

MEKONG UPDATE & DIALOGUE



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The Australian Mekong Resource Centre was established at the University of Sydney in 1997 to promote research, discussion and debate on development and environment issues in the Mekong Region. The AMRC is a focal point for information, dialogue and activities in support of an equitable and sustainable development path for the Mekong Region.

The *Mekong Update & Dialogue* provides:

- lead article on the key topic of the issue
- responses to the lead article
- news of current developments in the region
- news from the AMRC
- information on Mekong-related conferences and events in Australia

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EDITORIAL ... Environmental Security and Conflict in the Mekong

When popular media and international relations experts espouse regional security, they are usually talking about the relationship between regional governments, states and their military machines. When governments act on the basis of national security, they are similarly concerned with state power, often in a repressive act of some kind. Security is much less frequently framed in terms of whether the lives of the majority of people living in the Mekong Region today are more or less secure than they were 10, 20, 30, 40 years ago, if so how so, and if not why not.

The superpower-backed geopolitical conflict in countries bordering the Mekong has long since declined, and as such it is beyond question that many millions of people's lives are more secure than they were during the hot and cold wars of the 1960s to 1980s – despite the unexploded ordnance and other legacies described by Lady Borton in the following pages. Ironically, however, the development agendas held back by geopolitical tensions have re-emerged to pose new threats to human security. Now such threats are in the realm of actual or potential conflict over resources and environmentally-defined livelihood uncertainties.

Development brings mixed fortunes in terms of human security. On the one hand, food security in many parts of Vietnam, life expectancy and other broad indicators suggest basic life guarantees that were not there a generation ago. On the other hand, development continues to bring about gross displacements and infringements of rights, in the encompassing sense in which Michael Lerner describes them in his response article in this issue. Among the rights infringed are livelihood-based environmental rights.

Environmental security has become a key notion in today's world, and at one level it represents a progressive step away from security defined in terms of superpower politics. However, as Lorraine Elliott clearly articulates in the main feature overleaf, environmental security can easily be hijacked to focus our attention on the old state-to-state tensions and away from questions of conflict and security issues within states as they affect ordinary people. Jon Barnett has recently addressed head-on this cooptation of the environmental security agenda in a cogent critique.¹ We are thus reminded of the importance of maintaining a human security focus, as we take on the notion of environmental security based around access to natural resources and rights to live in a clean environment.

¹ Jon Barnett, 2001, *The Meaning of Environmental Security: Ecological Politics and Policy in the New Security Era*, London, Zed Books.

READER CONTRIBUTIONS

The Mekong Update & Dialogue welcomes the comments of its readers on issues raised in the Feature article and in the Responses to the Feature. If you do wish to make comment please email us at mekong@mail.usyd.edu.au. Comments should be sent by early May and should be limited to 1-2 paragraphs.



Kreung ethnic minority women in Ratanakiri Province, north-east Cambodia, meet to discuss the impact of the upstream Yali Falls dam on their community. (Source Ian Baird.)

FEATURE

Environmental Security in the Mekong by Lorraine Elliott

In a speech in Phnom Penh in July 1999, ASEAN Secretary General Rodolfo Severino suggested that the security dimensions of developments in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) were rarely raised. In raising it himself, however, he concentrated on traditional geopolitical approaches to security, observing that the recent admission to ASEAN membership of the four Mekong riparian states of Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Myanmar would extend the sense of a common stake and vision which was so essential for regional stability and enduring peace in Southeast Asia (Severino, 1999). In other words, conflict between states in the Mekong was now less likely because they were all part of ASEAN. Further, cooperation in the GMS would bring the added advantage of enhancing ASEAN's engagement with China, another important factor in regional security.

The absence of actual or potential conflict between states is not, however, a sufficient measure of peace and security, either in Southeast Asia generally or in the Mekong more specifically. Secure states do not necessarily mean secure peoples. This is especially so where, as in at least some of the Mekong countries, governments are often one of the major sources of political insecurity for their own citizens. Trends in security analysis over the last decade or more have confirmed that we need to think about security in more than statist terms and that we need to consider other forms of insecurity besides political violence. Our actual as well as intellectual concern should be to understand security as peace with justice rather than as the absence of war or threat thereof.

