

THE TRANSBOUNDARY COOPERATION AND DIALOGUE ON WATER MANAGEMENT: THE PRESENT SITUATION OF THE TRANSBOUNDARY WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT BETWEEN CAMBODIA AND VIET NAM IN MEKONG DELTA

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Abstract

In the years 2000-2008, the Mekong River Commission has implemented Water Use Program (WUP) to develop models of the basin, technical guidance for implementation of the Mekong Agreement 1995. In order to complete the procedures more consistent with the actual situation, MRC need institutionalization of procedures and principles of integrated water resource management (IWRM) in the Lower Mekong basin through its framework and the member countries. Currently, MRC is doing priority for the institutional development of transboundary IWRM and considers the connection created the unity and continuity for WUP. In the articles, the transboundary IWRM between Cambodia and Vietnam were presented to clarify the status and performance orientation within the MRC's procedure (Hung, 2015).

Keywords: Mekong delta, transboundary, IWRM, water resource, management, cooperation, dialogue

Introduction

The border areas of Viet Nam and Cambodia have high potential for economic development in term of fertile soil and abundant water resources if exploited and utilised reasonably. In addition this area with network of river and

channel, and road system creates good condition for transport of goods to Thai Land and other countries in the basin.

Nevertheless, the border area between Viet Nam and Cambodia in the Mekong Delta

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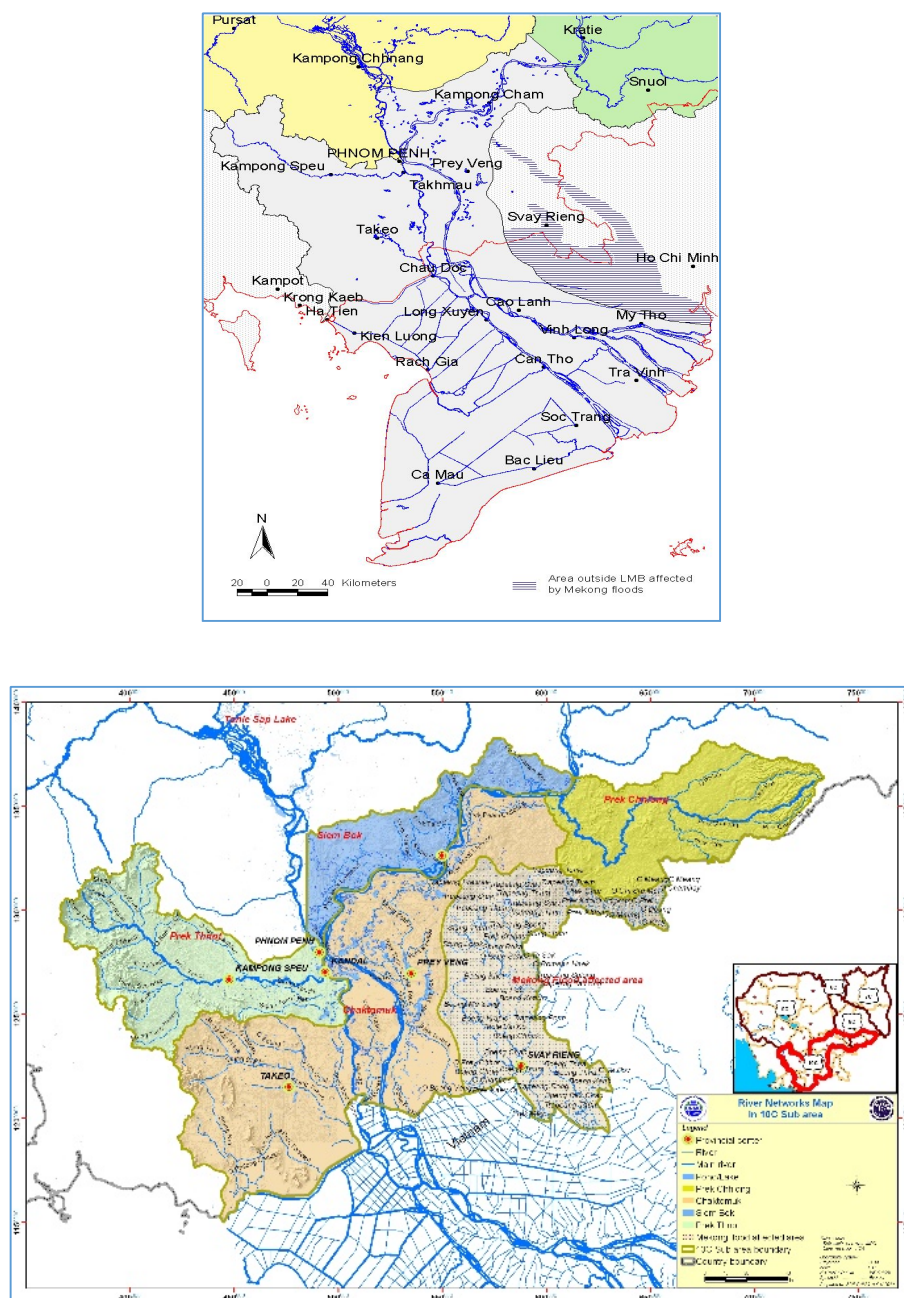


