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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 and the Mekong Region

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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 late November and should be limited to 1-2 paragraphs.

EDITORIAL - Poverty and biodiversity

In the pages that follow, three scholar-practitioners collectively think “outside the box” to take us beyond the tired, polarised and circular debates on whether poor people destroy nature or whether environmental destruction makes people poor.

In the Mekong Basin and wider Mekong region, the relationship between poverty and biodiversity conservation achieves particular poignancy as the Mekong River itself is seen as a resource to be harnessed to lift national economies out of poverty. Measured in terms of fish species, the Mekong is the second or third most biodiverse river system in the world. It is also at the centre of one of the most economically dynamic regions of the world, yet one in which tens of millions of people live in absolute material poverty, and perhaps even greater than normal relative poverty, given the wealth creation that is going on around them.

So perhaps we should dwell for a moment beyond questions of poverty and biodiversity to consider *wealth* and biodiversity. Why are the academic and programmatic targets chiefly on poverty and hence on the poor? Why not ask equally penetrating questions about the process of wealth creation in development and ways in which this can be made less destructive of biodiversity – with all the implications for access to resources for those impacted on, or left behind, by the development juggernaut?

If we were to pitch our examination in this way, we would come up with not very different fundamental conclusions from those of Bob Fisher, who stresses the contextual nature of links between poverty and conservation. In other words, there are mediating conditions and mediating policy and institutional options – not to mention human agency – that shape the relationship between wealth and biodiversity conservation. Put simply and perhaps simplistically, development does not have to be bad for the environment or for those who depend on it most immediately for their subsistence-oriented livelihoods, but it can be and often is.

So in looking at wealth and biodiversity conservation, it might be instructive to draw on Fisher’s strategic recommendations and:

- disaggregate the notion of wealth creation as part and parcel of the development process. In particular, development that “creates” wealth at the expense of biodiversity-dependent livelihoods represents the greatest mirage in the current context of Mekong development agendas
- seek mediating institutional mechanisms that allow for more equitable and sustainable processes of wealth creation. These need to include safeguards that break down the artificial line between environmental integrity and social well-being
- recall that wealth creation has impacts well beyond the local. Fisher’s “landscape level solution” here is the transboundary Mekong River Basin, whose management and governance requires much more robust and inclusive regulatory mechanisms for equitable use of the river’s potential to sustain and increase human well-being.

FEATURE

Poverty and biodiversity conservation

by Bob Fisher

Introduction

The relationships between biodiversity conservation, livelihoods and poverty reduction are a major topic of discussion in contemporary conservation. Discussion revolves around a number of themes including whether conservation can or should try to contribute to poverty reduction and to what extent it can contribute. The increasing presence of poverty on the conservation agenda has partly developed as a result of concerns within the conservation movement about the need to take more account of poverty either for ethical or practical reasons (or both). It is also partly a result of the fact that donor agencies seem to have become less interested in funding conservation unless it can be more clearly linked with poverty reduction, something which is very high on the contemporary international aid agenda.

Concern with the links between poverty and conservation is not, of course, new in itself. Various approaches to linking human needs with conservation have been evident for many years, especially in the form of Integrated Conservation and Development Projects (ICDPs). However, the intensity of the debate is something of a recent development, particularly evident in two recent international conservation congresses: the IUCN Vth World Parks Congress "Benefits Beyond Boundaries" (Durban, 8-17 September 2003) and the 3rd IUCN World Conservation Congress "People and Nature – Only One World" (Bangkok, 17-25 November 2004).

The key issues of debate can conveniently be grouped under two broad areas: (1) debates about whether biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction objectives can be realistically dealt with jointly without sacrificing one or the other; and (2) debates about whether there is an ethical imperative for conservation to address poverty issues.

