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KEY NOTE
ADAPTATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE CONTEXT OF
LOWER MEKONG BASIN

**“Second Mekong Climate Change Forum - Adaptation to Climate
Change in the Transboundary Context”**
6-8 October 2014, Siem Riep, Cambodia

**Excellency Bun Hean,
Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

Climate Change is a hoax, a lie, it prevents poor countries from developing, it is a green agenda to prevent developing countries to industrialize and provide for their people. It is a tyranny of neo-colonialism developed to minimize sharing of the world's wealth. Look at the “Climategate” in 2010 demonstrating how poor and inconsistent the underlying science is!

Climate Change is upon us, whether we like it or not. Last time we tried to wish it away, at the COP-15 in Copenhagen in 2009 it retreated as the world failed to reach consensus on its severity and solutions. But it did not go away, the recent 5th Assessment Report by the IPCC shed more scientific light on the situation, and on the political level the Climate Change Summit in New York some weeks ago (23 Sep 2014), hundreds of world leaders, gathered together, agreed that climate change is **“a defining issue of our time and that bold action is needed today”**.

In two months from now (in December 2014) we will see what the COP-20 can bring about in Lima, Peru. Bringing on more issues and wrap up in Paris in 2015, hopefully with a successful agreement to follow on from the Kyoto Protocol.

Closer to home, it's time for us in the Lower Mekong to make an "inventory" of what have been done, what information and knowledge generated and collected during the past five years about climate change and adaptation, what we can do to complete the remaining works by end of 2015 and plan for next steps of strategic planning cycle.

Adaptation is not new. Humanity has dealt with change in the past, whether it is social, economic or environmental, in fact some argue that a defining feature of our species is its adaptability, with only one special feature or skill, our brains.

Leaving that particular sociobiological speculation aside, the rise of Imperial China or Rome changed social constructs far beyond its own borders, forcing change upon people who adapted (some very successfully). In a different way the age of colonialism and later the industrial revolution change our world economy fundamentally requiring change and adaptation by all but the most insulated areas and countries.

More related to Climate Change the Little Ice Age from mid 1500's to mid 1800's had significant changes to cooler climates requiring not only the painting of winter scapes by grand masters, but adaptation in agriculture to colder, wetter and shorter summers. Likewise the cataclysmic impact of Krakatau eruption in 1883 in its wake average global temperatures fell by as much as 1.2 degrees Celsius and weather pattern changes caused crop failures and other hardship. Weather patterns continued to be chaotic for years and temperatures did not return to normal until 1888.

Although our capacity for adaptation is undisputed, it is timely for us to remind ourselves why we all began to talk about climate change and why we called for action. The reason was our concerns about climate change impacts and vulnerability and the influence of climate change adaptation in sustainable development that we are working on.

There are many views on climate change and adaptation. The debate on climate change - the why, how fast, what is impacted, what to do - is fuelled by scientific research through careful observation, calculation and analysis. The many Volumes of IPCC literature are testimony to that.

Changes in the environment are not new as I just pointed out, and we have proven capacity in adapting to and managing change. **But** the climate change issue is hard – we do not yet know the limit of change – we must work out how to manage that range of uncertainty. The uncertainty fuels speculation and often misinformation.

Decision makers at all levels in the LMB need better and trustworthy information, evidence and knowledge of climate change and its implications as a basis for better planning and actions and there is a thirst for more knowledge and clarity on Climate Change. I remember my own frustration a decade ago in meetings where scientists were showing results of different models, many showing similar results and others very different. "Oh", I said, "so the most likely outcome is the trend shown by most models", "NO" said the experts, and went on to explain that the different results shows the variability. Frustrated I recall struggling with this and complaining of the research efforts as my constituency of policy makers wanted to know the most likely scenario, and no expert was willing to provide it. I remember leaving the discussion disappointed. (ref Eugene.)

