
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Seventieth session

Bangkok, 4-8 August 2014 (Phase II)

Item 3(d) of the provisional agenda*

Review of issues pertinent to the subsidiary structure of the Commission, including the work of the regional institutions: environment and development

Report of the Mekong River Commission**

Note by the secretariat

The Secretariat transmits to the Commission the report submitted by the Coordinating Committee for Geoscience Programmes in East and Southeast Asia for information.

Summary

The Mekong River Commission (MRC) is entering its fourth year of implementation of its Strategic Plan 2011-2015 (SP 2011-2015). Since March 2009 when the framework of MRC's core functions to implement the 1995 Mekong Agreement was endorsed by its Joint Committee, MRC has been preparing for a transition towards an organisation based on core functions. The MRC Strategic Plan (SP) focuses on two main priorities: (1) implementation of the IWRM-based Basin Development Strategy, and (2) transition towards a decentralised mode of increasing Member Country implementation of the MRC's core functions and streamlining of the Secretariat aligned with core functions..

The MRC has continued to implement the IWRM-based Basin Development Strategy. The Basin Development Strategy will be updated in 2014 based on core river basin management functions; the updated Strategy will then direct the preparation of action plans at the regional and national levels in 2015 for implementation starting in 2016.

As for the Decentralisation, the MRC Joint Committee has agreed to the Recommendations of the Regional Roadmap for the Core River Basin Management Function (CRBMF) Decentralisation. The Secretariat is requesting the agreement by the MRC Council at the upcoming 20th Meeting on 25-27 June 2014. The MRC is also discussing its Member Country Contributions as the current formula expires in 2014. The decentralization reform process requires strengthening links between national and regional levels, strengthening capacities of Member Country agencies for the increased roles, and strengthening regional level expertise and coordination for the implementation of the MRC's core functions.

MRC is streamlining its strategic planning and reporting based on the CRBMF. The streamlined planning approach will replace the existing process of 15 different strategic and programme planning processes and results-chains including 13 MRC

* E/ESCAP/70/L.1/Rev.1.

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Programmes, the Basin development Strategy and the MRC Strategic Plan and will reduce duplications. The streamlined planning process aims for a simpler and effective MRC performance system, with only one set of goals, outcomes, outputs and activities focusing on the MRCs core functions. It will also lead to a less complex monitoring, evaluation and reporting system.

With support from Development Partners, Programmes made good progress in their implementation. The Agriculture and Irrigation Programme (AIP) is now making good progress on its studies, capacity building, and databasing in priority areas and most importantly its update and upgrade on the MRC Irrigation Database. The Basin Development Programme (BDP) is supporting the implementation of the Basin Action Plan (BAP) promoting greater integration of regional and national activities. The Drought Management Programme (DMP), with some financial contribution from GIZ, completed as actions including impact assessment of drought and climate change in the Mekong Delta and Central Highland of Viet Nam and initial vulnerability assessment of the four Member Countries to find out drought risk and vulnerable areas. Environment Programme (EP) implements several activities including water quality monitoring of the Mekong River and its tributaries, publication of its annual reports and Report Cards on water quality and ecological health and the report on the baseline survey of the Social Impact monitoring and Vulnerability Assessment (SIMVA). Flood Management and Mitigation Programme (FMMP) continued its regular activities of daily flood forecasts and flash flood guidance information during the flood season, and river monitoring during the dry season. Actions were also taken for the incorporation of climate change into MRC's short term flood forecasting system and the long term flood simulation modelling. The Fisheries Programme (FP) continued to support a science-based understanding of fisheries issues through dissemination of fisheries management information and maintaining active engagement with key stakeholders in the region. The Integrated Capacity Building Programme (ICBP) made good progress in provision of necessary technical competencies for MRC, NMCs and prioritised national agencies to integrate IWRM principles into policy making, planning and implementation as well as establishment of an effective integrated and sustainable capacity building mechanism to support the work of the MRC and NMCs. The Information and Knowledge Management Programme (IKMP) implemented a number of activities to reach the development objective of IKMP 2011-2015 by effectively supporting MRC Programmes, NMCS and relevant line agencies on the development and management of water and related resources in the Mekong Basin by providing basin-wide monitoring, impact assessment, modelling, forecasting, and knowledge management system for planning and programme implementation work. The Initiative on Sustainable Hydropower (ISH) has continued some of its activities including raising awareness of risks and opportunities in hydropower development, supporting dialogue and capacity building, both regionally and in tributary sub-basins, towards sustainable hydropower as well as developing trial planning and dialogue tools to promote planning and implementation of sustainable hydropower. Mekong-Integrated Water Resources Management Programme (M-IWRMP) set up a Joint Platform to improve the implementation of the MRC Procedures and roll out the Capacity Development Action Plan (CDAP). Navigation Programme (NAP) has also made a good progress with activities to improve the safety condition for the navigation on the Mekong River to help increase cross-border and international trade opportunities. Watershed Management Project (WSMP) has continued to implement its communication and outreach activities, support the Nam Ton watershed management Pilot Project, and prepared for the basin wide watershed conference to exchange experiences and lessons learned.

