

# MEKONG UPDATE & DIALOGUE



VOLUME 5, NUMBER 2, APRIL - JUNE 2002

ISSN 1441-8355

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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#### 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 mid-July and should be limited to 1-2 paragraphs.

## EDITORIAL - Civil society and river basin development

Most major players in river basin management and river basin development subscribe to the merits of stakeholder participation. Integrated river basin management (IRBM), total catchment management (TCM) and other concepts at the forefront of river basin planning are now supposed to be inclusive of the people who inhabit the river basins in question, and of those whose livelihoods are dependent on their resources. Civil society, it seems, has come of age in catchment management.

What does this mean in the real world? The basic but significant answer to this question is: different things in different places. Civil society is embedded in specific social, economic and political contexts, and civil society in river basin development will reflect this. It is therefore as difficult to transfer participatory principles as it is to implement a physical design structure out of its intended context.

Participation as a programmed “component” of a river basin planning framework is very different from participation as a reflection of spaces occupied by those hitherto excluded from voicing their concerns and influencing decisions that affect their lives. The Mekong Region displays a highly differentiated civil society, as displayed in summary on the back cover of this issue. Yet all countries – except Burma - now play at least lip service to participatory development.

In a recent polemic, Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari write of participation as the “new tyranny”,<sup>1</sup> inasmuch as the concept has discursively and instrumentally extended the possibilities and modalities of cooptation. In river basin development, some would argue that things are no different. In his challenging critique of mainstream approaches in Thailand, Montree Chantavong in his lead article for this issue sets out an NGO view of current governmental initiatives. Such initiatives include supposedly participatory committee structures, but the terms of participation have themselves become the bone of contention.

Both responses to Montree’s article below suggest that two mainstream organizations, the Murray-Darling Basin Commission and the Mekong River Commission, are actively seeking appropriate modes of participation. As MRC Chief Executive Joern Kristensen indicates, the time is ripe for opening new dialogues on this issue. Among other questions is the extent to which place-specific experience can be transferred, by expert consultancies or by other means, to new places – whether they be new river basins or new countries. Later this year, AMRC will be co-hosting an extended dialogue in Australia and in the Mekong Region on this very issue. For further details, see <http://www.mekong.es.usyd.edu.au/events/Conference2002/index.htm>

1 Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari, eds, *Participation: the new tyranny?* (London, Zed Books, 2001)

# FEATURE

## Civil society participation in river basin planning: a new blueprint?

by *Montree Chantawong* (translated by *Philip Hirsch*)

### River basin development

The common understanding of the term “river basin development”<sup>1</sup> in Thailand is the construction of dams, reservoirs, weirs and irrigation infrastructure, and the expansion of protected areas into upper water catchments to maximise the resource value of the system. What directs Thais to this interpretation?

The answer lies in four decades of experience, during which river basin plans have not gone beyond an obsession with creating large, medium and small sized water storages, whether for flood control or for dry season water use. River basin planning has been restricted to a small group of technocrats, economists and irrigation engineers, together with foreign experts brought in by the World Bank (WB), Asian Development Bank (ADB), JICA and so on.

This situation originates from three key conditions:

#### *1. Centralisation of the social and economic planning framework in Thailand*

Whether during more dictatorial or more democratic periods in Thailand’s recent political history, irrigation legislation has constantly allowed the Royal Irrigation Department to develop water resources unilaterally. The National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) has likewise been able to draw up development projects without any reference to, or involvement of, people living in areas affected by such projects. This process has been acculturated within the Thai bureaucratic system as normal practice. Even in the current era of openness and under the provisions of the 1997 Constitution, government approaches to river basin management continue to exclude popular participation, or at best allow “staged participation”, characterised by the Thai idiom of “*suk ao phao kin*”, or hasty and superficial process. This can be seen clearly, for example, in the Energy Promotion Department’s management of the Khong-Chi-Mun diversion scheme and its plan to divert Moei-Salween waters into Bhumiphol Dam; in the Royal Irrigation Department’s plans to divert Mekong headwaters from the Kok and Ing tributaries into the Chaophraya via the Nan River, or its plans for the Kaeng Sua Ten Dam on the Yom River; or the plans to divert water from the Mae Klong to Bangkok to augment the city’s drinking water supply.

