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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

Contact Details

Australian Mekong Resource Centre
c/- Division of Geography
School of Geosciences (F09)
University of Sydney
NSW 2006 Australia
Tel: +61-2-9351 7796
Fax: +61-2-9351 8627
mekong@mail.usyd.edu.au
www.mekong.es.usyd.edu.au

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 November and should be limited to 1-2 paragraphs.

EDITORIAL - Participation and research

Recurrent in past issues of *Mekong Update and Dialogue* are two predominant concerns over the direction of development in the Mekong River Basin. First is the concern that infrastructure development and neo-liberal economic framework are moving ahead rapidly with insufficient knowledge and understanding of their impact on ecosystems and people's ways of life. A second concern is that this approach to development is based on decisions that are made by a small group of technocrats rather than at a broader societal level.

Research is clearly needed to evaluate and better inform projects whose social and environmental impacts are poorly documented and poorly understood. Participation is a pre-requisite to inclusive development based on societal involvement and more accountable decision making. Does this mean that participatory research is the way forward?

In his lead article below, Simon Bush questions how dilemmas of achieving participation in the research process can be overcome when the process is so constrained by exigencies of academic timeframes, thesis requirements and so on. No doubt his concerns will resonate with many of those currently or previously engaged in local research and impatient to be more socially engaged than the information miners of old, who saw research subjects as depersonalised data and the real-world research environment as a depoliticised stage upon which to enact the rituals of questionnaire road-testing.

There are other modes of engaged research than participatory action research in the spirit of Paulo Freire. In some cases, engaging local government may be part of the solution, but as Muonpong Juntopas also reminds us, the merits of such engagement may be severely constrained by other realities. For this and other reasons, Utong Prasavinitchai suggests that participatory research can even serve to exacerbate problems related to unequal power and falsely legitimised claims to truth and knowledge.

The specific case of Laos raises important and complex dimensions to this puzzle. As Muonpong has eloquently shown us, there are clear limits to participation in affairs of state, particularly when it comes to issues that affect decisions on which a Party line is threatened. Yet as Bush rightly indicates, Laos is also marked locally by less sharply defined contours of power and authority, and at a cultural level village life is a good deal more participatory, than in seemingly more open, democratic countries. This extends to local government, whose offices are largely staffed by people who have grown up nearby, who are still out of necessity engaged in fishing and farming, and whose social distance from villagers is much less than that in, say, Thailand or Vietnam.

Perhaps the key dilemma rests in the nature of research itself, as constructed at academic institutions, and the structural linearity to which Utong draws our attention. This is so fundamentally different to the more holistic ways in which villagers see livelihoods that participatory research may remain a chimera unless researchers are drawn into new mindsets and ways of asking questions – rather than building “capacity” of farmers and fishers to change the ways in which they interrogate the world.

FEATURE

Research and ‘participation’

by *Simon Bush*

The term ‘participation’ has come to represent a common-sensical process within both rural development and research.¹ As researchers, like myself, go into the field we are often lured by the promise of participation as offering inclusive, reflexive and transparent methods. It occurred to me during my own research that while I was aspiring to conduct participatory research I felt a strong disjuncture between being ‘participatory’ and meeting the requirements of my research – the production of an academic thesis. This appears to draw on a wider antagonism between carrying out research to meet the specific aims of grants or consultancies and fulfilling the central aims of facilitating inclusive, context specific, locally sensitive research strategies. The question remains: can or should researchers and consultants working with rural communities adhere to notions of ‘participation’?

‘Participation’

Where does ‘participation’ come from and what does it mean? Robert Chambers has vigorously promoted participation as the “paradigm of the people” and the new orthodoxy.² The defining feature of this new paradigm is a move away from positivist, reductionist, and mechanistic top-down models. Instead it develops a reversal of learning through which multiple, local and individual realities are revealed for the benefit of those who are offering the information. As such, participation focuses on empowering the subjects of development or research. Increasingly, however, participation means different things to different people. These range from a radical agenda for the empowerment of politically and socially excluded people, to more pragmatic aims of improved ‘project performance’ and even ‘managing popular dissent’. Broadly speaking, participation in research can either be as simple as involving people in a research project, or alternatively a means of empowering people to understand the research and take action thereafter.

