjabhum 2 Building, 10th floor South Sathorn Road

Sathorn Bangkok, 10120, Thailand.

The 4th Mekong Dialogue:

The Water- Food-Energy-Climate Nexus: Revisiting Development in Mekong Region

February 27-28, 2023: Mae Fah Luang University Bangkok Office, Bangkok, Thailand

Program

DAY 1. February 27, 2023: 9:15-17:00		
09:15-09:25	**Welcome Remarks**	Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nantana Gajaseni, Vice President, Mae Fah Luang University, and Acting Dean, School of Social Innovation
		Ms. Mayumi Murayama Executive Vice President, the Institute of Developing Economies - Japan External Trade Organization (IDE-JETRO)
09:25-09:40	**Framing of the Mekong Dialogue**	Dr. Khen Suan Khai, Mekong Program, Mae Fah Luang University Dr. Kenji Otsuka, Senior Research Fellow, IDE-JETRO
09:40-10:30	**Keynote Speech**	Critical Issues for the Water Food Energy Climate Nexus in Mekong Region. Dr. Carl Middleton, Chulalongkorn University
10:30 – 10:40	**Short break**	
10:40-12:00	**Session 1: Revisiting Development of the Mekong Region (20 min per each presentation)**	
	Presentation 1	Forming the "Mekong": How did the conflicting nations create the space for cooperation? Ms. Maki Aoki-Okabe, Deputy-Director, Current Affairs Studies Group, Area Studies Center, IDE-JETRO
	Presentation 2	Practical Development Partnerships in Water-Food-Energy-Climate in Mekong Region: Australian approach. Dr. John Dore, DFAT Lead Water Specialist, Water Security and Nature Based Solutions Section, Climate Resilience and Finance Branch, Climate Development and Finance Division DFAT Lead Advisor, Mekong Australia Partnership, Water Energy Climate,

		South East Asia Regional Division, Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia Embassy, Bangkok, Thailand
	Q&A Session	
	Discussant: Dr. Kenji Nagata, Senior Advisor on Water Resources, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) *Moderator: Prof. Siriporn Wajjwalku, Thammasat University*	
12:00-13:30	***LUNCH***	
13:30-15:00	**Session 2: Local and transboundary practices in the Mekong Region (15 min per presentation)**	
	Presentation 1	The role of research in policy-making before the coup political era and major challenges agencies encountered, working on land issues after the coup in Myanmar Mr. Bawi Tha Thawng, Mekong Region Land Governance, Myanmar
	Presentation 2	Crafting Shared Governance Using a Commons-based Approach in the Wetland of Luang Prabang, Lao PDR: Mr. Phong An Huynh, NRM International Expert, GRET, Laos
	Presentation 3	Environmental Security in the Mekong: Debates, Evidence and the Vietnamese Approach /Building a Low-carbon, Climate-resilient Agriculture through Circular Approach: A Case Study in An Giang Province: Mr. Nguyen Minh Quang, Mekong Environmental Forum, Vietnam
	Q&A (15min) and Discussion(30min): 45 min	
15:00 -15:15	**Short Break**	
15:15 – 16:45	**Session 2 (Continued)**	
	Presentation 4	Food and Social Innovation: Exploring Participatory Policy Development and the Cases of Thailand: Ms. Wallapa van Willenswaard, Innovation Network International, Thailand
	Presentation 5	Community-based Solution to Addressing the Integrated Issues of Biodiversity Conservation, Climate Change and Sustainability: From China to the Mekong Region:

		Dr. Kui Peng, Program Manager, Ecosystem Conservation & Community Development Program, Global Environmental Institute, China
	Q&A (15min) and Discussion(45min): 60 min	
	Discussant: Dr. Sawang Meesaeng, Lecturer, International Development Program, School of Social Innovation, MFU; Mr. Keola Souknilanh, Deputy Director, Economic Geography Studies Group, IDE-JETRO; and Ms. Naomi Hatsukano, Associate Senior Research Fellow, Southeast Asian Studies Group II, IDE-JETRO *Moderator: Dr. Carl Middleton, Mr. Shozo Sakata, Senior Researcher, IDE-JETRO*	
DAY.2: February 28, 2023: 9:00-12:00		
9:00-10:20	**Session 3: Transboundary cooperation in the Mekong Region and beyond (20 min per presentation)**	
	Presentation 1	Water Resources Distribution and Utilization among the countries of the Lancang-Mekong: Prof. Yan Feng and Dr. Wenling Wang Institute of International Rivers and Eco-security, Yunnan University
	Presentation 2	Water Diplomacy in the Mekong Region Dr. Chheang Vannarith President, Asian Vision Institute, Cambodia
	Presentation 3	Address the Water Resources Issues toward the Better Future of Mekong: Dr. Kenji Nagata, JICA
	Q & A	
	Moderator: Ms. Maki Aoki-Okabe, IDE-JETRO	
10:20 – 10:30	**Short Break**	
10:30-11:50	**Roundtable Discussion**	
	All panelists and discussants	
	Moderator: Dr. Khen Suan Khai, MFU and Dr. Kenji Otsuka, IDE-JETRO	
11:50-12:00	**Closing Remarks**	Prof. Lee Lai To Director, Asian Research Center for International Development, School of Social Innovation, Mae Fah Luang University