Figure 1. Mekong Delta region (Source: MRC)

is also facing challenges to production and living condition of people resulted from natural disaster such as flood, drought as well as environmental pollution and water quality caused by development. With regard to social aspect, In the border provinces of Viet Nam

and Cambodia including Kien Giang, An Giang, Dong Thap and Long An in Viet Nam, and Kampot, Ta Keo, Kandal, Svey Rieng and Prey Veng there is a difference of infrastructure, specially hydraulic works system for irrigated agriculture and flood

management and level of living other social

The cooperation in using border water

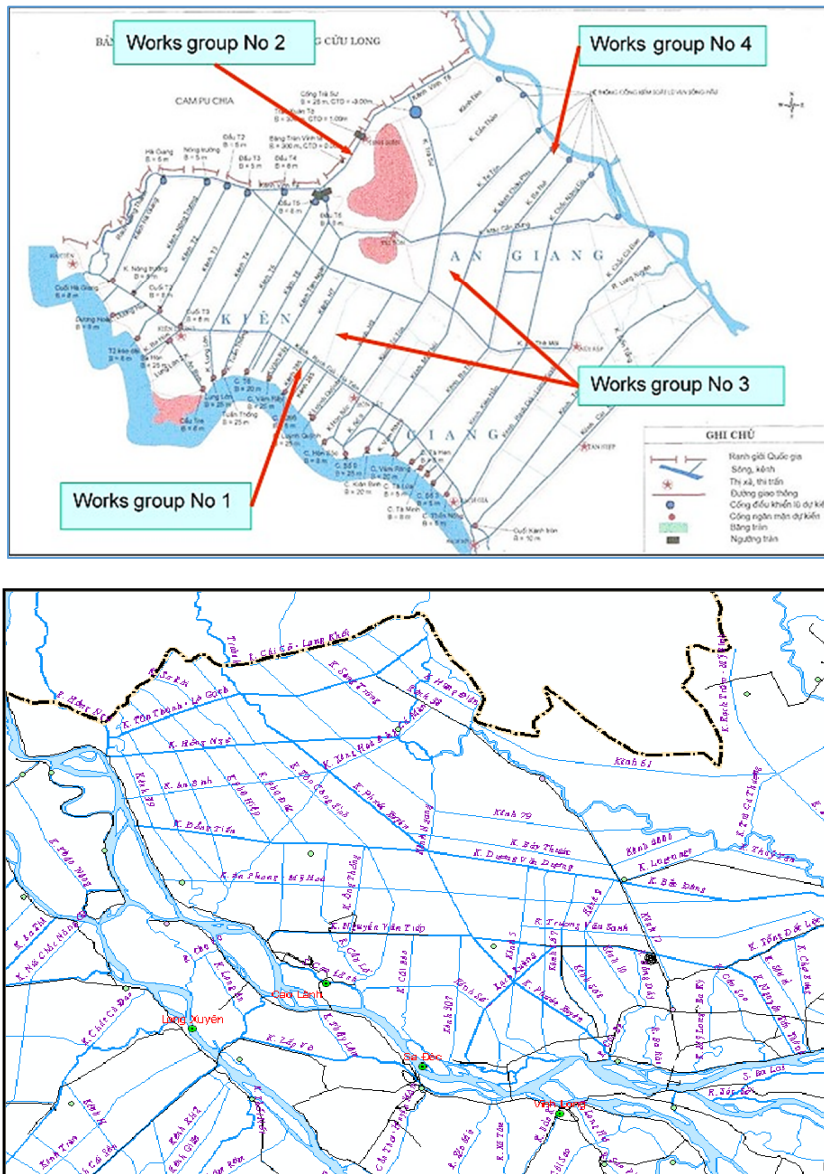


Figure 2. Flood management for Long Xuyên Quadrangle and Location of Cai Co – Long Khot in Flood Management Plan of Plain of Reeds

condition such as school and public health etc.