Several critiques of ‘participation’ have been put forward over the last decade that have focused on critically examining what has been called the ‘participatory development orthodoxy’. They outline a concern that there is an overemphasis on participatory methods and a lack of attention given to the overall methodology, process and outcomes of participation.

Methods or methodologies?

The development literature enthusiastically promotes notions of participation through participatory methods. The best known of these come under the headings of Participatory Rural Appraisal or PRA. I believe that researchers in search of such methods are placed in a precarious position. The development literature religiously promotes participatory methods but less attention is given to research strategies that promote participation as methodology. Independent researchers and consultants are often limited by funds and, more importantly, time. Achieving a participatory mode of research with notions of empowerment is very difficult through a set of methods alone. The challenge, therefore, is to focus on participation as an overarching method-

ology that engages participants within and beyond the research encounter to work towards change.³ For independent researchers reframing participation as an overarching methodology provides a way of selectively negotiating their involvement, and the involvement of their subjects, within the limits of their research.

I argue that in a practical sense collaborative research is most instructive as it is linked directly to notions of empowerment. Collaborative research involves a researcher joining in with formal and informal institutions. Throughout, the researcher maintains a very specific set of research goals of working with participants to develop the skills and knowledge to make use of the results of research themselves.

This leads of course to questions of who participates and collaborates, and what these two terms mean. Traditionally, collaborators can be considered those who are subjects of the research, the gatekeepers of information. Participants are those who engage with the research, actively influencing the process of research. Collaborative research can contribute to positive social change by challenging traditional modes of rural participatory research through working with organisations and not communities. In some cases this requires abandoning participation with communities to instead concentrate on collaboration with institutions. Alternatively organisations may be better involved as participants while communities are limited to the role of collaborators. This may seem to be the antithesis of the ‘participatory development orthodoxy’ but what it does is challenge researchers to critically reflect on the limits and circumstances of their work. In any case, it is matter of partitioning these terms and the notions of empowerment that researchers hold prior to carrying out research.

Participation and collaboration in Lao PDR

Finally, I would like to discuss briefly how I negotiated the role of collaborators and participants during my post graduate research in Lao PDR which focused on the development politics and livelihood importance of living aquatic resources.

Lao PDR is one of the five remaining Marxist-socialist states in the world, led by the Lao People’s Revolutionary Party which came to power in 1975 after more than two decades of civil conflict. As a single party state, dissenting voices are not tolerated and there are no indigenous NGOs. This leaves no room for traditional activist type research and aspirations of a truly participatory approach. In this political environment, the international NGO community still subscribes to the ideals of participation. At worst this is reduced to an application of participatory methods which act to reify existing hierarchies of power and stifle dissent. At best the NGO community promotes ‘learning by doing’, working with the government at the local level to influence change for the betterment of rural communities. However, as an independent researcher, I found that the ideals of ‘participation’ and ‘empowerment’ had to be reconsidered. Provincial and district government officials were defined as participants, actively engaging with the research project. Rural communities, the subjects of the research, were defined as collaborators acting as gate keepers of information. By working within rather than outside the government system, I was able to influence the skill base and perceptions of these government staff and – it is my hope - future development activities working with living aquatic resources.

Operating in this way had a number of advantages. Firstly, provincial and district field staff are often active community members, which reduces the gap between government and farmers. Although after the revolution the Lao government was involved in political persecution, the country has been relatively peaceful since. Secondly, communities benefit from interaction from the government staff as their needs are raised and understood by the government staff. Conversely, staff can also benefit from active involvement in the research by understanding what the information collected means and how to use it correctly. This is an important factor in Laos as successive regimes have failed to collect accurate and timely information. This is especially the case in the subsistence sector involving living aquatic resources. Finally, the participation of staff from a permanent organisation, the government, has advantages of institutional memory and persistence as it will not, unlike NGOs, leave after a certain amount of time.

