



Attitude survey: evaluate the understanding of the ban on catch of the Mekong Giant Catfish by villagers on both the Thai and Lao sides of the Mekong

Report

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Vientiane

The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund is a joint initiative of l'Agence Française de Développement, Conservation International, the Global Environment Facility, the Government of Japan, the MacArthur Foundation and the World Bank. A fundamental goal is to ensure civil society is engaged in biodiversity conservation. www.cepf.net

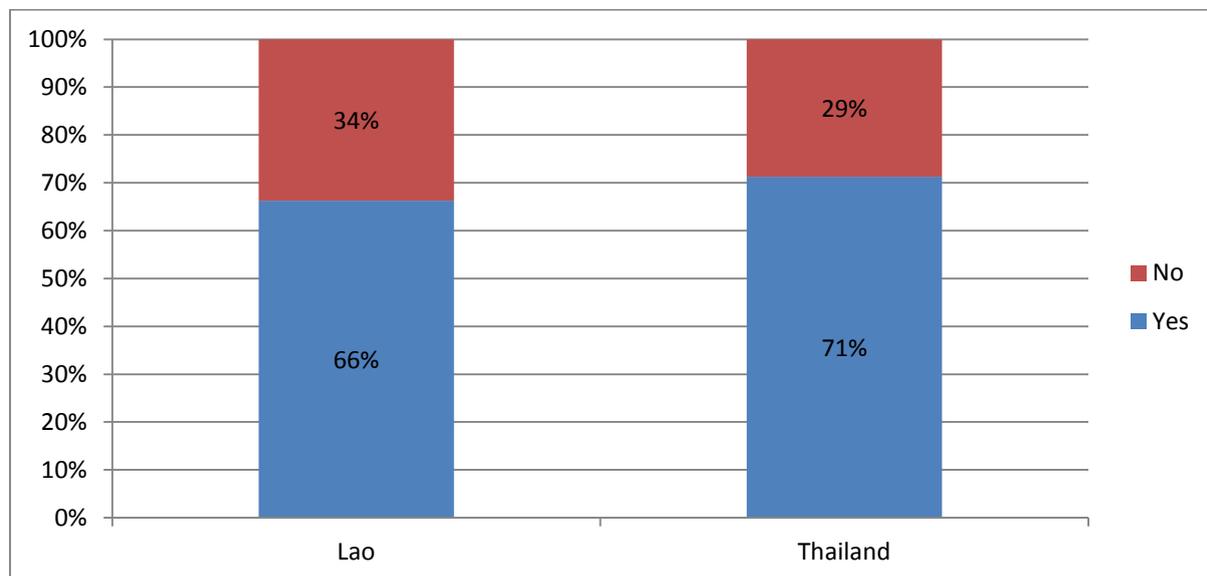
1 Background

As part of the CEPF funded project “Engaging with Key Actors in Reconciling Biodiversity Conservation and Development Objectives, Using the Critically Endangered Mekong Giant Catfish as a Flagship Species for Biodiversity Conservation”, attitude surveys of the local communities in the project location was a project deliverable under Component 2. Specifically, the expectation was “Villagers at project sites in Bokeo and Chiang Rai provinces demonstrate increased understanding of the ban on catch of the Mekong Giant Catfish, as evidenced by the results of pre- and post-activity attitude surveys”. In fact no pre-project survey was carried out, so this end of project survey asked people to compare their knowledge now with two years ago.

2 Methodology

A set of 12 questions was prepared by WWF, in English and then translated into Thai and Lao. The questions were asked in all 8 villages of the project, on both sides of the river. The survey was conducted in Thailand by the WWF-Thailand team on December 2-5, 2012 and in Laos by local authorities with the assistance of the WWF team on March 4-7, 2013. 10 men and 10 women in each village were interviewed individually. Some questions were closed and some open to allow direct input from the villagers. The respondents were chosen randomly in consideration of their availability. It was also ensured that a majority of the respondents participated in the project activities. There was some bias towards those who often fished.

Figure 1: responses to question 1 – Have you been involved in any project activities in the last 2 years? Yes or no?