This paper will give a brief overview of various aspects of the debate. It will go on to suggest that, while the sometimes alleged synergies between conservation and "development" are often overestimated, there is often nothing essentially contradictory or synergistic about the relationships. Rather, there are mediating (or transforming) structures which can often alter causal relationships. Too much emphasis has been placed on finding essential causal connections (such as "poverty causes loss of biodiversity" or "conservation is only possible if local peoples' needs are met") rather than trying to alter contextual and institutional factors that can change outcomes.

Pragmatic and ethical arguments for and against linking poverty reduction and conservation

The pragmatic argument in favour of conservation addressing the development or poverty reduction needs of people generally assumes that the exploitative use of biodiversity by poor people leads to degradation of biodiversity and that stopping this degradation requires providing incentives or alternatives to change this behaviour. It is sometimes asserted that getting

people involved in conservation and meeting their needs is essential to achieving conservation outcomes.

Although the integrated approach has become entrenched in the policies of many conservation agencies (sometimes more in rhetoric than in practice), some conservationists have always rejected the approach. One particularly strong critic is Oates (1999) who argues that attempts to base conservation on an integrated approach are leading to the failure of conservation strategies and that attempts to address conservation through economic development are essentially flawed. He argues that there are cases where conservation has worked without attempting to meet local needs. Brockington (2003) agrees that conservation is possible without meeting the needs of the poor, but only if coercive approaches are used and if local people are further disadvantaged.

It could be argued that, while coercive conservation might be possible in the short term, the long term costs, both financial and political, are likely to be so great that biodiversity conservation could only *be maintained* if the needs of the local poor are met. This argument does not assume that win-win outcomes for conservation and development are always possible, but rather that trade-offs will lead to better outcomes than are otherwise likely. Further, it does not assume that poverty reduction will necessarily involve sustainable consumptive use in every case, but rather that the costs of conservation to local people must be covered by the provision of genuine (rather than token) alternatives and choices.

This brings us more explicitly to the ethical argument for conservation addressing poverty. It is sometimes argued that conservation must address poverty simply because it is a serious human issue. Some conservationists respond that poverty reduction is important, but that conservation should not be expected to address an issue that world governments have been unable to address and have often caused or contributed to by poor policy. This is a legitimate observation, but it does miss the point that nobody has argued that conservation is solely responsible for addressing poverty, but rather that it should contribute when it can. Further, it ignores the suggestion that there is an ethical responsibility to address poverty when it results directly from conservation activities (as in the case of exclusion of people from protected areas).

Opportunism and creativity

The above discussion is not an attempt to resolve the practical or ethical issues, but rather to summarise some of the issues of debate. The recent IUCN book *Poverty and Conservation: Landscapes, People and Power* (Fisher et al 2005) argues that conservation does involve an ethical responsibility to address poverty when conservation activities themselves contribute to increased poverty, but this is a minimum standard. The book argues that activities should build on synergies when they do exist and suggests that synergies can sometimes be created. The suggested strategy is to be both opportunistic and creative.

Too much of the debate about poverty and conservation has resolved around the alleged causal connections between poverty and conservation: poverty is alleged to cause degradation of biodiversity; elsewhere, dependence of the poor on natural biodiversity is claimed to be a cause of conservation-oriented behaviour; development activities are claimed to

provide incentives for reduced exploitation of biodiversity; elsewhere development activities around protected areas are claimed to create increased pressure by attracting immigration with resultant increase in pressure.

All of these claims may be true in certain cases, but none of them is universally or necessarily true and attempts to resolve them as general propositions are pointless. The causes operate in quite specific contexts (including economic contexts) and are mediated by policies, laws and other institutional factors, which may lead to similar initial conditions having quite different results. The DFID livelihoods framework talks about “transforming structures and processes” which convert contexts and various types of capital (natural, financial, physical, human, social) into different livelihood systems (Chambers and Conway 1992).