Including government staff in the research process and in assisting the decision making process not only helps to identify what is possible, appropriate and relevant but also enables the staff to take the information and knowledge produced to meet their own needs. It must be stressed that this is how I reflected on participation as a researcher with specific limitations. I recognise that that government participation is not desirable in many other circumstances. However, it was deemed suitable for my research because many of the government staff are active community members and also because fisheries work is a relatively benign sector. This negotiation of roles of who collaborated and participated may not have been appropriate in a number of other circumstances in Laos.

Researchers must look reflexively at who and how they can empower if they are to adhere to notions of participation as a development orthodoxy. Broadening and redefining the role of participation beyond a set of methods to a coherent methodology may prove an important step for researchers working in the Mekong Basin. Incorporating concepts such as collaboration may also prove useful in distinguishing between empowerment and involvement. As argued above this may require a somewhat radical shift, broadening research methodologies to include organisations that can learn from the research process as well as contribute to the direction of research. It may be a tenuous and somewhat optimistic link but this in turn could follow on to the betterment of rural communities that engage with these organisations in the future.

Instead of using participatory research blindly, or dismissing it as unachievable in research, it may be more expedient for researchers to reconsider who they are participating with and who is participating with them. The answer to this could assist in avoiding false promises and unfulfilled hopes as well as making a meaningful contribution to a wider body of knowledge.

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1. Cooke, B. and U. Kothari, *The Case for Participation as Tyranny*, in *Participation: The New Tyranny*, B. Cooke and U. Kothari, Editors. 2001, Zed Books: London. p. 1-15.
2. Chambers, R., *Whose Reality Counts? Putting the First Last*. 1997, London: IT Publications.
3. Pain, R. and P. Francis, *Reflections on participatory research*. Area, 2003. 35(1): p. 46-54.

Simon Bush is a PhD student in the School of Geosciences at the University of Sydney. During his time in Laos he has been involved with the Mekong River Commission Assessment of Mekong Fisheries Component, the Living Aquatic Resource Research Centre (LARReC), the OXFAM America Mekong Learning Initiative and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF Lao) investigating livelihood issues of rural communities dependent on living aquatic resources. He has also been involved in setting up a GIS for the Department of Agriculture and Forestry in Savannakhet province.

RESPONSES TO FEATURE

Participatory research: another elusive goal?

by Utong Prasasvinitchai

Simon Bush's article seems to be a contribution to the debate concerning 'participatory development orthodoxy'. However, I was confused with his interchangeable uses of the terms 'participation' with 'empowerment', 'methodology' with 'objectives' and 'participatory research' with 'participatory development'. For example, when he proposes to focus on participation as an overarching methodology that engages research participants to work towards change, I think what he really means is that if empowerment is to be the ultimate objective of the research, then people's participation is not always necessary or the most effective means of achieving it.

What I find most difficult to follow is his equating participatory development with participatory research. In my opinion, the former is a must for all development planning whereas people's participation in (academic) research is a rather elusive goal. Participatory research can be used as a means to participatory development; to encourage people to understand their own problems and work out their own solutions. But in such a case, research design should be left up to the villagers: they should decide themselves how to go about finding answers and they should be able to express things in their own terms. Given this condition, people's participation in research conducted under an academic conceptual framework is likely to be at best an illusion.

Research to me is simply finding answers to whatever one is curious to know. Nonetheless, academics somehow manage to sanctify research and thereby reserve it for themselves. Year after year I watch students get lost in working out their research proposals. In the process they lose confidence in their ability to find the 'right' means to the 'right' answers. The only year I saw students work happily in the field and come back with a lot of information was the year in which no research proposals and questionnaires were required of them! Doing academic research needs a lot of 'getting used to'; a time-consuming experience which neither the researcher nor the villagers are prepared for.

More importantly, I think there is a real difference between academic and popular ways of conceiving and acting upon the world. Villagers seem to think in terms of 'bundles' of concrete things, whereas academics are trained to think in 'clear cut' (meaning compartmentalized) abstract concepts. For example, when villagers talk about high land, what they have in mind is

more than just land. They are also thinking about water. How can they get water? If a water pump is needed, can they afford it? Will they have to borrow one? How can they pay back? Can they get enough water exactly at the time they need it? Will they have quarrels with neighbours?