One area of fervent but still unresolved academic and policy debate is that of environmental security. More orthodox approaches to this concept which entered public policy lexicon in the late 1980s focus on environmental degradation and resource scarcities as a cause of conflict and violence between and within societies. This should not be discounted, although much of the evidence suggests that environmental degradation is unlikely to be a *primary* cause of inter-state conflict in South-east Asia (see Dupont 1998, p.75). It is, however, only a partial picture of environmental security, and its policy consequences run the risk of addressing symptoms rather than causes. A more comprehensive approach views environmental scarcity in human security terms, following the model introduced into public policy debate by the United Nations Development Programme in 1992 and confirmed by the Commission on Global Governance in 1995 and, more recently, the UN Secretary General's Millennium Statement. The attainment and maintenance of regional peace and security demands that *people's* lives be secure, not only from systemic and personal conflict and violence but also from poverty and from the impacts of environmental degradation.

To what extent is this relevant to the Mekong sub-region and to what extent is it being taken seriously in policy debates? The answers, I suggest, are 'very' and 'not enough'. Geopolitics is not necessarily being overtaken by environmental security as the key security concern in the Mekong although there are good grounds to suggest that this is what *should* be happening. The legacy of the region's geopolitics and continuing

political struggles remains a source of environmental (and human) insecurity. Over one-third of Cambodia's arable land, for example, is still heavily infested with landmines, making it dangerous for farmers to cultivate, causing available land to be used more intensively and unsustainably and compromising attempts to overcome poverty. Resources have become a convenient currency for governments in pursuit of political objectives that have little to do with peace. The ruling regime in Myanmar, for example, has sold oil and mineral exploration rights and logging concessions to fund its campaign against the democracy movement and Karen tribal resistance. There is also no doubt that in some Mekong countries the military is involved in illegal logging, fishing, and the smuggling of wildlife across borders.

The resource geopolitics of border regions and transnational resources still figure prominently in conventional approaches to environmental security in the Mekong. The primary concern, at least as far as the rest of the world is concerned, has been driven by the extensive international literature on the likelihood of conflict over water resources in transnational river basins. Tension over the appropriation and regulation of the water resources of the Mekong remains a possibility despite the 1995 reconfiguration of the old Mekong Committee into the Mekong River Commission (MRC), particularly as neither China nor Myanmar are presently bound by agreements on water use. China's projects to dredge the upper streams of the river and dam the main streams, for example, have already caused tension with downstream Mekong neighbours concerned about their own water resources as well as the impact on riverine ecosystems. These have been compounded by *geopolitical* uncertainties about China's power role in the region. Cambodia, which is heavily reliant on water sources external to the country, is environmentally and economically vulnerable to hydropower development in upstream Laos and flood control measures in downstream Vietnam. Laos and Vietnam, in turn, have claimed their right to exploit or manage their part of the Mekong in accordance with their own development policies.

But the impact on people's lives and livelihoods of environmental degradation and its causes must be a crucial measure of peace and security in the Mekong. Freedom from want, as the UN Secretary General argued in his Millennium Statement, is as important a measure of peace and security as freedom from fear. A substantial proportion of the region's 240 million people depend directly or indirectly on the ecological health of the river and associated ecosystems for their livelihoods. Deforestation, the impact of over-fishing and land-use changes, pollution, the ecological consequences of water management (and mismanagement), and the loss of biodiversity are real and proximate sources of insecurity, especially for the region's poor and disadvantaged of whom there are many. The causes lie to a great degree in the pursuit of a different kind of security – economic security – at a national level and at a regional level under the auspices of agencies such as the Asian Development Bank. This strategy of turning battlefields into marketplaces through, among other things, the 'industrialised' exploitation of the waters of the Mekong and the commercialisation of river-basin agriculture are seen by governments as crucial to economic development and entry into the world trading economy. The environmental consequences are well known. Commercial agriculture, the over-use of fertilisers and the expansion of often poorly designed and managed irrigation systems have resulted in soil and water pollution. Fisheries and rice production are

made vulnerable. The cycle of poverty is reinforced and life remains precarious. This, more than the threat of war or conflict, is insecurity for the people of the Mekong. The recent devastating floods in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, the worst for 35 years, provide one example. They were in part the consequence of an environment modified by local deforestation and global climate change. All three countries suffered extensive loss of rice fields, destruction of homes and infrastructure, food insecurity and a serious loss of livelihood for many poor, rural peoples (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2001).