The 4th Mekong Dialogue

The Water- Food-Energy-Climate Nexus: Revisiting Development in Mekong Region

February 27-28, 2023: Mae Fah Luang University Bangkok Office, Bangkok, Thailand

Abstract

Keynote Speech: Critical Issues for the Water Food Energy Climate Nexus in Mekong Region

Dr. Carl Middleton

Chulalongkorn University, Thailand

Session 1: Revisiting the Development of the Mekong Region

Presentation 1: Forming the "Mekong": How did the conflicting nations create the space for cooperation?

Ms. Maki Aoki-Okabe

Deputy-Director, Current Affairs Studies Group, Area Studies Center, IDE-JETRO

The concept of the "Mekong" was not widely recognized until the 21st century. Mekong River Basin was divided throughout the 20th century between China, the former French Indochina states such as Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, anti-communist Thailand, and Myanmar, which remained isolated under its unique socialist system. These regional countries and outside partners like the United States and Japan were at loggerheads over ideology and nation-building.

Notwithstanding, these countries drastically turned toward cooperation in the 1990s. They developed and maintained cooperation and amity by dissolving the divisions that had existed until then and forming the "Mekong" group of countries. In other words, the "Mekong" region-forming suggests a case of how the states waive conflict and foster cooperation, which is the most important question in international relations studies.

By reviewing the history of the development of the "Mekong" concept, the presentation examines the mechanisms that have made cooperation possible.

Presentation2: ***Practical Development Partnerships in Water-Food-Energy-Climate in Mekong Region: Australia approach***

Dr. John Dore

DFAT Lead Water Specialist, Water Security and Nature Based Solutions Section, Climate Resilience and Finance Branch, Climate Development and Finance Division

DFAT Lead Advisor, Mekong Australia Partnership, Water Energy Climate,

Southeast Asia Regional Division, Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade,

Australia Embassy, Bangkok, Thailand

Session 2: Local and transboundary practices in the Mekong Region

Presentation 1: The role of research in policy-making before the coup political era and major challenges agencies encountered working on land issues after the coup in Myanmar: A case study on the work of the Mekong Region Land Governance Project in Myanmar

Mr. Bawi Tha Thawng

Mekong Region Land Governance, Myanmar

This paper will present the role of research in policy-making before the coup era in Myanmar and how it was applied as a tool for advocacy and awareness by agencies working on land issues, especially in recognizing customary tenure. Moreover, it will explore challenges and gaps in land-related laws that challenge the recognition of customary tenure. It will also discuss how land-related laws and institutions were established before the coup and changed after the coup.

In addition, it will also highlight land-related issues that agencies have been working on for the recognition of customary tenure and what strategies and activities some agencies uninitiated to provide possible solutions to address customary tenure issues. Furthermore, the paper will provide a research case study on the "Virgin, Fellow and Vacant Lands law," which is the study conducted by the Mekong Region Land Governance, and then also further explain how it was applied by agencies working on land issues for advocacy and awareness before the political coup. Moreover, it will discuss some updates on land issues after the coup, significant challenges agencies working on land issues in Myanmar are encountering, and types of alternative strategies and options they initiated. The presentation discussion will be mainly based on the writer's experiences working on land governance issues in Myanmar and drawing the work of the Mekong Regional Land Governance Project and their partners in Myanmar on land governance issues.

Presentation 2: Crafting Shared Governance Using a Commons-based Approach in the Wetland of Luang Prabang, Lao PDR

Mr. Phong An Huynh

NRM International Expert, GRET, Laos

GRET is a French iNGO founded in 1976 and working in Laos since 2004 on a range of thematic (agriculture, natural resources management, water and sanitation, etc) and crosscutting issues (gender, climate change, etc.). GRET adopts a **Commons-Based Approach (CBA)**, to facilitate multi-stakeholders learning process and shared governance arrangements toward collective action to achieve fair use and re-appropriation of rights to their commons. CBA in Lao necessitates navigating the geo-political and socio-economic nuances inherent in Lao's one-party system and its governance priorities. Even so, the state increasingly recognizes the importance of decentralization, CSOs' contributions toward alleviating the state's burdens on meeting communities' demands, and iNGOs' facilitative role in actualizing its National Socio-Economic Development Plan. Leveraging its own experiences, GRET tested the CBA toward addressing issues in the wetland ponds of Luang Prabang, a World Heritage site linked to the Mekong.