Barrow and Mlengi (2005) describe the impacts of changes in institutional arrangements on forest conservation in Shinyanga, Tanzania. In an area where forest cover had been very severely reduced as a result of land clearing (largely resulting from well-intentioned but inappropriate government policies) a government project began to encourage local people to re-establish traditional forest enclosures called *ngitils* with the result that as between 300,000 and 500,000 ha of forest was restored, along with significant improvements in biodiversity and an estimated income of USD 1,000 per family per year. The changes required minimal investment and were largely the result of policy changes which allowed people to keep the production from communal and individual *ngitili*. Despite population increases, there was no necessary causal connection between population pressure and human use and deforestation. Under one set of policies the results were deforestation and increased poverty; under another set the result was poverty reduction and improved biodiversity. (The biodiversity outcomes are not perfect, but they are immensely better than under the earlier policies or any *realistic* alternative management regime.)

Barrow and Mlengi make the important point that the people were not specifically interested in biodiversity as an abstract category. Their interest was in the availability of a diverse range of products for use and sale. This happened to be consistent with biodiversity.

In the case of the IUCN Non Timber Forest Products Project in the Lao PDR, building of social capital in the form of a village level marketing group greatly increased the villagers’ share of income available from bitter bamboo. The establishment of a rice bank contributed to food security, which, although “only related indirectly to NTFP conservation... built trust in the conservation project, freed up villagers’ time for conservation activities, and reduced the threat of over-harvesting in the forest” (Morris and Ketpanh 2005, p 74).

What is clear in both these cases is that there is no “magic bullet”, no formula which will apply everywhere, but rather that creative solutions can sometimes (perhaps often) be found to particular cases.

Some strategies

There are several key strategies that can help to make efforts to combine conservation and poverty reduction more effective.

1. Disaggregate the category “poor”. People are poor for different reasons and in different ways in different situations. In

Attapeu in Laos, for example, food security is often seen as being essentially an issue of the availability of rice. However this ignores the fact that rural livelihoods depend very heavily on aquatic resources from ponds and other freshwater sources for food security (Fisher et al 2005). Policies that ignore these aquatic resources and focus on promoting improved rice production fail to impact on food security and also ignore the value of conservation to food security.

2. Look for mediating institutional factors that may change the relationships between causes and effects.

3. Remember that both environmental and poverty problems are often caused at physically remote locations or at institutional levels beyond the local. There is little point in expecting site level projects to solve problems when the causes are elsewhere. Working at multiple scales and multiple institutional levels is often essential.

4. “[U]se landscape-level solutions as well as — in many cases instead of — site-based solutions. Seek ways to meet objectives in different parts of the wider landscape rather than trying to address them all in a single site, such as a protected area.” (Fisher et al 2005, p. xv)

Conclusions

While the connections between poverty and biodiversity loss are complex and cannot be reduced to universal causal propositions, there are many cases where synergies can be used or created. In the sense that poor people often depend on diverse natural resources, conservation is essential to rural livelihoods and to livelihood security in addition to providing real opportunities for poverty reduction. On the other hand, addressing livelihood and poverty issues will often lead to better conservation outcomes than could be expected under other realistic scenarios. There is no necessary universal synergy, but there are good reasons for trying to create new synergies.

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Bob Fisher is Senior Researcher with the AMRC. This article is largely based on *Poverty and Conservation: Landscapes People and Power*, of which he is an author.

RESPONSES TO FEATURE

Conserving livelihoods through biodiversity

by *Simon Bush*

The debate raised by Bob Fisher over the relationship between conservation and poverty is an important one in the Mekong Basin where, for many rural communities, a mutually dependent relationship between 'nature', 'biodiversity' and rural livelihoods exists. Nevertheless, conservation and livelihood policy is often justified on the ethical grounds of either placing humans outside nature (conservation approach), or placing humans within nature (livelihood approach). Contrary to these simplified approaches, living aquatic resource use highlights the central role of biodiversity in supporting the food and income security of resource users. Conservation of these resources requires institutional approaches that not only address environmental sustainability but also political and social sustainability, by positioning biodiversity as a livelihood imperative.

