



3rd MRC International Conference

Enhancing Joint Efforts and Partnerships towards Achievement of
the Sustainable Development Goals in the Mekong River Basin

2-3 April 2018, Siem Reap, Cambodia

SUMMARY AND WAY FORWARD

MRCS, 20.11.2018





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1. The conference in a snapshot

The Mekong River Commission (MRC) International Conferences precede the MRC Summits of Heads of Government that are held every four years. The organisation of these conferences serves a double objective. Firstly, they offer a privileged space for exchanges on transboundary water management between experts and stakeholders from the Mekong and other regions. Secondly, they contribute to the leader's Summits by delivering key messages about best practices and new ideas for the sustainable management and development of the Mekong River Basin.

In 2010, on the occasion of the 1st MRC Summit held in Hua Hin, Thailand, the International Conference was themed "Transboundary Water Resources Management in a Changing World". Before the 2nd Summit in Ho Chi Minh City in 2014, the Conference was dedicated to "Cooperation for Energy, Food and Water Security in Transboundary Basins under Changing Climate".

The first two MRC International Conferences thus discussed the cross-cutting sectors and themes underlying transboundary water management worldwide. They brought numerous international experts and organisations to the Mekong region, including several other river basin organisations. Challenges of transboundary water management and possible solutions were compared and discussed by academics and practitioners from around the globe. Similarities between different regions, including the Mekong, were identified and synergies explored.

The third MRC International Conference, held in 2018 in Siem Reap, Cambodia, was titled "Enhancing Joint Efforts and Partnerships towards the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Mekong River Basin". As H.E. Mr. Lim Kean Hor, Minister of Water Resources and Meteorology of Cambodia, summarised in his opening speech, the first two MRC conferences focused on "*what to manage and how*". The third conference put a spotlight on "*who has to be involved in the sustainable management and development of the Mekong Basin*, in order to achieve the ambitious SDGs" under the overall motto of the 3rd Summit 'One Mekong, One Spirit'.

And why did MRC choose a different focus this time?

Since 2014 the organisation has undergone a profound reform, guided by the leaders' decision to have MRC self-financed by 2030. In only a couple of years, MRC adopted a leaner structure for its Secretariat, has established a basket fund, and has revised major internal policies and procedures. It has also put in place a strong communication strategy that includes more meaningful and regular engagement of stakeholders in MRC's activities. And, most importantly, the organisation is now led and staffed by highly qualified staff from the four MRC Member Countries.

The focus of the third MRC International Conference intended to reflect some of these changes. In particular, the high importance that MRC attributes to the involvement of stakeholders in MRC's work and the need for better Member Country uptake of MRC's products and knowledge,

as technical and financial ownership of the organisation increases. As MRC's CEO, Dr. Pham Tuan Phan, affirmed in his opening speech: *"MRC's mandate is clear: we are tasked to promote and coordinate the sustainable management and development of the Mekong Basin for the countries mutual benefit and the people's well-being. Therefore, our work at the Mekong River Commission is not over when we conclude a study and publish a report. We are only implementing our mandate if our work is known, useful and used."*

Main topics presented and discussed

At the third International Conference MRC's most recent work was showcased and shared with a wider audience, which provided yet another opportunity for a large number of stakeholders to contribute to the management of water resources in the Mekong Basin. Joint efforts undertaken by the MRC Member Countries, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam, were assessed and the future enhancement of these efforts was discussed. The way forward to strengthen existing partnerships was also debated. The achievement of the SDGs, intrinsically connected with MRC's mandate, was selected as the ultimate driver of MRC, Member Countries and partners' joint actions. The message that MRC conveyed was clear: transboundary water management in the Mekong Basin cannot be successful if undertaken by MRC alone. MRC Member Countries' institutions and actors have a crucial role to play as well as all regional stakeholders.

MRC presented the main findings of its basin wide assessments, including the impact of mainstream hydropower projects, as well the MRC's climate, flood and drought assessments and initiatives. The legal foundation of the Mekong cooperation and the implementation of MRC procedures, standards and guidelines were also part of the discussions. MRC's data and information management system, the founding pillar for MRC's work, was shared and debated. Water and energy planning, and the developments in the renewable energy markets and possible implications for the Mekong region, were also addressed. The identification of opportunities to initiate or strengthen collaboration in the different areas was the common thread linking all the sessions.

The key messages and outcomes of each session were captured by MRC Secretariat (MRCS) staff and presented at the end of the sessions. This innovative aspect of the third conference was appreciated by participants and welcomed by those that did not attend the conference but could access the results of each session online shortly after the end of the event.

Alongside the conference sessions, signing ceremonies of two new partnership agreements took place: between MRC and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), and MRC and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (UNESCAP). During the conference, participants also had the opportunity to join poster presentations on specific case studies and projects in the Mekong Basin presented by different partners, organisations and academia. Moreover, there was an exhibition of MRC's key work and winning pictures of an MRC photo competition.

The key messages of the International Conference were presented at end of the conference and then delivered to the Ministerial Meeting for the Summit and the Summit of the Heads of Government that followed the conference.

Who participated in the 2018 International Conference?

Around 400 participants attended the International Conference – 29% female and 71% male. About 155 participants represented MRCS, MRC Member Countries and its Dialogue Partners China and Myanmar (see figure 1). The remaining 250 participants came from other organisations, the private sector, universities and the media (see figure 2).

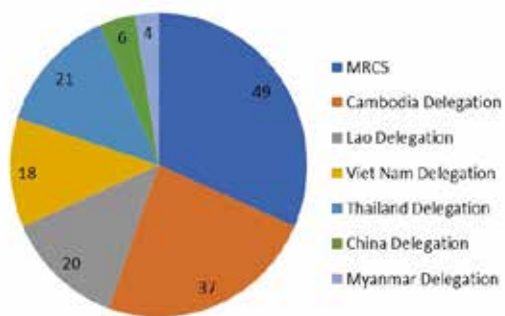


Figure 1: Number of representatives from MRCS, MRC Member Countries and Dialogue Partners (based on registration on-site)

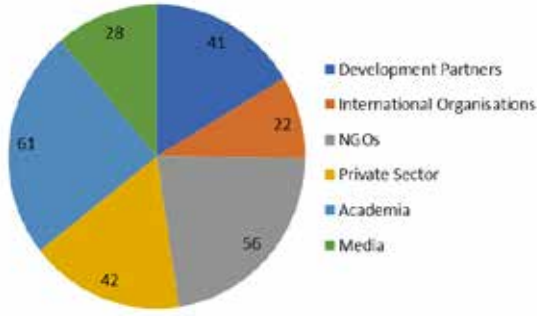


Figure 2: Number of participants from Development Partners, international organisations, NGOs, private sector, academia and media (based on online registration)

Out of the 400 participants, about 120 internal and external participants were actively involved in the flow of the conference as chairs, facilitators, speakers, presenters, panelists, rapporteurs and poster presenters (see figure 3). The sessions were chaired by representatives of MRC from the regional and national levels, with the sessions being co-facilitated by MRCS staff and representatives from other organisations. Facilitators, speakers, presenters, panelists and poster presenters represented organisations from about 20 countries.

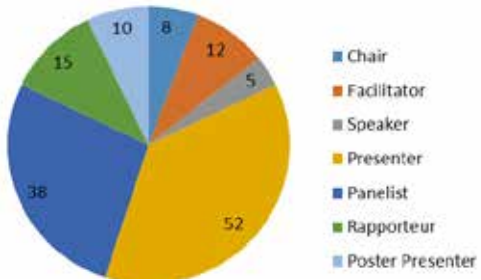


Figure 3: Number of chairs, facilitators, speakers, presenters, panellists, rapporteurs and poster presenters (Note: the total 130 is more than the above-mentioned 120 actively involved participants as some of them covered more than one role)

This short booklet does not intend to do more than put together in one document the links to all presentations followed by the results, as presented at the conference in the so-called ‘fishbone’ format. These graphic summaries link each session with the theme of the conference: Current joint efforts of the MRC Member Countries and existing partnerships in relation to a given topic are mapped and hints as to how they could both be enhanced are indicated. Furthermore, it includes a short reflection on the results of the conference satisfaction survey and the way forward to the next International Conference in 2022.