The border area has a dense and complex river system if not properly employed and utilised will affect to production and livelihood of people living in the area in both countries and may influence the cooperation between two countries at a certain extent.

between Viet Nam and Cambodia has been put forward in the agenda of the two Governments from national to provincial level through the mechanism of the Joint Committee for Cultural, Socio-economic and Technological Cooperation. In this mechanism, both countries has reaffirm their cooperation in the

integrated water resources management at the border areas through provincial authorities and line agencies / state management departments.

The cooperation between Viet Nam and Cambodia in putting forward measures to overcome constraints and mitigate risks in transboundary water resources development and management in the Mekong Delta relates to all the above strategic priorities, of course at different extent. This is convenient for both sides to mobilise national resources in the implementation of IWRM in the Delta with technical support from MRCS, VNMC and CNMC, and WB as well. (Figure 1)

Presently, in Low Mekong Basin, the escalating hydropower and large scale irrigation development have been experienced and these development may cause transboundary environmental impacts that are only addressed by pursuance of the Mekong Agreement signed in 1995 and MRC Procedures approved in the years from 2000 to 2005.

The Status of Exploitation and Using Water Resource in the Boundary Provinces of Viet Nam and Cambodia

Due to characteristics of water resources in the border flood plain, the infrastructures for flood management such as sluices, embankment, dyke systems and canals have the functions on flood management and supplying water for irrigated agriculture. In terms of transboundary water resources development and management, the followings are some key projects need to be assessed: (Figure 2)

- Tra Keo river located in An Giang originates from Cambodia running along the border Viet Nam – Cambodia and joins with Chau Doc river. River water source is abundant for both dry and wet season. Currently, at both sides, there are many canals excavated for irrigation and domestic uses. There are dispute for water use of the river.

- Binh Di river (An Giang) stemmed from Hau river has stretch of border between Viet Nam and Cambodia of 12 km. Due to the abundance of water in dry and wet season, there no dispute in water use.

- So Thuong river of Dong Thap is downstream of Stoeng Slot river of Cambodia. Running to the border demarcation point M4 of Cambodia, it flows along the border to point M3 then enters to Viet Nam. The length of river is 13km with abundance of water. The both countries take water for production and domestic use. Viet Nam has excavated Hong Ngu canal and more than 10 other big and small canals. Cambodia has built some canals but with smaller scale. There are some river stretch with eroded bank.

- So Ha river belonging to Dong Thap originates from Tonle Prasat river in Cambodia. Viet Nam has excavated 4 canals connected to So Ha (Ong Duong, Thong Nhat, Tan Thanh, Go Boi). Cambodia has had 40 big and small canals connected to the So Ha river to use water. River bank erosion is threatening some points along the river route.

- Rach Ro of Long An province originates from Cambodia, the border river between two countries has length of 12 km. During flood season, water is abundant and during dry season, the river has low water level and siltation occurs in many areas. Both sides have excavated many canals to take water, and due to shortage of water, the dispute has been happened.

- Cai Co river has length of 33 km originated from Cambodia (namely Ta Nou river) and runs to the border demarcation point L8 then divides into two branches one flows directly to Viet Nam, one runs along the border to connect with So Ha river in Dong Thap at Tan Thanh. Source of water in Cai Co is very limited in dry season. Viet Nam has excavated several canals such as Huong Dien, Canal 28, Canal Song Trong, Canal 79...In Cambodia, many small pump stations are built together with some connecting canals.