In Luang Prabang, CBA toolsets were utilized to develop a shared governance structure that foster re-appropriation of communities' rights toward the ponds while achieving local government's legitimization which in turn are consolidated due to observable impacts. These impacts include communities' prioritization and implementation of activities led by a wetland management committee whose structuration and operationality exemplify shared governance. Of course, prevailing challenges remain, including dependency on external technical and financial support to maintain the dynamics started, and the need for continued consolidation of this novel shared governance structure and its processes.

Shared governance building through CBA demonstrated feasibility and relevancy in different geo-political, socio-economical and territorial contexts. Stakeholders collectively define governance structures and processes for specific commons through **"collective learning process"** and by building on local knowledge and resources buttressed by instigated enabling conditions. It is imperative to recognize that the CBA is not a mere recipe to apply, but rather a series of objectives, principles and methods, needing to be adapted and developed for each specific situation (e.g.: NTFP sustainable consumption and production, watershed management...), with potential to empower rural women and youth in Lao PDR.

Presentation 3: Environmental Security in the Mekong: Debates, Evidence and the Vietnamese Approach

Mr. Nguyen Minh Quang

Mekong Environmental Forum, Vietnam

Riparian countries are damming the Mekong at all costs to meet growing energy demands and sustain economic growth. Ample evidence has explicitly demonstrated that this development is causing severe ecological, economic, and even health problems in downstream regions, threatening to undermine their new-found strengths. While transboundary water has not yet sparked major disputes among basin countries, the potential for non-traditional security challenges looms large. As the complicated inter-state relations persist and the politicization of external powers' presence grows in the Mekong, regional security now demands both the prevention of inter-state divergence and the fulfillment of human development and amenities. Some suggest that environmental security is essential in satisfying the former and a key to the latter. This paper offers a genealogy of regional and environmental security and its demands for a profound transition in the national approach to transboundary environmental challenges. The paper does this by reconsidering some of the debates surrounding the securitization of the environment. The environmental security in the Mekong is highly relevant because it, on the one hand, complements the divergence between those acknowledging security-environmental linkage and those who warn against the negative implications of such linking. On the other, it allows for understanding the hedging strategies in the non-confrontational yet thorny bipolar competition between the Sino and American-led Mekong cooperation and partnership initiatives. The paper then traces the evidence proving the security-environmental linkage in the Mekong. We argue that environmental problems fuel the likelihood of social instability and inequality and are likely to exacerbate transboundary tensions over development. However, an overstated, undesirable 'securitization' of the environment may appear to restrict the range of means available for resolving environmental problems. While the impact of existing institutional frameworks by external actors remains to be seen, riparian governments are managing to find the right way to address the trade-offs between economic growth and environmental security. In this regard, the paper analyses the recent shift in the Vietnamese approach to the environmental insecurity in its Mekong Delta, where the downstream impacts of Mekong dams are rampant, to draw some lessons for a self-help approach and shed some light as to how securitizing non-traditional issues can transform poor governance.

Presentation 4: Food and Social Innovation: Exploring Participatory Policy Development and the Cases of Thailand

Ms. Wallapa van Willenswaard

Innovation Network International, Thailand

The purpose of undertaking case studies was gradually understood as identifying prototypes for scaling. The case studies or flagship projects represent examples of how three 'design for social innovation'- issues shape scalable models for transformation toward sustainable food systems, targeting "accessible, affordable and healthy food for all." By 'social innovation issues' or 'principles' are impulses that provide social innovation processes with direction and purposeful relationships of mutual care. The three interactive designs for social innovation principles tentatively identified are Food Literacy, Food Citizenship, and Food Community. They together constitute creative social dynamics driving the Food Policy Design and implementation, introducing Public Food Procurement Policy Design to create conditions for an envisaged scaling process.

Presentation 5: Community-based Solution to Addressing the Integrated Issues of Biodiversity Conservation, Climate Change and Sustainability: From China to the Mekong Region

Dr. Kui Peng, Program Manager,

Ecosystem Conservation & Community Development Program,
Global Environmental Institute, China

At least one-quarter of the world's land surface is traditionally managed, owned, used, or occupied by indigenous peoples, covering more than 38 million km^2 in 87 countries, including those of the Mekong region, and intersects about 40% of all terrestrial protected areas and ecologically intact landscapes. Unfortunately, most of these indigenous territories and communities face comprehensive changes in biodiversity loss, climate change, and sustainable development. Respecting the rights and natural resources of indigenous people and local communities, the community-based solution empowers and helps local people conserve their land and adapt to climate change through sustainably using natural resources to develop green livelihood. We have been demonstrating the community-based solution in western China and introducing the approach to the Mekong region with the support of local NGOs, CSOs, and governments in the Mekong region countries. The cases across the region show good performance in addressing environmental and sustainable issues.