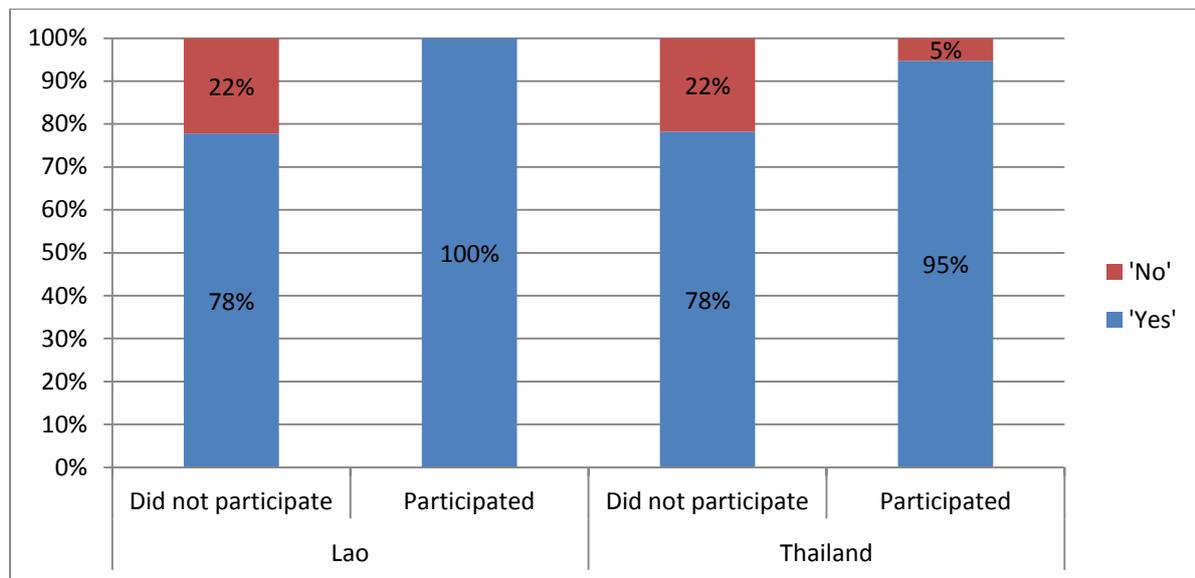
3 Objectives

The main objective of the survey was to evaluate the understanding of the ban on catch of the Mekong Giant Catfish by villagers on both the Thai and Lao sides of the Mekong. A secondary objective consisted in trying to evaluate the potential remaining threats to the habitat of the Mekong Giant Catfish

4 Results

Overall, the people who participated in project activities appear to have appreciated the project and are willing to participate in more activities, if given the opportunity, as demonstrated by the responses to question 2. In Laos, all participants (100%) would like to participate in more activities, should there be a follow-up project. This is positive, and with the soon to start Mekong River Commission's Fishery Programme project, the opportunity for participation will be there.

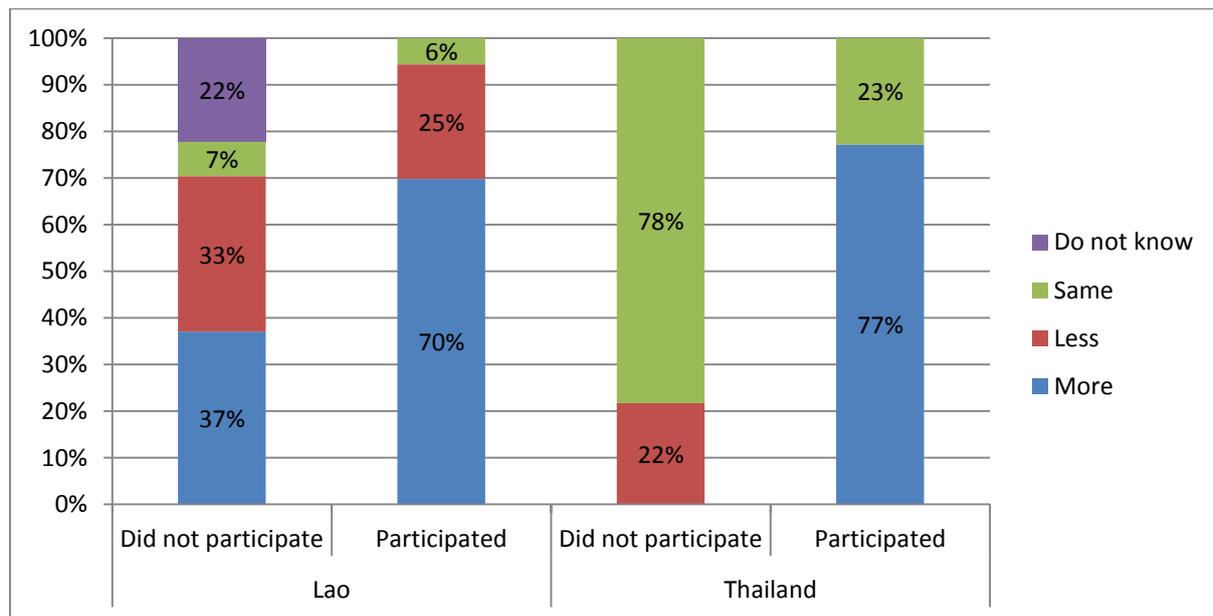
Figure 2: responses to question 3 – Are you interested to do more project work in the future? Yes or no?



