Media Training Workshop Report

Reporting on Mekong Dams – Science, Policies and Voices from the Ground

An Giang, November 10th, 2015

I. Introduction

Mekong is one of the largest and most biologically diverse river in the world. With nutrients from the river, Mekong countries have became the largest rice producers and second highest diversity of natural fish in the world, nourishing 60 millions people in the basin. However, values of the river are threatened by development pressures in the region, especially by hydropower dams. In addition to six operational dams on the upstream part of China, 11 planned dams in the Lower Mekong are predicted to cause significant impacts, particularly on the Mekong Delta as the most downstream of the river.

Since the start of Xayaburi project in 2012, follow-up dam plans began to emerge, including Don Sahong, Pak Beng among others. The decision-making process on mainstream dams under procedures of the Mekong River Commission is in question with many concerns and criticism from different stakeholders. Laos government's unilateral decision on the construction of dams demonstrates that the "cooperation spirit" under the Mekong 1995 Agreement is overshadowed by national interests.

In that context, the training workshop ***Reporting on Mekong Dams – Science, Policies and Voices from the Ground*** was organized in order to provide participating journalists with new updates and diverse perspectives from the angles of science, policies and concerns of local communities in the Mekong basin.

Time: 15h-18h30, 10 November 2015
Venue: Hoa Binh 2 Hotel, No. 8 Le Hong Phong, Long Xuyen City, An Giang Province

Participants: 30 journalists from national and provincial newspapers, radio and television agencies in the Mekong Delta; guest speakers and NGOs representatives from Vietnam and Mekong countries.

II. Training Program

- Opening presentation: Overview of Mekong dams, Ms. Nguyen Thuy Hang, PanNature
- Mekong dams and potential impacts on environment, livelihoods and food security in the Mekong Delta, Dr. Le Anh Tuan, Can Tho University

- Mekong dams: Why science and policies failed? – Ms. Ame Trandem, International Rivers
- Lessons of hydropower dams and people's movement in Thailand, Ms. Premrudee Daorung, TERRA
- The UN Watercourse Convention: opportunities and the way ahead, Mr. Trinh Le Nguyen, PanNature
- Q&A: questions from participating journalists and responses from speakers

Workshop program and materials are published online in Vietnamese: http://nature.org.vn/vn/2015/11/hoi-thao-thuy-dien-me-cong-khoa-hoc-chinh-sach-va-tieng-noi-cong-dong/

Ms. Nguyen Thi Thuy Hang, PanNature: An overview of hydropower development on the Mekong River

With the hydropower potential of 23,000MW and 30,900MW in upstream and downstream respectively, hydropower is aggressively exploited in the Mekong region. Currently, on the upstream of Mekong river, China government has completed six hydropower dams and at least two other dams being built. At the downstream, 11 hydropower projects are being planned and Xayaburi dam is half completed. Among many regional cooperation mechanisms in the Mekong basin, Mekong River Commission (MRC) is the only institution that responsible for managing water resource for sustainable development. However, given that Mekong Agreement signed in 1995 is not illegal biding, cooperation under MRC is struggling. This illustrated by the failure of the PNPCA process for the Xayaburi and Don Sahong dams which is completed with no agreement of all MRC members. Currently, the most reliable and comprehensive assessment on the hydropower dams impacts is Strategic Environmental assessment (SEA) commissioned by MRC that was published in 2010. Two other important studies is Vietnam's Mekong Delta Study which expected to be finalized later this year and the study on Sustainable Management and Development of the Mekong River (Council Study) which is expected to complete in 2016.

Full presentation: http://nature.org.vn/vn/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/201115_TongquanThuydienMK.pdf

Dr. Nguyen Anh Tuan, Can Tho University: Mekong hydropower and potential impacts on the environment, livelihoods and food security of the Mekong Delta

Mekong River is the largest basin in Southeast Asia with a very important role for people's lives. For Vietnam's Mekong Delta, Mekong River is a source of food, especially fish. The hydropower development in the Mekong threats to water resources, fish stock, sediment and ecosystem of the Mekong Delta. If all the planed downstream dams will be built, damage of natural fisheries was estimated at 220,000 to 440,000 tons of white fishes per year, equivalent to a loss of 1 to 3 Can Tho Bridge per year. Furthermore, Mekong Delta also will be impacted by the decline in the amount of sediment, leading to a series of consequences, such as reduction of soil nutrients, reduction of plankton – food for fishes, river and costal erosion... Along with the other impacts that Mekong Delta suffer as climate change, rising sea levels, population growth and migration, land use changing, exploitation of natural resources, pollution, the Mekong dams will put this area at the peril.