It's not just that people and communities are being made insecure by the pollution and exploitation of ecosystems and resources and the consequences thereof. Common property resources, which involve subsistence and social-cultural access to forest lands and river waters, are being privatized and corporatised in the hands, frequently, of economic elites. Local communities are forcibly resettled so that dam construction can proceed. Local peoples are rarely consulted in a way that provides them with real opportunities to negotiate or contest such policies. Those vulnerabilities can also exacerbate social tensions and conflicts between competing groups of users (see Dore, 2001, p.48; Lim and Valencia, 1990) and engender local resistance to environmental scarcities and economic policies.

The United Nations Development Programme anticipated human security, which included environmental security, as an antidote to traditional geopolitics and called for a 'profound transition in thinking' (1994, p.22). Yet despite the very real insecurities which environmental degradation brings to the Mekong region and its peoples, and despite a declaratory commitment to a more comprehensive approach to security under ASEAN, the ASEAN Regional Forum and the Track II Council for Security Cooperation Asia Pacific, the kinds of policy responses which are required to address this kind of security rarely take priority. Military and defence spending remains high as a proportion of government budgets and environmental spending remains low. At both national and regional levels, under the auspices of the Mekong River Commission and ASEAN, the importance of environmental protection and sustainable development has been written into policy (Elliott 2001). But in contrast to defence policies, environmental policies remain underfunded, subject to poor capacity for implementation and with little legal backup against violations. They are unlikely to address the problems of an insecure environment nor the human insecurities that result.

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Dr Lorraine Elliott is a Fellow in the Department of International Relations at the Australian National University. She has been writing and teaching on environmental security in the Asia Pacific since the early 1990s.

RESPONSES TO FEATURE

Response (1) by Michael Lerner

Dr. Elliott is clearly correct in noting that the environment and its condition matter greatly to the people who live in the Mekong region. As she has pointed, the relationship between the environment and people's lives and livelihoods is a complex one, especially in the face of the very real competition that exists for natural resources – competition between governments, corporations, and communities; between industry and agriculture; and between national governments. Determining the appropriate policy can be a difficult task.

At Oxfam America, we feel that the concept of human rights can contribute to this task by offering a robust analytical framework. Human rights – and in particular, economic, social and cultural rights – lie at the heart of Oxfam America's approach to development, and inform the way we work with our local partners.

Human rights are defined in international legal instruments. The most fundamental of these documents is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was unanimously approved by the UN General Assembly over half a century ago, in 1948. The UDHR guarantees people civil and political freedom – including rights to life, physical integrity, free speech and belief, and due process of law – as well as economic and social well-being, including the rights to an adequate standard of living, housing, education, food and health. All members of the Oxfam International family work toward five aims that reflect the UDHR: 1) the right to a sustainable livelihood; 2) the right to basic social services; 3) the right to life and security; 4) the right to be heard (social and political citizenship); and 5) the right to an identity (gender and diversity).

In the Mekong, these rights are often at odds with environmentally unsustainable development. In such projects, human rights are implicated in two different ways. First, the environmental degradation that results from these projects can directly lead to human rights violations: for example, the construction of large dams can lead to the forced resettlement of displaced communities, violating people's rights to property or to housing. Downstream communities may suffer due to changes in the quantity and quality of the water, in ways that violate people's rights to food, to health, and to an adequate standard of living.

But abuses are not just an end result. Human rights violations are often part of the decision-making process that authorizes harmful policies and projects. Many governments are neither transparent nor accountable, and routinely exclude their citizens from the decision-making process. When communities or civil society organizations try to protest in such a climate, they frequently suffer at the hand of the government or its private-

sector partners. These situations are what a rights-based approach tries to prevent.

A rights-based approach is grounded in people's rights to a healthy environment, to dispose freely of their natural resources, and not to be deprived of their means of subsistence. The rights-based approach recognizes people's right to take part in the governance of their natural resources, and to receive relevant information from governments when key public interests are at stake. People also have the right to organize and speak out against policies and projects that they do not support. When abuses occur, people have the right to an effective remedy, through fair and public hearings in which all parties are equal before the law.