As the MRC continues to explore opportunities for expansion of its cooperation with Dialogue Partners and Development Partners as guided by the MRC Hua Hin Declaration, cooperation with China and Myanmar has been further strengthened through (1) official visits and exchange, especially the recent visit to Beijing to strengthen cooperation and renew the MRC Agreement on the Provision of Hydrological Information of the Lancang/Mekong River in Flood Season by the Ministry of Water Resources of the People's Republic of China to MRC Secretariat; (2) participation in symposiums, the annual Dialogue Meeting, Junior Riparian Professional (JRP) Project and regular follow up meetings with the Permanent Representative to UNESCAP in Bangkok, China focal point for MRC, and the Ministry of Forestry and Environmental Conservation as well as the embassy of Myanmar in Vientiane respectively.

In parallel to seeking and expanding funding opportunities through cooperation with Development Partners and keeping them engaged and better informed of the latest development in MRC strategic matters and opportunities for financial or technical cooperation, the MRC Secretariat has continuously worked to maintain and improve technical partnerships with other regional and international organisations and River Basin Organizations through various mechanisms of partnerships including organization of and participation in the workshop/seminar/technical forum, secondment of experts/exchange of staff, technical and reciprocal visits, study tours and experience exchange.

All in all the MRC achievements in 2013 contributed towards the achievements of the goals set out in the Basin Development Strategy and the MRC Strategic Plan 2011-2015.

REPORT

1. The MRC Council at its Nineteenth Meeting in January 2013 reviewed the implementation of the IWRM-based Basin Development Strategy and the SP 2011-2015. The Joint Session of the Council and Development Partner Consultative Group also reviewed the progress of the implementation of the Hua Hin Declaration. The following report provides a brief account of activities of the MRC in 2013.

I. THE PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MRC STRATEGIC PLAN 2011-2015

2. MRC River Basin M&E reporting system was updated in 2012 and applied in 2013. The focus of the reporting is being shifted towards results-based and indicators monitoring. Workshops and coaching sessions were organized to support the programmes to apply the new reporting content. There is a clear evidence of the improvement of the programmes reporting in 2013. Programmes have started to report on their indicators and implemented some data collection. Even though the outcomes are not 100% evidence-based, there were efforts put in determining the indicator status. In the spectrum of the results chain, majority of programmes have shown overall satisfaction in the Activity and Output reports and are facing difficulty in verifying outcomes. The issues are that programmes had been running without continuous follow up mechanisms to trace programme outcome developments over time - meaning that they lack collaborative RBM&E mechanism between national and regional levels to produce and monitor outcomes.

3. The development of RBM&E system is planned for a 3 years period with 3 stages: Alignment, Capacity, and Change. Currently we have completed the Alignment stage with the following achievements.

