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# Mekong Joint & Transboundary Cooperation

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# Long history of Mekong cooperation

- Cooperative efforts since the 1940s...
- Cooperation on legal, institutional, and strategic aspects, backed by technical work
- Mekong has 6 riparians but cooperative efforts had and can take place among 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 – opportunities and challenges
- Current MRC efforts are primarily 4 member countries, with efforts to expand to 6 and with efforts to focus on 2 or 3
- All these efforts taken under the influence and support of external powers and actors

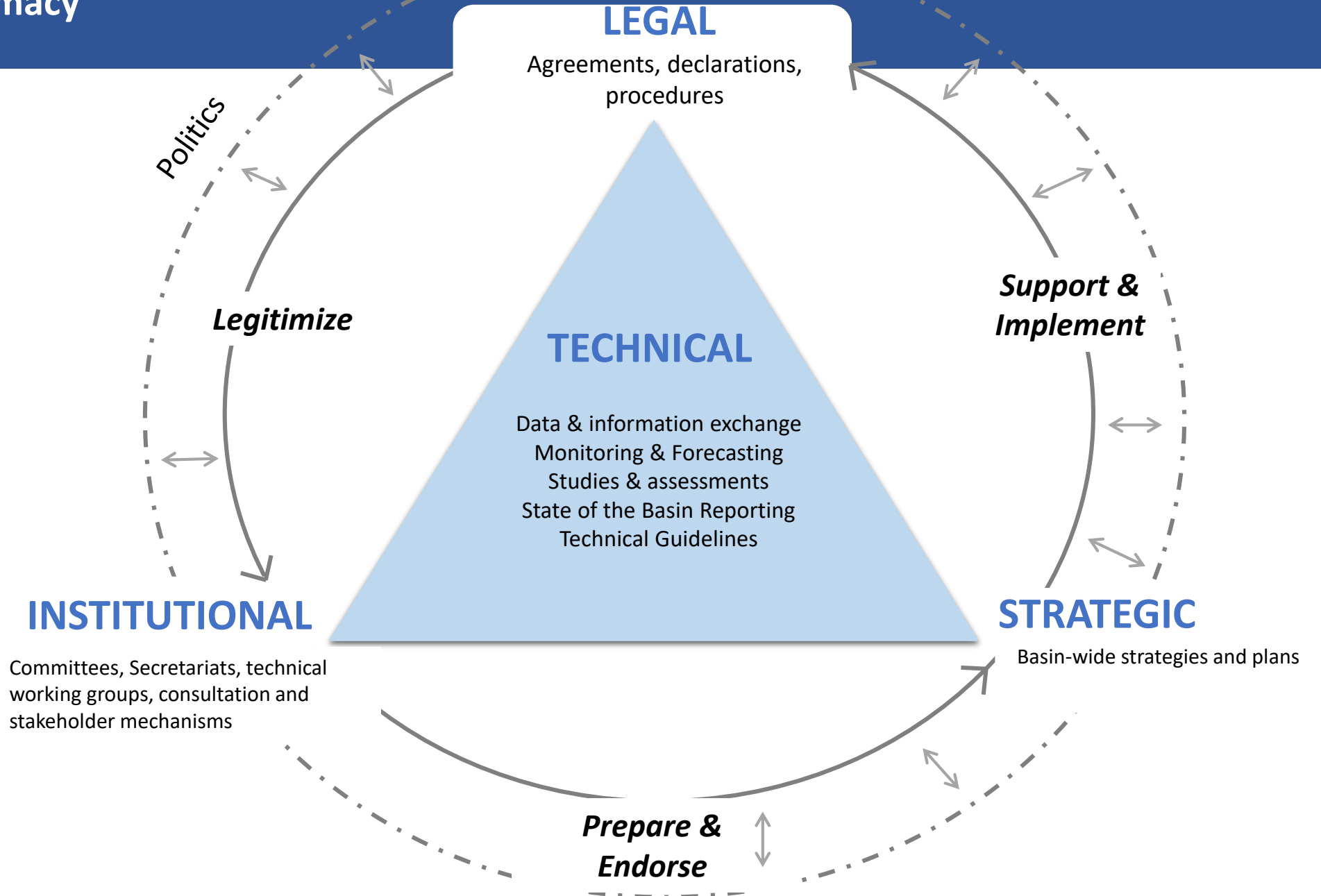


# External interest & support



- Mekong is one of the world's "great rivers" – situated in one of the **world's most "geo-strategic regions"**
- Its very location always invites external interest, influence & support
  - Colonial times: British (in Burma) and French (Indochina)
  - World War II: US and Japan
  - Post-war: US
  - Vietnam/Indochina wars: US, China
  - Post-VN war: US, UN, Japan
  - Contemporary:
    - Major powers: US, China, Japan, Germany, France, EU
    - Other actors: Australia, Korea, Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland, Finland, Netherlands, World Bank, ADB, etc

# MRC Water Diplomacy cooperation



# Cooperation before 1995



- **1947** - **Mekong Consultative Committee** - Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam (under colonial French Indochina, minus Thailand)
- **1954** - **Provisional Mekong Committee** – newly independent Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam (minus Thailand)
- **1957** – Committee for Coordination on the Lower Mekong Basin (**Mekong Committee**) – under UNECAFE and four members (C, L, V, plus Thailand) and **1978 Interim Mekong Committee** (L, T, V minus Cambodia)
  - **Legal:** 1957 *Statute for the Committee for Coordination of Investigations into the Lower Mekong Basin*, 1975 Joint Declaration of Principles for Utilization of the Waters, Article X
  - **Institutional:** *Mekong Committee, Mekong Secretariat*
  - **Strategic:** Indicative Basin Plan 1970, 1987 (i.e. BDP)
  - **Technical:** *monitoring, assessments/studies such as the 1994 Run of River Hydropower Dams (CNR)*