2. Conference sessions

Opening session

Keynote 1: A matter of survival – Vision for water cooperation from the Chairman of the Global High Level Panel on Water and Peace by H.E. Dr. Danilo Türk, Chair of Global High Level Panel on Water and Peace and former President of Slovenia and former Assistant Secretary General, United Nations Department of Political Affairs

Keynote 2: Achieving the SDGs in a transboundary river basin through joint efforts and partnerships – International experiences, and opportunities for the Mekong basin, Mr. Takuya Kamata, Practice Manager, Global Water Practice, World Bank

Keynote 3: Lancang-Mekong Cooperation and Mekong River Commission – Opportunities, synergies and collaboration for the sustainable development and management of the whole Lancang-Mekong Basin, Dr. Zhong Yong, Secretary General, Lancang-Mekong Water Resources Cooperation Center

Keynote 4: MRC’s achievements and efforts in addressing Mekong opportunities and challenges towards achieving the SDGs, Dr. Anoulak Kittikhoun, Chief Strategy and Partnership Officer, Mekong River Commission Secretariat

From assessments to actions

Session 1a: Optimizing regional benefits and minimizing adverse impacts

Latest Basin-wide impact assessments: the MRC Council Study and others

Mekong sediments, Ms. Sopheap Lim, Modeller, MRCS

Environmental impacts of water resources development, Dr. So Nam, Chief Environment Management Officer, MRCS

[Social, economic and cumulative impact assessment of water resources development](#), Ms. Nguyen Thi Ngoc Minh, Socio-Economic Specialist, MRCS

[Lancang-Mekong Development Plan Environmental Study – Findings and conclusions](#), Dr. Jeremy Carew-Reid, Director General, International Center for Environment Management (ICEM)

[Lancang-Mekong navigation plans – Perception and reality](#), Mr. Jacques Dezeure, Waterway Expert

[Nam Kong – Forgotten river of Myanmar and future international navigation improvement](#), Mr. Win Naing Tun, Director and Principal Consultant, Myanmar Environment Institute

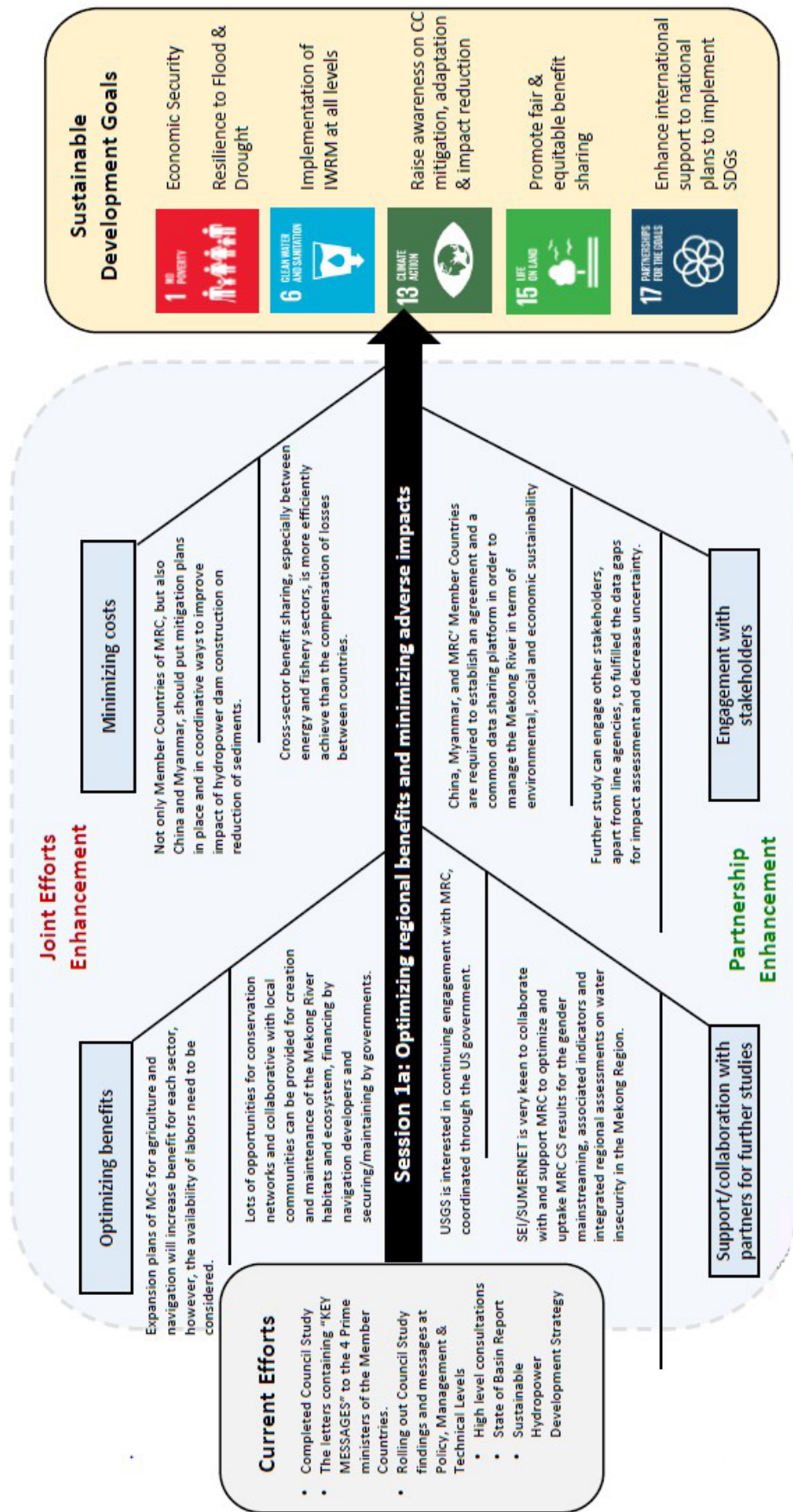
Reflection and implications of the MRC Council Study and others

[Review of Mekong River Commission Council Study Reports](#), Dr. Zhiliang Zhu and Matthew Andersen, United States Geological Survey (USGS)

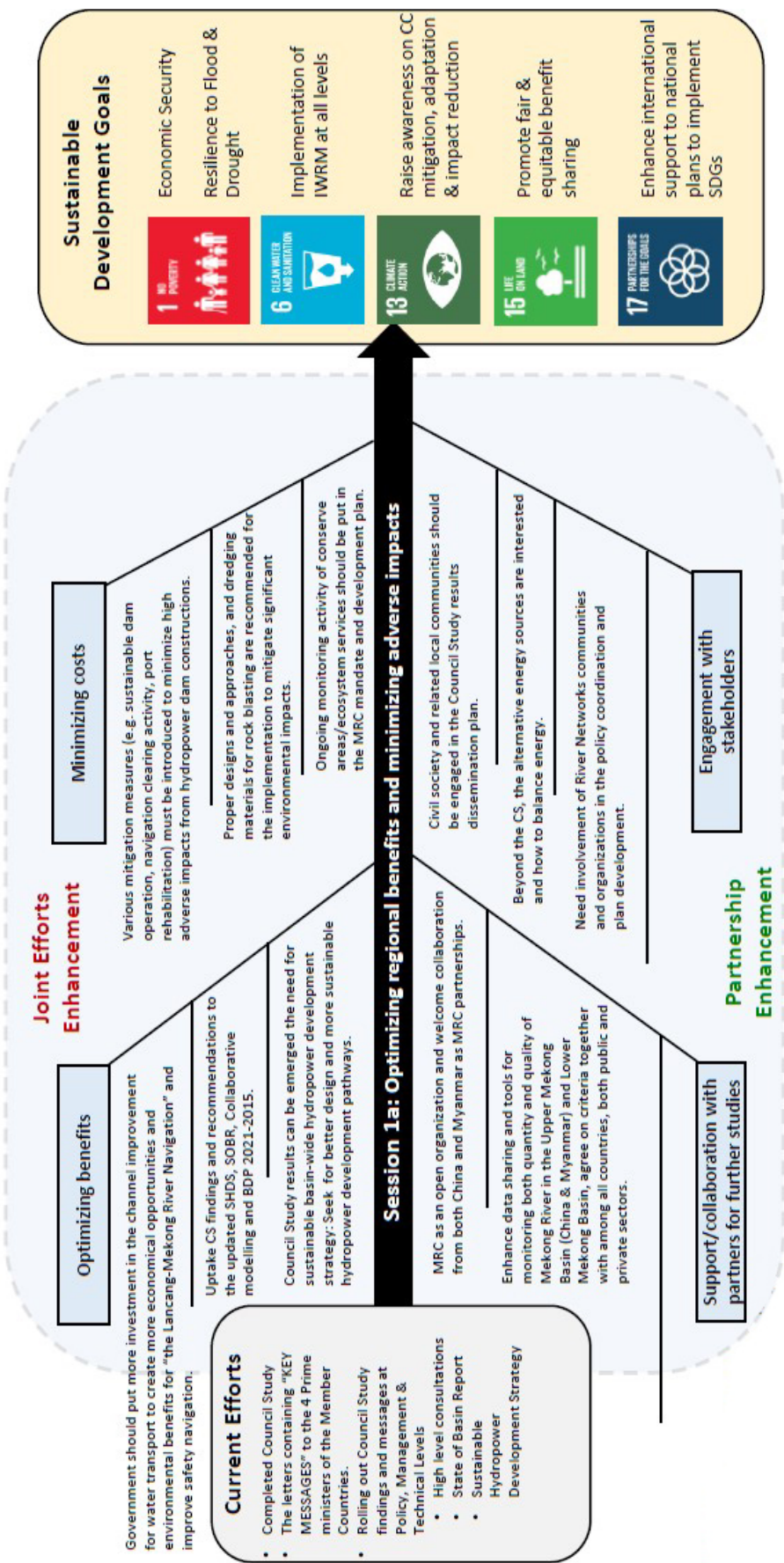
[Review of MRC Council Study: An assessment of the results and conclusions of selected reports](#), Dr. Chayanis Krittasudthacheewa, Deputy Director, Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) Asia Center, Bangkok, Thailand