When I mentioned all this to a friend who had proposed a model of farmers' decision-making in which water was only a physical factor, she listened attentively and said that next time she would include water under economic, social and political categories as well! Her familiarity with research presentation formats made her miss my whole point that we should not, and cannot, compartmentalize villagers' conceptions of the world.

There is yet another, perhaps more fundamental, difference. Since concepts are expressed in words rather than actions, they are forced to be linear by the nature of language itself. It is often found that villagers cannot put into words what they can actually do with great competence. I suspect this is not entirely due to their lack of articulation skills. When one acts, knowledge is called upon in bundles, not in linear sequences. It is thus difficult to rearrange what one knows in linear forms.

All this makes me believe that it must be very difficult for villagers to really 'participate' (to help design and decide) in research carried out under an academic framework. Isn't it better to be humble and aim to achieve only participant observation in one's research? It is the researcher who participates in the villagers' life rather than the other way round. From my own experience, it's hard enough to participate and remain observing. As I got involved in community life, I often found myself become a non-observing participant!

But my point goes further than just saying that people's real participation in research conducted by outsiders is near impossible. I'd like to point out that by claiming one's research is participatory, one is actually promoting oneself as an important source of information for participatory development. I've seen a number of projects which claimed to be PAR (participatory action research) and were thus credited as appropriate bases for future development planning when, in fact, people only 'participated' in answering questions and filling in questionnaires.

Like the elusive goal of objectivity, which has led many researchers to falsely claim unbiased and thus more reliable knowledge, participatory research can be more than just elusive. It can lead to a dangerous illusion and a false claim to authority.

Utong Prasasvinitchai is a sociologist recently retired from Silpakorn University, Thailand.

Sharing thoughts on research and participation

by *Muanpong Juntopas*

Simon Bush has given us a useful summary of the importance of participation in research: "Instead of using participatory research blindly, or dismissing it as unachievable in research, it may be more expedient for researchers to reconsider who they are participating with and who is participating with them. The

answer to this could assist in avoiding false promises and unfulfilled hopes as well as making a meaningful contribution to a wider body of knowledge".

I appreciate the dilemma faced by fellow social scientists who have the desire to be participatory in conducting research on the one hand, and are constrained by money and time on the other. Often it is not an easy compromise. The product, in this case academic research on aquatic resources and their management, apart from being an essential component in fulfilling university graduation requirements, also enhances our knowledge at a broader scale (i.e. at the regional or global level). However, it is our duty as social researchers to also allow the research community to be our teachers and to give us new understanding, so that we may help it deal with its problems.

Ideally, both the process and the products of research would help communities advance their interests during and beyond the time of research encounter. Empowering local communities is important, be it done directly and indirectly. Thus, the location and objectives for participatory research must be carefully chosen to maximize the impact of the research "touch". We certainly should not want our research to prove futile for our community teachers; and it should in no way cause them harm either.

I find the idea of "collaborative research" interesting and, potentially, very useful where time is limited but an enduring positive impact is wanted. Simon Bush has aimed to use his research process to increase the capacity of a government organization in data collection and to provide the organization with useful information generated by the research. A formal organization - a government agency and its officials - was engaged as a "participant" (or partner in research) instead of a community, while local people were assigned to play the role of "collaborators" (or "subjects of research"). Local people gave information in a format designed by research partners. Thus the first point of contact for empowerment is a government agency, a provincial department and its officials. Bush argues that "...in a practical sense collaborative research is most instructive as it is linked to the notions of empowerment".

I would like to put two questions: Is it likely that the local research partners will use skills /knowledge developed from their involvement in research and any resulting information in advancing the interest of the "research subjects?" Would the knowledge gained be used to empower the subjects who most often are rural poor, subsistent farmers/fishers, and the marginalized? The likelihood of affirmative answers to these questions depends on two key factors: the legal, political and social context where research is conducted, and the nature of the subject investigated.