- Project of Improvement and dredging Vinh Te canal (An Giang, Kiên Giang): Vinh Te Canal lasts from Chau Doc to the saline water swamp of Ha Tien with the length of 98.75 km together 16 first canals excavated from the bank in Viet Nam territory. The purpose of project is to rehabilitate and widening Vinh Te Canal aimed at reducing flood water with poor quality spilled over the border from Cambodia into Long Xuyen Quadrangle, increase sediment for cultivation fields, diversion of flood water to Ha Tien

Quadrangle, create fresh water source for Long Xuyen Quadrangle and leaching acid sulphat soil in Ha Tien Quadrangle. Due to the increase of draining flood water to West Sea, the depth of flood inundation at beginning of flood and end of flood decreases, therefore it supports for harvesting Summer-Autumn rice crop and planting Winter – Spring crop in time. This solution for Vinh Te also supports for decrease of peak flood level in the area in order to provide convenient condition for taking sediment from Hau river into Long Xuyen Quadrangle areas. The project combines road and navigation systems, construction of residential zone and improvement of border security.

- Project of Group of Tra Su - Tha La Spillway (An Giang): The project includes two spillways, namely Tra Su (head of Tra Su canal on the Southern Bank of Vinh Te canal) and Tha La (beginning of Tha La located on the Southern Bank of Vinh Te canal) to be able to prevent early flood in August into the center of Long Xuyen Quadrangle, to support for harvesting Winter – Spring crop, at the same time to divert flood water spilled over the border to Vinh Te and then to Ha Tien. The project provides necessary conditions to drain out peak flood for reducing water level upstream Chau Doc and therefore limit flood inundation for LX Quadrangle.

- Bay Xa Canal Project (An Giang): The project area is located in the Northern part of An Giang province, Bay Xa canal is the main route of Tan Chau and An Phu District and along this main canal there are two first level canals: West and East canals with the resettlement areas during high flood period. Because the project is located upstream of Tien and Hau rivers it is directly effected by flood lasting for 5-6 months. The main purpose of the project is to build residential cluster for flood resistance in combination with safety navigation in flood season, and dredging and excavation of canal to store water for irrigation and domestic uses.

- Bac Tan Hong Water Resources Project (Đồng Tháp, Long An): Bac Tan Hong project is located in Viet Nam territory bordered with Cambodia on the length of 62km of Đồng Tháp and Long An province. At the beginning, this area is area with deep inundation with long period. Border route is where to receive flood

water from Cambodia to flow directly to Plain of Reed. Main component of the project is to dredge and excavate So Ha - Cai Co - Long Khot for draining out flood water and store of water for irrigation and heightening residential areas above natural elevation of 3.5 m.

Social and Environmental Implications

The development of water resources infrastructure systems to serve for irrigation and drainage and control flood for the border provinces, specially areas closed to border has considerably improved and increased agricultural production, aquaculture. With these achievements, the border areas become where there are important contributions to national food security and promotion of transboundary cooperation. The projects of flood control and management in combination with residential clusters for flood resistance have changed social life of peoples living in the flooded areas. After flood in 2000, the building of residential clusters in flooded areas in general and border areas have been very fast invested; and district are designated as manager of investment by the Ministry of Construction. Viet Nam and Cambodia, including water pollution caused by aquaculture, agricultural intensive cultivation and waste water from the residential areas. The good solutions for the environmental issues would promote for the common understanding and transboundary cooperation.

Flood and Drought Situation

With such characteristics river systems and low land elevation, the most of border areas belong to the Mekong flood plain. The flood plain in the Mekong Delta in Cambodia and Viet Nam is high potential for economic development under good measures of flood and drought management associated with environmental ecological protection. There are many embankment systems and flood management structures which have been completed (all four provinces of Kien Giang, An Giang, Dong Thap and Long An) to serve for domestic purpose and agricultural production. Besides resulted benefits, these systems also cause negative impacts such as environmental pollution and increase of water level during flood season at border areas at a certain extent. During dry season, shortage

of water for irrigation and prevention/reclamation of acid sulphat soil is challenging for the border provinces in Viet Nam such as An Giang and Dong Thap. Therefore, the improvement of existing canal systems for

designed based on location and flow regime of rivers such as Tien, Hau and border rivers in which there are many rivers originated from Cambodia. Some projects have done for the supporting agriculture development.

purpose irrigation and flood discharge is necessarily required. The shortage of water is also a cause for salinity intrusion in main rivers affecting to agriculture and living conditions.