[Uptaking the Council Study in the MRC work: High-level dissemination, State of Basin Report, Sustainable Hydropower Development Strategy](#), Mr. Suthy Heng, Regional Technical Advisor, MRCS, and Mr. Palakorn Chanbanyong, Sustainable Hydropower Specialist, MRCS

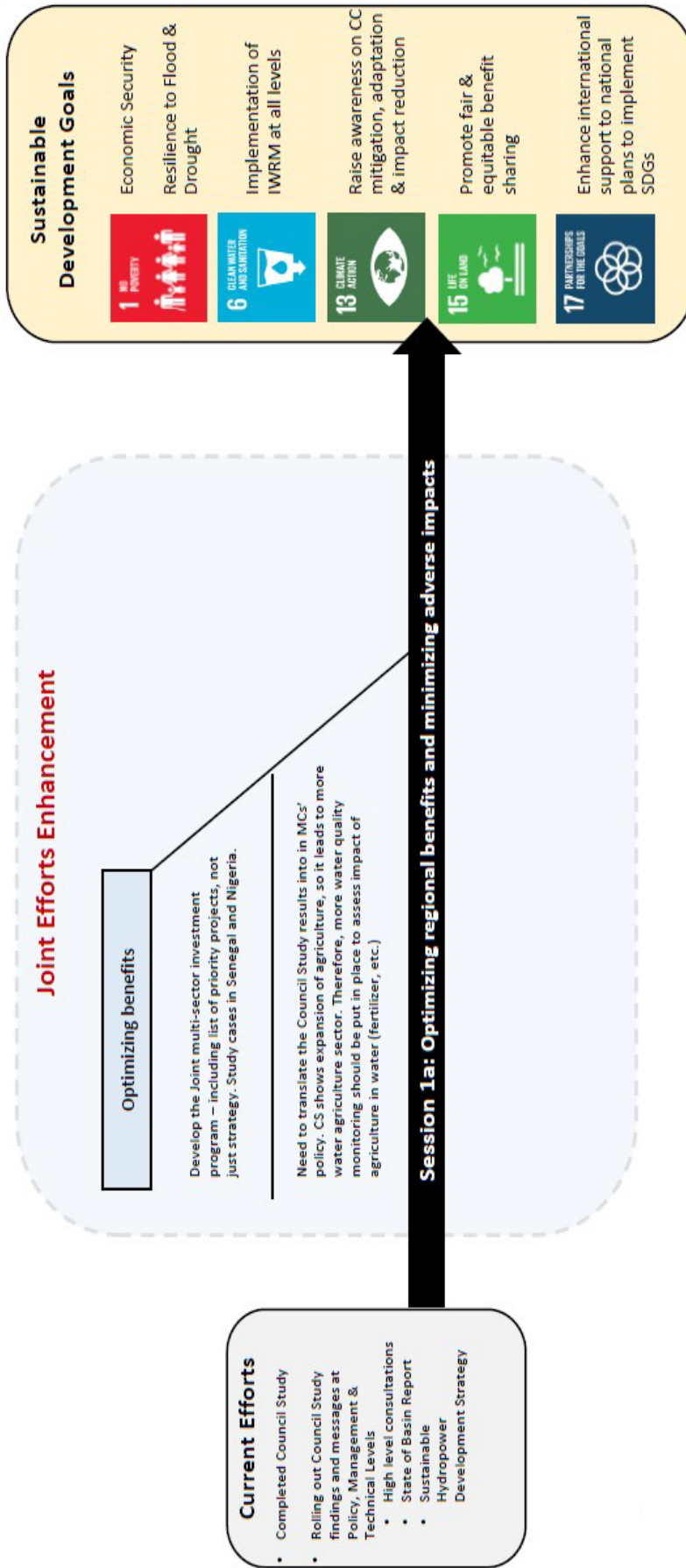
ENHANCING JOINT EFFORTS AND PARTNERSHIPS TOWARDS ACHIEVEMENT OF THE SDGS IN THE MEKONG RIVER BASIN



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Session 1b: Addressing climate change, drought and flood

Latest climate, flood and drought assessments and actions

[MRC assessments on floods, droughts and climate change](#), Mr. Oudomsack Philavong, MRCS Advisor, and Dr. Cong Nguyen Dinh, Climate Change Adaptation Specialist, MRCS

[MRC Actions on Flood, Drought and Climate Change Adaptation: Joint Projects, Strategies and Action Plans](#), Dr. Thim Ly, Chief River Basin Planner, and Mr. Ix Hour, Drought Technical Coordinator, MRCS

[Where does the effort go? A review of the contribution from international and regional players to flood and drought adaptation in the Mekong River Basin](#), Dr. Nguyen Huong Thuy Phan, Academic Coordinator and Head of SEA Region, Development Policies and Practices Executive Master Program, Graduate Institute Geneva

Good experiences and innovations from other partners/basins

[The ASEAN Specialised Meteorological Centre – A regional collaboration for improved weather and climate services in Southeast Asia](#), Dr. Thea Turkington, Research Scientist, Centre for Climate Research, Meteorological Service Singapore

[Robust adaptation strategies to address a +4C world](#), Mr. Niall O'Connor, Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) Asia Center, Bangkok, Thailand

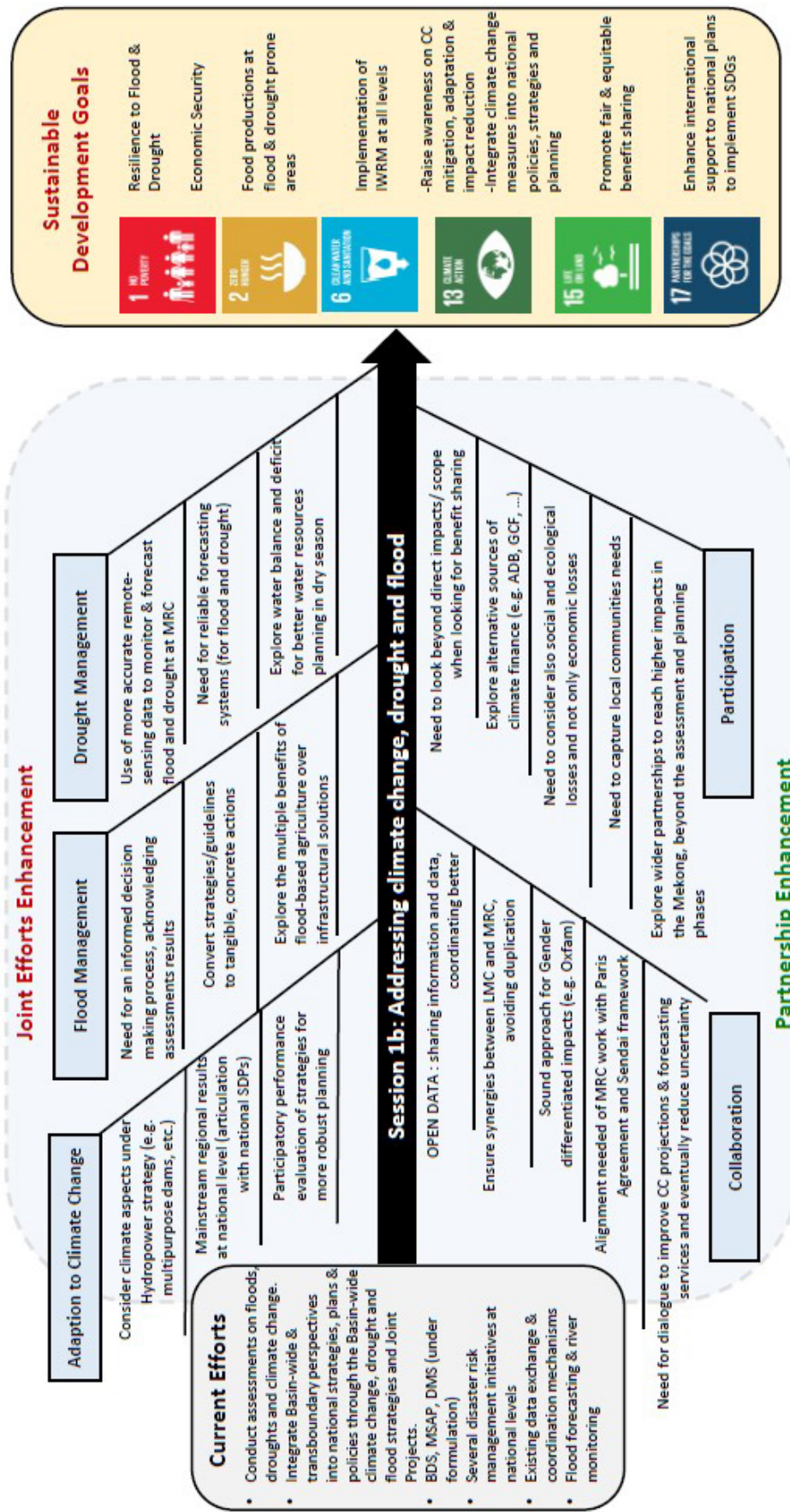
[Flood forecast of Han River Flood Control Office](#), Ms. Ji Youn Sung, Han River Flood Control Office, Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, Republic of Korea