In Simon Bush's case the research was on fisheries in Laos PDR. Riverine fisheries in Laos is a rather controversial subject. There is little political and social space for local community empowerment, especially where empowerment requires some segments of the bureaucracy to mobilize.

In order to accurately assess the likelihood of "community empowerment" through government "involvement" in research it is important to consider the political-bureaucratic environment within which research takes place, at both local and national levels. Laos PDR is a single party state whose bureaucracy is based on the principles of democratic centralism. Party mem-

bers must contribute to political unity by their unshakable support for leadership decisions. Obligation to adhere to democratic centralism applies not only to party members but also to state organizations according to article 5 of the 1991 Constitution.¹ This means that all government employees are prohibited from criticizing central party policy. Thus government officials are afraid to act contrary to party policy and are even afraid to be perceived as critical of established policy. The requirement to follow central party policy influences most administrative decisions in the country, including those related to natural resources and fisheries.

There is high-level support for the construction of hydropower dams on most of the Mekong tributaries in Laos. The state envisages this to be a major source of government foreign exchange earnings. However, dams are often in conflict with the interests of wild fisheries. The adherence to democratic centralist policy is evident in the reluctance of government agencies to be involved in riverine fishery management. This, despite the fact that wild fish and other aquatic animals provide a large portion of protein intake to rural populations whose subsistence livelihoods depend heavily on foraging and catching.² There are very few riverine fisheries management initiatives in the country. Those that exist are small-scale initiatives. In the mid 1990s government staff were required to attend political seminars where benefits of hydropower was explained to them. Government staff were told that involvement in riverine fisheries management would uncover potential negative impacts of dams, thus threatening democratic centralist hydropower policy.³ Such an eventuality could have strong repercussions on their jobs.

Conformity to the principles of democratic centralism has also been evidenced in many Lower Mekong Basin regional meetings where Lao officials are quick to deny the significance of riverine fisheries and point out that impacts from upstream dams on fisheries are negligible. They are also often skeptical about fish statistics.

For the reasons given above, “collaborative” research may not work well in terms of empowering the research “subjects” who are usually rural poor. Truly participatory decision-making regarding natural resources such as fisheries is not feasible in the current political-bureaucratic environment in Lao PDR. Information collected is normally not easily or willingly shared. Prospects for a dramatic change to make this possible are not bright and it seems that it might take a very long time for this to happen. Where most of the population is directly dependent on natural resources, and where riverine fisheries and forests are increasingly being diminished by trade, we must race against time to make significant improvements in this condition.

“Collaborative research” could be very useful in a political environment that allows for “innovation”, where officials use new skills and information to help solve social and economic problems. In such a case it is likely that information would be willingly shared and discussion take place with local communities in order to find the most appropriate solutions.

Given these difficulties, I would suggest that working with established non-government agencies in Laos is a better choice. In particular, it would be useful to partner with those NGOs which have already partnered with government officers in their program work. Government officers can acquire “know how”, and information can be shared with “mild” advocacy

NGOs which work with communities, while maintaining workable relationships with the Lao government in order to help bring positive changes.

- 1 “Making biodiversity convention work in Laos PDR: some reflections on the feasibility of participatory resources management” IUCN, 2002.
- 2 “ State of basin report”, Mekong River Commission, 2003.
- 3 IUCN, 2002

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2. IUCN (2002) “Making biodiversity convention work in Laos PDR: some reflections on the feasibility of participatory resources management” Vientiane. Internal document.
3. MRC (2003) “State of Basin report”, Phnom Penh.

Muanpong Juntopas works with the Basin Development Plan at the Mekong River Commission.

NEWS FROM THE REGION

Xekaman dams in Laos

Work will start on Xekaman 1 dam in Attapeu Province in two years if finance is approved. The investor is the US New England Power Company. The dam is expected to generate 468 MW of electricity, most of which will be sold to Thailand and Vietnam. Xekaman 3 dam is due to begin construction later this year and has a potential of 250 MW. Sekaman 4 dam is still at the planning stage.