I strongly agree that cause and effect narratives such as 'poverty causes loss of biodiversity' are neither constructive, nor an accurate reflection of the complexity of nature resource dependent livelihoods. A starting point to a more nuanced understanding of conservation and poverty begins with a disaggregation of groups termed 'the poor', and should be followed by a better understanding of the political barriers to integrating livelihoods and conservation in policy. Research on fisheries shows that despite the overall assumption that 'fishers are the poorest of the poor' there is either no difference in resource dependency between wealth groups or, in some cases, a certain level of wealth is needed to access resources (Béné 2003; Garaway 2005). Further attention should also be given to the political context of conservation and poverty. For example, conservation in Lao PDR is looked upon sceptically by the government as a project of restricting access to resources (placing humans outside nature) and seen as antagonistic to the key government objective of maintaining resource access for the predominantly rural population (placing humans within nature). Wetlands in particular have been associated with this negative connotation of 'conservation', which has curbed support for initiatives such as the Ramsar convention (Chanphengxay et al. 2005).

Overcoming this stalemate requires a different, non-confrontational or 'synergistic' approach. Two examples from the Mekong Basin illustrate such alternatives to meeting the needs of both conservation and poverty that are grounded in the livelihood importance of biodiversity and are politically sustainable.

In a somewhat radical shift for the MRC, David Coates et al. (2003) promote fishing as a mechanism for supporting biodiversity conservation, in direct opposition to the more common understanding of fishers as a cause of fishery decline. Their idea has not been picked up in policy and, going by the recent shift to 'fishers as a major cause of fisheries degradation' in the MRC publication *Catch and Culture*, will not be in the near future (*Catch and Culture* Volume 10, No. 2, 2005). However, by arguing that biodiversity is best served by maintaining exploitation, they have identified a complex synergy between living aquatic resources and livelihood sustainability. The

people exploiting the rich diversity of organisms found in a range of habitats cannot be understood in terms of rich and poor. In many communities fisheries are exploited by a range of demographic groups using specialized gears, targeting specific species at different times of the year. The fishery is not monolithic, but rather an inherently diverse resource and the maintenance of biodiversity is best served by supporting the viability of the livelihoods that exploit them.

In Southern Lao PDR Roger Mollet et al (2003), working for Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF Lao), promote living aquatic resources conservation by focusing on flooding and the inverse relationship between native fish production and rice cultivation (based on the Flood-Pulse concept of Junk et al. 1989). In doing so they work with communities to reflect on the importance of flooding to biodiversity - whereas it is more commonly understood only in terms of its negative impact to the rice economy. Conservation is therefore framed in terms of a trade-off between maintaining native fish production while also maintaining a staple agricultural activity. At the policy level it is hoped that such trade-offs are recognized and the negative consequences of flood control on the reproduction of fish stocks are incorporated within a more realistic understanding of sustainable livelihoods.

Neither of these examples adheres to an overall synergy between poverty and conservation, nor do they adhere to the narrative of 'poverty causes biodiversity loss'. In the first case, fishers, often seen as a cause of resource degradation, are promoted as a facilitator of conservation because of the intrinsic importance of biodiversity for the livelihoods of *all* members of rural communities. The second case addresses the trade-off between rice and fish production, suggesting that livelihoods cannot be based on rice alone, but also on the conservation of living aquatic resources biodiversity. Both cases highlight the use of seemingly antagonistic positions of resource use and resource conservation to create new institutionally-based win-win arrangements. There are trade-offs in both, but as Fisher argues, they may lead to "better outcomes than are otherwise likely".

The challenge lies in convincing formal institutions to embrace the flexibility required for creative and adaptive modes of conservation and frame biodiversity conservation through the lens of humans *in* the environment, rather than the more common humans *outside* the environment. The reality for many resource dependent communities in the Mekong Basin is that there is little alternative to such approach. Debate must move beyond the division of ethical vs. pragmatic attitudes to poverty and conservation by drawing attention to the realities of livelihoods that can only be sustained through conservation of biodiversity.