[Using flood-based livelihoods to restore the flood retention ecosystem function of the Mekong Delta, Vietnam](#), Dr. Andrew Wyatt, Mekong Delta Program Manager, IUCN Vietnam

Evaluation of Water Balance Process in Dry Season for the rainfed areas in Thailand:

[Case study from 2016 to 2018](#), Mr. Laonamsai Jeerapong, Civil Engineer, Practitioner Level, Water Crisis Prevention Center, Department of Water Resources, Thailand

ENHANCING JOINT EFFORTS AND PARTNERSHIPS TOWARDS ACHIEVEMENT OF THE SDGS IN THE MEKONG RIVER BASIN



Strengthening management, development and cooperation regimes

Session 2a: Monitoring and management of development projects in the Mekong and other basins

Procedures, guidelines and standards

[The five MRC water utilisation procedures: A sound basis for water diplomacy and transboundary water management and cooperation](#), Dr. An Pich Hatda, Director of Planning, MRCS

[Sustainable development of multipurpose projects in the Mekong and Rhone Basins](#), Mr. Jérôme Mentre, Project Manager, CNR representative in Viet Nam, CNR France

[Importance of trans-boundary impact assessment and joint monitoring in sustainable management of the Mekong River Basin](#), Dr. Truong Hong Tien, Director of Environment Management, MRCS

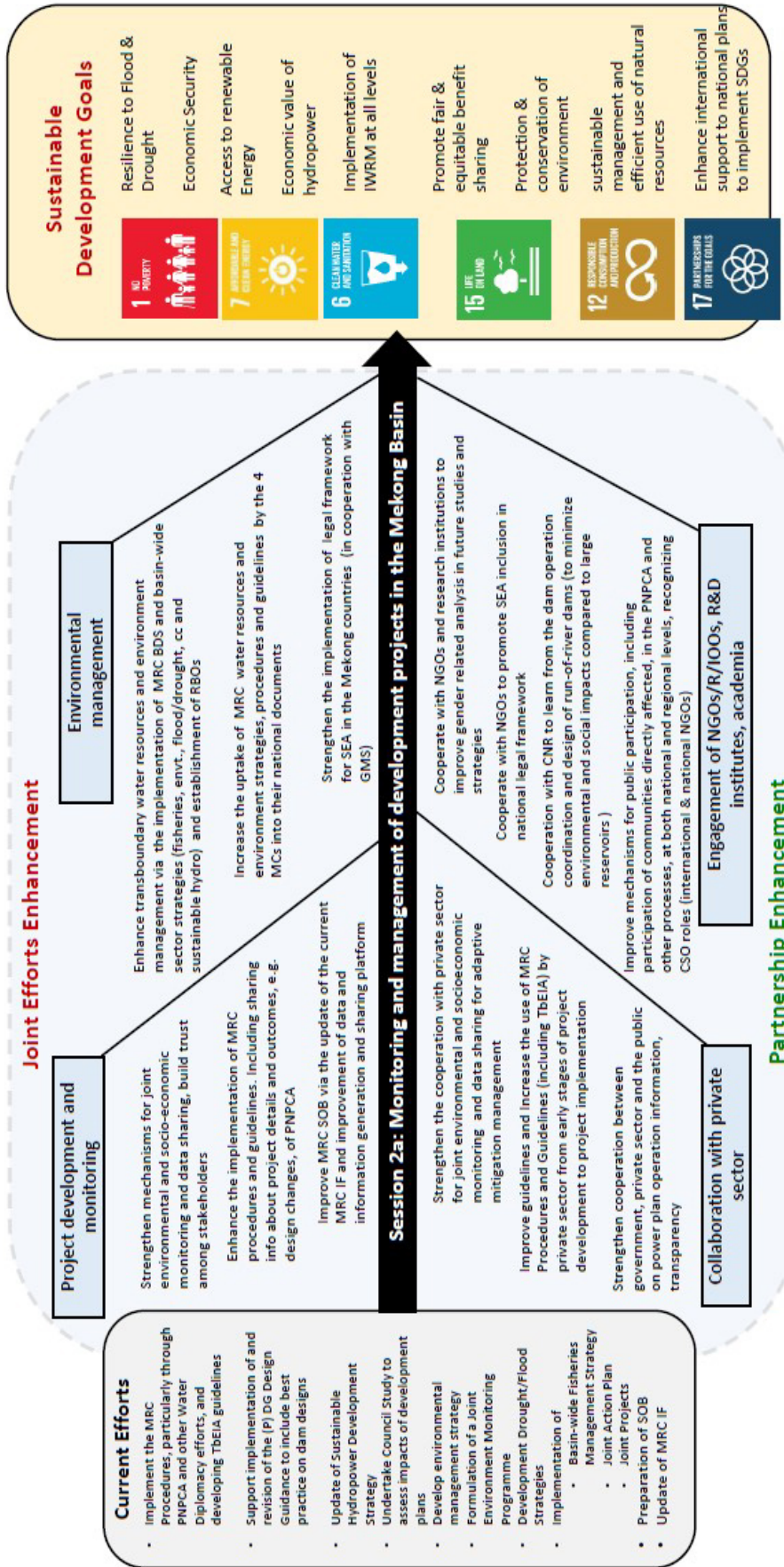
[Strategic Environmental Assessment \(SEA\): Comparative analysis in the GMS countries and implications for SDGs](#), Mr. Thy Try, Executive Director, and Mr. Aliaksei Patonia, Research Intern, Open Development Cambodia

Cases

[Learning from the M-IWRM Communication Outreach between the Tonle Sap and Songkhla Lake basins](#), Mr. Hell Tony, Tonle Sap Authority, Cambodia

[Linkage of transboundary Mekong water governance and livelihood of community in 3S rivers in Cambodia](#), Mr. Leang Bunleap, Executive Director, 3S Rivers Protection Network

ENHANCING JOINT EFFORTS AND PARTNERSHIPS TOWARDS ACHIEVEMENT OF THE SDGS IN THE MEKONG RIVER BASIN



Session 2b: Strengthening Mekong cooperation and partnerships

Legal foundation of cooperation

[Strengthening the 1995 Mekong Agreement](#), Dr. Pham Tuan Phan, CEO, MRC

[Benefits and challenges for the Lower Mekong countries deriving from the 1997 UN Watercourses Convention](#), Dr. Alejandro Iza, Director of the IUCN Environmental Law Centre, Bonn, Germany

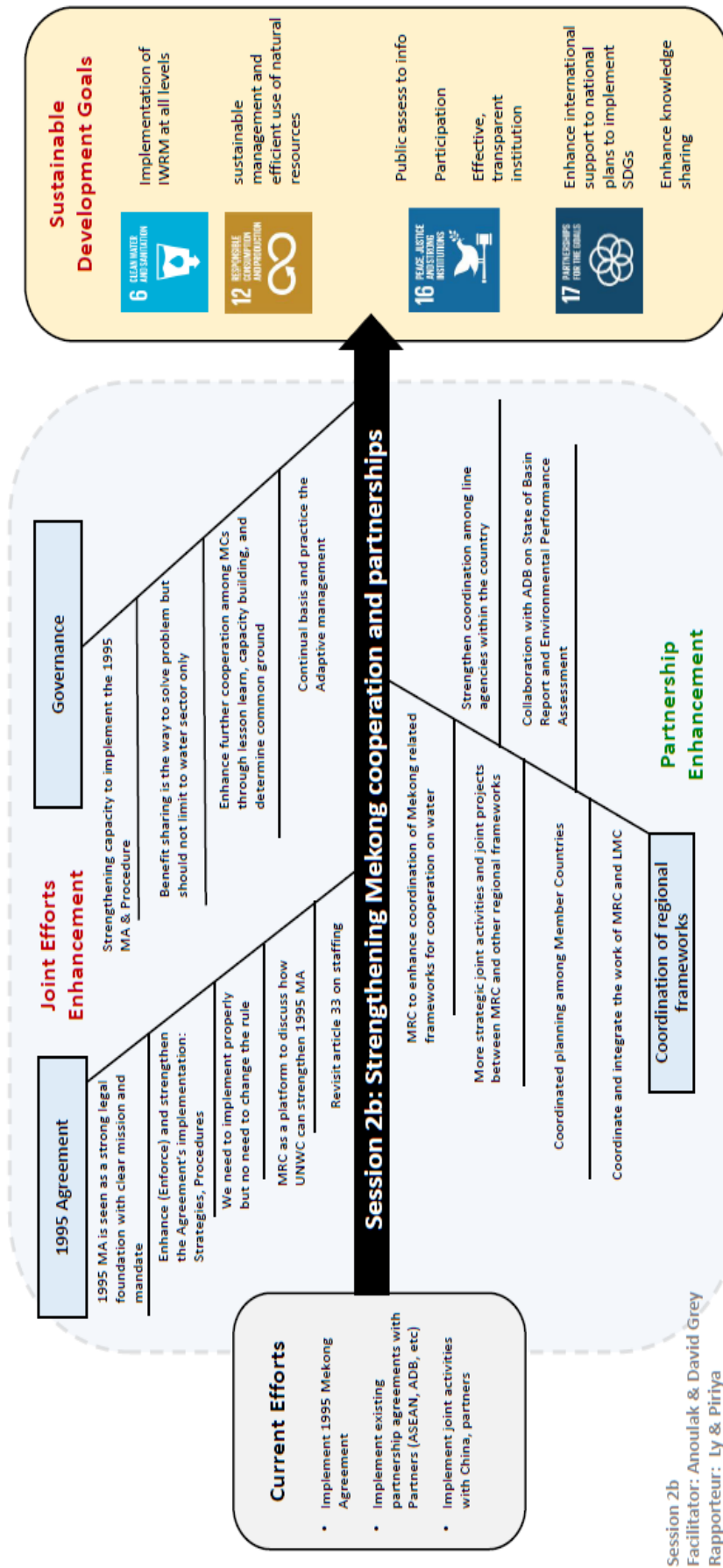
[Beyond international water law – Successfully negotiating mutual gains agreements for international watercourses](#), Prof. Richard Paisley, University of British Columbia and UN Expert on transboundary water management