In conclusion: 1/Vietnam, especially the Mekong Delta, absolutely have no significant benefit from the hydropower dams on the Mekong River. 2 / The losses will impact on the two largest economic mainstay of the Delta: agriculture and fisheries. Vietnam will be threaten to loss a leading role in the export of rice and food in the international market. 3/ Mekong hydropower will degrade permanently and unrecoverably wetlands ecosystems and biological diversity in the Mekong Delta. 4 / The poor people will be the most suffer from the dams impacts, leading migration on a large scale and upsetting the social order. 5/ Damage caused by hydropower dams would have a domino effect with many risks can not predicted. 6/ Operations of hydropower will challenge measures to adapt to climate change and cause many other consequences.

Full presentation: http://nature.org.vn/vn/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/201115_TacdongThuyDienMeCong.pdf

Ms. Ame Trandem, International Rivers: Damming the Future? Why science and policies have failed for the Mekong river thus far

Mekong River is the lifeblood of the Region. Following the MRC's SEA report, if all the mainstream dams will be built in lower Mekong, up to 60% of the total Mekong fish catch is at risk; nutrient rich sediment loads will be cut in half. While experience around the world indicates that these impacts cannot be mitigated, hydropower dams will affect livelihoods of approximately 40 million people in the Mekong Basin, food security of 2 million people at risk. Main recommendation of SEA suggests that decisions on mainstream dams should be deferred for a period of ten years for comprehensive scientific studies to be completed. However, Xayaburi dam is building, illustrating the failures of PNPCA and showing the necessary of a transparent, participatory decision making process and more comprehensive, inclusive studies.

In conclusions, what we need are: 1/Reform to the PNPCA process to allow for regional decision-making processes by states and people; 2/ Transboundary EIAs and baseline data as standard for shared rivers; 3/MRC Council Study and Mekong Delta Study to feed into planning processes; 4/Comprehensive energy options assessed; 5/A working mechanism for mediation and remedy.

Recommendations: Stop all construction and decisions over Mekong dams until more informed decision-making can take place by ensuring that: 1/ A more participatory approach towards decision-making over the shared river is required between stakeholders, especially riparian people; 2/Prior consultation *and agreement* should be sought for all hydropower projects on shared rivers; 3/ Science must trump politics in decision-making, baseline data, transboundary/cumulative impact assessments, and comprehensive energy options assessments must be a prerequisite; 4/ Rather than stakeholders having to demonstrate impacts; the burden of proof of impact and the effectiveness of mitigation should lie with the developers and be open to scientific scrutiny; 5/ The Mekong River should no longer be seen as an economic commodity, but rather valued for the ecosystem services it provides.

Full presentation: http://nature.org.vn/vn/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/201115_Ame-Trandem_Final.pdf

Ms. Prerudee Daoroung, Toward Ecological Recovery and Regional Alliance (TERRA): Can fishermen fight? Dams and people's movement in the Mekong Region: Some observations

In Thailand, the struggle with the Pak Mun dam has undergone 16 governments so far. Currently every year Thai people still have to negotiate with the The Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) to open the dam for free water flow. Pak Mun dam case can show how difficult and strained of people's anti-dam movement. Movements for the hydropower projects do not just happen in Thailand, but also in the upstream of Mekong river, where China's Man Taiwan dam was built in 1986, and even in Lao, where the Nam Theun 2 dam built. People everywhere in the dam sites always suffer from negative impacts. That has explained the reasons why people want to fight the dams. Currently, the Thai people are sued EGAT to the Administrative Court of Thailand. This shows that they always try to involve new actors in their movement. I believe that the movement for the dam will become increasingly stronger. According to my observations, the cooperation between communities, scientists, the media is extremely necessary for the common goal to protect sustainable Mekong river

Full presentation: http://nature.org.vn/vn/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/201115_Can-fishermen-fight.pdf

Mr. Trinh Le Nguyen, PanNature: The UN Water Convention: Opportunities and the way ahead

Mekong Agreement is not a legally binding treaty. With that limitation, the UN Watercourses Convention (UNWC) can be an opportunity to fill the gaps of the 1995 Mekong Agreement. UNWC currently is supported by 103 and take effect from last year (2014) after Vietnam's ratification as 35th countries to adopt it. The strength of the Convention are clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of the parties; have mechanisms for settlement of disputes and disagreements; covering the whole river basin, including tributaries; defining burden of proof belongs to the proposals ... The Convention has the potential to strengthen the Mekong Agreement and Mekong River Commission. However, the question is whether UNWC can apply to all other countries? With the Mekong Basin, it's necessary to have participation of Thailand, Laos, Cambodia. UNWC ratification would be more difficult with Lao, however, if all the countries approve UNWC, Lao will also have to consider participation because of its benefits.

