

Support to the Mekong River Commission

Working together for the sustainable development of the Mekong Basin

Context

Over 60 million people in the Lower Mekong Basin, consisted of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam, depend on its water resources to ensure their livelihoods through fisheries and agriculture. The river's economic significance is tremendous for those who live along the riverbanks as it secures their food base, and income generation. Furthermore, with its potential for transport, tourism, energy, trade, and investment, the river forms the basis for socioeconomic development and growth in all the riparian states.

However, the Mekong Basin faces numerous challenges that threaten the sustainable development of the region. Rapid economic and demographic growth are increasing pressure on water resources as the demand for food, energy and manufactured goods is rising. Studies confirm that fish stocks are in decline, biodiversity is decreasing, severe floods and droughts are occurring more often, and the Mekong Delta is sinking due to the rising levels of the sea. Climate change is exacerbating these pressures.

Ultimately, the sustainable development and management of water resources in the Mekong Basin will require a better balance between economic, social and environmental interests. Given the transboundary nature of the Mekong Basin shared between six countries, such balance can only be achieved through cooperation, as the actions of one country are having an impact on other countries downstream.

In 1995, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam established the Mekong River Commission (MRC) as a mechanism for addressing the development opportunities and challenges of the Lower Mekong Basin.



Lower Mekong mainstream in front of MRC secretariat
Photo: © GIZ/MRC-GIZ Cooperation Programme

Project name	Transboundary Water Cooperation in the Lower Mekong Basin
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Project region	Cambodia, Viet Nam, Thailand, and Lao PDR
Leading executing agency	The Mekong River Commission (MRC)
Duration	January 2019 - December 2021

Since then, the Commission has worked to improve the sustainable management of water resources.

Objective

Cooperation between riparian countries of the Lower Mekong Basin with the support from the Mekong River Commission (MRC) has been strengthened.

Approach

GIZ supports the MRC to address the development challenges in the Mekong River Basin, especially on sustainable hydro-power development and climate change adaptation. The programme also supports the ongoing organisational development including the decentralisation reform of the MRC in various areas as well as the financial management reform.

GIZ works directly with experts and managers of the MRC Secretariat and, where applicable, also provides support to the National Mekong Committees in each member country.

Through these approaches the programme is contributing to strengthening cooperation between the riparian countries.

Impact

With support from Germany, MRC has contributed to improve the knowledge base on water resources, develop a shared vision for the basin, make the MRC a more efficient organization and improve the cooperation mechanisms between member countries. MRC is now on its way to become a world leading organization in the field of transboundary water cooperation, receiving increasing political and financial support.

More recently, MRC has achieved the following:

- Undertaken an in-depth review of the MRC Strategic Plan 2016-2020.
- Drafted a Programme for the Joint Environmental Monitoring (JEM) of Mekong mainstream dams.
- Shared the first result of the JEM pilot projects at Xayaburi and Don Sahong with member countries.
- Finalised the fish pass monitoring methodology and approach to be tested at Don Sahong dam.
- Oriented the MRC proposed Core River Monitoring Network in the Lower Mekong Basin to member countries.
- Identified joint actions to promote cross border cooperation between Cambodia and Thailand to manage floods and droughts at the border area.
- Supported the funding mobilisation for the implementation of the identified joint actions for flood and drought mitigation.
- Formulated the new Basin Development Strategy 2021-2030 and a five-year Strategic Plan 2021-2021.
- Finalised MRC Gender Handbook and MRC Gender Action Plan (GAP) 2021-2025.
- Finalised the development of MRC Multiyear Work Plan (MWP) 2021-2022.



Participants of JEM Pilots fisheries training
February 2020, Luang Prabang, Lao PDR
Photo: © GIZ/MRC-GIZ Cooperation Programme

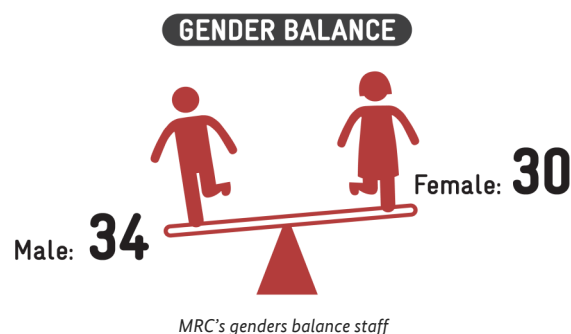
Gender and water management

GIZ supports MRC in translating MRC's gender policy and strategy into the implementation of its work at the strategic, organisational and operational levels.

Among others, GIZ supported MRC in conducting a gender analysis, developing a Gender Action Plan (GAP), mainstreaming Gender and Vulnerability (G&V) into the next Basin Development Strategy 2021-2030 and Strategic Plan 2021-2025, and developing a Gender and Vulnerability (G&V) Mainstreaming Handbook to provide continuous mainstreaming support for MRC core work.

GIZ also supported the update of the Strategic Plan gender indicators, which allow the MRC to consistently and continuously mainstream gender into key activities and to systematically monitor its gender mainstreaming efforts.

Furthermore, the current project phase aims at integrating gender into the planning of flood and drought mitigation measures. The approach that will be taken will depend on the priority mitigation measures identified by the member countries.



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