Collaboration with other regional mechanisms and frameworks

[Some bi- and multi-lateral institutions relating to the Mekong cooperation and recommendations to synergize](#), Mr. Nguyen Nhan Quang, Former Director, Centre for Promotion of Integrated Water Resources Management

[Views from the GMS/ADB on current and future alignment and cooperation with other regional mechanisms and the MRC](#), Dr. Jiangfeng Zhang, Director of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Asian Development Bank, Manila

ENHANCING JOINT EFFORTS AND PARTNERSHIPS TOWARDS ACHIEVEMENT OF THE SDGS IN THE MEKONG RIVER BASIN



Session 2b
Facilitator: Anoulak & David Grey
Rapporteur: Ly & Piriya

Strengthening MRC's work from the perspective of other organisations

Special Session 1: Underlying data and information systems in the Mekong and other river basins

[Use of water monitoring information and data for Mekong Basin management and development](#), Mr. Vongthasone Vilaythong, Information System and Database Specialist, MRCS, and Dr. Paradis Someth, Water & Climate Monitoring Specialist, MRCS

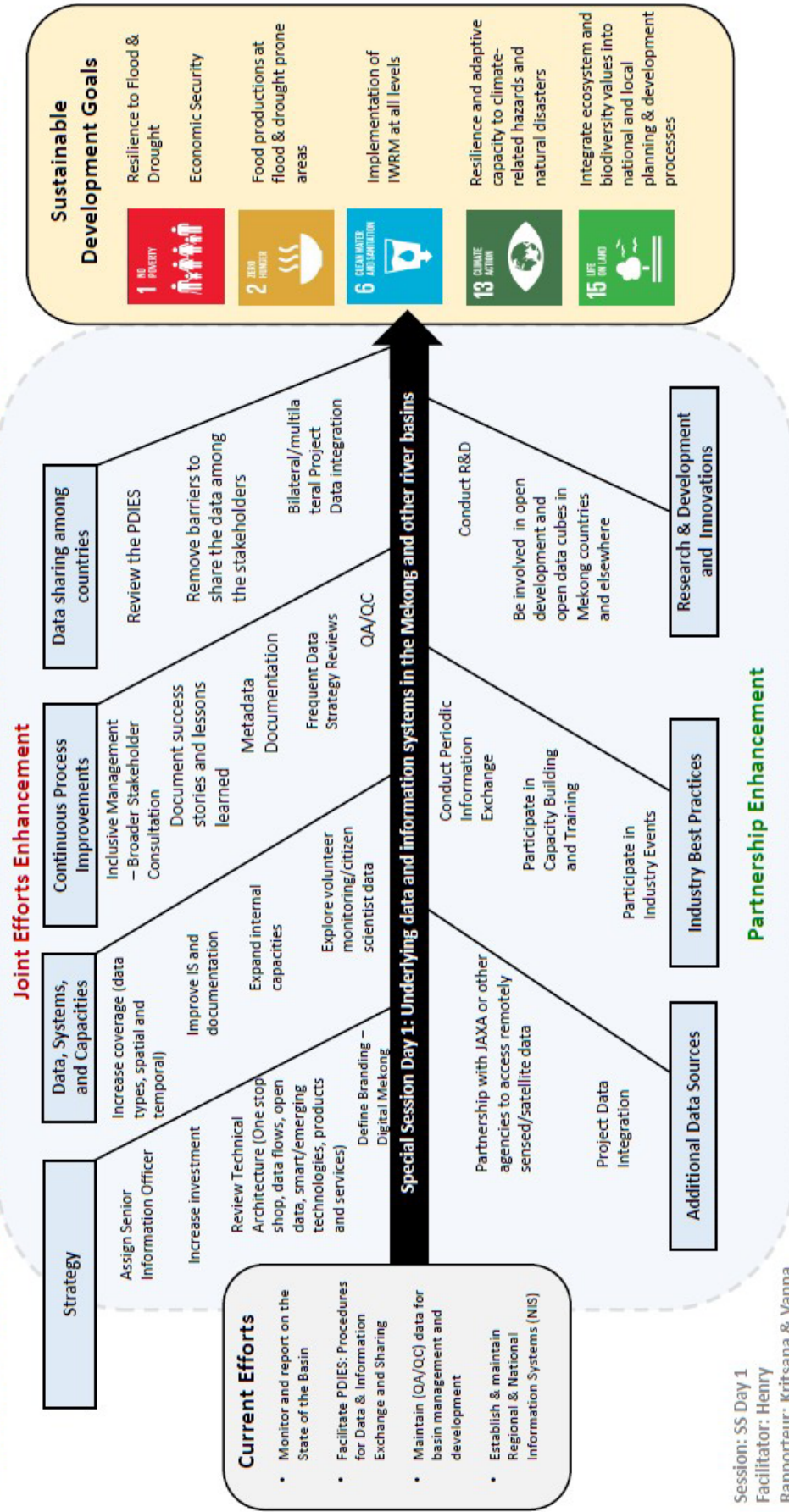
[Improving Data for Water Resources Management](#), Mr. Suparek Janprasart, Coordinator of the LMI Sustainable Infrastructure Partnership Program, and Ms. Christy Owen, Country Director, PACT Thailand

[Integrated Water Resources Management in K-water: Example of a Drought Risk Management by Multi-purpose Dam](#), Dr. Su-Hyung Jang, Principal Researcher, Water Resources Research Center, K-water Institute, Republic of Korea

[Water information systems – The art of the possible](#), Prof. Rob Vertessy, former Director, Australia's Bureau of Meteorology

[Paradigm shifts in using satellite data for land and water management – Introducing Digital Earth Australia and Open Data Cubes](#), Mr. Norman Mueller, Director of Product Development for Digital Earth Australia, Geosciences Australia

ENHANCING JOINT EFFORTS AND PARTNERSHIPS TOWARDS ACHIEVEMENT OF THE SDGS IN THE MEKONG RIVER BASIN



Special Session 2: Integrated water and energy planning: pathways for sustainable hydropower and other renewables

Changing dynamics of power trade in South Asia: Implications for hydropower development. Dr. Sagar Prasai, Country Representative, the Asia Foundation, India