Full presentation: http://nature.org.vn/vn/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/UNWC_Presentation_An-Giang-Nov-2015.pdf

Discussion

Question: Currently, there is a large number of countries began to participate in the Mekong basin cooperation as the US, Japan, South Korea…. China also recently announced a new mechanism for the Lancang - Mekong. Whether participation of China in the Mekong Basin just because of involvement of "big factor" in the basin?

Ms. Premrudee Daoroung: On my view, China has been the biggest factor involved in the Mekong. Apart from the upstream dam cascades, they invest in many dams in the lower basin. China has also established the large financial institutions in Asia, so participating of this country with new mechanism is understandable.

Ms. Ame Trandem: China is the largest dam constructor in the world. China has exploited most hydropower potential on their river with about 65,000 dams nationwide and is currently largely invest in dams abroad. The dam projects in the Mekong region are attractive to Chinese enterprises because of lacking strict requirement on accountability and transparency. However, the situation has changed as many projects with participation of China was opposed in recent times. China is faced with requirement of improvement in environmental and social standards to minimize risks.

Dr. Le Anh Tuan: The problem lies in geopolitics. China is the exporter of dam technical and dam equipment, the world's largest hydropower constructor. However, there is also the ongoing movement against the dam so the investment of China was not easy. China's invest in dams in Myanmar currently struggling due to process of democratization. In that context, the downstream countries with limitation on management, corruption is more easily accessible for Chinese companies.

Question: Laos needs power to grow. Do neighboring countries have alternative options for Lao if not agree with Laos to develop hydropower dams?

Dr. Le Anh Tuan: Laos can produce hydropower on tributaries for its energy demand. Studies on Vu Gia-Thu Bon and Son La hydropower projects shows that damage from the dams even outweighs benefits. Nowadays technology gives us many options for alternative energy such as solar, wind, tidal... with large initial investment, but less social and environmental cost. Laos can not be in poverty without relying on hydro electricity. However, the international community and Vietnam, Cambodia can negotiate with Laos on other solutions rather than hydropower development. Actually, profit from hydropower falls into the pocket of an interest group and not bring wealth to the people, so social injustice lies elsewhere, not in electricity.

Ms. Ame Trandem: Hydropower is the traditional technology with very high costs and actual costs are not included, especially social and environmental cost. Some countries already have plans to remove dams to invest in more sustainable energy. In order to have sustainable energy strategy, governments have to set goals to develop methods to fully account the costs of negative impact, so that alternative energy sources may compete. Furthermore, energy sufficiency should be prioritized.

Mrs. Premrudee Daoroung: Investors always have many claims why hydropower is better than other source of energy. In hydropower development issues, a lot of false allegations were made public. A country like Laos with the population of just 6 million, why they need to 300 dams?! If the final goal of development is for social security, food security, good education, good health care... then why we should build dams? Dam is not in the interests of people, and part of the money fall into the pockets of corrupt individuals. For example, Thailand do not need import electricity from Laos but Thailand still do because companies "lobby" with authorities.

Mr. Trinh Le Nguyen: Mentioning about the interests of people in the Mekong hydropower issue should also include the fact that Vietnam have 20 millions people living in the Delta. So, justice for people must consider in all countries equally, not just for one particular nation. Mekong tributaries are absolutely sufficient for Laos to meet their energy demands. However, if all the countries agree to discuss about the benefits and responsibilities, we may have better solutions for Laos and all other countries in the

basin. The solutions are not necessarily to aid to or invest in Laos but rather than facilitate their development. Such tradeoff could help Vietnam and Cambodia to avoid losing the benefits that Mekong River brings.