Salinity Intrusion

Two important elements in the upstream that are potentially affecting to the salinity intrusion in the Mekong Delta are water storage in Tonle Sap Lake and inflow to Kratie. Water use in the Delta is one of key factors in relation to extent of salinity intrusion. In the Mekong Delta. Water is widely used for all economic sectors but large portion for paddy growing. Salinity intrusion can be affecting to the coastal areas and upstream of Vam Co rivers belonging to Cambodia and Viet Nam territory. Salinity intrusion is also taken into account in the process to formulate flood plain management. The current salinity trend is complicated and reason may be use of water right in the Delta (construction of embankment, agriculture and aquaculture cultivation ...) and impacts of flow change due to hydropower development and water diversion as well as increase of water demand.

Agriculture Development

The flood Plain of Cuu Long Delta is main area to produce food for the Cuu Long Delta region. In 2013, rice production is 13.7 million tones accounting for 63% of Cuu Long Delta production. Agricultural development in the flood plain requires solutions for water resources development in order not only for ensuring water for irrigation in dry season, but also for fool management in flood season in line with cropping calendar. Provinces in Viet Nam have expanded cultivated areas and intensive cultivation to 3 crops, and become the provinces of first ranks in the Cuu Long Delta in rice export. All hydraulic work systems and flood management have to be

Fisheries and Aquaculture

The Flood Plain has high potential in fish capture and aquaculture, is important source of protein for poverty alleviation. Production of fish capture in the flood plain slowly increases with rate is only 1.3 % in 2005-2010, in 2010-2013 it is of 2%/year. The total of production in 2013 obtained 549.300 tones accounting for 10,7% of the total of the whole country, in which Kien Giang achieved 361.600 tones and An Giang is 144.600 tones.

Navigation

Cuu Long Delta in general, and flood plain in particularly have high desity of rivers (0.68 km/km^2) to provide good opportunities for water born transportation of goods (rice, construction materials, agricultral materials and means..) inside the region and to Cambodia for commercial and domestic purposes. According to statistic data, in the Cuu Long Delta annually about 73 percent of the region's cargo tonage and 27 percent of passengers are transported by inland waterway. For the areas far from the administration or business centers such as border communes, the inland waterway become more important, especially during the monsoon season when road become impassable for months at a time. Therefore, in the irrigation and flood control projects, there are a common target to combine improvement and development of rural navigation. Under the condition of complicated canal/rivers networks in the border areas, their rehabilitation or upgrade need to be carefully considered to avoid serious bank erosion. Two main rivers in the Cuu Long Delta are Tien and Hau in which Hau river has a shared border about 10 km between two countries. Inland waterway in these rivers plays key role for transport of goods from other countries and Viet Nam to Cambodia. In this context, Viet Nam and Cambodia have signed the Agreement on Navigation.

Canals for Discharging Flood

Food water flows to the Cuu Long Delta through mainstream of Mekong and spilling over the border though the system of border river including Vai Co river. Therefore the improvement of condition of border river / canal and infrastructure is reasonable and significant for flood control and management. However, this measure has potential to cause environmental impacts and rise of flood water level because of complicated connection of the river systems. For example, the diversion of flood to Vam Co river may cause inundation downstream, specially Ho Chi Minh City and adjacent areas.

Wetland and Water Ecosystems for Retention of Flood and for Livelihood of Poor Peoples:

Wetland in the flood plain undertakes the role of flood retention and store. Wetland provides livelihood for poor peoples living in the flood plain areas. When urbanisation takes place in several recent decades, wetland area is significantly reduced leading to fast flooding downstream and prolong flood inundation timing. For example, the exploitation of wetland area in Cambodia for industrial development and recreation and tourism purposes is one causes for flooding over the border to more seriously occur with poor water quality and less sediment.

Climate Change

According to the study made by the Southern Institute for Water Resources Planning until 2050, with impacts of climate change and sea water rise, in the high flood years, flood will be higher in long period. This situation may lead to a very short time that does not allow for growing two crops in the current deeply flooded areas at the border (900.000 ha). There are many transport routes, especially in the deep and medium flooded areas which is possibly and additionally inundated by more than 0.2 to 0.5 m. Due to higher flood, the foundation of residential clusters is at risk of flood inundation. Sea water rise leads to difficulty for draining out flood from Plain of Reeds to the West Vam Co and from Long Xuyen Quadrangle to the West Sea.