- Alignment of programmes with Strategic Plan
- Development of New Results-based reporting templates
- Operationalize the reporting mechanism
- Indicator sharpening of 13 programmes
- Raised awareness on RBM&E Concepts & Principles
- Establishment of RBM&E focal point
- Development of RBM&E Manual
- MRC Mid-term Review

4. The review of the institutional arrangement during the Mid-term Review of MRC has led us to the understanding of the challenges faced in institutionalizing RBM&E. There is no doubt that the MRC organizational change will bring a significant change to the RBM&E system, for this reason we will have to start preparing a pragmatic approach towards the future of MRC RBM&E.

II THE DECENTRALISATION OF THE CORE RIVER BASIN MANAGEMENT FUNCTIONS

5. The on-going reform process to decentralise MRC's core river basin management functions (CRBMFs) to Member Countries is part of MRC's strategy to create a leaner organisation that is more in line with its mandate specified in the 1995 Mekong Agreement. Therefore, for MRC the key objective of this reform through the decentralisation process is to establish greater balance and synergies between regional and national levels in the implementation of its activities for effectiveness and long-term sustainability of the organisation. As such, the decentralization reform process requires strengthening links between national and regional levels, strengthening capacities of member country agencies for the increased roles, and strengthening regional level expertise and coordination for the implementation of the MRC's core functions.

6. As reported last year, National Roadmap materials and portions of the Regional Roadmap have been available since mid-December 2012, for the MRC Programmes to review and provide feedback in preparing for follow-up consultations within the Secretariat and with Member Countries. Progress in the preparation of the Roadmaps and messages as well as implications for MRC, Member Countries and MRC Secretariat derived from the early drafts of the National and Regional Roadmaps were presented to the Council members and Development Partners at the 17th Donor Consultative Group meeting held back to back with the 19th Council meeting in January 2013. By December 2013, National and Regional Roadmaps have been finalised, ready for the next step of official approval by the Joint Committee and Council.

7. Prepared during the first quarter of 2013 and available by May 2013, Part 2 of the Regional Roadmap identifies generally what is needed to strengthen implementation at both regional and national levels and provides preliminary options for operational, structural, staffing and financial reform to support decentralised implementation. These reform requirements and options were presented to Member Countries and MRCS Programmes thereafter for deliberative discussion and consideration. The NMCs and line agencies discussed and reviewed these between June and December 2013.

8. Since July 2013, the MRC Secretariat conducted two in-depth financial analyses with consultancy support of external financial experts, to review the existing formula of Member Country contribution to the MRC's Operating Expenses Budget (OEB), and to review the MRC's future budget requirements in the context of CRBMF decentralisation and organisational reform. By December 2013, the OEB review report has been available for internal MRCS review, while preliminary findings and analyses of the total MRC budget requirements from 2016 until 2030 were discussed with the MRCS senior management staff but the final report will be available only in January 2014. Alternative options on Member contribution formula and financing scenarios and strategies have been prepared as part of these analyses to support discussion with Member Countries. Preliminary

discussions with individual countries have started, but negotiation across all four countries has been delayed to early 2014.

III PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION

1. Agriculture and Irrigation Programme (AIP)

9. During 2013 AIP conducted studies, capacity building, and databasing in priority areas. Preparatory work and study was conducted on necessary conditions for long term projection on food security and poverty reduction in Member Countries of Lower Mekong Basin, and a report was produced. The biggest activity was updating and upgrading the MRC Irrigation Database, which has made significant achievement while some remaining work is still in progress and expected to complete by middle of 2014. On the agricultural groundwater use, significant progress is made by each national working group. The selection of the site was completed, first training workshop for national working groups was conducted while field characterization is implemented by each national working group. A joint project for development of guidelines for fish-friendly irrigation schemes is being implemented by two programmes.

10. A series of workshops for technical harmonization in irrigation was also continued from previous year. The workshops intended capacity building of young irrigation professionals as well as their networking so that balanced technical capacity is developed by sharing information and learning from each other. The 2nd and 3rd workshops conducted in 2013 focused on technical rules, standards and guidelines and higher education and professional training contents in national irrigation agencies.

11. Capacity needs assessment was conducted with concerned line agencies in agriculture and irrigation sectors. Realizing IWRM concepts, the assessment was conducted by using questionnaires which covered related capacity needs in policy, organization, human resources, legal frame, finance, capacity building programs, protocols for project planning, design, construction, and operations and maintenance. National consultation meetings and regional consultation meeting were completed, a report is being finalized.

