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Global Drivers in the Mekong River Basin

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Session: Global Drivers

Key Message

Economic development, namely construction of large dams remain a major driver in the Mekong River Basin. Demand for energy, increases in investment by the private sector (e.g. China, Vietnam, Thailand, Russia, Malaysia, etc) and efforts to regulate flows along the Mekong mainstream exacerbate this development.

Summary

In three scenarios (S1-S3), energy demand from Thailand and Vietnam are major drivers Mekong Basin resulting in a sharp increase in hydropower development in the Mekong region. In S1 and S3, dams designs are not fish friendly leading to theobliteration of the downstream fisheries. In S2, dams are built with innovative fish and sediment friendly technologies, enabling the maintenance of fisheries. Local farmers/fishers livelihoods continually change. In S1, remittances and migration factor strongly whereas in S2/S3, livelihoods are largely a mixture of rural and urban. The private sector controls fish and farming in S1 and only partially in S2/S3. As a result, social unrest in S3 breaks out across the Basin. While economic development has skyrocketed, civil society has continued to develop. In S1, civil society decides to engage with decision-makers and advocate for change. In S2, CSOs create partnerships and in S3 protest violently. Corruption is rampant in S1/S3 but maintained in S2 because of investment by the MDBs. Hydrologically, flood pulsing decreases; dry season flows increase and ecosystem services are lost. S2 sees some pulsing resulting in E-Flows and ecosystem services maintained. The nutritional needs

of society are of great concern, however not on the radar of investors. S1/S3 result in less animal protein availability whilst in S2 more protein is provided due to E-Flows. In conclusion, a water war breaks out in S3; stakeholders in S1 decide to surrender, as none of their efforts have been successful. Stakeholders in S2 coexist peacefully and ultimately change the development trajectory of the Mekong region.



HYDROPOWER PROJECTS IN THE MEKONG BASIN (CREATED BY JANET PONTIN, CPWF MEKONG)