

## An Open Letter to the Mekong River Commission - Save the Mekong, Before It's too Late!

Dear Mekong River Commission Member Countries, Secretariat and Development Partners:

The Xayaburi Hydropower Dam in northern Lao PDR will create negative impacts on the livelihoods of communities living along the banks of the Mekong mainstream, especially those living downstream of the Mekong, including in Thailand, Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam. For this reason, the Buddhist Association for Environmental Development [BAED], along with NGOs members of the Rivers Coalition in Cambodia [RCC] who have been actively working on the issues of the Mekong River and Tonle Sap Lake, jointly organized the 2nd Peace Walk on "Hydropower Dams in Mekong mainstream and Important Role of the River to the Livelihoods of Communities Living along the Bank" for two and a half days, starting the journey by foot from Wat Kirivanaram (Wat Stung Trang) in Prek Kok Commune, Stung Trang District, Kampong Cham Province and ending at the east side of Kizuna Bridge in Tbong Khmoum District of Kampong Cham Province from 22-24 May, 2013.

We also acknowledge that the Xayaburi Hydropower Dam and eight other proposed dams in Lao PDR and the two proposed dams in Cambodia will bring a financial benefit of approximately 33 billion USD. However, the negative impacts from those dams will cost more than 274 billion USD<sup>1</sup>.

If the Xayaburi and other projects are built, about 55% of the Mekong between Chiang Saen Province in Lao PDR and Kratie Province in Cambodia will become a series of reservoirs and it change the river to a series of ponds<sup>2</sup>. The impacts will destroy the natural water flow and ecosystem of the Mekong River.

According to the MRC's "Strategic Environmental Assessment" report published in October, 2010, it states that around 29.60 millions people living and working in a distance of 15km around the river will get negative impacts from these dams. Around 2.1 millions people who live a distance of 5km around the river will get serious impacts on their houses, jobs, cultures, spirits and other risks.

The degradation of fish production in the river can't be replaced and the blockage of sediment will affect the fisheries resources in the river's floodplain areas and the Great Lake of Cambodia. Rice production in Vietnam's Mekong Delta will also be remarkably impacted. More importantly, if the Xayabur Dam and other 10 proposed dams in the Mekong mainstream are constructed, fish production will decrease by 550,000-800,000 tons or 26-42%, based on the baseline in 2000, and the sediments that reach Kratie Province will decrease up to 25% of the current volume<sup>3</sup>. Also, according to the recent reserach of Inland Fisheries Research and Development Institute, Fishery Administration, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishery (MAFF), the Sambor Dam alone is predicted to reduce yields of fish and other aquatic animals by 16% to 31% or 98,000-182,000 tonnes compared to 2011 baseline values and Stung Treng Dam alone is predicted to reduce fisheries by 6% to 24% or 34,000-145,000 tonnes respectively<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Portland State University and Mae Fah Luang University, 2011, *Planning Approaches for Water Resources Development in the Lower Mekong Basin*.

<sup>2</sup> ICEM, 2010. *MRC Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of hydropower on the Mekong mainstream*, Hanoi, Viet Nam.

<sup>3</sup> ICEM, 2010. *MRC Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of hydropower on the Mekong mainstream*, Hanoi, Viet Nam.

<sup>4</sup> IFRDI, MAFF, 2013. *Key Considerations: Food and Nutrition Security Vulnerability to Mainstream Hydropower Dam Development in Cambodia*. Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Issue Date: June 2013

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While construction on the Xayaburi Dam officially began in November 2012 without regional agreement, we are now very concerned with the news reports that the Don Sahong Dam, only 2 km from the Lao/Cambodian border, may also be following a similar process, in which construction towards the project starts while the transboundary impacts of the project have yet to be adequately considered and the MRC's prior consultation process has yet to be adequately adhered to and respected.

So, with all of these reasons, we the 149 participants from NGOs, communities and monks who participated in the 2nd Peace Walk, along with a total 352 thumbprints collected from the participants and other supporters, **would like to request to the four MRC governments of the Lower Mekong mainstream not to construct any hydropower dam in the Mekong mainstream now or in the future.** We also request that construction on Xayaburi Dam be immediately halted. We also request that all work towards the Don Sahong Dam stop until the project enters the MRC's prior consultation process and there is found to be no objection to the project from regional governments and the public. We hope that all work on the Xayaburi Dam and Don Sahong Dam, as well as the other mainstream dams, will stop in order to allow for a 10 year delay that allows for further detailed study on the environmental, social and economic impacts which may be caused from the Xayaburi Dam, the Don Sahong Dam, and other Mekong mainstream dams. The study should be conducted by independent bodies who are not in the favor of any party or project.

Sincerely,

**Rivers Coalition in Cambodia:**

The NGO Forum on Cambodia (NGOF)

Buddhist Association for Environmental Development (BAED)

My Village Organization (MVi)

Fisheries Action Coalition Team (FACT)

Cultural Environmental Protection Association (CEPA)

Khmer Farmer Association (KFA)

Save Cambodia's Wildlife (SCW)

The Coalition of Cambodian Fishery (CCF)

NeakPon for Development (NoD)

3S Rivers Protection Network (3SPN)

Cambodian Volunteers for Society (CVS)

Cambodian Rural Development Team (CRDT)

Save the Vulnerables Cambodia (SVC)

Center for Development Oriented Research in Agriculture and Livelihood Systems (CENTDOR)

Community Economic Development (CED)

Cambodia Human Rights and Development Association Cambodia (ADHOC)

Peace and Development Aid Organization (PDAO)

Khmer Farmer Association (KFA)

Mlup Promvihearhor Center (MPC)

Ponlok khmer

Northeastern Rural Development Organization (NRD)