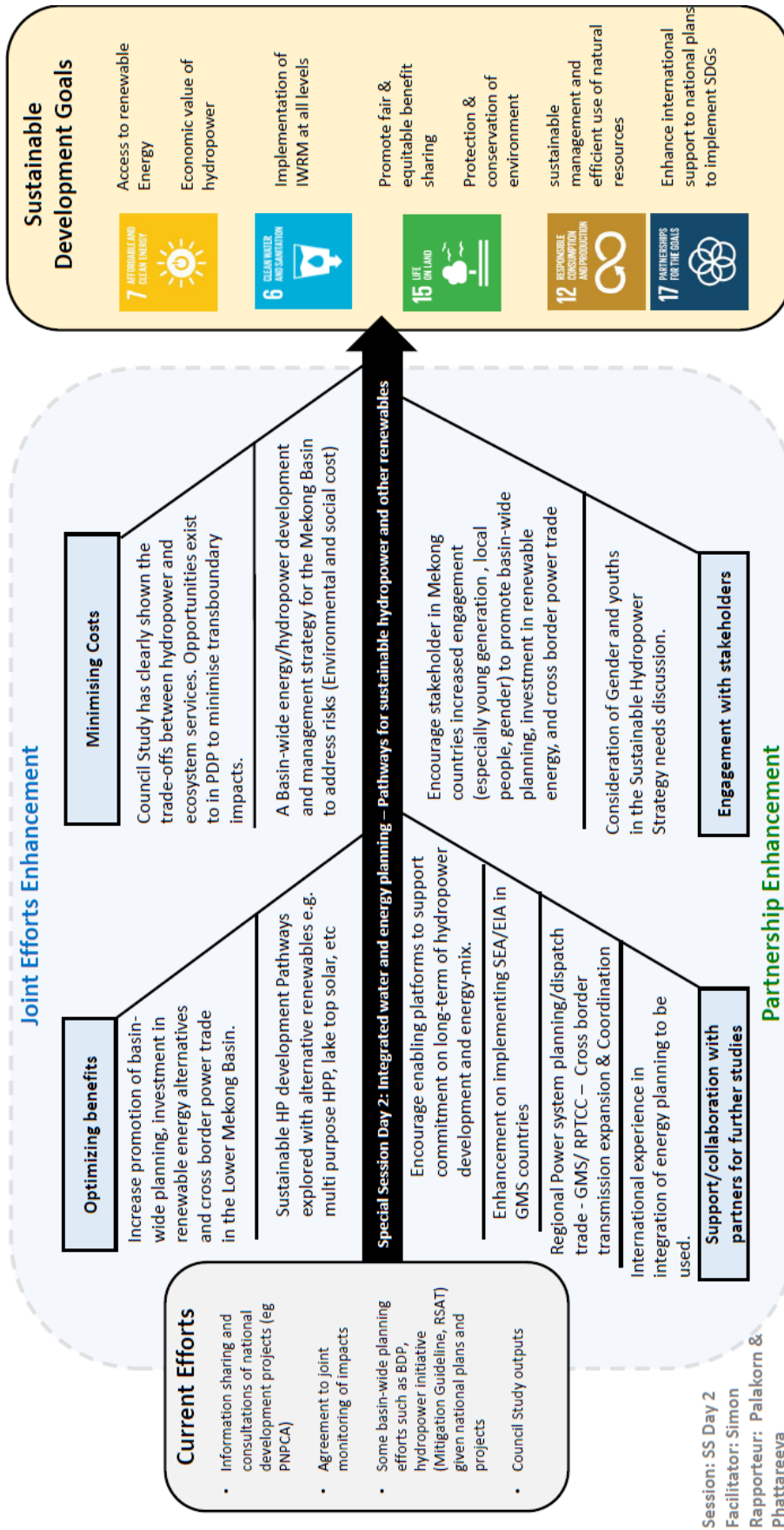
Repositioning hydro operations and electricity supply in a dynamic energy sector. Mr. James E Mason, International Business Development Manager, Entura-Hydro Tasmania

Southern African power pool – Cross-border partnership in planning and operation. Mr. William Derbyshire, Director for Asia, Economic Consulting Associates (ECA)

Enhancing regional water cooperation through clean energy transition. Mr. Brian Eyer, Stimson Center and Mr. Jake Brunner, IUCN

Sustainable hydropower development alternatives for the Mekong: Maintaining the flows that nourish life. Mr. Gregory A. Thomas, Executive Director, Natural Heritage Institute

ENHANCING JOINT EFFORTS AND PARTNERSHIPS TOWARDS ACHIEVEMENT OF THE SDGS IN THE MEKONG RIVER BASIN



3. Feedback: Results of the conference satisfaction survey

At the end of the two-day International Conference, participants had the chance to share their feedback by filling in the conference satisfaction survey. 93 out of about 400 conference participants filled in the survey – 32% female and 68% male. The majority of them represented other government agencies (excluding National Mekong Committee Secretariats; including development agencies), NGOs and universities/research institutes, and have used MRC products/studies/guidelines in their work before.

Overall, it can be concluded that the International Conference met its purpose in bringing together a diverse audience to discuss and exchange views on the chosen theme and in conveying these forward to the Summit of Heads of Government. Regarding the conference organisation, participants were overall satisfied with the facilitation, set up of the parallel sessions and panel discussions as well as with the presentations. Time for clarification and discussion was not considered enough. The logistics were well arranged and most of the documents and information were made available in time on the MRC Summit website.

The majority of the survey participants agreed that MRC’s key work presented at the International Conference contributes to address the SDGs in the Mekong Basin. Concerning MRC’s different work with regard to partnership and joint efforts, hydropower development is identified as the area of MRC’s work that could benefit more from joint efforts by Member Countries and enhanced partnerships. This can be seen in table 1 below, with hydropower, transboundary impact assessment and integrated water and energy planning belonging to the top three rated ‘slightly satisfied or not satisfied’.

Table 1: Satisfaction with different MRC work with regard to partnership and joint efforts

	Very satisfied	Moderately satisfied	Slightly satisfied	Not satisfied	Do not know
Hydropower	12%	48%	22%	13%	4%
Climate, flood and drought	15%	66%	17%	2%	0%
Transboundary Impact assessment	16%	48%	31%	6%	0%
Data and information management system	18%	54%	20%	7%	1%
Procedures, guidelines and standards	20%	63%	12%	2%	2%
Integrated water and energy planning	5%	51%	30%	9%	6%
1995 Mekong Agreement	18%	56%	17%	7%	2%

Regarding possibilities to improve the contribution of MRC's work to SDGs, the main recommendations relating to SDGs can be summarised as follows:

MRC actions with regard to SDGs

- MRC to ensure Member Countries implement the SDGs
- MRC's plan to report on SDGs to be aligned with the SDG reporting/implementing strategies of the Member Countries (coordinate/support methodology for countries to report on SDG 6)
- MRC could report on a selected number of SDG key indicators (e.g. five) in its annual report for these to be reported to the UN high level panel
- MRC to design tools and awareness raising modules to train practitioners and policy makers on the SDG linkages and highlight the role of SDG 6 in achieving other SDGs

MRC Member Countries actions with regard to SDGs

- National adoption of SDGs done by countries should be more open and involve dialogue with citizens
- Conduction of studies to understand requirement to achieve the SDGS in the Mekong region are necessary

Future conferences

- Consider Involvement of institutes that work on the 17 SDGs in future events related to the implementation of SDGs
- Consider participation of local community members in future conferences

4. The way forward until the next International Conference in 2022

The [outcomes and key messages of the third two-day International Conference](#) were read out by the conference facilitator Prof. David Grey during the closing session of the conference and delivered by the MRC CEO to Ministerial Meeting for the 3rd MRC Summit (see Annex 1). The outcomes of the International Conference and Ministerial Meeting were then delivered by the MRC Council Member for Cambodia to the 3rd Summit (see Annex 2). The 3rd Summit brought together the four Prime Ministers of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand Viet Nam, high-level representatives from China and Myanmar, and high-level and senior representatives from MRC's partners, including Development Partners, ASEAN, IUCN, the Stimson Centre and Morocco. It concluded in the [Siem Reap Declaration](#) (see Annex 3).

The declaration commends MRC for recent achievements and progress made since the 2nd MRC Summit, including the adoption and implementation of the IWRM-based Basin Development Strategy, Strategic Plan and the National Indicative Plans for the period 2016-2020, MRC's institutional reform, agreement on the financial contribution formula towards equal sharing by 2030 by the Member Countries, MRC's improved communication and engagement with stakeholders, cooperation with Development and other partners, the completion of the Council Study, and other basin-wide strategies and guidelines as well as the continued implementation of the five MRC procedures.

It goes on to say that the MRC Member Countries expect the MRC to foster joint efforts and partnerships to optimise any development opportunities and to address challenges and risks through a basin-wide, integrated, gender-sensitive and inclusive multi-disciplinary process. In total, the Declaration includes 12 recommendations, which reflect the key messages that came out of the International Conference (see table 2 below).

The recommendations resulting from the Summit are being followed up by the MRCS. Progress is reported to the MRC Joint Committee and Council meetings. The recommendations that are not sufficiently covered yet by the current Strategic Plan will be integrated in the next MRC Strategic Plan for the period 2021-2025. The next MRC International Conference and 4th Summit will take place in 2022.