The rights approach does not guarantee that environmentally harmful projects would be rejected, nor does it promise that appropriate regulatory policies would be enacted. But by letting civil society participate in the decision-making, the rights approach allows communities' voices to be heard.

National governments, donor countries and international and regional institutions should incorporate the rights-based approach into their policies. National governments should fulfill their human rights obligations, and undertake real and effective consultations with communities that will be affected by projects. Donors and international financial institutions such as the World Bank or Asian Development Bank should condition funding on meaningful community consultations and guaranteed respect for human rights. And regional institutions such as the Mekong River Commission should include human rights in its technical assistance, standard setting and project evaluation work with the riparian states in the Mekong Region. If implemented, the rights-based approach would offer a framework for balancing community concerns with the competing interests that seek to exploit natural resources, and for assessing economic concerns against environmental and human security needs.

Michael Lerner is a human rights lawyer working with Oxfam America's Southeast Asia Regional Office in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. His current work focuses on the intersection of human rights, governance and water resources, and is funded by a grant from the Human Rights Institute of Columbia University.

Response (2): What's a Small State to Do? by Lady Borton

Regional security issues run broad and deep like the majestic Mekong with its great potential for diversion and development but also for destruction. For many ordinary people in the Mekong-region countryside, environmental insecurity means denial of the basic human right to walk one's own land without ingesting dioxin or blowing up from bombs. Now, other concerns join this double jeopardy.

One might reasonably consider Dan Wessner's question: "What's a small state to do?" (Wessner 2001).

More than a century ago, French colonial cartographers created the boundaries that now define the three countries – Cambodia,

Lao PDR and Viet Nam – that the mapmakers named and claimed as French Indochina. Their boundaries took little notice of ethnic groups with different languages and cultures. Indeed, French colonial policy set ethnic groups against each other as part of a prolonged divide-and-conquer strategy.

Then the Americans came.

US forces in South Viet Nam – one fortieth of the Vietnamese population – became an occupying army. The US dropped more bombs on North and South Viet Nam than used by all sides on all fronts of World War II. By the end of the US War in 1975, impoverished and land-locked Laos had become the most bombed country in history. In 1970, the US toppled the neutral government of Cambodia while Prince Sihanouk was out of the country, setting in power the US-backed Lon Nol regime. Later, in addition to its embargo, the US politically backed the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime against Viet Nam and politically backed the Chinese invasion of three northern Vietnamese provinces.

The origin of many current environmental security complications for ordinary people in the region sits squarely on US shoulders. Take unexploded bombs and mines: Unofficial estimates suggest that unexploded ordinance left from the US War kills or injures more than 2,000 Vietnamese annually (Ngoc Mai 2002, p. 4.) Or, consider Agent Orange: According to the late Admiral E.R. Zumwalt, Jr., who made some of the early US decisions to spray Agent Orange, "... evidence readily suggests that at the time of its use experts knew that Agent Orange was harmful to military personnel." (Zumwalt 1990, p. 2.)

Further, Dr. James R. Clary, who prepared the final 1979 *Ranch Hand Report*, noted:

"When we (military scientists) initiated the herbicide program in the 1960's, we were aware of the potential for damage due to dioxin contamination in the herbicide. We were even aware that the 'military' formulation had a higher dioxin concentration than the 'civilian' version due to the lower cost and speed of manufacture. However, because the material was to be used on the 'enemy,' none of us were [sic] overly concerned." (Zumwalt 1990, p. 3.)

In short: The US knowingly used chemical warfare.

Exhaustive research done by Hatfield Consultants of Canada and Viet Nam's 10-80 Committee during the last nine years shows the disastrous, long-term effects of Agent Orange. A finite number of "hot spots" – documented Agent Orange spills, old US and ARVN airstrips, storage and loading sites – remain (Hatfield 2000). However, and this point is important, dioxin contamination in the general ecosystem is low.

Nevertheless, ecological damage to the once triple-canopy forests of Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam is vast. The hills of Viet Nam's Aluoi District remain barren more than thirty years after the spraying (See Hatfield 2000, plates). Floods are devastating because the run-off from clear-cut (or defoliated) hillsides is *one hundred* times that from the same area when forested (Solomatine 1994).