Presentation 1: Water Resources Distribution and Utilization among the countries of the Lancang-Mekong

Prof. Yan Feng, Dr. Wenling Wang

Institute of International Rivers and Eco-security, Yunnan University

In the Lancang-Mekong River, the mainstream length is around 4880km; the drainage area is around 795,000~810,000 km^2, the total drop head is over 5000m, and the average annual runoff is 475 km^3. In 2019, the total population was 93million in the basin; the largest populations are in Thailand and Vietnam, with 30.4million and 29.8million, then in Cambodia, with 16.5million; China, Laos, and Myanmar have less, 9.4million, 7.2million and 0.6million. Within the basin, the major objectives of water utilization are irrigation, domestic usage, fishery, hydropower, and navigation. Among them, water for agriculture is the biggest consumptive water usage, occupying over 70% of the total water use. Around 80% of the population relies on agriculture, essential to ensure food security and livelihood（MRC, 2018）.

Water and land resources distribution among the six riparian countries: (1) 4 countries occupy over or equal to 20% of the drainage area within the basin, the most is Laos, then Thailand, China, and Cambodia; Vietnam, which mainly locates in the delta, and

Myanmar has the smallest area, only 3%; (2) water contribution, Laos contributes the largest amount, nearly to 35%, then in Cambodia with 19%, Thailand and China contributes similar amounts, is 17% and 16% respectively, and Vietnam and Myanmar have fewer contributions, with 11% and 2%; (3) water energy, the total reserve is around 90, 060MW, and the exploitable one is 57,370MW, which distribute mainly in China(on the mainstream), Laos and Cambodia (on tributaries).

The current water utilization: (1) the consumptive water usage, the total amount is 68.4km^3, the water use rate is 14.4% in 2019; the amounts among the countries, ones for irrigation by the 3 down-stream countries are much more than the ones by the 3 upper-stream countries; according to water contribution or self-produced water by each country, Vietnam used the largest proportion of its contribution, was 55.7%, Laos used only 2.5%; (2) the surplus water is abundant, but the surplus water amounts are different between wet season and dry season; (3) water storages for irrigation and domestic use, are water consumptive objectives, there are 21 large reservoirs, with nearly 3.2km^3 in the basin according to the data of WLE, Thailand has a largest water storage capacity with 2.9 km^3; (4) on the non-consumptive water usage, as hydropower development, in 2019, China

already built 12 dams on the mainstream, Laos has 65 dams including 3 on the mainstream, 2 in Cambodia, 7 in Thailand, and 14 in Vietnam; the total water storage is around 81.8km^3, around 96% of the storage is for power generation; as water uses for fishery and navigation, also are non-consumptive usages, the biggest beneficial owner, either fishery or navigation is Vietnam; the benefits from navigation to the 4 lower countries (Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam) are much more than the ones to China and Myanmar.

In summary, the Lancang-Mekong, has rich water resources sharing among six countries, feeds a large population facing disasters (such as drought and flood) and climate change, using water for different objectives to get benefits combing with other natural resources endowments. Nevertheless, water utilization and water benefits have different benefits; losses or damages among the countries and groups are challenging to evaluate.

Presentation 2: Water Diplomacy in the Mekong Region

Dr. Chheang Vannarith
President, Asian Vision Institute, Cambodia

The presentation will shed light on the concept of water diplomacy, the evolving regional cooperation on transboundary water resources in the Mekong region, and the roles of the Mekong River Commission, ASEAN and other regional initiatives such as Lancang-Mekong Cooperation, Mekong-Japan Cooperation, Mekong-Korea Cooperation, Mekong-Ganga Cooperation, Mekong-US Partnership, and Mekong-Australia. It will propose ways to build synergies among these regional mechanisms and initiatives so that the Mekong River can be better managed.

Presentation 3: Address the Water Resources Issues toward the Better Future of Mekong

Dr. Kenji Nagata
Senior Advisor on Water Resources and Disaster, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)

Resource-rich and economic-growth Mekong is influenced by Climate Change and may have severer impacts and unfair benefits-allocation effectuated by economic development. Then, it is necessary to solve transboundary water resources issues toward a better future and people's well-being in the Mekong.

A variety of development, including dams by leading developers such as countries, private companies, and donors, produces great benefits. Meanwhile, it sometimes causes loss and damage to people. Extreme weather and Climate Change exacerbate the loss and damage. The world community or all basin countries needs to mitigate the loss and

damage caused by Climate Change. Meanwhile, the main developers should compensate for the loss and damage caused by the development, even over the border.

In order to come to an agreement and implementation over this principle, it is necessary to clarify the cause-and-effect link between development and loss/damage. To gather together natural and social sciences and accumulate objective facts clarifies the causal linkage of development and loss/damage, then the priority areas of investigations and research should be defined.