But things have changed, with more clarity on how to address increased uncertainty and some emerging trends. For example polar ice caps are melting, the issue is not if, but how quickly. Comprehensive scientific information and research results will help them to improve confidence to plan, manage and possibly put extra money into climate proofing of development and to take adaptive actions.

As a result of the vast effort which has gone into creating this wealth of information and knowledge another issues has emerged. How to make use of the vast amount of information and knowledge from global and regional researches on climate change? Some which comprise high uncertainty. How to translate global knowledge down to the scale of the Mekong Basin – to the national and provincial planners, to each individual catchment, the affected settlements and vulnerable people. At those scales we need to know how people's livelihood is changing and how it is affected by climate change; and to help people to adapt to it – and develop – at the same time. Should Adaptation be responding to change now or anticipating future change – These are not easy questions.

The analyses of investment in adaptation and preparedness (such as Stern Report 2006, more recent?) **strongly suggest that early action**

is cost effective and a better strategy than reacting to disasters as climate change unfolds. Others suggest an adaptive approach incorporated in the planning process – we plan now for a range of scenarios and monitor closely – then we respond at the right time. For example, to have defenses and measures against sea level rise in place when they are required, not before they are needed but also not when it's too late either! Ultimately what will be done is also guided by what is **politically possible. As pointed out by Eugene much is done outside the water sector, further complicating the decision making. Excellently making the point of how the decision making may work.**

In the face of climate change, the Governments of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam have come together and pledged to cooperate in making the Mekong River Basin *economically prosperous, socially just and environmentally sound* and that is responsive and adapting to the challenges induced by climate change.

One of the first steps these Governments have been doing is to bolster the commitment to sustainable development of water resources and related resources of the Mekong, and to take account of the changing climate and find appropriate adaptation measures throughout the four member countries.

Looking back to the last five years as HE Bun Hean pointed out, we note that the CCAI of MRC and the Member Countries have done a lot on the way to implementing the climate change and adaptation work programme and achieving the objectives, despite number of obstacles and difficulties. With the risk of becoming a bit repetitive and long winded I would like to mention some of the key achieved milestones and on-going activities:

- The first batch of the MRC CCAI **demonstration projects** in four Member Countries has been completed and the second batch projects are going on, providing concrete practical examples and experiences on how to adapt to climate change;
- The policies and strategies, methods and tools available for climate change adaptation were reviewed; data and information related to climate change are being collected to formulate the **MRC climate change and adaptation database.**
- The first **assessment of climate change impacts on flow regime** was conducted and the second assessment are on-going; **climate change scenarios** is being updated

incorporating the latest information and methodologies from the IPCC Fifth Assessment Report;

- Research and studies were initiated under the **basin-wide assessments** of climate change impacts on key sectors and areas such as food security (including agriculture and fisheries), ecosystems (including wetlands) and biodiversity, flood and drought, hydropower and socio-economics;

At this time it is of great importance to us to spread knowledge and improve capacity to the appropriate level. To this end, the CCAI has worked with the Member Countries to complete a Capacity Needs Assessment (related to climate change adaptation) among NMC and Line Agencies in order to gauge what types of capacity building is needed for the future work on climate change adaptation in the LMB at different levels. In parallel, a Stakeholders Engagement Framework has been developed to guide regional and national teams in involving all relevant actors and stakeholders in the climate change related sectors. This led to the formulation and initial implementation of a comprehensive Capacity Building Plan and Gender Responsiveness Plan of the CCAI.

These are just some examples of the enormous amount of knowledge have been generated in the LMB and moreover, gathered from all over the world. **Now the burning question is how we can make use of and spread this information and knowledge, avoiding it being a case of documenting them and putting on the shelves and forgotten gathering dust. In order to help the Member Countries better adapt to climate change in transboundary context we need to put it into action.**

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is the reason why we are gathering here today – to share the knowledge and experiences, the research results, the lessons learned and good practices; to find synergies and the way for harmonizing national and transboundary adaptation strategies and actions; to further replicate and upscale what have been done in pilots and demonstration sites; and ultimately to learn from each other.