#### *2. Over-dependence on dominant “expert knowledge” in river basin management*

Direction by “experts” goes hand in hand with centralised river basin planning. Apart from the imposition of technological solutions, whether in the form of large dams or smaller structures, people also face the loss of status and value of their own water management knowledge. Irrespective of the multitude of problems that water development projects have created for effective water management, there are still limited opportunities

for effective challenges to this mainstream thinking and dominant knowledge system. For example, dam construction in northeastern Thailand has already created problems of soil salinity, yet plans for further projects continue unabated. Dams have been unable to solve flooding or water storage problems, yet society continues to place its faith in the experts’ rationale for further dam construction. The logic that “we can’t let water flow wasted and unused into the sea” continues to underpin further dam construction and water diversion projects.

#### *3. Export oriented economic development that ties production to the global economy*

Economic re-orientation changes the system of values associated with managing water. From a public good, managed and used communally, water has become a kind of capital input into industrial agriculture. Furthermore, the rapid expansion of the urban, industrial and service sectors and their corresponding demands for water have placed great pressure on water resources with unfair priority allocations by state authorities.

The situation summarised above has altered the basic ideology of water management within a river basin framework, from one of securing supplies of water toward one of allocation based on maximising economic benefit. This is the starting point of “stakeholder group” approaches to water administration in the form of river basin management committees designed to reduce conflict within the basin. The scheme that reflects this approach most clearly is the strategy for water resource administration in the Chaothraya River Basin, drawn up by the NESDB in 1997, with technical and financial assistance from the World Bank and Japan. Another example is the privatisation of urban water supply, which has received technical assistance from the Asian Development Bank since 1994.

### **The role of people, stakeholders and civil society in river basin planning**

Over the past decade, there has been an emergence of popular scrutiny of river basin development projects. This scrutiny has been both about the projects themselves and about process. On the substantive side, important issues have included efficiency of dams and irrigation structures, environmental and social assessment, economic efficiency, RID’s water allocation principles, compensation mechanisms for those affected by projects and water demand forecasting. Process concerns have included overly centralised state-centric decision-making systems, inability for people to gain access to and involvement in decision-making at all levels, and absence of opportunities for community-based knowledge to be employed in river basin development.

Even though the new Constitution and policy framework nominally stipulate participation, and the ADB and WB procedures for water resource development include measures for stakeholder consultation, Thai state practice – both at the bureaucratic and political levels – continues to brush aside demands for popular participation in every corner of Thai society. Meanwhile, a new set of processes has been established to maintain the centralised culture of power and planning in river basin development. This can be illustrated by three recent examples of the shutting out of popular participation.

## ***1. National Water Policy, approved by government resolution on 31 October 2000***

The National Water Policy is part of the conditionality of the ADB's Agriculture Sector Program Loan (ASPL). The loan project documents stated clearly:

"Subsequently, after consultation with stakeholders, by 31 December 2000, the Government will adopt and commence implementation of the comprehensive, unified water management system. In order to reinforce the system of reformed institutional framework and legal instruments, the Government will establish a uniform and comprehensive national water policy". (Source: www.aspl.moac.go.th)

Article 79 of the 1997 Constitution stipulates people's participation in drafting key national policy. Yet in reality the ADB and Thai government facilitated virtually no public involvement. Further, some members of the National Water Resources Committee simultaneously served as consultants to the ADB at this time under the program's Technical Assistance (TA 3260), which was itself partly concerned with drafting the National Water Policy with the National Water Resources Committee.

## ***2. Study to develop an integrated plan for the management of water resources in the Ping River Basin by the Office of the National Water Resources Commission (ONWRC)***

This project follows on from the Pilot River Basins project of the ADB's ASPL. This program arose amidst debate and criticism over the process and extent of real public participation in the Ping River Basin and the sense that the development path of the Basin had been stipulated mainly by ADB consultants during its pilot phase in 2000-2001. The process has remained unchanged during the second phase in 2001-2002, whereby the ONWRC has commissioned consultants whose main expertise is in dam construction. The consultants have been left to arrange the "stakeholder consultations" to develop and finalise the integrated plan for the Ping River Basin. A network of villagers' organizations in northern Thailand has requested that ONWRC arrange a direct process of planning with stakeholders without having to go through consultants, but to no avail. This experience has shown that deciding who is a key stakeholder remains in the hands of those with vested interests and decision-making power over the process and substance of river basin development.