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Simon Bush is a research associate of the AMRC and has recently taken up a research and teaching position with the Environmental Policy Group at Wageningen University in the Netherlands.

Alliances as instruments to mainstream “pilot successes”

by Guido Broekhoven

Reality is sometimes more complex than we may wish it to be. Over the past few decades we have come to realise that this is certainly true for the conservation-development nexus: the relations between the two are complex and locally specific. This poses a number of important challenges for the design and implementation of projects and programmes that aim to achieve both conservation and rural development objectives. It has become clear that the analysis of the local situation and core problems needs to be comprehensive to enable the identification of appropriate strategies and interventions. And this in turn has had implications for the nature of these interventions (for example, not only work in the field but also in the political centres). And finally, impact monitoring has become more important.

Progress is being made in all these areas. While doing so, more and more skills are required from project and programme implementing agencies and their staff: methodological skills, skills to combine action and research, to understand the local context, to communicate and document and to negotiate. In particular, skills are required at the analytical level; to think “outside the box” and to work and think at various levels, from the day-to-day concerns of per diems and project vehicle use, to debates about conservation strategies, landscape level planning and national policies. And all these skills are requested from people that frequently work in relatively isolated areas. No wonder that it is often difficult for conservation agencies to find individuals who fit this bill!

And this is where the issue of alliances comes in. Through alliances, for example with rural development agencies and development NGOs, conservation organisations can get access to skills and knowledge that they normally don’t possess.

There’s another reason why alliances are important: the tasks at hand are simply too large for conservation organisations and governments to tackle on their own. Although there is a growing collection of literature which has increased our understanding of the positive interactions between improved management of natural resources such as NTFPs (non-timber forest

products) and rural livelihoods (Fisher provides a few examples), the majority of these cases relate to small scale “pilot projects”. With little attention being paid to the process of “knowledge flows” beyond the project life cycle it is perhaps not surprising that many of these rural poverty-reducing interventions in the natural resource sector, which are successful at a small scale, are failing to inform national development planning processes. Problematically, it is not clear how the lessons learnt from pilot projects are being used to inform decision-making at a national level or even the extent to which these successful experiences are being replicated locally outside the pilot areas.

Two specific policy instruments come to mind as potential means of promoting policies, programs, and projects that can help and scale up positive pilot experiences and hence help poor families benefit more from forests and other natural resources: Poverty Reduction Strategies Papers (PRSPs) and national forest programmes (NFPs). PRSPs have become the main mechanism for governments in least developed countries and some middle-income countries to define their budget and policy priorities and discuss those priorities with the international community. National forest programmes play similar roles with regard to forests.

Several reviews of PRSPs and interim-PRSPs to date have found that although an increasing number of PRSPs and interim-PRSPs make reference to forests and forestry, these references tend to be rather superficial. There is little analysis of the role forests currently play in rural livelihoods or their potential role, nor of the measures required to capture that potential. Efforts to monitor the implementation of the PRSPs have not reflected the full potential that forests may contribute.

No similar reviews have been done to look at the extent that national forestry programmes have taken up issues related to poverty reduction. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that these aspects have also been weak in most NFP processes.

A network of development agencies and NGOs (Winrock, Profor, IUCN, CIFOR, ODI and others) is currently implementing a series of case studies to identify how the positive achievements of the project like the NTFP project in Lao PDR have been expanded locally (“horizontally”) or scaled-up nationally and how the knowledge generated pilot projects can be better integrated into national policy.

It seems clear however, that cross-sectoral alliances can help to bridge the divide described above, attract the resources and capacity and to mobilise the political will to adopt what has been successful at a small scale in a wider area.

Guido Broekhoven is currently team leader of the “Strengthening Voices for Better Choices” forest governance project. This is a global project run by IUCN to test and support improved forest governance mechanisms in six countries: Brazil, Ghana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, Sri Lanka and Vietnam.