2. Basin Development Plan (BDP)

12. In line with the MRC mission, the BDP works to facilitate collaborative basin development planning process among MRC Member Countries and stakeholders. Implementation of the Basin Action Plan (BAP) has promoted greater integration of regional and national activities. It is estimated about 75% of the regional activities in the BAP are being addressed, totaling US\$ 40 million. About 40% of the national activities and projects in the BAP are completed or being implemented, including projects of basin-wide significance and bilateral (transboundary) projects. The total value of these projects is about US\$ 500 million. The basin-wide projects will reduce knowledge gaps and increase understanding of basin-scale issues and potentially expand the Development Opportunity Space (DOS). The bilateral projects will gather development opportunities through direct cooperation amongst countries.

13. In March 2013, the BDP Inception Report was formally approved and implementation commenced fully since. A complex activity such as regional benefit sharing in all water and related sectors was started, and the year saw the preparation of and consultations on a comprehensive review of

international experience and assessment approach and methodology. A hierarchy of strategic, assessment and monitoring indicators for the whole MRC in terms of managing and reporting on the Mekong river health and trends was developed involving many programmes such as hydropower, climate change and environment.

3. Climate Change and Adaptation Initiative (CCAI)

14. The MRC Climate Change Adaptation Initiative (CCAI) has been formulated in response to a call by the MRC Council at its Fourteenth Meeting to develop a cooperative regional initiative to provide knowledge, tools and capacity building and other assistance to the MRC Member Countries to better adapt to climate change. The Initiative's immediate objective is climate change adaptation planning and implementation guided by improved strategies and plans at various levels and in priority locations throughout the Lower Mekong Basin.

15. For 2013, Climate Change Adaptation Initiative (CCAI) continued to work to collect baseline data on past and projections of future climate as well as developed the MRC modelling system and analytical tools for use at both regional and national levels. The 2nd batch demonstration projects were set up in Member Countries to gather lessons learnt from the sites on adaptation planning. The lessons learnt and experience will be incorporated with feedbacks from workshops and exchange of experience in adaptation planning with related stakeholders in Member Countries to inform and guide the development of a Regional Climate Change Adaptation Strategy. Capacity Needs Assessment, Capacity Building Plan and Stakeholder Engagement Framework were completed. Preparation for the 1st Regional report on status of climate change and adaptation in the LMB and the Roadmap for the Mekong Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan was conducted to be consulted in 2014.

4. Drought Management Programme (DMP)

16. The objective of the Project is to establish effective drought planning and management mechanisms in the Lower Mekong Basin supported by the best available tools and technical expertise. The Project also facilitates the implementation of high priority national and regional programmes and multi-purposes projects related to drought management.

17. Drought Management Programme started its initial activities in 2013 by a financial contribution from GIZ with an amount of US\$ 133,000 for "basin-wide analysis of drought and climate change impacts and measures for adaptation options to mitigate the impacts" and "study on drought monitoring system for the LMB". With such limited fund, DMP has completed the impacts assessment of drought and climate change in the Mekong Delta and Central Highland of Viet Nam focusing on adaptation strategies application for certain impacts and in Battambang and Banteay Meanchey Provinces of Cambodia. The Programme has also carried out an initial vulnerability assessment of four member Countries finding out the drought risk and vulnerable areas with a combination of different drought indicator indices namely meteorological, hydrological, agricultural, land use, irrigation, and ground water indices.

5. Environment Programme (EP)

18. The EP aims to assist Member Countries in executing the articles in the 1995 Agreement that relate to the protection of the environment and the

prevention and cessation of harmful effects on the river system. To ensure water quality according to the Procedures for Water Quality (PWQ) adopted in 2011, the EP has conducted a number of activities including water quality monitoring of the Mekong River and its tributaries. The data and results from the 2011 ecological health survey were analysed and prepared for publishing as an MRC Technical Paper and Mekong River Card. Annual reports and Report Cards on water quality and ecological health were published.

