

## Regional Scoping Workshop on Gender and Sustainable Hydropower



### Workshop report

20-21 June 2013 in Bangkok, Thailand



Although awareness has increased significantly in recent decades on the need for gender mainstreaming in development projects, knowledge about the consequences of hydropower development on girls, boys, women and men is still limited in the Mekong Region. Moreover, the involvement of women in hydropower-related planning and decision-making processes remains low. With the aim to integrate gender sensitive activities in its work

program, specifically improve gender mainstreaming in the Lower Mekong Region's hydropower development, the Mekong River Commission (MRC)'s Initiative on Sustainable Hydropower (ISH), supported by GIZ, hosted a highly interactive scoping workshop on Gender and Sustainable Hydropower on 20-21 June 2013 in Bangkok, Thailand.

Presentations by renowned experts were accompanied by interactive and fruitful discussions among participants. This contributed to elaborating priorities and concrete activities to be implemented by the MRC and its stakeholders to improve gender-sensitive hydropower. Key issues raised and the lessons drawn on by participants are summarized in the following main sections:

### **1. Global, regional and national experience in gender, hydropower and water resource management**

The workshop started with the presentation on global gender and water issues by Kenza Robinson from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA). She emphasized the role of women in development, recognized by the global community and international frameworks, but also stressed the challenges that remain with regard to gender equality in water resource management. For overcoming these challenges, Kenza stressed that collection and use of sex disaggregated data on access to water, energy and food and the importance of concerted actions at both national and international level.

This global experience was followed by insights from the Mekong River Basin: Sengamphone Chitthalath (MRC) presented MRC's regional Approach for Gender Mainstreaming in the Lower Mekong River Basin (LMB) and Maytinee Bhongsvej (Gender Advisor, Thailand) shed light on introducing gender

mainstreaming into government agencies in Thailand. MRC Member Country representatives then presented their national policy and/or legislation on gender equality in the water resources and energy sectors. Examples included the Vietnamese Ministry of Industrial and Trade (MOIT)'s Action Plan for the Advancement of Women in Vietnam or the Cambodian Gender mainstreaming Action Plan of Ministry of Industry, Mines and Energy (2012-2017). At the same time, remaining shortcomings were addressed, including the gaps in implementation of policies and the development of practices on the ground that ensure a gender sensitive approach in hydropower planning, implementation, operation and management. This emphasized the need to fill the gap between policy and implementation in gender and hydropower development.

## 2. Hydropower and Gendered differentiated impacts

Participants discussed both positive and negative impacts of hydropower on women and men in sectors such as health, resettlement, local communities and ethnic minorities. The benefits of hydropower mentioned include improved housing, infrastructure, health services, water and sanitation, education access and job opportunities. However, these benefits are not gender neutral because women and men, boys and girls have different needs, access to and control over resources: For example, often more boys than girls have the opportunities to go to school; female headed household has more difficulty in accessing credit or receiving land as compensation for relocation; women and girls have different needs and priorities of water and sanitation and health services compared to men and boys. Regarding negative impacts, the loss of land, market, livelihood, natural resources, social cohesion and changes in culture and living style raised by participants are the major costs of hydropower. These impacts are not the same for women and men. Specifically, women are more severely affected than men when social relation and kinship structures are disrupted due to resettlement. Also, hydropower development has different impacts on the health status of women, men, girls and boys including accidents during construction; HIV/Aid; stress and mental health; diseases and illness due to dust, noise, poor water and sanitation and insufficient food and nutrition.