Outputs and outcomes of this Forum, together with the knowledge and experiences we gain will serve as inputs for the First Report on Status of Climate Change and Adaptation in the LMB and lay the foundation

for establishing the Mekong Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan by end of 2015.

This Strategy and Action Plan is a plan of action for guidance and addressing the impacts of climate change in the Lower Mekong Basin. The strategy will support the Member Countries to enhance their capacity to adapt through planning for addressing transboundary impacts of climate change and implementing measures for transboundary adaptation. Bearing in mind Eugene's earlier comments on the policy environment and diplomacy.

Addressing climate change impacts, developing an adaptation strategy and an action plan for a large river basin are challenging and complex tasks. It requires long-term modelling of the impacts, deriving robust basin-wide adaptation strategies and action plans, which to be effective, need to be part of the riparian national policies and take into account the rapid changes in those transitional economies.

In the long term, climate change adaptation needs to be supported by an integrated, cross-cutting policy approach that is not separated from other policies. The effectiveness of climate policy can be enhanced and policy coherence is improved if the inter-linkages with other policy fields can be strengthened, while also supporting the other policy areas. Climate change adaptation should therefore be integrated into existing policy development, in planning, programmes, and budgeting, across a broad range of economic sectors. This mainstreaming is a central element of an adaptation strategy as elaborated on by HE Bun Hean in his speech earlier.

To be effective, riparian countries need to show strong ownership of their water cooperation. It can help overcome inequity in access to water, lead to more efficient and sustainable use of water resources, for instance, through joint management plans creating mutual benefits. Such joint management can help in overcoming cultural, political and social tensions and build trust between communities, and the countries. Cooperation can also reduce costs related to tensions between riparian countries and can pave the way to much greater cooperation between the countries and even economic integration among the countries.

Implementation of transboundary adaptation will require a good financing system in place. Without a good financing system, transboundary river basin management is not viable in the long run.

Financial as well as ecological sustainability can be improved by recognizing water as an economic good. This makes users aware of the consequences, and costs, of their activities and can help to avoid overexploitation. But equity considerations need to be taken into account.

- Beside development partners funding, four other funding sources can be distinguished such as: Direct funding from taxes and charge to support transboundary water management services, this is planned for some parts of the world.
- Private sector investments. The role of the private sector has been limited in financing water management, most has been in water supply and sewerage, much less in sewage treatment. The private sector investment most relevant to transboundary water management has been in hydropower.
- Trust funds offer a plausible option for sustaining transboundary river institutions and longer term planning and programming, and
- Inter-riparian financing.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

About one year from now, after the COP21 in December 2015 in Paris which hopefully will introduce a new universal agreement under the UNFCCC (to replace Kyoto Protocol) and consolidate the global efforts to respond to climate change. Although the newest programme of MRC – the CCAI – will complete its first face and with the restructuring may not appear as a clear programme for 2016-2020 strategic period, Climate Change adaptation will remain on MRC's agenda and support will be continued to the Member Countries to adapt to it.

It is in this context I would like to see the MRC continue as an effective knowledge generator and a world class river basin organization supporting its members to deal with transboundary issues, to bring together all the Member Countries as one family to preserve our precious natural environment and protect the livelihood of people in the Lower Mekong from magnifying and increasing impacts of climate change.

I hope that you will find this Forum interesting and useful, that you will learn something new for yourself not only from the various speeches and presentations in plenary and parallel sessions but more importantly from your active discussion and contribution, sharing and networking within and outside of this room. I hope that by the end of the Forum, you found that the Forum program was too interesting not

too long. I also hope to see a clear progression of impact from this forum to the next. The time is calling for compelling action. The acronym for Mekong Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan i find fitting, MASAP, or more direct Mekong As Soon As Possible! This is then a good tool for further water diplomacy for dealing with transboundary water cooperation, which is central to MRC's work.

I wish the Forum a great success and wish all of you good health, great success and joyful learning!

Thank you very much