Response to Bob Fisher

by Oy Kanjanavanit

In this article Fisher has made a sensible assessment that argues for creative conservation management which constantly identifies synergies with poverty reduction on a case by case basis, with no one-cure-for-all magic formula. Few would disagree. It is not simply that his argument 'sounds right'; there is also a desperate need to move away from heavily politicized dualism in sustainable development of the past decade that often pitched conservationists against human rights advocates and social scientists.

The issue is highly complex and exceedingly difficult. Often it is not simply a case of wildlife and ecological health versus the poor, but there are also conflicting interests among different groups of poor people where there is no absolute win-win solution that will make all sides completely happy. It is refreshing that the author does not claim to have perfect answers. He does, however, make an effort to give practical suggestions on some key strategies, which presumably are addressed to conservation/development project designers and managers. The section is a little thin to be really useful, but perhaps this is because that is not the objective of the article.

It should be noted that many conservation project designs have already taken many of Fisher's lines of argument and suggestions into account. In practice, however, many of these have not succeeded in Thailand. This is particularly apparent with conservation initiatives that are designed to work "at multiple scales and multiple institutional levels" – just as Fisher suggests. Perhaps this calls for a rigorous review of lessons learned among funding agencies and project consultants.

Oy Kanjanavanit is Secretary-General of the Green World Foundation, Thailand.

READER COMMENTS

Responding to Kurt Morck Jensen's criticism of the Mekong River Commission's failure to help resolve water conflicts (Mekong Update & Dialogue, Volume 8, Number 2, April – June 2005.)

Mr. Jensen's criticism of the Mekong River Commission might carry more weight if it was also directed at his own ministry, the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and other MRC donors. After all, it is donor agencies that ultimately approve or reject the Mekong River Commission's programs and priorities, not the region's water users or bureaucrats. If Denmark wants the MRC to get involved in resolving water conflicts it has every right, indeed is obligated, to make this a condition of future aid to the organization and its member countries. Otherwise Denmark is as culpable as Mekong governments for the MRC's inertia.

Mr. Jensen should also take a closer look at his ministry's role in exacerbating water conflicts along transboundary Mekong

waterways. For example, Denmark is providing Vietnam with a US\$4.6 million grant for "Integrated water resources management in Ca and Srepok River Basins" which is supposed to assist local authorities, local communities, and other water stakeholders with "sustainable water resources management" over a four-year period. Nowhere in the project announcement is it mentioned that Sre Pok is a transboundary river shared by Vietnam and Cambodia, or that Cambodians will or should be recognized as stakeholders in decisions and plans affecting their river. Nor does it mention that Sweden and Norway have funded hydro planning along the Vietnamese stretch of the Sre Pok since 1999, without consulting Cambodians, without assessing the costs to Cambodian livelihoods, and without promoting any type of benefit-sharing mechanisms common in Nordic countries. According to the Swedish International Development Agency's head of infrastructure and economic cooperation, Rolf Carlman, the point of this aid is to help Vietnam plan, build and operate hydro dams "in a responsible manner." Yet in all this time, Vietnam has yet to complete a single environmental impact assessment that includes the Cambodian stretch of the river or recognize the rights of Cambodians to participate in the planning process let alone be compensated by Vietnam for damages to their livelihoods. In December 2003, Vietnam started building the first of six dams identified by Nordic consultants for development on the Sre Pok.

Cambodians have appealed to the MRC and donor agencies to stop funding hydro planning on the Sre Pok until damages and problems arising from hydro dams on the Se San, another river shared by Vietnam and Cambodia, are duly investigated and resolved. But unless MRC donors reinforce this message and insist upon higher standards for hydro planning and water management, pulling funding if necessary, the MRC executive have little incentive to do more than talk endlessly about the need for change.

Unless MRC donors demand reform or cutoff funding, the MRC will remain politically and financially adrift, unaccountable to Mekong water users, and oblivious to market realities and technological advances.

