

The background of the entire page is a photograph of two individuals in a rural field. On the left, a person wearing a dark jacket and a red patterned headscarf holds a large bundle of harvested rice stalks high above their head. On the right, another person wearing a grey jacket, a red headscarf, and a wide-brimmed hat also holds a large bundle of harvested rice stalks high above their head. The field is filled with green rice plants, and the background shows a line of trees under a blue sky with light clouds.

Commitment on Gender Mainstreaming

in Water Resources Development
in the Lower Mekong Basin

Cambodia • Lao PDR • Thailand • Viet Nam
For sustainable development



Gender Policy & Strategy

At the Mekong River Commission (MRC), achieving a balance between the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development has become increasingly important. Identified as one of the strategic objectives which form the cornerstone of the MRC vision for an economically prosperous, socially just and environmentally sound Mekong River Basin, social considerations have emerged as critical in the achievement of natural resources planning and development objectives. Among them, gender is a priority issue. For the riparian countries, it is also an issue of national priority in order to increase the equitable economic and social benefits of development activities. Gender has been emphasized as a major socio-economic variable of a crosscutting nature that needs to be taken into account in all aspects of MRC's development programming.

In this regard the MRC Gender Strategy and Policy were developed and endorsed by the governments of the riparian countries through the MRC council in 1998 and 2000 respectively.



MRC Gender Policy

Successful integrated water resources management calls for a cross-sectoral approach to the planning, development, use and protection for water resources. Such an integrated approach links institutional, managerial, social, gender and economic aspects with technical analysis and problem solving, offering opportunities for development that responds to the various needs of all, men and women, on an equitable basis.

Following the approval of a Gender Strategy by the four Member Countries, the purpose of this policy is to define the main approach of the Mekong River Commission to address gender issues in water and related resources development in the lower Mekong Basin. ■

Rationale for MRC Gender Policy



Scope

The Mekong River Commission's focus is on "gender", rather than on "women". Gender refers to roles, responsibilities, needs, interests, and capacities of both men and women. These are influenced by social and cultural factors. Therefore the term "gender" is not synonymous to the term "sex" which refers exclusively to biological differences.

In the Mekong context, co-operation within the framework of the Mekong River Commission (MRC) is aimed at achieving optimum integrated development of water and related resources in the Mekong Basin in a sustainable way and to improve the quality of life of the riparian peoples.

Men and women often play different roles in the development, and accordingly, have different needs, interests, access to, and control of resources. A gender perspective is required to ensure that the specific needs of men and women, vulnerabilities and capacities are properly recognized and addressed.

Goal

The overall objective of the Policy is to mainstream gender perspectives in all MRC development efforts, ensuring that all MRC development programmes benefit men and women equally, in accordance with their different needs, and with the input and equal participation of men and women at all levels. ■



Guiding Principles

- 1 Gender equity and equality is considered an integral part of all MRC programmes, projects and activities.
- 2 Effectiveness and efficiency in achieving development goals require the recognition that every MRC activity affects women and men differently and that their different perspectives, needs, interests, roles and resources should be taken into account at every stage.
- 3 Gender equity and equality are fundamental values that must be strengthened and reflected in development choices and institutional practices.

Strategies and activities to support the achievement of Gender Policy

The approval of the MRC Gender Strategy by the four riparian countries in 1998 reinforced the commitments of the MRC as a River Basin development and management organization and facilitates the fulfillment of the gender policy.



To achieve its goal, MRC shall:

- 1** Ensure equal opportunities among female and male staff members in the areas of recruitment, promotion, privileges, training and working conditions.
- 2** Make every effort to have data disaggregated by sex for needs assessment and programme planning and to include gender analysis into programme design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- 3** Increase awareness and skills of staff and line agency officials in considering the social differences between men and women when designing, implementing and evaluating programmes.
- 4** Conduct a systematic review of, and put in place, institutional procedures which ensure that the needs of boys and girls, men and women, are all met equitably when planning the MRC development activities. ■

MRC GENDER STRATEGY

The MRC Gender Strategy aims at integrating and promoting gender perspectives in the directions, policies, plans, programmes and projects of the Mekong River Commission (MRC). This strategy is to support the general strategy aiming at a sustainable environmental and social development in the Mekong River Basin. Among those listed within the framework of the MRC Strategic Plan are the formulation of organisational policies for integrating social issues into development activities related to water and other resources, enhancing the implementation of these policies through a structured awareness campaign and capacity-building through the dissemination of supportive management tools.



(Main components)

- 1 Formulation of gender sensitive policies**
- 2 Obtaining commitment and support of top level MRC officials and managers**
- 3 Creation of gender awareness in organisational culture**
- 4 Capacity building in gender and development**
- 5 Institutionalising gender responsive organizational structure and procedures**
- 6 Provision of necessary tools for implementing gender responsive development practices**



The first component refers to the formulation of a gender policy for the MRC. This should facilitate the redefining of the development objectives, institutional set-up and process in order to reflect the perspectives and priorities of both men and women. This should contribute to reducing gender disparities in development efforts for a sustainable utilization of water and other resources.

The second component of the gender strategy includes obtaining commitment and support of top level MRC officials and managers. This is done through organising gender sensitisation events for members of the MRC Council, Joint Committee, and senior staff of the Mekong River Commission Secretariat (MRCS), as well as decision makers of water resources line agencies in the riparian countries.

In order to gradually induce change in the organization culture, training courses or other events on gender sensitivity are to be organised for all levels of staff in relevant line agencies, National Mekong Committees and the MRCS.

Formulating of MRC Gender Policy

1

Organisational Commitment

2

Creation of gender awareness in the organisational culture

3

Capacity-building in gender and development

4

Gender Responsive Organisation

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Capacity-Building in gender and development has been highlighted as another important part of the gender strategy. It consists of conducting training courses on gender planning and gender analysis for MRCS and line agency project officers and provincial staff; the coordination of pilot projects in selected line agencies to train project officers in gender analysis at a practical level; and the coordination of formal education at a Master's degree level in the field of gender research and training for a core of riparian officials.

The fifth component of the MRC Gender Strategy is the institutionalisation of gender responsive organisational structures and procedures. This includes the establishment of a steering committee at the MRCS and gender focal points for line agencies of the riparian countries where appropriate. It is further to ensure that a member of the gender steering committee or gender focal points is taking part in important decision-making bodies. Also, the Mekong Project Management Manual and other project guidelines are to be made gender responsive. Finally, the establishment of a database for programmes and projects of the MRCS and line agencies should provide for data disaggregated by sex with training for responsible officers to be provided accordingly.

The last identified strategy is the provision of necessary tools for implementing gender responsive development practices. This includes the publication and dissemination of the “Guidelines for Mainstreaming Gender in Water Resources Development in the Lower Mekong Basin” in all riparian languages as well as the publication and distribution of the Gender Mainstreaming Handbook that provides a practical checklist.

Gender Tools

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The implementation of these components of the Strategy will contribute towards the achievement of a fair balance among the three dimensions of a sustainable development in the Mekong Basin: economic, environmental and social development for future generations.





Mekong River Commission

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www.mrcmekong.org

Office of the Secretariat in Vientiane (OSV)

Office of the Chief Executive Officer

184 Fa Ngoum Road,

P.O. Box 6101, Vientiane, Lao PDR

Tel: (856-21) 263 263

Fax: (856-21) 263 264