4.1 Knowledge

The impact of the project on the understanding of the ban on catch of the Mekong Giant Catfish by villagers on both the Thai and Lao sides of the river is clearly positive, as the figure below shows.

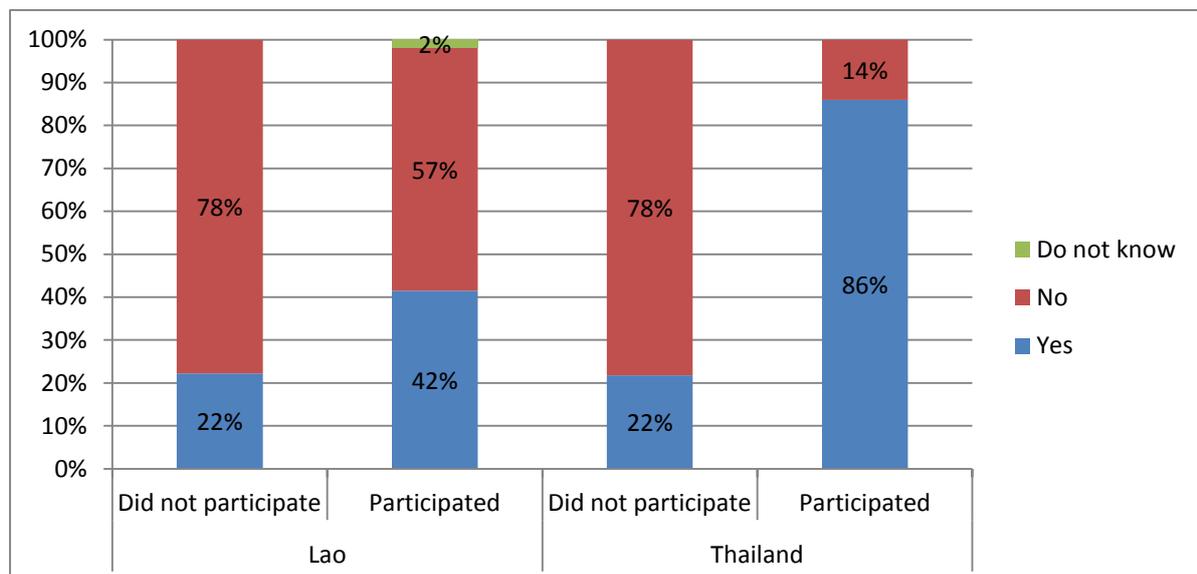
Figure 3: responses to question 4 – Compared to 2 years ago, do you understand more about the need to conserve the giant catfish (and other species) than you did before? Yes, no, the same as before?



In both countries, the vast majority (70% in Laos and 77% in Thailand) of the people who participated feel they know more after the project. In Laos, the project seems to have had an impact on the whole community, as some people who did not participate feel they have learned from the project. In Laos also, 25% of the people who participated feel their knowledge has decreased, which tends to say that more work is needed on awareness. It may also be a realisation that we know so very little about the Mekong Giant Catfish and its life-cycle needs.