Workshop Closed

Appendix I: Media Coverage after the Workshop

1. http://dantri.com.vn/xa-hoi/nuoc-nao-cung-xay-dap-tren-song-me-cong-moi-nam-viet-nam-mat-3-cau-can-tho-20151112105745147.htm
2. http://www.nguoidothi.vn/vn/news/chuyen-hom-nay/binh-luan/7744/trien-vong-moi-cho-dong-me-kong-.ndt
3. http://www.baoangiang.com.vn/An-Giang-24-Gio/Thoi-su/Noi-lo-thuy-ien-tren-song-Me-Kong.html
4. http://www.tapchicongsan.org.vn/Home/PrintStory.aspx?distribution=36084&print=true
5. http://laodong.com.vn/xa-hoi/hay-cuu-lay-song-me-cong-395548.bld
6. http://www.thanhnien.com.vn/kinh-te/dbscl-co-the-mat-hang-ti-usd-moi-nam-632477.html
7. http://dailo.vn/Hay-cuu-lay-song-Mekong-04-820143112235559772.htm
8. http://baotainguyenmoitruong.vn/moi-truong-va-phat-trien/tin-tuc/201511/tiep-tuc-phan-doi-xay-dung-dap-thuy-dien-tren-dong-chinh-song-me-kong-2641125/
9. http://tuoitre.vn/tin/chinh-tri-xa-hoi/20151111/40-trieu-dan-bi-anh-huong-boi-dap-thuy-dien-song-mekong/1000789.html
10. http://baotainguyenmoitruong.vn/moi-truong-va-phat-trien/tin-tuc/201511/tiep-tuc-phan-doi-xay-dung-dap-thuy-dien-tren-dong-chinh-song-me-kong-2641125/
11. http://www.thesaigontimes.vn/138266/DBSCL-se-ton-that-nang-tu-cac-dap-thuy-dien-tren-song-Mekong.html
12. http://thegioitiepthi.net/the-gioi-hoi-nhap/xay-thuy-dien-luu-vuc-mekong-tac-hai-toan-dien-va-khon-luong/
13. http://baocantho.com.vn/?mod=detnews&catid=63&p=0&id=171727
14. http://www.doanhnhansaigon.vn/van-de/bao-ve-dong-me-kong-cho-the-he-sau/1093312/
15. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yHNtIOY1k0Y
16. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l23-_A8NnQA
17. http://english.thesaigontimes.vn/44025/Damming-puts-Vietnam%E2%80%99s-Mekong-Delta-at-risk.html
18. http://www.talkvietnam.com/2015/11/mekong-river-hydro-dams-to-take-heavy-toll-on-vietnam-experts/
19. http://www.vietmaz.com/2015/11/mekong-river-hydro-dams-to-take-heavy-toll-on-vietnam-experts/

Appendix II: List of Participants

#	Name	Organization
1	Lâm Thanh Bảo Hạnh	Báo điện tử dailo.vn
2	Lê Quỳnh	Người Đô Thị
3	Nguyễn Chí Nhân	Báo Thanh Niên
4	Trần Đức Vịnh	Báo Tuổi Trẻ TPHCM
5	Huỳnh Như	Truyền hình Vĩnh Long
6	Đặng Công Mạo	Thông Tấn Xã Việt Nam
7	Đặng Công Tứ	Thông Tấn Xã Việt Nam
8	Lê Nguyễn Ngọc Bích	Thế giới tiếp thị
9	Nguyễn Hữu Đức	Báo Nông nghiệp Việt Nam
10	Huỳnh Kim Huynh	Thời báo Kinh tế Sài Gòn
11	Đào Anh Dũng	Truyền hình Vĩnh Long
12	Phạm Thanh Phong	Truyền hình Vĩnh Long
13	Võ Hữu Giao	Truyền hình Vĩnh Long
14	Nguyễn Hữu Tuấn	Truyền hình Vĩnh Long
15	Nguyễn Hoàng	Truyền hình Vĩnh Long
16	Tư Duy	Đài Truyền hình Vĩnh Long
17	Trần Khải	Đài Truyền hình Vĩnh Long
18	Phạm Vũ Nhật Hồ	Báo Lao động
19	Lê Trung Hiếu	Báo An Giang online
20	Nguyễn Thị Mỹ Linh	Báo An Giang online
21	Nguyễn Tấn Cường	Đài PT&TH tỉnh Hậu Giang
22	Nguyễn Văn Vũ	Đài PT&TH tỉnh Hậu Giang
23	Nguyễn Nhật Liên	Đài PT&TH tỉnh Hậu Giang
24	Lê Thị Thúy Diễm	Đài PT&TH tỉnh Hậu Giang
25	Lục Thanh Tùng	Lao Động
26	Ngô Chuẩn	Báo An Giang
27	Nguyễn Hành	Dân Trí
28	Nguyễn Thị Hồng Vân	VRN/WARECOD
29	Dương Thu Hằng	VRN/WARECOD
30	Premrudee Daoroung	TERRA
31	Juhani Mikael Klemettti	MEENet
32	Phairin Sohsai	Tổ chức Sông ngòi Quốc tế
33	Rose Katharine Alice Christine	Tổ chức Sông ngòi Quốc tế
34	Ame Trandem	Tổ chức Sông ngòi Quốc tế
35	Senglong Yourk	FACT
36	Oudom Ham	EarthRight International
37	Ts. Lê Anh Tuấn	Đại học Cần Thơ
38	Đoàn Thị Thuý Hoa	Phiên dịch
39	Đoàn Thị Thu Thuỷ	Phiên dịch
40	Trịnh Lê Nguyên	PanNature
41	Hoàng Văn Chiên	PanNature
42	Nguyễn Thị Thúy Hằng	PanNature