19. The EP has, like every second year, conducted ecological health monitoring to support surveys in agreed sites of each Member Country. Furthermore, EP completed the report on the baseline survey of the Social Impact monitoring and Vulnerability Assessment (SIMVA) conducted in 2011. This will serve as a basis for monitoring of socio-economic conditions among rural people living close to the Lower Mekong mainstream. In order to promote regional collaboration on transboundary water quality emergency management, EP organized a study visit to USA and Canada for our Member Countries to study and learn from a well-established collaboration on shared water resources.

6. Flood Management and Mitigation Programme (FMMP)

20. The overall goal of the FMMP 2011-2015 is in line with the MRC Strategic Plan (SP) Goal: ‘Member Countries apply basin-wide IWRM approaches in national water and related sector frameworks and development programmes’. Some of the FMMP’s significant outputs achieved in 2013 included daily flood forecasts and flash flood guidance information during the flood season, and river monitoring during the dry season, through the MRC website and dissemination to a wide network of stakeholders for Flash Flood and Flood Warning.

21. FMMP has also enhanced understanding, knowledge and skills of personnel of the National Centers, and is building knowledge and skills for staff of line agencies and technical centers in the Member Countries on application of Integrated Flood Risk Management. FMMP has raised awareness, understanding, knowledge and skills for dedicated personnel of national line agencies of the MCs. FMMP is incorporating climate change into MRC’s short term flood forecasting system and the long term flood simulation modeling. The results of the upgraded and recalibrated Toolbox Models under the MRC Decision Support Framework for high flow in the Lower Mekong Basin will become available mid 2014.

7. Fisheries Programme (FP)

22. The goal of FP 2011-2015 is that ‘Riparian governments and other stakeholders make sustainable and effective use of the Mekong’s fisheries resources to alleviate poverty while protecting the environment’. The FP’s objective is thus “Regional and national organisations successfully implement measures for sustainable fisheries development and improved rural livelihoods”.

23. The FP has made efforts in enabling organisations to have a good, science-based understanding of the situation of fisheries in the Region by implementing effectively the Fisheries Programme 2011-2015 and packaging and disseminating effectively technical, scientific and fisheries management information on LMB fisheries. The FP has also kept key stakeholders engaged and maintained a high level of regional and national dialogue, as well as dialogue between sectors and programmes relevant to fisheries within a basin-wide IWRM framework, and guided the implementation of suitable

measures to maintain fisheries sustainability. To this end, FP is developing a basin-wide fisheries management and development strategy, designing guidelines for fish-friendly irrigation schemes, studying the socio-economic impacts and social implications from reduction of capture fisheries, undertaking classification of LMB fish habitats and assessing their yields, threats and opportunities for fisheries management and development, and is developing standard methods for capture fisheries monitoring to quantify impacts of water development projects.

8. Integrated Capacity Building Programme (ICBP)

24. The key outcomes of the ICBP for 2013 include: (i) to provide MRC, NMCs and prioritised national agencies with the necessary technical competencies to integrate IWRM principles into policy making, planning and implementation, (2) to equip MRC and NMCs (including their Secretariats) with the necessary organisational capability to effectively coordinate and support the achievement of MRC objectives, (3) to mainstream gender within the MRCS, and all IWRM work of the MRC, NMCs and prioritised national agencies, and (4) to establish an effective integrated and sustainable capacity building mechanism to support the work of the MRC.

25. In 2013, ICBP revised and updated module-based IWRM Competency Framework (CF) and made it available in four riparian languages. The CF has been used for capacity building activities by Member Countries and MRC Programmes. The CF is now used as a reference for ICBP and MRC Programmes to develop training modules on negotiation and facilitation skills, regional and national learning and sharing dialogues, basin planning, etc. ICBP has helped Viet Nam to apply the CF to develop job profiles and description for MONRE and VNMC staff. ICBP has intensively supported Human Resources Section (HRS) to facilitate the preparation for and implementation of the K&S Transfer Plan.