Panyasith Thammavongsa 2004 "Xekaman I waits on US backing",
Vientiane Times, 26 July 2004

Nam Theun 2 dam debate intensifies

There is still no clear indication as to whether the dam will go ahead. A recent report by Probe International - "Ten Reasons Why the World Bank Should Not Finance the Nam Theun 2 Power Company" - argues that there are other options than this very costly 1070MW dam. The developer is the Nam Theun Power Company which has been given 18 months from last November, when it signed a power purchase agreement, to secure its finances. The main buyer of electricity will be the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT). The Lao government strongly supports the project, seeing it as a key component in its development strategy.

The World Bank, responsible for evaluating the social and environmental costs, has not yet given its support to the project, support which is crucial for developer and investor confidence by guaranteeing against political risk. The bank is hosting a series of technical workshops in Bangkok, Tokyo, Paris, Washington and Vientiane during late August-September. Probe International sees these consultations as part of the World Bank's "manoeuvring". The bank is scheduled to make a decision on the project by May 2005.

-- 2004 "Ten Reasons Why the World Bank Should Not Finance the Nam Theun 2 Power Company", Probe International Press Release, 1 July 2004

Ryder, G. 2004 "World Bank dam poses huge risk to Laotian farmers",
Probe International Backgrounder, 23 August 2004

Schuetzler, D. 2004 "Laos defends dam project against environmental critics", Reuters, 31 Aug 2004

Burma's massive dam building program

Hydropower accounts for about a third of Burma's electricity. Dam construction in Burma is proceeding at an accelerated pace with financing coming from Japan, China and Thailand. Human rights abuses are rampant: forced migration, forced labour and destruction of local livelihoods. Burma and Thailand are planning to jointly develop hydropower dams on the Salween River with the aim of exporting power to Thailand. Two proposed sites on the Salween - Weigyi and Dagwin - could see dams with generating capacities of 4,540MW and 792MW. At Tasang in Shan State a 3,300-3,600MW hydropower project appears to be underway. But while dam construction on the Salween River has attracted much attention the Burmese military government also has plans to build hydropower dams on many of the country's other rivers such as the Irrawaddy, Chindwin and Sittang. The Paunglaung Dam, situated on a tributary of the Sittang, is close to completion and will have a 280MW capacity.

Akimoto, Y. 2004 "Hydro-powering the regime", The Irrawaddy 12:6,
June 2004

Vietnam's nuclear industry

Vietnam is contemplating the construction of a nuclear power plant by 2017-2018. The Vietnam Atomic Energy Institute is finalising its pre-feasibility study for the project. Nuclear energy will supplement hydropower, gas-fuelled and coal-fuelled power in supplying the country's future electricity needs. The nuclear power plant would be sited in central Ninh Thuan province and would probably have a capacity of 2,000MW. France has offered to help Vietnam with finance, training and technological support.

-- 2004 "Vietnam considers roadmap for first nuclear power plant",
Vietnam News Briefs, 27 August 2004

AUSTRALIAN MEKONG NEWS

The Thai shrimp farming experience and the Mekong Delta.

In collaboration with Can Tho University's Department of Environment and Natural Resource Management, AMRC Research Fellow, Andrew Wyatt, assisted and participated in a study tour from 14 to 18 July to learn from Thailand's 20 year experience in shrimp farming. The study tour was organised by AMRC's Bangkok based partner, Toward Ecological Recovery and Regional Alliance and conducted in the context of the Department's work with the Long Hoa Village People's Committee in Tra Vinh Province which is assisting local farmers in fostering and creating more secure livelihoods. This work is being supported by Oxfam America and the Mekong Learning Initiative. Long Hoa village, like many other coastal areas of the Mekong Delta, is undergoing a market driven shift from rice farming to intensive mono-cultured shrimp farming. Like many other areas of the Delta, this shift has been accompanied by the attendant risks of crop failure due to disease and other factors, and the build-up of financial debt. The study tour assisted a group of Vietnamese provincial and local government policy and decision makers, academics, entrepreneurs and farmers' representatives to not only heed the mistakes of Thailand's experi-



Vietnamese team with Khun Sarin, a Thai shrimp farming expert.
(Photo: Andrew Wyatt)

ence in shrimp farming, but to also learn of less intensive, organic shrimp raising techniques from Thai shrimp raising experts. Since their return to Vietnam, the group has been actively reporting its observations and lessons back to the Mekong Delta through local television and print media, as well as through more direct discussions with provincial and local officials, and farmers.