For the most part, ethnic minority people live along that French-defined border area which, during the US War, came to be known as the "Ho Chi Minh Trail." Their livelihoods were vulnerable even in the best of times. Now, in addition to the

double jeopardy of dioxin and unexploded bombs, comes outside interference and more affronts to the peace that these ordinary people have known for only twelve years:

- A year ago, US citizens of ethnic-minority Vietnamese background drew twenty-four ethnic-minority Vietnamese citizens across the Viet Nam-Cambodia border. The US State Department provided immediate asylum to the twenty-four people without consulting either the Vietnamese ambassador in Washington or the US ambassador in Ha Noi.
- Even more dramatically, the US in its War against Terrorism chooses *not* to control its own citizens who export "Terror Made In the U.S.A." (Johnson 2001). These minority groups of US citizens originally from Viet Nam, Lao and Cambodia use arms and explosives to destabilize the peace.
- The *Viet Nam Human Rights Act* passed the US House of Representatives 410-1 (Library of Congress 2002). It is currently in the US Senate. If passed, the *Viet Nam Human Rights Act* would fund Radio Free Asia to broadcast into Viet Nam, basically to set ethnic group against ethnic group. It would fund non-governmental organizations to do the same work. There it is again: that old divide-and-conquer strategy so familiar from French colonial times.

One might reasonably ask: "What's a Small State to Do?"

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Lady Borton is the Quaker International Affairs Representative in Viet Nam for the American Friends Service Committee, an INGO based in Philadelphia, USA. She is the author of *After Sorrow: An American Among the Vietnamese* (Viking/Penguin 1995; Kodansha America, 1996) and *Sensing The Enemy: An American Among the Boat People of Vietnam* (Dial/Doubleday, 1984).

UPCOMING EVENTS

Southern Thailand Conference: "Experiencing Southern Thailand: Current Social Transformations from a People's Perspective"

13-15 June 2002, Pattani, Thailand

Email: fidcost@bunga.pn.psu.ac.th
<http://intranet.pn.psu.ac.th/fidcost/main.asp>

Ninth Annual Workshop on Southeast Asian Women

28 June 2002, Monash University, Australia

Contact: Dr Susan Blackburn, School of Political and Social Inquiry, PO Box 11A Monash University, Victoria, 3800, Australia

Email: sue.blackburn@arts.monash.edu.au
Phone: 61 3 9905 2384

III MMSEA Conference: Indigenous Knowledge, Sustainable Livelihoods and Creative Means of Resources Governance

25-28 August 2002, Yunnan, China

Contact: Centre for Biodiversity and Indigenous Knowledge, Zhonghuandasha, Yanjiadi, Kunming, China 650034

Phone: 871 4123519; Fax: 871 4124871

Email: CBIK@public.km.yn.cn
www.cbik.org

Riversymposium 2002

2-6 September 2002, Brisbane, Australia

www.riverfestival.com.au/2002/content/symposium_home.asp?name=RiverSymposiumLink

2 September 2002 - AMRC Workshop
"International Transfer of River Basin Development Experience: Australia and the Mekong Region"

The Second International Symposium on the Management of Large Rivers for Fisheries: Sustainable Livelihoods and Biodiversity in the New Millennium

11-14 February 2003, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Contact: Chris Barlow, LARS2 Coordinator, Mekong River Commission, PO Box 1112, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

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<http://www.lars2.org/>

The events listed above are changed with each issue of Mekong Update & Dialogue. For a complete list of upcoming events please go to our website at www.mekong.es.usyd.edu.au. For submission of new events please contact the AMRC Administrator at mekong@mail.usyd.edu.au

NEWS FROM THE REGION

Mekong Region dams update

1. Hydropower on a rocky road in Burma

Three hydropower projects have been prioritized by Burma's military government: the Yeywa project on the Myitnge River near Mandalay to generate 780 MW, a long-planned project on the Bilin River (280 MW) and another on the Paunglaung River near Pinyin (280 MW). While the Paunglaung project is due for completion next year at a cost of a quarter billion dollars, the other two are experiencing financial problems. The Yeywa and Biliin hydropower projects will need loans totalling more than a billion dollars.