26. The intensive training courses for the Junior Riparian Professional from the four MRC riparian countries and 2 Dialogue Partners (China and Myanmar) JRPs such as IWRM, Project Cycle Management, Facilitation and Presentation Skills, Gender Mainstreaming, Logical Framework, etc. were facilitated by the in-house experts from the ICBP and relevant MRC Programmes. A numbers of former JRPs who completed their on-the-job training from MRC were promoted to higher positions and a number of them won scholarship for higher education from the well known Universities based on the knowledge they have gained from the MRC.

27. The new MRC Gender Toolkits providing guidelines and checklists for mainstreaming gender into organisational, programme/project and field implementation levels have helped the MRC Programmes, national gender teams and their consultants to include gender aspects into their work right from the beginning. In addition, ICBP together with gender focal points from relevant Programmes including EP, CCAI, BDP and an external gender expert from the Gender and Water Alliance (GWA), co-designed training module, co-facilitated gender training and provide further support to coach their team members to implement their gender action plans. ICBP is in the process of improving the effective integrated and sustainable capacity building mechanism to support the MRC Decentralisation and Riparianisation.

9. Information and Knowledge Management Programme (IKMP)

28. The Information and Knowledge Management programme (IKMP) was designed in 2005 as a cross cutting programme of the Mekong River Commission (MRC) which provides information and knowledge services to other programmes as well as to National Mekong Committees (NMCs) and Line Agencies (LAs). The development objective of IKMP 2011-2015 is to “effectively support MRC programmes, NMCS and relevant line agencies on the development and management of water and related resources in the Mekong Basin by providing basin-wide monitoring, impact assessment, modelling, forecasting, and knowledge management system for planning and programme implementation work”.

29. Based on the IKMP core functions, principally, IKMP well performed the fundamental monitoring, data management, modelling and knowledge management activities, regularly monitored and ensured the secured-hydro-meteorological and sediment, provided data sharing with MRCS programmes, MCs and LAs. IKMP obviously produced a number of significantly achievements in delivering data, tools, products and services to client agencies and users. Particularly, online data sharing services such real-time water level, rainfall data and the available data of MRC master catalogue. The results of modeling works have been provided to others MRC Programmes upon their purpose for using. IKMP well established and manage a platform for data and information exchange and sharing which called “MRC web portal”. The numbers of users of the portal have increased significantly since 2011.

10. Initiative on Sustainable Hydropower (ISH)

30. Hydropower remains a significant development opportunity in the Mekong basin and also poses a number of significant risks. The overall goal of the MRC’s Initiative on Sustainable Hydropower for 2011-2015 is to support cooperation among Member Countries with regards to sustainable forms of hydropower. In 2013, ISH has continued to raise awareness of risks and opportunities in hydropower development, and have supported dialogue and capacity building, both regionally and in tributary sub-basins, towards sustainable hydropower. Consultations have been held with different Mekong stakeholders along with Member Countries.

31. ISH has continued to develop and trial planning and dialogue tools to promote planning and implementation of sustainable hydropower. This included the Rapid Basin-wide Hydropower Sustainability Assessment Tool (RSAT), guidelines on the evaluation of hydropower and multipurpose project portfolios and a tool to support hydropower planning around ecologically sensitive areas. The MRC continued to provide advice to member countries on aspects of the Mekong mainstream dams evaluated against the MRC’s Preliminary Design Guidance. Options for national-to-local benefit-sharing mechanisms have been explored and each Member Country will now pursue further actions to develop this policy option. A substantial review of environmental and socio-economic baseline information for hydropower planning has been undertaken by ISH to support the MRC in filling knowledge gaps and uncertainties in different areas of water use and development. The findings will be used by MRC programmes to allow better planning and management of hydropower in the Basin.

11. Mekong Integrated Water Resources Management Project (M-IWRMP)

32. The Mekong Integrated Water Resources Management Project (M-IWRMP) supports the strengthening and enabling of integrated water resource management principles at all levels throughout the Lower Mekong Basin. In 2013, the TOR of a Joint Platform to improve the implementation of the MRC Procedures and roll out the Capacity Development Action Plan (CDAP) was finalized and the first Joint Platform regional meeting will be organized on 29 April 2014 at Bangkok, Thailand. Progress was made with understanding the implementation challenges around all five MRC Procedures including the Procedures for Notification, Prior Consultation and Agreement (PNPCA), Procedures for Maintenance of Flow on the Mainstream (PMFM), Procedures for Water Use Monitoring (PWUM), Procedures for water Quality (PWQ) and Procedures for Data and Information Exchange and Sharing (PDIES).