- > Most projects (esp. joint) proposed were infrastructures – but not much implemented due to war, instability, and 1975 Declaration, except 1971 “Nam Ngum dam”

# Cooperation since 1995

- 1995 – Agreement on the Cooperation for the Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin, with C, L, T and V as members. China and Myanmar joined as “Dialogue Partners” in 1996.
  - **Legal:** Mekong Agreement (replaced all previous MC agreements), added MRC Procedures
  - **Institutional:** MRC (Council, JC, Secretariat), added Summit, Expert Groups, committees, Regional Stakeholder Forums
  - **Strategic:** formulated Basin Development Strategy, other thematic/sector strategies, but no BDP yet
  - **Technical:** expanded monitoring, added forecasting, improved assessments/studies, guidelines
- >BDS promotes the development of joint projects (both infrastructures and non-infrastructures)
- >3<sup>rd</sup> Summit calls for “joint efforts and partnerships”





Benefit sharing  
>> joint projects

**1995 Mekong Agreement Article 2:**

- To promote, support, cooperate and coordinate in the development of the full potential... of Mekong River Basin waters, with emphasis and preference on **joint and/or basin-wide development projects** and basin programmes through the formulation of a basin development plan... to seek assistance for and to implement at the basin level.

**>> Joint and/or basin-wide development projects are a primary form of cost & benefit sharing**



## Types of joint projects

### Non-infrastructure projects

**Projects leading** to coordinated national actions and investments of a non-structure nature in the respective countries to achieve a mutually beneficial outcome (under a MoU, agreement, etc), such as **navigation aids, common navigation rules, monitoring and flood warning systems**, and floodplain and watershed & floodplain management.

### Infrastructure projects

**Joint investments** (sharing costs and benefits) in infrastructure and facilities such as **storages with multiple purposes** from flood protection and navigation to energy and irrigation.

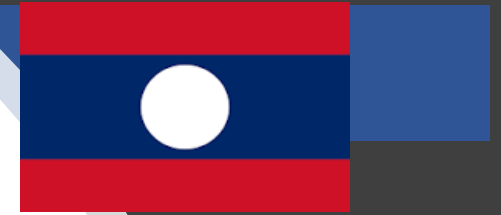


# MRC joint & TB projects



## Cambodia-Lao PDR:

1. Mekong-Sekong Fisheries Management
2. Cross border water resources development and management in Khonefall



## Cambodia-Thailand:

1. Tonle Sap - Songkhla Lake Basins Communication Outreach
2. Transboundary cooperation for flood and drought management in border area (9C-9T)



## Cambodia-Viet Nam:

1. Agreement on Waterway Transportation 2009
2. Transboundary fisheries management project in Preveeng-Dong Thap
3. Sesan – Srepok river basins water resources management
4. Mekong Delta Water Resources Management
5. Integrated flood management in the border area of Cambodia and Viet Nam in the Mekong Delta (not funded)
6. Vessels and river classification project



## Lao PDR-Thailand:

1. Transboundary fisheries management in Bokeo and Chiang Rai
2. Xe Bang Hieng – Nam Kam River Basins Wetland Management
3. Safety regulations for navigation
4. Vessels and river classification



## Cambodia-Lao PDR-Viet Nam:

1. Sustainable water resources development and management in the Sekong, Sesan and Srepok river basins (not funded)

**Potential?**

**Lao PDR-Viet Nam**

**Thailand-Viet Nam**

# MRC-related joint water infrastructure projects



## Lao PDR-Thailand: Xaiyaburi Hydropower Project

- Proposed project in the Mekong Committee's Indicative Basin Plan and the 1994 Study (which was supposed to be further worked on with new MRC).
- However, further project study, assessment and preparation took place outside the new MRC framework.
- Project did become part of MRC database and was assessed as part of development scenarios by the MRC (in BDP Assessment 2011).
- Project notified and went through prior consultation under MRC framework.
- Many MRC recommendations were taken into account by Lao Government and developer (Thai/Lao) in improving project designs to avoid, minimize and mitigate possible impacts.
- The project will be monitored through the MRC Joint Environment Monitoring.

## Potential?

**Cambodia – Lao PDR**  
(power trade, joint hydropower project)

**Cambodia – Thailand**  
(flood and drought management)

**Cambodia – Viet Nam**  
(flood and drought management)

**Lao PDR – Viet Nam**  
(power trade, joint hydropower project)

**Thailand – Viet Nam**

# Summary

- Longstanding efforts of cooperation among the Mekong countries (and their partners) to develop and manage the Mekong river
- Cooperative efforts in the Mekong always been comprehensive – building legal regimes, institutional capacities, technical competence, and strategic basin-wide and joint planning/management
- Cooperation’s ultimate purpose is about: “to optimise the multiple-use and mutual benefits of all riparians and to minimise the harmful effects” (Article 1, MA)
- One primary instrument is “joint projects” where two or more countries have worked together on transboundary opportunities and issues
- So far, these have resulted in concrete achievements: mutual economic benefits, common rules for navigation, common understandings of issues, transboundary coordination mechanisms, joint action plans, strengthened data and information exchange and communication, etc
- Although some two countries are working together a great deal, other two countries (such as Laos-Viet Nam and Thailand-Viet Nam) could explore joint projects under MRC framework
- More “two countries” (including with China or Myanmar) could explore investing jointly in water infrastructure related projects – share costs and share benefits
- Partners and stakeholders should actively encourage and support member countries towards these ends

# Thank you