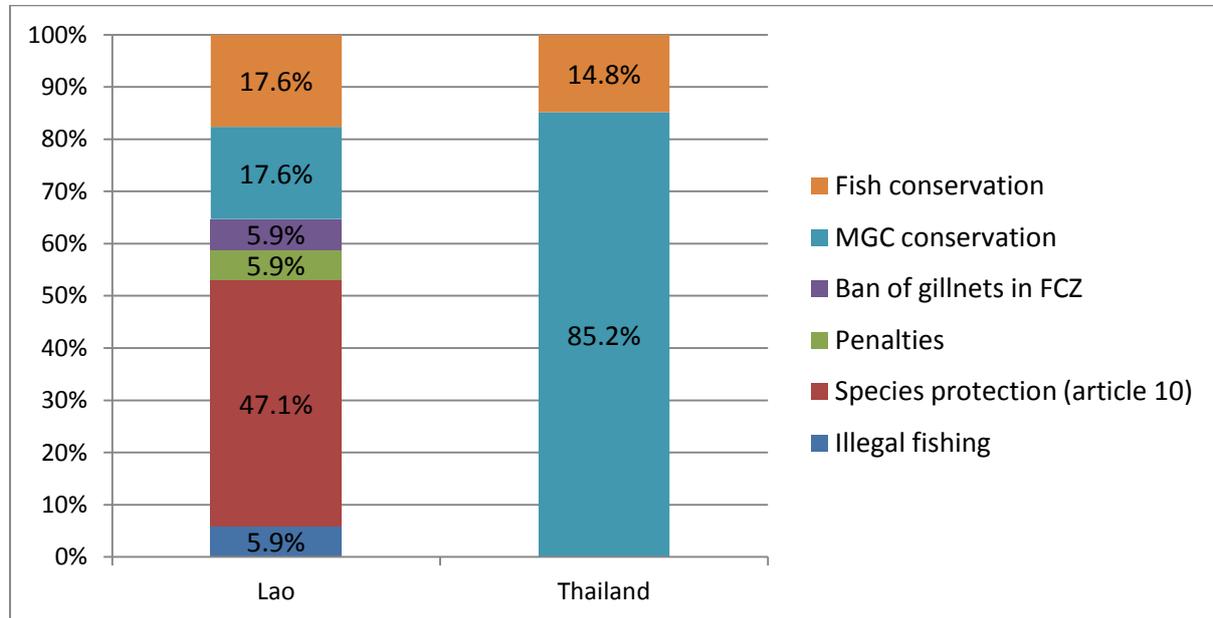
The project seems to have increased the perceived knowledge of the fisheries law in both countries, as shown in the figure below. In both Thailand and Laos, 78% of the respondents who did not participate in project activities do not know about the law. This figure is reduced to 57% in Laos and only 14% in Thailand for those respondents who participated.

Figure 4: responses to question 6 – Are you aware of the Fishery Law...?



In Laos, however, it is worth noting that only 42% of those who participated in the project know about the Fisheries law and its implication for the MGC. This shows that a lot more awareness-raising work is needed in order to promote the law at large.

Figure 5: responses to question 6 - and if so, what does the Fishery Law say about the giant catfish?



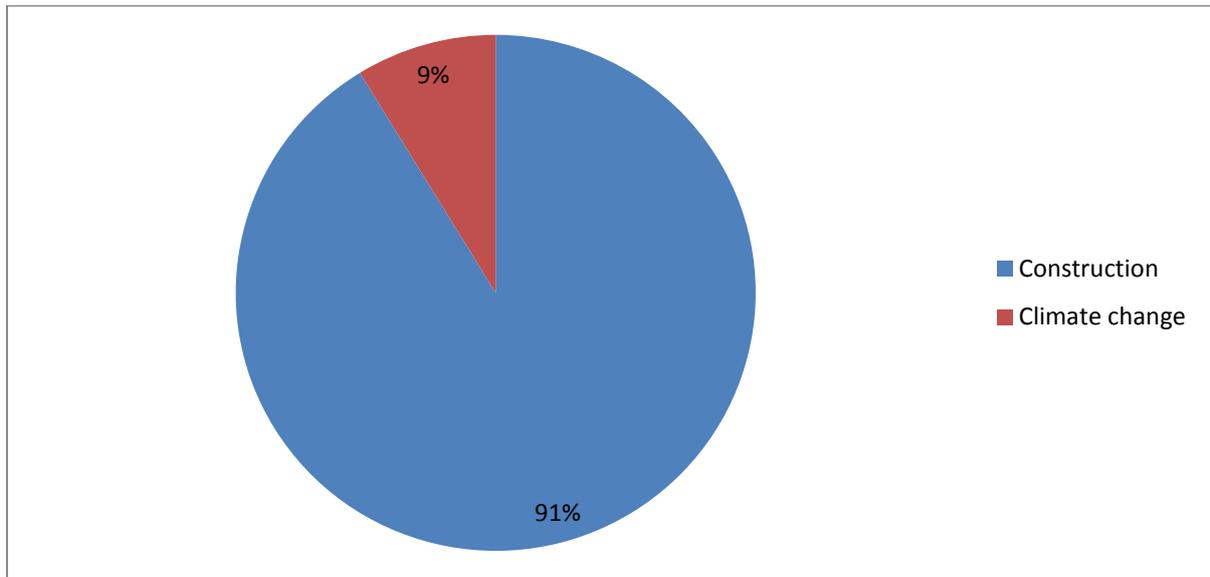
The figure above illustrates what respondents in both countries answered to describe their knowledge of the Fisheries Law and what it says about the MGC. Thai villagers are unanimous that the Fisheries Law calls for MGC conservation (85.2%) or overall fish conservation (14.8%). In Laos, responses are more diverse – and it should be kept in mind that only a few respondents said they knew about the Law. However, nearly half of them (47.1%) mentioned that the law calls for (assumed fish) species protection, followed by MGC conservation and overall fish conservation (17.6%). Illegal fishing gears and penalties are also mentioned to be part of the Law, as well as the ban of gillnets in FCZ.