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NEWS FROM THE REGION

Second Greater Mekong Subregion Summit

On July 5 the Kunming Declaration was signed by leaders from the six Mekong countries. The agreement is for \$25 billion worth of tourism, transnational highway and hydropower projects. It is aimed at facilitating trade and investment within the region as well as boosting health surveillance at borders in order to stop infectious diseases such as SARS. The ADB has some concerns over funding, seeing its capacity falling to \$10 billion, thereby requiring substantial public-private funding input.

Writing for the Bangkok Post, Chris Greacen has drawn atten-

tion to the pitfalls for electricity rate-payers in the signing, at the Summit, of the \$1.2 billion Mekong Region electricity grid scheme. The Memorandum of Understanding on the Implementation of Stage 1 of the Regional Power Trade Operating Agreement (RPTOA) is the first stage in the establishment of a Mekong transmission network and power market.

Greacen, C. 2005 "A gamble that leaves us holding the bill", Bangkok Post, 30 June 2005

-- 2005 "Mekong states outline development projects worth \$25 billion", Japan Economic Newswire, 5 July 2005

AUSTRALIAN MEKONG NEWS

Visit by Mekong students

Sydney University Geography students who participated in the January 2005 Southeast Asian Field School have recently hosted a return field trip for five students from the Mekong Region. One student was selected from each of the five universities the Australian students worked with while in the region. Between August 13 and September 9 the students participated in a busy program examining a range of issues in Australia including environmental management, multiculturalism, indigenous affairs, tourism and urbanisation. Activities in the program included a lecture program organised by students and academics in the School of Geosciences, visits to various museums and cultural centres, to research and education centres and to government and non-government organisations. The program also incorporated a number of field trips to sites outside Sydney, including to Orange (an agricultural area), the Blue Mountains, Gerroa (a coastal site), and Canberra. The trip provided an opportunity for the exchange of information and ideas and for the overseas students to examine issues relevant to development in their own countries in a different country context.



Giao, Sysomphane, Tuan, Somchai and Bank at the Coastal Environment Centre, Narrabeen (Sydney).

NEWS FROM THE CENTRE

Visiting scholar from Denmark

Kurt Morck Jensen joined the AMRC in September 2005 as a visiting scholar. Kurt is on seven months leave from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs where he is a senior adviser in Danish development assistance to Asia and the Middle East concerning water and environment. He holds a Ph.D. in social anthropology and his research background is rural development and social change in South Asia. He is currently coordinating an AMRC study on "National Interests and Transboundary Water Governance – the Mekong River" sponsored by Danish International Development Assistance (Danida). In his development work he has done policy work and has been responsible for projects and programmes in India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Vietnam, and Cambodia, and on transboundary water issues the Lower Mekong Region. In addition to water and environment, he has also worked on conflict and post conflict reconstruction in Afghanistan and Palestine. Kurt was employed by the World Bank for three years working on irrigation management and forestry in India, Nepal and Indonesia. He was posted for a total of nine years in India, Egypt and Bangladesh for the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Third General Meeting of RWESA

17-20 November, 2005, Siem Reap, Cambodia

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International Symposium: Towards Sustainable Livelihoods And Ecosystems In Mountainous Regions

7-9 March, 2006, Chiang Mai, Thailand

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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

Poverty and biodiversity



House of poor farmer associated with livelihood and conservation oriented sloping land conversion project, Shuan-bi catchment, Yunnan. (Photo: Phil Hirsch)



Conservation for better food production. Construction of a check dam in a community forest, Nam Jo village, Muang Phan District, Lampang Province, Thailand. (Photo: Jaruwat Kaewmahanin)



Poor farmer with wild vegetables for livestock, Shuan-bi catchment, Yunnan. (Photo: Phil Hirsch)



Walnut trees against background sloping land cultivation of tobacco, corn, etc., Shuan-bi catchment, Yunnan. (Photo: Phil Hirsch)

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