The Signature Transboundary Water Resource Management Issues

Viet Nam and Cambodia although the both are located in the bottom downstream but each countries has requirement to use water for economic at different scale. The water resources development and management in each country has also depended on national budget and human resources/capacity in planning and designing and operation of water systems and addressing environmental issues. The transboundary significant water resources development and management issues may be directly brought from the impacts of structures or caused by insufficient coordination. We can describe the issues related to transboundary water management in boundary region between Viet Nam and Cambodia follows some aspects/topics such as:

(i) *Issues related to water resources development* (Management of flood and drought and development projects; Transboundary environmental impacts; Upstream hydropower development impacts);

(ii) *Issues related to coordination and mutual benefits* (Uneffective application of MRC Procedures; Insufficient Capacity; Public participation; National different benefit from water and infrastructure).

Finally, based on above issues described, we can summary and get the **significant transboundary water management issues**, which are reasonable and occurring, in boundary region of Mekong Delta between Viet Nam and Cambodia. They are such as:

- *Shortage of water in the border rivers and canals not to meet water demand* for production and domestic use and others pertaining disputes between two countries and affect to other initiatives of cooperation

- *Increase of early flood water level* due to the operation of existing structures and newly-constructives ones to cause damages to the affected areas

- *Unreasonable structure solutions* to cause inundation and bank erosion, instability and safety for residential clusters

- *Water pollution* caused by agriculture production, aquacultures, urbanisation and industrial development, water with poor quality spilled over the border.

- *Change of flow in mainstream Mekong river* and reduction of sediment and nutrient for fertilising rice field and maintaining biodiversity ecosystem caused by the mainstream hydropower dams and large scale irrigation project in upstream, Cambodia and the Delta

- *Lack of joint integrated management of flood plain*, specially of the border flooded area.

The following is some significant issues in transboundary water resources development and management that need to have joint efforts of Viet Nam and Cambodia in addressing them. To support for the process to address, it is necessary to clearly understand the nature of issues, assessment and analysis of issues by useful tools and through effective cooperative mechanisms between the two countries including data and information sharings, application of MRC Procedures and bilateral regulations as well.

The Status of Cooperation on the Transboundary Water Management Between Viet Nam and Cambodia

Due to the exploitation of water region in boundary region, which is increasing daily for supporting to the production and livelihood from both countries, governments as well as close boundary provinces have the dialogue, cooperation activities each other to find and solve directly and subject any issue raised in the current development progress, which include a water management. It is the dialogue mechanism for the close boundary provinces to prevent any conflict raised in transboundary exploit/use water and management. We can summarize some known activities in the dialogue mechanism as:

- The meetings of mixed committee Viet Nam – Cambodia of cooperation on economic, culture and technology are organizing generally and got many useful results. The example is the content of the twelfth meeting on August 12 2011, which emphasizes that “... Both participants of two countries have assessed well about the sharing data and information on weather forecasting and flood management between the MONRE of Viet

Nam and Ministry of Water Resource and Meteorology of Cambodia. (3.2)” ... “Both countries encouraged the local boundary administrations that is continuously cooperating to solve friendly every issues raised at local level ... (25.2)”.

- The minute of aquaculture cooperation between two boundary provinces Kien Giang (Viet Nam) and Kampot (Cambodia) on May 2014, which emphasized the aquatic resource management issue as sharing experiences, supports and protection of the valuable and noble species in boundary region (Kiên Giang DARD, 2014).

- The agreement of transboundary cooperation between Kien Giang province (Viet Nam) and KanDal province (Cambodia) on February 6, 2007 in KanDal province, which emphasized the issues on transboundary flood prevention and salvage (Kiên Giang DARD, 2007).

- The agreement of transboundary cooperation between Kien Giang province (Viet Nam) and KanPot province (Cambodia) on March 2008 in KamPot province, which emphasized the issues on transboundary coastal ecosystem and natural resource management in the boundary region of two provinces to enhance the environment protection, preservation of biological diversification and prosperousness of two provinces (Kiên Giang DARD, 2008).