Potential ways to address these problems were highlighted by various speakers sharing their experiences from various countries and projects: Stephen Bartholomeusz (Sarawak Energy Berhad) shared the example of the Murum Penan Literacy Program through which 71% of female participants were able to learn to read and write. Jo Pereira (Theun Hinboun Hydropower Company) highlighted the importance of data collection on the situation of affected population before and after the project for effective monitoring and evaluation. Malasri Khumsri (MRC) explained the role of women in fisheries and the effects of hydropower on their socioeconomic situation. Deepa Joshi (Wageningen University) highlighted the involvement of men and women in Nepal's hydropower development through civil



society movements. And Siviaxay Soukharath (Nam Theun 2 Project) explained the project's gender mainstreaming approach, including various targeted activities to support women and girls, including conducting women-centered focus group, establishing women's cooking group, coordinating with the Lao Women Union, practicing hand-washing with soap targeting women and children.

In addition to project-level activities, the application of sustainability assessment tools can help raise awareness for gender issues in hydropower projects and develop means for integrating the different needs of women, men, girls and boys into sustainable hydropower development. Here, the Rapid Basin-wide Hydropower Sustainable Assessment Tool (RSAT) and the Hydropower Sustainable Assessment Protocol (HSAP), presented by Donna Brown (MRC-GIZ) as well as and gender impact assessment (GIA), presented by Michael Simon (Oxfam) can provide meaningful tools.

### 3. Recommendations – Mainstreaming Gender into Sustainable Hydropower Development



The workshop provided a platform for productive discussions on the key barriers to mainstreaming gender in hydropower sector. First, inadequate perception of key stakeholders towards gender equality and gender mainstreaming was addressed by a number of speakers as one of the major challenges. Second, a lack of capacity and knowledge of government officials, project staff, and development practitioners on how to integrate gender issue in hydropower sector is another main difficulty.

Participants stressed the need to have specific and easy to use tools and guidelines on how to mainstream gender in hydropower development. And third, a lack of an effective communication and participation mechanism between local community and government was defined by participants as another barrier.

In order to respond to these challenges, the following approaches to mainstreaming gender into sustainable hydropower were discussed:

- 1) Support to ***develop sex disaggregated databases and evidence-based studies on gendered approach to hydropower***, including research on:
  - a) how hydropower development impacts on women and men, girls and boys in specific aspects of health, social and cultural wellbeing, food security, income and livelihood;
  - b) impact evaluation of gender sensitive approach in specific hydropower projects;
  - c) what is “basic good practice” on gender for hydropower developers; and
  - d) accepted methods to collect disaggregated baseline data for hydropower induced changes (impacts and benefits)

- 2) Support to **improve capacity building, training and awareness rising**, with trainings focusing specifically on
  - a) Training of Trainers, gender analysis, gender action plan, gender sensitive training manual, sex disaggregated data collection methods
  - b) Gender sensitive indicators and M&E mechanism
  - c) How to integrate gender in all stages of project and program management
  - d) How to integrate gender in sectoral action plan and strategic development plan
  - e) How to use gender sensitive tools and guidelines in hydropower development such as GIA and how to mainstream gender issues in SIA, EIA
  
- 3) Support to **strengthen networks, partnerships, communication and knowledge exchange among key stakeholders**, with MRC and MRC's ISH having a key role to play in
  - a) Developing a strategy for gender mainstreaming into sustainable hydropower development
  - b) Strengthening existing local and national groups and network focus on gender issues and connecting them with international networks
  - c) Developing strategic communication for better gender sensitive awareness and coordination between governmental institutions
  - d) Facilitating meetings, workshop and platforms for International Financial Institutions (IFIs), private sector, government agencies, civil society to share knowledge and experiences on data, information and good case studies at national, regional and international level

In this context, the role of the MRC and its ISH were highlighted. With MRC being the regional platform for integrated water resources management and already having a long experience in gender mainstreaming (both MRC-wide and in some MRC Programmes), MRC is well-equipped to address gender-related challenges in sustainable hydropower development. MRC, MRC's ISH as well as Member Countries should therefore increasingly work on overcoming the challenges described in the workshop and developing and implementing concrete measures in the fields of data gathering, capacity building and network strengthening.

For more information on the Regional Scoping Workshop on Gender and Sustainable Hydropower or on MRC ISH's work on gender and hydropower, please contact

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