## ***3. Program to develop small-scale water resources for increasing agricultural production under the ASPL by the Royal Irrigation Department***

One project under this program arose in Yuwa Subdistrict (Tambon) of Sanpatong District, Chiangmai Province. The aim was to excavate a jointly used village wetland of about 30 hectares, with a budget of 8 million baht. Despite the small size of the project, and despite the legal entrustment of such small-scale resource projects in the hands of the Tambon Administrative Organisation under the Tambon Administration Law, RID did not devolve decision making to the local level. Instead, the contract was given to a Bangkok-based company with no prior consultation over the necessity of the project with Tambon or village authorities in the locality. The villagers' participation was limited to allowing the contractor's trucks to use their roads and pass over their land. If RID had consulted locally, they would

have found that in fact the wetland had already been excavated four years previously by the Chiangmai Provincial Office! This case shows the wastage and inefficiency associated with continued centralised decision making.

## **Conclusion**

River basin development planning can be nicely packaged and phrased as an integrated plan, integrated water resources management, or sold via the language of participation such as participatory irrigation management, multi-stakeholder consultation or civil society involvement. Yet the real substance and meaning depends ultimately on power relations between the range of institutions and groups in any society. In water resources planning within its global river basin context, these various terminologies have been produced as a kind of dogma for water management, with the key aim of preserving the mainstream knowledge approach to water management in response to mainstream economic interests within the global economy. In Thailand, this has translated into the maintenance of traditional power structures and relations in support of pre-existing vested interests.

With this in mind, a real participatory process for popular or civil society involvement is a process of challenging existing structures of river basin planning authority, as manifested in the over-centralisation of power, reliance on mainstream knowledge systems and vested interests in river basin planning. This participation cannot be handed down by mainstream institutions, but rather has to come from genuine, earnest and persistent efforts of civil society.

### Notes

1 Similar understandings are associated with terms such as river basin management, river basin masterplan or comprehensive river basin planning.

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Montree Chantawong is Deputy Director of the Project for Ecological Recovery. Based in Chiangmai, Montree's work is focused on coordination with NGOs, people's organisations, academics and other civil society groups to challenge and decentralise national water policy. He is also involved in monitoring and campaigning on impacts of water privatisation involved with loans and technical assistance from the ADB, World Bank and the IMF.

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*Irrigation near Fai Wang Yang, northeast Thailand. This is part of the Khong-Chi-Mun project. (Source: Margie Law.)*

# RESPONSES TO FEATURE

## Civil Society and River Basin Development, *by Joern Kristensen*

The key river basin development issues identified by Montri Chantawong are not unique to Thailand nor to developing countries. To a large extent the issues identified in his paper are Thai examples of issues already canvassed extensively by the World Commission on Dams report. Montri seems to be making two points. One is that there is an over-reliance on experts for river basin planning. The second related point is that the people, the stakeholders, have been excluded from the planning process.

Rather than an over-reliance on experts there has been a reliance on too narrow a range of expertise, mainly in engineering and economics to the exclusion of environmental and social considerations. Formerly it was considered difficult to obtain quantitative estimates of social and ecological impacts of proposed river basin development projects but that is no longer the case. Methods for quantifying and predicting those impacts have now been developed and are being used. For example in the Lesotho Highlands water development project in southern Africa decision makers now have good information on the social and ecological consequences of a range of development scenarios. Having the information does not necessarily make the final decision easier.

The final decision about a proposed development project will always be a trade-off, a value judgment. Do you want more water for irrigation or domestic use or a healthier river? Too often the technical experts have been prepared to make those political value judgments that are more properly the domain of political processes. The technical experts, who have conceived and nurtured the development project, are not the most appropriate people to make the decision. Much more inclusive and consultative decision making process involving all the stakeholders must be put in place, as the World Commission on Dams pointed out.

How to involve stakeholders effectively in environmental decisions and the planning process is a problem which has confronted, and continues to confront, governments at all levels around the world. It is confounded by potential conflicts of interest between communities at different scales – for example the local vs the national vs the international. Local communities may oppose projects that are in the national interest, or support projects that are not. Many developed countries have faced or are facing significant social conflict in resolving such problems. Confrontations over environmental issues have occurred in Australia, Canada, Germany and the United States. In some cases protests came from local people opposing a project proposed by the national or provincial government, in others projects with local support were opposed by groups from elsewhere in the country.