-- 2001 "Than Shwe: hydroelectric projects to be prioritized", Courier News Service, 26 December 2001

2. Two new Thai dams proposed

Two new dam proposals threaten to flood 4,000 rai of Khao Soi Dao wildlife sanctuary in Chanthaburi Province. The costs of construction are approximately 1.458 billion baht in the case of Klong Ta Lew Dam and 1.348 billion baht for Klong Ta Rong Dam. Both will create reservoirs covering about 2,000 rai each inside the wildlife sanctuary. Despite rationales of flood mitigation and orchard irrigation by the Irrigation Department, local protest has been threatened. The Forestry Department, which controls land use in the sanctuary, is also unhappy about the proposal.

Samabuddhi, K. 2002 "Dam projects threaten to flood 4,000 rai of wildlife sanctuary", Bangkok Post, 5 January 2002

3. China to build five more dams on the Upper Mekong (Lancang)

With the Xiaowan Dam already under construction, China plans to build five more dams on the Lancang (Upper Mekong) River in Yunnan Province. In addition, the Manwan Dam (1.25 million kW) is already built and the Dachaoshan Dam (1.35 million kW) is in partial operation on the Lancang. The Xiaowan Dam will eventually form a reservoir with a storage capacity of 14.94 billion cubic metres. These eight dams comprise the Lancang River Cascade project which in its entirety will generate power equivalent to about 80% of the massive Three Gorges Dam. The four downstream countries of the Mekong Basin - Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam - are concerned that further dam building by China will reduce downstream water flow and water quality. Environmental groups are also worried about the effect



Lancang River at Nuozhadu, Yunnan, site of the largest proposed dam on the Mekong. (Source Phil Hirsch.)

on fish species. This concern has recently been expressed through the Mekong River Commission.

-- 2002 "China to Build 8 Power Stations on Lancang River", Xinhua News Agency, 21 January 2002

-- 2002 "Power stations on Lancang to control flow of water", China Daily, 4 February 2002

Decherd, C. 2002 "Mekong River nations concerned about China's planned dams", Associated Press, 24 January 2002

McCormack, G. 2000 *Water Margins: Development and Sustainability in China*, AMRC Working Paper #2

4. Khone Falls hydropower project planned

On 30 November last year an agreement was made for the construction of the Pakse-Khon Pha Pheng water fall electricity project between Electricite du Laos (EDL) and the China-East Resource Import and Export Corporation (CERIECO). The project involves construction of transmission lines and generation stations on a small-scale (115 kW). Significantly, however, an electricity generation station is proposed for the Hoo Sahong Channel near Khon Pha Pheng waterfall in southern Laos.

-- 2001 "Local access to electricity in southern Laos", Vientiane Times, 7-10 December 2001

Energy an issue in Thailand

A petition demanding the scrapping of two proposed coal-fired power plants in Prachuap Khiri Khan Province, southern Thailand, has been signed by 534 people including academics. The petition also demanded that the contracts for the projects be scrutinized by the government. The power plants are seen as development of energy over-capacity and creation of unnecessary public debt. However, the head of the power division of Thailand's National Energy Policy Office (NEPO) has stated that, if the coal-fired power stations don't go ahead, then Laos would be asked to accelerate its hydroelectric program to augment Thai energy needs. The issue of Thai energy sources stems from growing industrial and household demand as well as national security concerns. The coal-fired power plants are part of Thailand's plans to become less dependent on natural gas and fuel-oil in power generation.

-- 2002 "Academics ask state to scrap projects", Bangkok Post, 21 January 2002

Wong-Anan, N. 2002 "Thai power uproar may speed Laos electricity dream", Reuters, 31 January 2002

HIV-AIDS spreads in Vietnam

In 2001 the number of HIV-AIDS patients climbed 24% and the number of HIV-AIDS deaths rose by 22%, compared with the previous year. More than 60% of HIV carriers are drug addicts and more than 84% are men. A government survey has found that more than half of the registered prostitutes in Hanoi are now HIV positive. There is a risk of further spread of HIV-AIDS as more than 60,000 prostitutes are being forcibly repatriated to Vietnam from Cambodia. A number of Vietnamese children under 15 years of age have been sent to work in the sex trade in Cambodia.

