

Transboundary Water Cooperation in the Lower Mekong Basin I and II (TWC)

The Mekong River Commission in its efforts to promote cooperation between the countries along the Lower Mekong Basin to improve their joint water management as well as to strengthen resilience and sustainable development.

Context

Over 70 million people in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Viet Nam depend on the Mekong and its tributary rivers. The river basin is critical to sustaining people's livelihoods by providing food, energy, and water security. Depending on the natural conditions, the Mekong River and its ecosystem can be used and developed by the riparian countries. The need for economic recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic and socio-economic development can lead to over-exploration of the river beyond its natural boundaries. In such a situation in which countries may maximize the benefits and externalize the costs, a full depletion of the Mekong River is more than ever looming. These human-induced impacts on water resources are further multiplied by climate change which underlines the need for Mekong River Commission (MRC) as a water diplomacy platform to promote sustainable water resources development at the transboundary level. The only way to balance economic, social and environmental interests is for neighbouring states to cooperate. To this end, MRC was established in 1995. Since then, the MRC has been developing as a key international organisation for the management of water resources. Nevertheless, its work must be improved at both regional and national levels to face the challenges in the Lower Mekong Basin. This requires strengthening the work of the national line agencies and stronger regional coordination.

Project Title	Transboundary Water Cooperation in the Lower Mekong Basin I and II
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Project regions	Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam
Leading executing agency	Mekong River Commission (MRC)
Duration	2018 - 2024

Objective

The Transboundary Water Cooperation project aims to enforce the coordinating and management capabilities of the MRC, supporting river monitoring and the implementation of transboundary projects for flood and drought management.

Approach

MRC is the region's intergovernmental organization to steer cooperation between the countries along the Lower Mekong River, to improve their joint water management as well as to strengthen resilience and sustainable development.

The project has been supporting MRC in its efforts to establish a Mekong River Basin wide development strategy which tackles:

- The creation of a Core River Monitoring Network to assess environmental changes due to hydropower dams, or e.g., increasing plastic pollution. The project has been involved through the provision of trainings, increasing equipment contributions, as well as technical advice to elaborate monitoring methodologies. These activities have been contributing to the approval of a Joint Environmental Monitoring Program for dams and a Capacity Development Strategy.



Signing Ceremony between MRC and GIZ in continuing of the Joint project until 2024. Photo: © GIZ/Transboundary Water Cooperation in the Lower Mekong Basin

- MRC's Joint Planning, a local cross-border approach, to mitigate flood and drought risks. This is being supported through the development of an early warning system, the identification of adaptation solutions to climate change, and to implement nature-based solutions. The project has been closely cooperating with MRC in transboundary sub-basins to develop a digital atlas, a master plan and to prioritize on sustainable green-grey investments.
- Fostering the organisational development of the MRC Secretariat by supporting the implementation of the MRC Strategic Plan 2021-2025. This includes advice on compliance mechanisms, for example, internal controls and efficient use of the funds from international donors and member countries.
- Finalized the Joint Environmental Monitoring Program, integrated into the MRC Core River Monitoring Network, which covers the Mekong mainstream and its tributaries, as well as socio-economic monitoring with decentralized key functions being transferred to the member countries.
- In total, seven sets of water quality monitoring equipment are provided for the MRC Core River Monitoring Network.
- A Digital Sub-Basin Atlas has been developed and is operational for early-warning systems.
- The Digital Sub-Basin Atlas of Cambodia and Thailand has been finalized and translated into Khmer and Thai languages.
- Promoting the usage of MRC M&E system for reporting, budgeting and planning.

Impact

With support from Germany, the MRC has contributed to improving knowledge-based management of water resources, developing a shared vision for the basin, and strengthening the cooperation mechanisms between member countries. With this contribution, the MRC will be more efficient and effective on its way to becoming a world-leading organisation in the field of transboundary water cooperation, receiving increasing political and financial support.

More recently, the project has achieved and is progressing the following:



Proposed NbS to address transboundary flood and drought between Aranyaprethet and Poipet. Photo: © GIZ/ Transboundary Water Cooperation in the Lower Mekong Basin

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Gender and Water Management

The gender-sensitive Capacity Development Strategy for the Core River Monitoring Network is under preparation and expected to be ready in early 2024. The project also supports the Gender and Vulnerability Assessment in the sub-basin as well as the implementation of the MRC Gender Action Plan.

About GIZ Laos

GIZ, as part of German Development Cooperation, has been active in Laos since 1993, mainly on behalf of German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and its donors and development partners. Currently, GIZ is implementing numerous projects in three core areas: a) rural development, b) conservation of nature and natural resources and c) sustainable economic development.

Please visit www.giz.de/laos for further information.

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On behalf of Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)

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