Table 2: Recommendations extracted from the Siem Reap Declaration and proposed actions by MRCS as reported to the MRC Joint Committee meeting in August 2018

Recommendations	Proposed actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Optimize development opportunities Implementation of BDS within broader context of regional integration, cooperation & socio-economic development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue implement BDS 2016-2020 through its SP, NIPs and 5 Joint Projects Update BDS, SP, NIPs involving other regional organisations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider Council Study key findings in national planning, plans and projects as well as in MRC work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use CS to update SHDS, BDS, and other strategies/ plans MCs to provide info on how to uptake CS findings with MRCS support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue recent momentum in implementing all MRC Procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen implementation of 5 MRC Procedures involving and strengthening the Joint Platform and capacity of MCs Reinvigorate the implementation of PWUM and PDIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen the MRC basin-wide monitoring networks and forecast systems Strengthen the underpinning data & information system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve existing monitoring networks and data; Drought forecasting system based on new strategy Improve data & info system considering MTR and partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement BDS, SP and NIPS with greater effort on joint projects and decentralisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implemented funded Joint Projects and seek further financial & technical support for others Review decentralisation as part of MTR and implement recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve dissemination, uptake and use of MRC products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement MRC sectorial strategies and actions plans Improve capacity of NMCS to involve line agencies (AWP 2019) Improve M&E support (AWP 2019)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and implement opportunities for further cooperation with Dialogue Partners and DPs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategy paper on engagement with China and Myanmar Partnership database & strategy under preparation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pursue further concrete cooperation with ASEAN, MLC, and GMS towards a shared future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular exchange and implementation of identified cooperation activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue regular engagement with relevant stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue regular engagement with relevant stakeholders, including regular holding of Regional Stakeholder Forums and improving feedback mechanisms (AWP 2019)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen MRC's governance, including roles of the Council, JC, MRCS, NMCs and line agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen role of JC Increase and improve JC interaction with Council Implement and strengthen the 4 MRC EGs VNMC study on MA; Encourage other initiatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore financing opportunities from private-public partnerships or other sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MRCS and MCs to explore other financing opportunities (public – private partnership AWP 2019) Partnership database & strategy under preparation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Task MRC to ensure and monitor the implementation of the Siem Reap Declaration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MRCS to report to the MRC Council on the implementation of the Declaration MRCS to define monitoring system (AWP 2019)

The implementation of the current Basin Development Strategy and Strategic Plan can meet the majority of these recommendations. To do so, it is acknowledged that strong focus and mobilisation of resources is needed, in particular for further engagement with other regional frameworks, river monitoring related activities, improved data and information systems, the implementation of the MRC Procedures, as well as the uptake of the MRC Council Study findings and the implementation of the Sustainable Hydropower Strategy, the Basin Development Strategy and Joint Projects. Furthermore, MRC's governance and involvement with line agencies needs to be strengthened. This was reported to the first MRC Joint Committee Meeting after the Summit in August 2018.

Finally, in what concern the conference recommendations on MRC and SDGs, the mid-term review of the current MRC Strategic Plan 2016-2020 will provide further guidance on how MRC can support its Member Countries in reporting on and contributing to relevant SDGs in the first quarter of 2019.

For more information about the third MRC International Conference, please follow the links:

<https://www.mrcsummit.org>

<https://www.mrcsummit.org/agenda/>

<https://www.mrcsummit.org/documents/>

A.1. Short report by the CEO on the outcomes and key messages of the International Conference

Short Report by the Chief Executive Officer on the outcomes and key messages of the International Conference

The two-days MRC International Conference, with the theme **Joint Efforts and Partnerships towards Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Mekong River Basin**, concluded on 3rd April 2018. The conference welcomed about 400 stakeholders from Mekong country governments, non-governmental organisations, academia, the private sector, and other river basin organisations.

Overall, there was a wide appreciation for the work of the MRC. At the same time, a number of views and recommendations was expressed, exchanged and debated lively and constructively towards enhancing our joint efforts and partnerships. The following reflect diverse but consolidated views from the Conference participants:

Mekong River Commission: riparian ownership and direction

Unprecedented steps have been taken to achieve the Member countries' goal of full riparian ownership and direction of the Commission, in line with the reform and decentralization roadmap:

- Recruitment of the first 'riparian' Chief Executive Officer.
- Recruitment of all regular staff from Member Countries for the first time.
- Increased financial contribution from Member Countries.
- Agreement to fully fund MRC core functions by 2030.
- Partner financial contributions to a 'basket fund' managed by the Commission
- MRC work underpinned by cooperative and joint efforts of Member Countries— from conducting assessments together to developing and implementing guidelines, strategies and procedures, to joint monitoring and state of basin reporting, to work with partners and stakeholders in the basin and from around the world.

These included the Basin Development Strategy, the National Indicative Plans, including Joint projects, the Mekong Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan, the Basin-wide Fisheries Management and Development Strategy, the Council Study and other assessments. Support from partners from around the world is well appreciated.

Mekong Agreement

The signing of the Mekong Agreement in 1995, reflecting the Mekong Spirit, is historic and progressive and its implementation has yielded significant achievements. After 23 years of implementation new needs and challenges require adaptation and strengthening of the implementation of and compliance with the Agreement, considering relevant best practices and experiences from water-related agreements in other basins around the world.

Mekong River Commission and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The MRC work and activities, within the framework of its objectives set out in the 1995 Mekong Agreement, is comprehensive for achieving sustainable development. The SDG 6 on water is connected to ALL 17 SDGs, and particularly to SDGs on gender, hunger, inequality, energy, environment, climate change, infrastructure, peace and institutions, and partnerships.

Mekong development needs, opportunities and challenges

MRC has made considerable progress in the past four years, in particular through:

- providing a water diplomacy platform for member countries to discuss and address transboundary issues and challenges
- exploring sharing of benefits through the agreed Joint Projects, and
- conducting basin-wide assessments to support better decision making.

The MRC Council Study and other studies

The Council Study provides a sound scientific reference (with gaps to be filled) to guide policy making. The results reveal both the positive benefits and negative impacts of developments. Enhancing positive benefits and minimizing negative impacts will require substantial cooperative and joint efforts by the Member Countries, with technical and facilitation support by the MRCS and in relevant collaboration with partners, including:

- identifying multi-sector investment needs to sustain water-food-energy-environment security
- assessing location and design options from a basin-wide perspective
- establishing and maintaining protected areas in the Mekong
- development of plans and projects that optimize benefits and minimize costs including considering alternative water and energy sources,
- putting in place sound mitigation measures,
- exploring innovative co-financing and co-ownership by the Mekong-Lancang countries.

Flood, drought and climate change

Participants called for increased joint efforts on mainstreaming regional results at national levels to improve informed, participatory decision-making processes, especially articulating results with national socio-economic development plans. Opportunities for synergies by sharing data and coordinating complementary know-how, including that of local communities, should be explored. Partnerships can help better assess gender-differentiated impacts. Participants recommend a more systematic combination of structural and non-structural measures to improve resilience to flood, drought and climate change.

Data and information

MRC Decision Support Framework and the PDIES have been implemented to conduct joint assessments and promote sharing of data among countries. However, there is more to be done. New opportunities to improve the way we manage our water resources are becoming available because of new technologies. So the call for action for our joint efforts to be strategic, invest more, modernize our data and systems infrastructure, and expand the scope and extent of data sharing among countries and its Dialogue Partners through the PDIES. We should pursue new and improved partnerships to seek new data (like satellite data), share best practices, and work together on innovations and research and development.

Dialogue Partners

MRC Dialogue Partners China and Myanmar were well represented and welcomed at the Conference. Senior Chinese representatives committed to close cooperation with the MRC. There are important opportunities to cooperate between the Mekong Lancang Cooperation and the Mekong River Commission, including integrated basin-wide planning, data and information sharing, joint studies, capacity building and exchanges, and coordination of infrastructure projects.

A.2. Report by the Council Member for Cambodia on the outcomes of the International Conference and Ministerial Meeting for the Summit

Report by the Council Member for Cambodia on the outcomes of the International Conference and Ministerial Meeting for the Summit

The MRC International Conference took place on 2-3 April 2018 with about 400 participants. The following **Eight Key Messages** reflect diverse but consolidated views. The Ministerial Meeting for the 3rd Summit reinforced some of the messages from the Conference in terms of MRC's primary and unique role in the sustainable development of the Mekong River Basin.

Eight Key Messages of the 2018 Mekong River Commission (MRC) International Conference

1. Great steps have been taken towards our goal of **clear riparian ownership and direction of the MRC**:

- with recruitment, for the first time, of a Chief Executive and all regular staff from Member Countries; with partner financial contributions to an **MRC-managed 'basket fund'**, increased financial contributions from Member Countries and agreement to fund all **MRC** core functions by 2030; and with **MRC** basin-wide work underpinned by cooperative efforts of all Member Countries, including basin-wide sector and thematic strategies, MRC Procedures, guidelines, monitoring, and data and information systems and decision support framework.

2. Our historic and progressive **1995 Mekong Agreement** that has sustained the **Mekong Spirit** and served us well.

3. The **MRC's** work and activities, within the framework of our **1995 Mekong Agreement**, have been and clearly support our Member Countries' efforts to achieve the **Sustainable Development Goals (the SDGs)**. The SDG 6 on water is connected to all 17 SDGs.

4. The **MRC** has provided significant support to meeting Mekong development needs, opportunities and challenges, in particular through: providing a water diplomacy platform for member countries to address transboundary challenges and exploring the sharing of benefits.

5. The **MRC Council Study**, despite gaps, provides a sound scientific basis for policy making, identifying both positive benefits that can be enhanced and negative impacts that must be minimized, requiring cooperative efforts by Member Countries, supported by our **MRC** Secretariat, including:

- identifying multi-sector investment needs to sustain water-food-energy-environment security and
- exploring innovative co-financing and co-ownership by the Mekong-Lancang countries.

6. Joint efforts are needed to incorporate regional findings on **flood, drought and climate change** within national development plans, incorporating participatory decision-making processes, local community knowledge and gender-differentiated impacts, to increase basin-wide resilience.