33. The M-IWRMP also made the MRC Toolbox available online as part of the MRC Portal webpage. In 2013, 17,648 people (52,879 people cumulatively from 2009 through 2013) from the Mekong region and outside of the Mekong region accessed the MRC Toolbox. Four transboundary projects have been approved for implementation, including (1) Cambodia – Lao People’s Democratic Republic: Transboundary IWRM-Based Fisheries Management on the Mekong and Sekong Rivers in Cambodia and the Lao People’s Democratic Republic; (2) Cambodia – Viet Nam: Transboundary cooperation between Cambodia and Viet Nam: Integrated Water Resources Management in the Sesan and Srepok Sub-basin; (3) Lao People’s Democratic Republic – Thailand: Transboundary cooperation for river basin management in Xe Bang Hieng and Nam Kam basin; and (4) Cambodia-Viet Nam: Transboundary cooperation in the Integrated Water Resources Management in the Mekong Delta.

34. A fifth bilateral project between Cambodia and Thailand: Communication Outreach cooperation project on IWRM implementation in Tonle Sap and Songkla Lakes aims at producing key communications messages on building resilience in resource based livelihoods. In 2013, the M-IWRMP also provided the technical and financial supports to the national projects of the Lower Mekong Basin countries to take loans from the World Bank to improve the Water Law Management. Lao government (MONRE/LAO) has been under the process of project implementation of M-IWRMP 1 with the loan of 18 million USD, while the Vietnamese government (MONRE/VIETNAM) has completed the project proposal of M-IWRMP 2 with the loan of 25 million USD. The Cambodian government (MOWRAM/Cambodia) has almost completed the project proposal of M-IWRMP 3 with the loan of around 15.50 million USD. The Thai government (MONRE/THAI) has used its government budget to implement and manage the Water Law improvement.

12. Navigation Programme (NAP)

35. NAP recently has been focusing on activities to improve the safety condition for the navigation on the Mekong River to help increase cross-border and international trade opportunities for navigation in the Mekong basin. The Navigation Programme has provided assistance for the implementation of the Agreement on Waterway Transportation between Cambodia and Viet Nam by facilitating the establishment of the Bilateral Navigation Facilitation Committee.

36. A project called “Risk Analysis of the Storage, Carriage and Handling of Dangerous Goods along the Mekong River” which was undertaken in 2012 provided recommendations and actions for more safety and better prevent pollution, thus contributing to cross-border trade activities. To implement the Recommendations, the Navigation Programme, in 2013, has been carrying out the second phase of the Storage, Carriage and Handling of Dangerous Goods work by developing the Regional Action Plan for sustainable management of Dangerous Goods transportation, which will be finalized in middle of 2014.

37. Besides, together with line agencies, the Navigation Programme has designed, commissioned and installed aids to navigation systems on selected stretches of the Mekong River in all four countries. An alternative approach to GPS vessel guidance was proposed for the Middle/Upper Mekong River which is difficult to navigate because of the numerous rocks and rocky outcrops, and because of the changing river levels that submerge the obstacles. This system would allow the navigators to keep the vessel on a predetermined track, thus avoiding underwater obstacles and rocky outcrops. The navigator could reach the safety of port by steering with assistance from the digital chart. An initial project has already been conducted, namely from Huay Xay downstream to Luang Prabang. This stretch is now subject to a six-month trial period for the GPS Vessel Guidance System.

13. Watershed Management Project (WSMP)

38. The Watershed Management Project (WSMP) aims to strengthen the planning, coordination and piloting for replicable sustainable watershed management and development solutions that integrate water resources management principles. This project applies the IWRM principles and addresses the Mekong respective challenges by promoting the implementation of IWRM at the regional and watershed level. Activities of WSMP in 2013 included communication and outreach activities, support to the Nam Ton watershed management Pilot Project, and preparation for the basin wide watershed conference to exchange experiences and lessons learned.