Decisions within one country may also impact on neighbouring countries. One country protecting its own forests may exacerbate illegal or unsustainable forestry activities in others. Illegal logging in Indonesia is partly a product of forest protection policies in other countries creating a demand, and escalating prices for timber.

In the Lower Mekong Basin the problems of public participation are compounded by poverty and the presence of multiple countries with differing national interests. The poor have limited access to the media, often low levels of literacy, and many lack the skills and confidence to participate readily in public debate. It is difficult to distribute information effectively, and difficult to obtain responses. It is more difficult in those countries where civil society has, until recently, been seriously disrupted by warfare, and where basic infrastructure is still being rebuilt.

The issue is even more difficult when projects have potential for impacts across national boundaries. Clearly any large water resources development project in the upper Mekong would have potential to affect millions of people in the downstream countries such as Vietnam or Cambodia. How does one involve stakeholders in another country in the decision making process? MRC has been developing guidelines and conducting awareness raising activities on transboundary environmental impacts, but these issues are proving difficult to address in regions such as Europe and North America and are no easier to deal with in Southeast Asia.

Few would disagree that public participation in planning has been sub-optimal in the Lower Mekong Basin in the past. For that reason development of public participation is an important component of all of the MRC core programmes, with an emphasis on promoting participation at the sub-basin and local levels. We have also been providing assistance to government agencies to develop their capacity to institute effective public participation activities. But we do not under-estimate the challenges for the delivery of effective public participation programmes in this region, and we welcome any constructive contributions to the debate on how public participation can best be improved.

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Joern Kristensen is a socio-economist who has held senior administrative positions in NGOs and with the United Nations in the Mekong Region. Since 1999 he has been Chief Executive of the Mekong River Commission.

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## Reflections on the Murray-Darling - Mekong Liaison, *by Susan Kemp*

I would like to take this opportunity to place the issues raised in Montri Chantawong's article, "Civil society participation in river basin planning: a new blueprint", in the context of the AusAID funded Murray-Darling Basin Commission (MDBC) Mekong River Commission (MRC) Strategic Liaison Programme.

In brief the goal of the "twinning" programme is "To support the Mekong River Commission, including the four National Mekong Committees (NMCs) working together to be a competent river basin manager." The specific objectives of the programme identified during the design phase are:

- MRC Organisational capacity
- MRC Technical capacity
- Engagement of the community

Hence the situation described in Montri Chantawong's article and the issue of establishing a real participatory process for popular or civil society involvement is a key component of the MDBC-MRC programme for the Mekong River Basin.

This programme is not one of transplanting an Australian approach to public participation in basin planning, to the Mekong. This is clearly not appropriate and runs the risk of copying some of the reliance on "experts" as is referred in the article.

The programme is designed to assist the MRC develop its own public participation strategy for the Mekong River Basin, through joint workshops, study tours and training programmes looking at the MDBC model and adapting any of the approaches where they are relevant. The programme is also about learning from some of the mistakes made in the Australian context.

The premise of the MDBC-MRC programme is that public participation at a range of levels is a very important ingredient in basin planning activities. One of the programme's activities is a nine month modular training programme for MRC and NMC basin planning staff. A key module will focus on appropriate models for public participation in the Mekong Basin context. A number of very successful examples do already exist in the Mekong Basin and these will be used as learning models for the basin planners.

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Susan Kemp is the Project Manager for the MDBC-MRC Strategic Liaison Program Phase II. Until September 2001 Susan was Deputy Director-General of the New South Wales Department of Land and Water Conservation, New South Wales being one of the partner governments in the Murray Darling Basin. In her role Susan had responsibility for the implementation of a wide range of community engagement and participation programs, and the effective implementation of integrated natural resources planning at a catchment level.