Andrew Wyatt

NEWS FROM THE CENTRE

Andrew Wyatt's PhD thesis met with examiners' approval with flying colours. Dr Wyatt continues his full-time employment with AMRC based in Vietnam, dividing his time between Ho Chi Minh City and Can Tho. He has been working on a study on Long Hoa island in Tra Vinh province, which is part of AMRC's research into risk in river basin management.

Natalia Scurrah has commenced a one-year placement as Australian Youth Ambassador for Development (AYAD) at Ubonratchathani University, where she is working with Dr Kanokwan Manorom and Dr Suchada Taweessit. Natalia is helping to facilitate work on the Mekong Curriculum initiative being coordinated by AMRC. Meanwhile Emily Hunter has been working as an AYAD at the National University of Laos since March 2004, also on a 12 month placement.

Fiona Miller took up her new position at the Stockholm Environment Institute, where she is working as a Research Fellow. Her area of research is in the risk and vulnerability program. She will continue to work in the Mekong Delta and is a part of AMRC's work on water governance supported by the Australian Water Research Facility.

Anucha Leksakundilok has submitted his PhD thesis on community-based ecotourism in Thailand and has returned to his former position at the Thai Institute for Scientific and Technological Research.

Phil Hirsch attended the final workshop of the Both Ends – Gomukh project on *River Basin Management: a negotiated approach*, held in the Netherlands near Dordrecht, 11-15 July 2004.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Mekong Rice Conference 2004. Theme: "Rice, the Environment, and Livelihoods for the Poor"

15-17 October, 2004, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Contact: Dr. Nguyen Van Bo, Director, Dept. of Science and Technology, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Vietnam, 2 Ngoc Ha, Ba Dinh, Ha Noi, Vietnam

Tel: 84-4-08043146 Fax: 84-4-8454319

Email: nvbo@hn.vnn.vn

<http://www.irri.org/mrc2004/default.htm>

International Conference on Globalization and Ethnic Minorities in the Mekong Region

12-18 November, 2004, Chiang Mai, Thailand

Contact: Prasit Lepreecha, Social Research Institute, Chiang Mai University, Thailand

Email: Leesia@chiangmai.ac.th

SEAGA-KKU International Geography Conference Theme: "Southeast Asia: Development and Change in an Era of Globalisation"

29 November-2 December, 2004, Khon Kaen, Thailand

Southeast Asia Geography Association

7th Asian Fisheries Forum: the triennial meeting of the Asian Fisheries Society

30 November-4 December 2004, Penang, Malaysia

Contact: The Secretariat, 7th Asian Fisheries Forum, School of Biological Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 Minden, Penang, Malaysia

Tel: ++ 60-4- 6533888 Ext. 3961/2932/4005/4009

Fax: ++ 60-4- 6565125

Email: 7aff2004@usm.my

<http://www.usm.my/7AFF2004/>

An International Conference on DELTAS

10-16 January 2005, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Contact: Dr. Yoshiki Saito, IGG, Geological Survey of Japan/AIST, Central 7, Higashi 1-1-1, Tsukuba, 305-8567, Japan

Tel: +81-29-861-3895

Fax: +81-29-861-3747

E-mail: yoshiki.saito@aist.go.jp

IV MMSEA Conference

April 2005, Sapa, Lao Cai, Vietnam

www.ikap-mmsea.com

<http://www.emwg.org.vn>

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

Participation and research in Lao PDR



Farmers collaborating in research activities in Savannakhet province, Lao PDR. (Photos: Simon Bush)



District staff participating in research training workshop in Savannakhet province, Lao PDR. (Photo: Simon Bush)



Provincial staff teaching research methods to district staff, Lao PDR. (Photo: Simon Bush)

Australian Mekong Resource Centre
C/-Division of Geography
School of Geosciences
University of Sydney NSW 2006
Australia