IV. DEVELOPMENT PARTNER SUPPORT

39. The MRCS continues to keep its active engagement with current Development Partners as well as potential partners to identify new opportunities for funding to close existing funding gaps. Several missions as well as reviews have been arranged to keep the Development Partners closely engaged and better informed of the latest progress in MRC strategic matters and opportunities for financial or technical cooperation. The MRC Secretariat has also been actively working on maintenance and improvement of technical partnerships with other regional and international organisations through various mechanisms of partnerships including provision/exchange of data and information, secondment/exchange of staff, reciprocal visits, study tours, organisation of workshops/seminar/technical forum, and mutual participation in governance or technical events. In 2013, MRCS has successful technical cooperation and exchange with the Mississippi River Commission, USACE, US Environmental Protection Agency, and Environment Canada. By end of 2013, the MRC has fifteen active development partners, with a total funding secured until the end of 2015 of about 96 million USD or 63% of the total budget required.

V. COOPERATION WITH DIALOGUE PARTNERS

40. In August 2013, the CEO led a delegation including the MRC Joint Committee members and MRC delegates to Beijing in an effort to maintain the momentum of strengthening engagement and cooperation with China and between lower and upper Mekong countries and renew its Agreement on the Provision of Hydrological Information of the Lancang/Mekong River in Flood Season by the Ministry of Water Resources of the People's Republic of China to MRC Secretariat. The delegation met with a number of Chinese agencies including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Water Resources, the Ministry of Transport, the National Energy Administration, and HydroChina. One of the highlights during this visit is the renewal and signing of the above Agreement on 6 August 2013 followed by discussion on other technical cooperation such as the MRC technical visit to the hydro-met station, secondment of experts and Chinese experience in flood protection.

41. It is acknowledged that the hydrological data during flood season and provision of water level data during dry season in 2010 data provided by China has helped with disaster preparedness including the Flash Flood Guidance system and the forecast values for the one-to-five days flood forecasts especially in the Upper Reach of the Mekong River and other areas, including navigation, drought forecasting and water resources management. China has also contributed to drought management of the MRC Member Countries by water released from its upstream hydropower dams. In addition, the MRC has also continued to enhance collaboration with China in capacity development under the MRC Junior Riparian Professional (JRP) project and joint training activities on flood forecasting. Since batch 6, China has sent a total of seven JRPs to MRC for the project. However, for 2013, China did not manage to send their JRPs to MRC due to some administrative constraints.

42. As for the cooperation with Myanmar, for 2013 the focus has still been on waterborne transportation. Further to the initial discussions on the potential for Myanmar to become a member of the MRC, MRC has maintained and enhanced collaboration with Myanmar in capacity development under the Junior Riparian Professional (JRPs) project. For 2013, two JRPs (one from batch 8 and the other one from batch 9) from Myanmar have finished their training for FMMP and CCAI at MRC respectively and returned to Myanmar.

VI. COMMUNICATIONS AND COOPERATION WITH OTHER PARTNERS

43. In 2013, some MRC Programmes also had their cooperation activities with other organizations. IKMP and ISH were particularly active in the preparation of workshops with technical support from the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). The MRC has also paid a visit to the Mississippi River Commission in 2013 in following up the Memorandum of Understanding between the two Commissions. Following the 2012 plan, in 2013, the EP hosted a seconded expert from the US and the CCAI also hosted another seconded US science expert as part of the US Embassy Science Fellowship Programme concerning the preparation of guidelines for integrating environmental issues into national climate change adaptation plans. MRC's ongoing cooperation with the Murray-Darling Basin Authority in Australia with support from AusAID has also made good progress with a planned visit and several other activities to exchange experience and lessons learnt in areas of mutual interest.

44. In addition to the above contacts and communication and cooperation the MRC Programmes have developed, the MRC Secretariat's corporate communication unit has also carried out external relations activities with other stakeholders, including international and local non-governmental organizations, academic and education institutes and the media.