7. The **MRC Decision Support Framework**, which supports our water management, joint assessments and data sharing, now needs to be enhanced further, modernize systems infrastructure, and expand data sharing among Member Countries and partners.

8. The **MRC Dialogue Partners China and Myanmar** were well represented. China's representatives committed to close cooperation between the Mekong-Lancang Cooperation Council and the MRC, potentially including basin-wide planning, data and information sharing, joint studies, capacity building and exchanges, and coordination of infrastructure projects.

A.3. Siem Reap Declaration

Siem Reap Declaration

Enhancing Joint Efforts and Partnerships towards Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Mekong River Basin

5th April 2018

Preamble

We, the Heads of Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Kingdom of Thailand, and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, meeting in Siem Reap, Cambodia, for the 3rd Summit of the Mekong River Commission (MRC),

1. Considering the vital importance of sustainable development and management of water and related resources of the Mekong River Basin, and reaffirming the highest political commitment to the more effective implementation of the Agreement on Cooperation for the Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin signed on 5 April 1995 (Mekong Agreement);
2. Confirming the MRC's importance as a primary regional cooperation framework and its unique role as regional knowledge hub in enhancing the implementation of a set of Basin-wide strategies, procedures, guidelines, and data and information that fosters peaceful and mutually beneficial cooperation towards the optimal and sustainable development of the Mekong River Basin;
3. Acknowledging that climate change, natural disasters, over-population, unsustainable industrialisation, intensive agriculture, irrigation, hydropower, and other development activities in the basin all constitute major challenges to the Mekong River Basin;
4. Noting that while Mekong River Basin development has been essential for economic growth of riparian countries, it has also yielded adverse environmental and socio-economic impacts including transboundary impacts that need to be jointly addressed;
5. Reiterating the importance of integrated water resources management (IWRM), the

need for water-food-energy nexus and gender-sensitive perspective as well as the mainstreaming of climate change and alignment of regional and national efforts in development planning and implementation, the protection against extreme floods and droughts and the preservation of key environmental assets and livelihood of vulnerable communities;

6. Recognising the importance of enhanced joint efforts and partnerships to address Mekong challenges and opportunities to contribute to achieving the relevant Sustainable Development Goals committed by the MRC Member Countries, especially Goal 6 - "Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all";

Hereby agree to the following:

Achievements since the 2nd Summit in 2014

7. The preparation and approval of the IWRM-based Basin Development Strategy (BDS) 2016-2020, the Strategic Plan 2016-2020 to implement the BDS by the MRC, and the National Indicative Plans 2016-2020, including the agreement to cooperate on five Joint Projects to implement the BDS by the Member Countries are notable successes.
8. The MRC's institutional reform, and the approval and implementation of a new MRC Secretariat structure forms a sound platform for continued cooperation. The appointment of a riparian Chief Executive Officer and the consolidation of the Secretariat Headquarters into one location in Vientiane, continued operation of the Regional Flood Management and Mitigation Centre in Phnom Penh, and the operationalisation of the new basket funding mechanism are noteworthy. The efforts and perseverance of the MRC Secretariat and the National Mekong Committees to successfully undertaking this comprehensive reform is worthy of praise.
9. The completion of the Council Study and its findings, knowledge base and tools produced are of value for the Member Countries, the MRC and relevant stakeholders.
10. The continued implementation of the 5 MRC Procedural Rules for Water Utilisation for Data and Information Exchange and Sharing, Water Use Monitoring, Notification, Prior Consultation and Agreement, Maintenance of Flows on the Mainstream, and Water Quality, has uniquely contributed to the sound and cooperative management of the Mekong River Basin. The learned experiences of the Prior Consultation processes for three proposed mainstream hydropower projects are vital for the management of the Mekong river basin, and the agreed Joint Committee's Statement on the Pak Beng hydropower project has shown strong commitment of the member countries. The approval of Technical Guidelines for the Procedures for Water Quality and the updated knowledge in preparing the Technical Guidelines for the Procedures for Maintenance of Flows on the Mainstream meant that all technical guidelines following implementation experience will contribute to a more coordinated and effective implementation of the Mekong Agreement.
11. The approval of the Mekong Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan and the Basin-wide Fisheries Management and Development Strategy are commendable. The substantial progress in finalising the Guidelines for Transboundary Environmental Impacts Assessment, the development of the Joint Environmental Monitoring activity for mainstream dams and Regional Drought Management and Mitigation Strategy, and the updating of the Preliminary Design Guidance for Mainstream Dams and Sustainable Hydropower Development Strategy are acknowledged.
12. The recent approval by the Member Countries on the financial contribution formula towards equal sharing by 2030 demonstrates the high commitment by the four governments to the MRC and its future financial sustainability.

13. The cooperation with the Dialogue Partners, China and Myanmar, continues to be strengthened with data and information sharing, joint technical symposiums and exchange of visits, joint observation, and research being conducted on key issues, and the emergency water supplement to the Mekong River during dry season 2016 is highly appreciated.
14. The historical and continuing financial and technical support from Development Partners including but not limited to Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Japan, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Republic of Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States, Asian Development Bank, Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Food and Agriculture Organisation, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Environment Programme, World Bank and Global Environment Facility, as well as other partners to the MRC is highly appreciated. Recent exchange visits between the MRC with the Mississippi River Commission, Murray Darling Basin Authority, Morocco and others are valuable in terms of world-wide collaboration.
15. Cooperation with ASEAN continues, including participation in each other's meetings, implementation and development of joint activities.
16. The MRC's communication, interaction and engagement with stakeholders have seen major improvement, resulting in a significant positive impact on the public's understanding and perceptions of the organisation.
17. The outcomes resulted from the International Conference held on 2-3 April 2018 prior to the 3rd Summit are acknowledged with appreciation. We express our thanks to all stakeholders for their input and contribution.

Regional opportunities and challenges

Through its studies and assessment work during the last four years, the MRC has obtained better understanding and a clearer focus of the crucial development and management opportunities and challenges that the Mekong River Basin has faced:

18. The Mekong River Basin offers development opportunities and cooperation for mainstream and tributary water resources development, fisheries, navigation, flood and drought management, tourism and environment including ecosystem management.
19. At the same time, there remains significant challenges such as rapid economic and population growth, increased demand for water, food and energy, urbanization, industrialization, the loss of environmental assets, wetlands and natural fisheries, deforestation, floods and droughts and risks to biodiversity and people's livelihoods and assets. All these are compounded by the effects of climate change, as well as past and ongoing developments in all water and related sectors. The increasing development in the mainstream and tributaries highlight the increasing need for the sustainability and coordinated operational management of tributary and mainstream water resources development projects.

Priority areas of action

Building on 23 years of achievements and experience, and considering opportunities and challenges, we expect the MRC to foster joint efforts and partnerships, focusing on:

20. Optimising the development opportunities and addressing challenges through a basin-wide, integrated and inclusive multi-disciplinary process, notably the implementation of the BDS within the broader context of regional integration, cooperation and socio-economic development.
21. Considering the key findings from the Council Study, including at both policy and technical levels in order to capture development opportunities and address trade-offs, benefit sharing, risks as a reference for planning and implementation of national plans and projects, and in relevant MRC work.
22. Continuing the recent momentum in implementing all the MRC Procedures for Water Utilisation to support the sustainable, reasonable and equitable use of the Mekong water and related resources.
23. Strengthening the MRC basin-wide monitoring networks and forecasting systems for floods and droughts, and the data and information management systems underpinning them.
24. Implementing the MRC Basin Development Strategy, Strategic Plan and the National Indicative Plans with greater efforts focusing on joint projects. Further effort on the implementation of the Decentralization Roadmap including the strengthening of decentralised monitoring activities with secured budget.
25. Continuing to improve the dissemination, uptake and use of the MRC products by relevant line agencies and organizations.
26. Identifying and implementing opportunities for further cooperation with Dialogue Partners, Development Partners, and other partners. Concrete cooperation should be further pursued with ASEAN, Mekong-Lancang Cooperation, and Greater Mekong Sub-region towards a shared future. Regular engagement with relevant stakeholders in the work of the MRC should be continued.

Ways ahead

27. We reaffirm our solidarity and the Mekong Spirit, and our highest political commitment and support to the effective implementation of the Mekong Agreement; we encourage the strengthening of the MRC's governance including the roles of the Council, the Joint Committee, the MRC Secretariat, the National Mekong Committees and relevant national agencies in the work of the MRC in order for the MRC to become a world class inter-governmental organisation as stated in its vision. Reiterating our support to the MRC's institutional reform in line with the decisions of the 1st and 2nd Summits, and the recently agreed new contribution formula, we task the MRC to explore opportunities for securing other means of financing through private-public partnerships or other sources including from Development Partners.
28. We task the MRC to ensure and monitor the implementation of this Declaration.
29. We express our sincere gratitude to the Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia for hosting the 3rd MRC Summit, and we look forward to the 4th Summit to be held in April 2022 in the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Adopted in Siem Reap, Kingdom of Cambodia, on 5th April 2018 in the English language.



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