- Viet Nam and Cambodia both are very active members and have expressed their concerns of the water and related development in the Mekong in line with the Mekong Agreement 1995. The Mekong Agreement 1995 has many articles which can be applied for consideration of water resources development to meet national requirements as stipulated in Article 1 (areas of Cooperation) “to cooperate in all field of sustainable development, utilization, management and conservation of the water and related resources of the Mekong River Basin including, but not limited to irrigation, hydropower, navigation, flood control, fisheries, timber floating, recreation and tourism in a manner to optimize the multiple-use and mutual benefit of all riparian and to minimize the harmful effects that might result from natural occurrences and man-made activities”. The Article 3

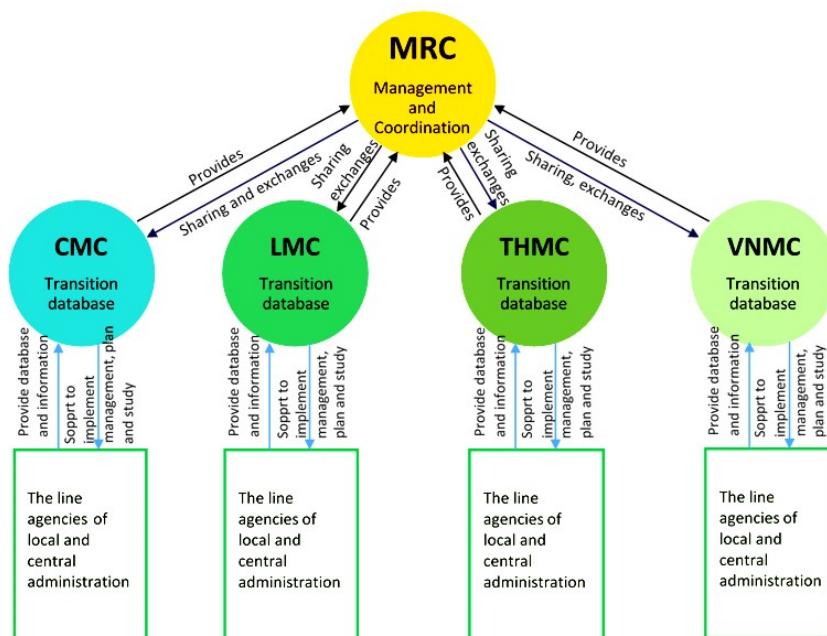


Figure 3. Framework of provide, exchanges and sharing data and information between MRC, NMC and relevant national Las. (Source: MRC, 2014)

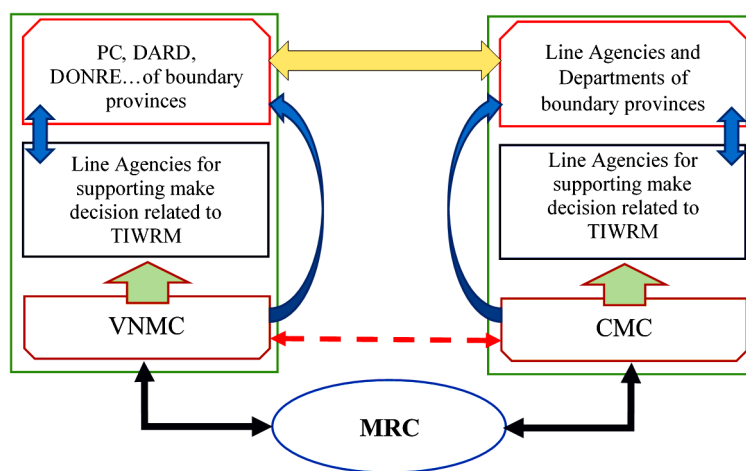


Figure 4. Transboundary dialogue mechanism between boundary provinces of Viet Nam and Cambodia in Mekong Delta

(Protection of the Environment and Ecological Balance) indicates that the MRC countries cooperate “To protect the environment, natural resources, aquatic life and conditions, and ecological balance of the Mekong River Basin from pollution or other harmful effects resulting from any

development plans and uses of water and related resources in the Basin”.

It is clearly that transboundary cooperation works generally and transboundary water management particularly between Viet Nam and Cambodia is implemented at different levels. However, by the high velocity of

economic development in boundary region, there are many issues related to exploit and use transboundary water resource raised and will occurred, which makes many difficult and challenges to the local boundary administrations. So that, it should enhance, reinforce and improve the transboundary cooperative/dialogue activities for supporting present practice.

Orientation for the Reinforcement of Dialogue and Cooperation on the Transboundary Water Management Between Viet Nam and Cambodia

The institute on transboundary dialogue and cooperation mechanism is clear and concrete. The remaining thing is enhances and rises “quality” content of transboundary dialogue and cooperation about technical methods to solute the issues raised on the transboundary water management. The technical methods are such as: the flooding control works, the water exploitation and use for agriculture production and livelihood in boundary region, etc.