-- 2001 "Vietnam: HIV/AIDS infection spreads "at dangerous rate" in 2001", BBC, 31 December 2001

-- 2002 "HIV warning as prostitutes go home to Vietnam", The Mercury, 1 January 2002

-- 2002 "More than half of Hanoi prostitutes HIV positive: government survey", Agence France Presse, 13 March 2002

AUSTRALIAN MEKONG NEWS

Dialogue on River Basin Development and Civil Society in the Mekong Region

The AMRC in cooperation with key civil society partners in the Mekong Region is organising a Dialogue on river basin development and civil society in the Mekong Region. The Dialogue will comprise a series of related events and activities in Australia and the Mekong Region. The Australian component will include a study tour of the Murray-Darling Basin and a workshop - held in Brisbane in conjunction with the RiverSymposium - during late August-early September, while the Mekong Region component will take place in Thailand in November.

The overall purpose of the Dialogue is to stimulate debate and encourage cooperation between civil society, and national and regional policy and decision-makers in the Mekong River Basin countries over appropriate models of river basin development and management and the role of civil society. The Dialogue aims to challenge the conventional wisdom that river basin management entails the direct transfer of a model or a set of policies and institutions from one context to another. Alternative views of river basin development and management as a process, an arena of negotiation and dialogue between civil society and the state, will be explored.

By bringing civil society and key decision-makers involved in river basin planning and development together to participate in a variety of forums, an improved understanding between these key parties is anticipated. The aim is to work towards innovative and more participatory ways of dealing with emerging water-resource based competition and conflict in the Mekong Region.

For the latest information please visit our website www.mekong.es.usyd.edu.au

NEWS FROM THE CENTRE

Director returns from study leave

In February this year Phil Hirsch returned to Sydney to resume his position as AMRC Director. He had spent six months study leave in Chiang Mai, Thailand, and a further month (January) in the Mekong Region running the Southeast Field School. Andrew Wyatt, who had been acting AMRC Director during his absence, has continued on in the new position of Research Program Manager.

Reports from AMRC Associates working in the region

Simon Bush

Simon is half way through carrying out field work for his PhD in Savannakhet, Laos. He has been dividing his time up between mapping aquatic resources, collection of fish marketing information and a survey on fisheries activities. He has also recently presented a paper on previous research in Champassak prov-



Simon Bush (left foreground) at lunch at Ban Kadan, Savannakhet, Laos. (Source Simon Bush.)

ince on fish marketing at the International Symposium on Sustaining Food Security and Managing Natural Resources in Southeast Asia held recently in Chiang Mai. As part of his work in Savannakhet he has been setting up a Geographical Information System for the Provincial Department of Agriculture and Forestry Office. This has involved training provincial staff in GIS skills as well as district staff in the use of Geographical Positioning System hand units. It is hoped that a series of maps relating to various agricultural resources can be completed and distributed by the end of the year.

Olivia Dun

For nine months during 2001, Olivia worked in Vientiane, Lao PDR, as a volunteer through the Australian Youth Ambassador for Development Program. She was based within the Faculty of Forestry at the National University of Laos (NUOL) and her volunteer contract involved two components. The first was to assist in an AMRC supported community-based natural resources management project. More specifically this project is investigating the effects of land allocation legislation, implemented by the Lao government, on local people's access to resources. It is also training teachers at NUOL in village-based research and report writing. The second component of Olivia's volunteer contract saw her working in the Faculty of Forestry library. In both work areas Olivia was assisting in building up databases and improving the management of library resources.

During her time in Laos, Olivia also managed to join some of the students and teachers in the Faculty of Forestry in various campaigns aimed at raising environmental awareness amongst youth in Laos. On various occasions she joined a group called the 'Mobile Conservation Unit' (supported by the Wildlife Conservation Society) which visited schools in remote regions of Laos in order to educate primary school children about nature conservation.

MAKING RESOURCES OUT OF CONFLICT IN THE NAM NGUM WATERSHED, LAO PDR



Dead trees in Nam Ngum reservoir left over from the war period have been a source of timber revenue.



Duck pond in B-52 bomb crater.



Granaries on bomb casing stilts.



B-52 bomb casing used as aerial vegetable garden.

(Photos source Phil Hirsch.)

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