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*The controversial Rasi Salai Dam, northeast Thailand, with sluice gates open. (Source: Simon Bush.)*

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### **MMSEA III 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](mailto:CBIK@public.km.yn.cn)  
[www.cbik.org](http://www.cbik.org)

### **Conference on Economic Recovery and Reform**

28-29 October 2002, Bangkok, Thailand

Contact: Ms Wannah Vejbrahm  
Email: [intconf@econ.tu.ac.th](mailto:intconf@econ.tu.ac.th)  
fax: 66 2224 9428

### **International Conference "From Conflict to Co-operation in International Water Resources Management: Challenges and Opportunities"**

20-22 November 2002, UNESCO-IHE Delft, Netherlands

Contact: Janos Bogardi, Programme 'PCToCP: Water for Peace', Division of Water Sciences, UNESCO

### **4th International Hani/Akha Culture Studies Conference**

1-10 December 2002, Honghe Prefecture, China

Contact: The Honghe Research Institute of Nationalities, Jianshui, 654300, Yunnan, China.  
Tel: 0873-7613015 Fax: 0873-7616545  
Email: [hnhnxh@yahoo.com.cn](mailto:hnhnxh@yahoo.com.cn)  
<http://www.hani-akha.org/international/4th.html>

### **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  
Email: [barlow@mrcmekong.org](mailto:barlow@mrcmekong.org)  
<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](http://www.mekong.es.usyd.edu.au). For submission of new events please contact the AMRC Administrator at [mekong@mail.usyd.edu.au](mailto:mekong@mail.usyd.edu.au)

# NEWS FROM THE REGION

## Hydropower update

April witnessed the completion of Vietnam's second largest hydropower plant at Yali Falls. The construction of the Yali Falls Dam has been dogged by controversy because of its impacts on downstream communities in Cambodia. The plant has a capacity of 720 MW and will supply more than 10% of Vietnam's electricity. The plant has been built by Vietnamese companies with Russian and Ukrainian technical assistance.

The Meipan Creek hydropower plant in Burma's Shan State was commissioned on 14 May. Two 660KW generators are installed and the purpose is to supply electricity to Monghsat town and hinterland for expanding cottage industries. The plant is also part of the Burmese government's border development strategy.

- 2002 "Vietnam completes construction of second largest hydro power plant", Xinhua News Agency, 29 April 2002
- 2002 "Myanmar adds new hydropower plant", Xinhuanet, 16 May 2002

## Pak Mun Dam campaign continues

The operation of Pak Mun Dam in northeast Thailand has had a devastating effect on the lives of local people and, in particular, the livelihoods of local fishers. Fish species have declined, water weed infestation has spread and communities have broken up as a result of the dam.

Last October there was a protest march from Pak Mun Dam to Bangkok by members of Assembly of the Poor to demand that the sluice gates of both Pak Mun and Rasi Salai dams be opened permanently.



*Fish ladder at Pak Mun Dam, northeast Thailand. (Source: Phil Hirsch.)*

The gates of Pak Mun Dam have been open since June last year, but are under threat of being shut again. An evaluation is being carried out by Ubon Ratchathani University. Alternative research into the effects of the dam is also being undertaken by SEARIN (Southeast Asia Rivers Network) which intends to present some preliminary findings soon.

SEARIN Thailand was established in March, 1999. According to its mission statement: "SEARIN Thailand is a campaign-based

organization, working to support local community rights to their rivers, and to oppose threats to rivers and riverine ecosystems in mainland south-east Asia, such as large dams and water diversion projects."

The SEARIN research, dubbed "*ngarn wijai taiban*" or grass-roots people's research, places great emphasis on the contribution of local indigenous knowledge of fish species, flora species, and fishing gear. The research process used by SEARIN has created a social dynamic of its own, in so far as ties between villages have been strengthened through revival of the tradition of sharing called "*watthanatham huk-paeng*".

Chinvarakorn, V. & Un-anongrak, Y. 2002 "Swimming against the current?", Outlook Bangkok Post, 14 May 2002

Singkhiri, D. 2002 "Egat to close sluice gates on June 16", Bangkok Post, 25 May 2002

SEARIN website: <http://www.searin.org/index.htm>

## AUSTRALIAN MEKONG NEWS

### Xe Kaman Dam developer released

Australian engineer, Peter Martin, was released from a prison in Laos in mid-May after serving a six-month sentence for embezzlement. Martin was manager of the proposed Xe Kaman hydroelectric dam project in southern Laos. The project was initially developed by the Tasmanian government's Hydro-Electric Commission Enterprises Corporation (HECEC) in 1994. With the privatisation of HECEC, development of the project passed into the hands Austral Lao Power, Peter Martin's company.

