
[Stop All Mekong Basin Dams!](#)

On September 2014, fishing communities' networks from Cambodia and Thailand met with great solidarity and commitment to share and voice the impacts related to large-scale hydroelectric power dams being built along the Mekong mainstream and its tributaries. They warned that the future of the Mekong River, the mother of all Southeast Asian rivers, and the livelihoods and cultures of the people that depend on it is under serious risks, as large-scale hydroelectric dams planned and being built rapidly progress (1).

Since mid-2006, Thai, Malaysian, Vietnamese and Chinese companies have been preparing detailed studies for a cascade of twelve large hydropower dams on the Mekong River's mainstream. Eight of the dam sites are in Laos, two are in Cambodia, and two are on the Thai-Lao border. Most of the power generated would be sent mostly to energy-hungry cities in Thailand, and some in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. In total, the dams would create over 600km of reservoir along the Mekong River that, according to official estimates, would require the resettlement of 88,000 people (2). In 2008, the "Save the Mekong coalition" was established and launched its campaign to protect the Mekong River from those Mekong mainstream dams. This coalition is a network of civil society groups, academics, journalists, artists, fishers, farmers, and ordinary people from within the Mekong countries, regionally and internationally that have been working together to protect the Mekong River, its resources and people's livelihoods (3).

Fishing communities in the region rely on the Mekong River and on Cambodia's great Tonle Sap Lake, which also depends directly on Mekong waters, especially for the spawning and migration of fish. The free-flowing rivers provide fish and nutrients to feed the soil in the forests and agricultural lands. The rivers and lake are the foundation of local cultures and livelihoods. Local economies, from fishing to agriculture and tourism are nourished by the rivers. The flooded forests along the Mekong, its tributaries, and the Tonle Sap also provide other means of livelihoods, including herbal medicines and food. The lower Mekong mainstream and Tonle Sap together produce 2,100,000 tons of freshwater fishes per year and feed the lives of at least 6 million people in the basin. Major Mekong tributaries, including Mun River in Thailand, Sesan River in Cambodia and Vietnam and Theun River in Laos, are all known as the richest areas in fishery resources. Tonle Sap, with nearly four million people living in its proximities, is also one of the very unique and most valuable fishing grounds, with the largest freshwater fishing area in South East Asia. Without maintaining the good health of the Mekong, the health of Tonle Sap will also be jeopardized.

Since China begun the construction of the first dam on the upper Mekong River, lower Mekong fishing communities have witnessed dramatic changes in water levels and a continual decrease in fish. Mekong tributaries face similar problems. While Pak Mun Dam on Mun River became the biggest case of an anti-dam movement in Thailand since more than two decades ago, the Yali Falls Dam on the Sesan River in Vietnam was known to be the first and suffered example of a dam construction that impacted fishing communities also in Cambodia; as well as the Nam Thuen 2 Dam on the Theun River in Lao People's Democratic Republic, a land-linked country bordering Myanmar, Cambodia, China, Thailand, and Vietnam. Serious concerns and struggles are raised not only within

the Mekong region, but also among other South East Asian countries and shared by international groups. Yet, the problems remain unresolved.

The Don Sahong Dam

The government of Laos is planning to build the Don Sahong Dam – the second dam on the Lower Mekong mainstream after the Xayaburi Dam, which is currently being built. If built, the Don Sahong Dam will entirely block the Mekong's Hou Sahong Channel in southern Laos, endangering fish migration throughout the region, with far-reaching consequences for food and livelihood sovereignty in Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam. The planned site is also home to one of the last remaining populations of critically endangered Irrawaddy dolphins as well as the iconic Khone Phapheng waterfalls, and near internationally protected wetlands in downstream Cambodia (4).

Since September 2013, the Government of Laos has been working hard to push the Don Sahong Dam forward, and is already constructing some infrastructure. Moreover, the discussion on the resettlement of fishing communities began before any consultation was done with neighbouring governments, even though the impacts will be also directly affecting Thai, Cambodian and Vietnamese people. After several meetings, the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam have finally expressed concern about the potential impacts of the Don Sahong Dam. The government of Vietnam had already called for a 10-year moratorium on all dam building on the Mekong.

Local people have been receiving misleading and incomplete information about the likely negative impacts of the dam (5). The Assembly of the Poor on the Pak Mun Dam in Thailand, who have spent 26 years struggling the impacts of the dam and suffered the loss of their livelihoods and fisheries, plead last December to the Thai government to demand the government of Laos to halt the construction of the Don Sahong Dam. They also stressed the necessity to call for a Mekong River Commission (MRC) meeting - a regional river basin management organization directed by the governments of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam - before any further decision-making is made for clearly assessing the real impacts of the Don Sahong Dam (6).

The voices of the affected

Despite existing severe cross-border impacts and concerns raised by many local and international groups, most of the dams are still planned and proposed solely by the government who remains the only decision-maker. However, it is the people within the fishing communities, including those in the countries upstream and downstream of the dams, who are the ones to bear the impacts.

The unnatural fluctuation of Mekong River is a major serious shared concern. The continual unprecedented rise and fall of Mekong River throughout the basin hurt fish species and reduce their population. Riverbank farming is damaged as unseasonal floods inundate crops and take away the shoreline.

The fishing communities' networks that met last September clearly reiterated that "any act to prevent the people in Mekong countries from knowing about the dams or prohibiting them from raising their voices against the projects is a complete violation of human rights and our basic rights. We believe the people of the Mekong Basin are the owner of the river and riverine resources. We believe the people of the Mekong Basin have the rights to protect our rivers and Tonle Sap from any act that may destroy them.

We insist that any dam in the Mekong Basin that may grab or take away our resources will not be allowed by us the people. We, therefore, jointly declare that we oppose all large scale hydropower

dams in the Mekong Basin.”

- (1) <http://www.flipsnack.com/A5AA9B6BDC9/stop-all-mekong-basin-dams.html>
- (2) http://www.internationalrivers.org/files/attached-files/mekong_mainstream_aug09.pdf
- (3) <http://www.savethemekong.org/>
- (4) <https://www.rainforest-rescue.org/mailalert/979/the-mekong-river-means-life-stop-the-don-sahong-dam#>
- (5) http://www.internationalrivers.org/files/attached-files/don_sahong_briefing_sheet_2.7.14.pdf
- (6) http://www.terraper.org/mainpage/top_stories_detail_en.php?tid=243&langs=en