The results on the Lao side suggest, to a degree, that the villagers may be confused, as it seems that they do not differentiate between the national law (the Fisheries Law) and their own fisheries regulations (associated with the establishment of fish conservation zones and respective committees). This, however, should not impede local practical conservation efforts.

4.2 Threats to the MGC

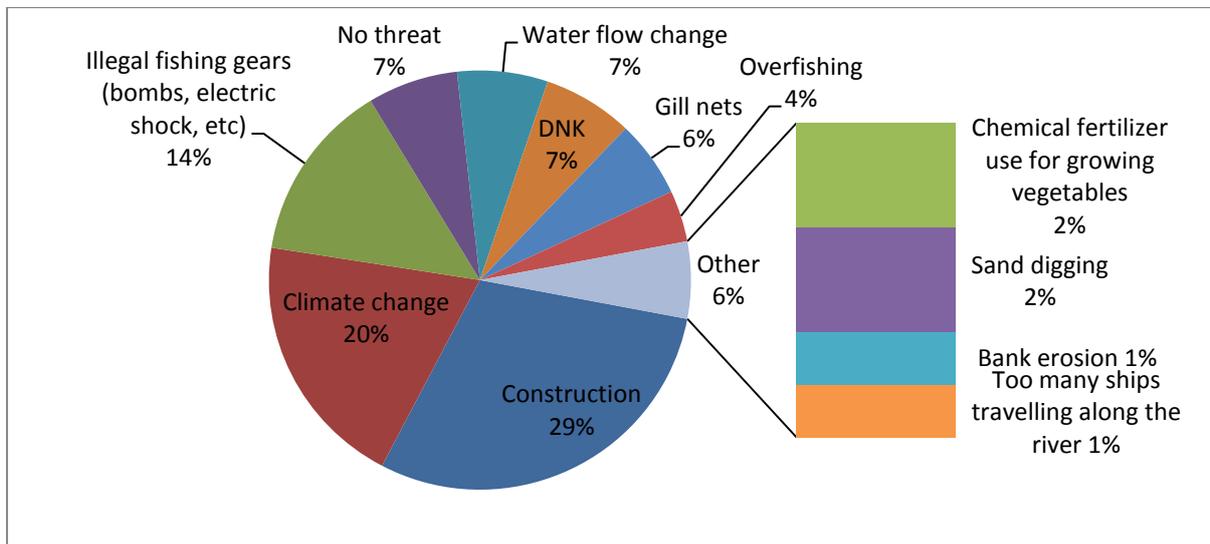
The survey represented a good opportunity to learn more about what the local population perceives as threats to the MGC in their river. In Thailand, due to limitations during the field work, the question was kept closed i.e. answers choice was limited to “infrastructure construction” and “climate change”.

Figure 6: responses to question 5 in Thailand – What do you think are the main threats to the survival of the Mekong Giant Catfish? (Closed choice of answer, “infrastructure construction” and “climate change”).



The vast majority chose construction (i.e. dams, embankments, etc.) as the main threat to the MGC. This displays the concerns that the local population in Thailand has over infrastructure construction on the Mekong River.

Figure 7: responses to question 5 in Laos – What do you think are the main threats to the survival of the Mekong Giant Catfish? (Open choice of answers, including “infrastructure construction” and “climate change”).



In Laos responses were more diverse, even though construction and climate change remain the main perceived threats (29 and 20% respectively). “Illegal fishing gears” comes third, which shows that these gears are still used by some villagers. This information is somewhat alarming, since such gears are clearly prohibited by law. It demonstrates that more work is needed in both awareness-raising and law implementation.

5 Conclusion

The results of the attitude survey conducted in the eight villages targeted by the project on both sides of the Mekong River in Bokeo (Laos) and Chiang Rai (Thailand) provinces demonstrate that the project has had positive impacts on the understanding of the ban on catch of the Mekong Giant Catfish by villagers. Knowledge about conservation on both sides of the Mekong has increased. Law awareness has also increased in both countries. The threats to the survival of the MGC are – for most – known and understood on both sides of the river. However, the survey shows that there is still a clear and pressing need in Laos for more work to be done so that the Fisheries Law is better known, understood and complied with.