Resettlement of villagers from the proposed dam site and its watershed has already been taking place. Logging is an important environmental issue and it has been suggested that the Xe Kaman project is primarily a logging venture. As an entirely private venture Austral Lao Power is not subject to the same degree of scrutiny as publicly-funded projects.

-- 1999 *Power Struggle: the impacts of hydro-development in Laos*, IRN, Berkeley

-- 2001 "Aussie held in Laos", AAP, 17 November 2001

Lyall, K. 2001 "Secrecy shrouds Laos man", News Limited, 19 November 2001

Lyall, K. 2002 "Australian freed from Laos prison", The Australian, 16 May 2002

### The power of small things

A new micro-hydro scheme has come online in Xam Tai Province, Laos. It is a Lao government project which has been supported by AusAID over the past six years. The new 104kW hydroelectric system is providing the villages of Ban Tao, Ban Piengkoon, Na Keua, Na Xai and New Na Xai with lights and power. Wood and metal working workshops are being constructed, along with rice mills, to tap into this new source of electricity.

Bryce, P. 2002 "Laos microhydro", email 4 June 2002

# NEWS FROM THE CENTRE

## Changes at the AMRC Office

In April part-time Program Officer, Helen Gunning-Stevenson, left the AMRC in order to concentrate her energies on a small business venture. Her presence and contribution are missed and we wish her well for the future. Alanna Linn, a geography honours student researching approaches to water management in Northern Thailand, has joined the AMRC staff as coordinator for the upcoming Dialogue on River Basin Development and Civil Society in the Mekong Region. Alanna co-authored the recently published AMRC Working Paper No. 5 with AMRC Program Officer, Doug Bailey.

## Working Paper #5 hot off the press!

**“Twinning Squares and Circles: the MDBC-MRC Strategic Liaison Program and the applicability of the Murray-Darling Basin management model to the Mekong River Basin”**

*... by Alanna Linn & Doug Bailey*

The Australian Mekong Resource Centre (AMRC) has produced the fifth in its series of Working Papers. The aims of this Working Paper are to examine the nature of the relationship between the Murray-Darling Basin Commission (MDBC) and the Mekong River Committee (MRC), and to consider the applicability of the Murray-Darling Basin management model to the Mekong River Basin.

The paper starts by considering catchment management models and their functions of sharing expertise, transferring management strategies and exchanging knowledge. The Murray-Darling and Mekong river basins are then compared, noting significant differences despite some commonalities. Next an Australian aid program for transferring management strategies and sharing expertise - the MDBC-MRC Strategic Liaison Program - is discussed. This is followed by a critical examination of the appropriateness of the Murray-Darling model and various issues - political, cultural, legal, etc. - that arise from technology transfer (in the broad sense) to the Mekong. An important element in catchment management model transfer is the nature of community engagement. This is problematic enough in the Murray-Darling Basin, but enormously more complicated in the Mekong. In its conclusion the paper expresses concerns about the sensitivity of the Australian model to taking on board past mistakes and doubts the ability of the MRC to acquire, assimilate and apply the Murray-Darling catchment management model effectively. It also poses some questions for future research.

Copies of Working Paper #5 are available from the AMRC at a cost of AU\$12 (Australia+Asia-Pacific) or AU\$15 (Elsewhere) including GST & postage. Order forms are available from the AMRC website [www.mekong.es.usyd.edu.au](http://www.mekong.es.usyd.edu.au)

## OPENINGS

### Human Rights Advocates Training Program

Applications are now being called for the Human Rights Advocates Training Program at Columbia University, New York.