Based on the analysis and assessment data and information of interviews and surveys in four boundary provinces (Kien Giang, An Giang, Long An and Dong Thap) on the transboundary water resources exploitation and management, building capacity needs of line agencies, the transboundary cooperation and dialogue mechanism focus on some frameworks as:

The Exchange and Sharing Data and Information Mechanism Between Viet Nam and Cambodia Bases on the MRC's Cooperation Framework (Figure 3)

The responsibilities of National Mekong Committees and Mekong River Commission are cooperation and supports on (i) support and advance to implement the sharing data and information procedure; (ii) provide their reasonable and legal data and information collection/surveys to MRCS, and try support the partners' requirements; (iii) exert themselves to provide, follow the concrete case, the necessary historical data for implementation Mekong Agreement.

Concrete Framework of Transboundary Cooperation and Dialogue Mechanism Between the Boundary Provinces of Two Countries (Figure 4)

The mechanism's foundation bases on all bilateral agreements between two governments as well as local administrations of boundary provinces. The legal documents included as:

- The Peaceful, Friendly and Cooperation agreement between Viet Nam and Cambodia on February 18, 1979;
- The Agreement of boundary regulation between Viet Nam and Cambodia on July 20, 1983;
- The Agreement of Sustainable Cooperation and Development in Mekong River Basin in 1995 between four countries in Low Mekong Basin.

Enhancement Capacity on Make Decision Related to Transboundary Water Management

(i) Building capacity for dialogue and make decision of local management agencies focuses on some aspects as:

- Knowledge on the integrated water resource management and water environmental protection;
- Capacity on the data analysis and process;
- Capacity on the presentation and negotiation related to transboundary water resource management issues;
- Capacity on the communication (English and Khme language)
- Identification and applicable of the dialogue and cooperation mechanism on the transboundary water management;
- Fund for the transboundary integrated water resource management;

(ii) Building capacity of supporting line agencies for helping local management to make decision related to transboundary water management should focus on some aspects as:

- Updated knowledge on the climate change issues;
- Budget for the researches/projects to support and provide knowledge as impacts assessment, data analysis and processes, which help boundary provinces to

make decision related to the transboundary water management;

- To give supplementary data, information and documents related to the exploitation and using water resources in boundary region for enhances of exaction on water balance computation.

Conclusions and Recommendation

In the condition of the complicated systems of Boundary Rivers and these rivers have an interaction to meet requirements of strong economic development in not Viet Nam but also in Cambodia, the potential for transboundary impacts is essential and objective trend.

The border flooded areas play important roles for socio-economic development, so the government of Viet Nam and Cambodia have given high attention to the cooperation in all aspects of the water use and utilization to serve for the development of these areas. In reality, the transboundary water cooperation has considerably and importantly contributed to the permanent cooperation between the two countries.

The transboundary dialogue and cooperation activities of Viet Nam and Cambodia have been implemented at many levels, many kind of line agencies of local and central administrations, which are based on many agreements as well as bilateral meetings/consultations. Generally, these transboundary activities of two countries have good results and effect as the peaceful boundary region, the increasing economic of boundary provinces.

To be able to have proper planning and solutions, the priority should be concentrated on the collection of data, monitoring tendency of hydro-meteorology, water requirement, related development plans, evaluation of the cooperation in using water of the international border rivers. The sharing of information and data via the various channels depends on types of information and data used for the different purposes and scopes defined in details by the countries.

It is necessary to scientifically assess and analyze the upper development and its impact to the border areas in order to express the inter-

relationship of the border area with other ones in the Mekong Basin. The water resources development and management of Delta flood plain is very complicated. Therefore firstly it needs general studies, for instance joint integrated planning, and secondly the selection of case study which can be done at the same time so that its results could be applied for the next projects. The technical support for such activities could be made through the establishment of expert groups of two countries to make joint plan and followed by the specialist / working groups to prepare case studies and so on.

Because the cooperation of transboundary water resources development has significant affect to the comprehensive cooperation, several mechanisms with different targets / purposes should be established, but put under the direction of the high level of the two countries. The cooperation between Viet Nam and Cambodia in transboundary water resources development also need to be put under the support of other initiatives of multilateral cooperation, especially MRC and ASEAN to make the most use of legal, technical capacity and political support aimed to create bases for seeking fund for the implementation from the different financial institution and development partners.

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