The program “seeks to equip emerging human rights leaders with the tools and information necessary to resolve human rights issues in their own communities, and with the resources needed to link their issues to a broader struggle. To accomplish this, the Advocates Program utilizes a combination of theory and practice, complementing academic training in the principles and theories of human rights with practical workshops on issues such as human rights advocacy, reporting, and fundraising..... The Program is designed for lawyers, journalists, teachers, community organizers, and other human rights activists working for non-governmental human rights organizations.” Applications close on 1 August 2002. For details contact:

Center for the Study of Human Rights

420 West 118<sup>th</sup> Street, Room 1108

New York, NY 10027 USA

Tel: (212) 854-3014 | Fax: (212) 316-4578 or (212) 854-6785

Email: [hradvocates@columbia.edu](mailto:hradvocates@columbia.edu)

Web: [www.columbia.edu/cu/humanrights](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/humanrights)

## SOME USEFUL MEKONG-RELATED WEBSITES

**Rivers Watch East & S.E. Asia (RWESA) <http://www.rwesa.org/>**

This network was launched in July 2000 in response to a meeting on dams and other river development projects in the Mekong held near the contentious Pak Mun Dam in Thailand. RWESA is based in Bangkok and aims to protect the health of river ecosystems and their ability to sustain biodiversity and the livelihoods of communities. The website is a good source of news and information about dam and river basin issues in East and Southeast Asia. Navigation around the site is easy. There are a number of useful links to organisations and individuals within Asia and elsewhere.

**Global Association for People and the Environment (GAPE) <http://www.geocities.com/gapelaos/index.html>**

GAPE is an international NGO whose purpose is capacity-building, community development, environmental conservation and people-centred learning. It has projects in Laos and documents detailing these can be viewed on the website. The navigation needs some refining - some of the internal links are not yet activated - but the website is still new. It is a site to be watched over the coming months as more information is added and links are activated.

**SEARIN (Southeast Asia Rivers Network) <http://www.searin.org/index.htm>**

SEARIN is a campaign-based organization with a concern for local communities and their river systems in Southeast Asia. This website has Thai and English versions. It is particularly focussed on the Pak Mun Dam campaign in Thailand with some news items of interest. It would be nice to see more recent additions to the news items however. While it doesn't house a large document collection it does have a number of helpful links to other sites.

# MEKONG MAPS:

## Is there such a thing as a Mekong civil society?

### Thailand

Civil society participation in resource management has increased substantially over the past decade due to the demise of military rule and the growth of democracy.



### Yunnan

International NGOs and other civil society organisations work within the constraints of China's political culture. Research institutes play a significant role in alternative viewpoints.

### Laos

Civil society consists of international NGOs and mass organisations connected to the state. Local NGOs are yet to emerge.

### Burma/Myanmar

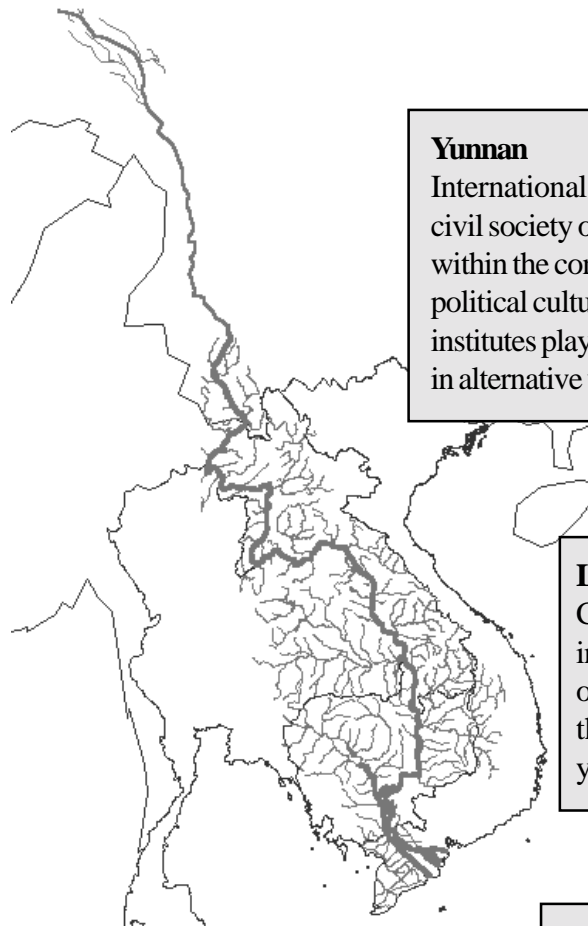
Civil society ?

### Cambodia

There has been a proliferation of NGOs since the defeat of the Khmer Rouge. However, civil society continues to be hampered by lack of the rule of law.

### Vietnam

State-sponsored mass organisations and international NGOs exist. New laws are being developed to formalise the status of local NGOs.



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