

# Rapid Strategic Environmental Assessment (RSEA) of the Lancang-Mekong Development Plan

## Annex 4: Social Assessment

### Project background:

The proposed RSEA will identify key environmental and socio-economic issues and define recommendations for the avoidance, enhancement and mitigation of the main impacts of the Lancang Mekong Development Plan (LMDP). The following process will be adopted to implement the RSEA:

- (i) **Scoping:** What are the key issues for biodiversity and navigation development?
- (ii) **Baseline:** What are the trends in the key issues without the LMDP?
- (iii) **Impact:** What are the impacts of the LMDP on each of these trends?
- (iv) **Avoidance, enhancement, mitigation:** How will the most important risks be avoided or mitigated and benefits be enhanced?

The RSEA aims to assess the potential impact of planned navigation improvement works on biodiversity and livelihoods in the Mekong River between Golden Triangle and Luang Prabang.

### Project location:

The RSEA will be implemented on the Mekong River and development corridor between the Golden Triangle (Chiang Saen, Thailand) and Luang Prabang in Laos, as shown below in Figure 1.

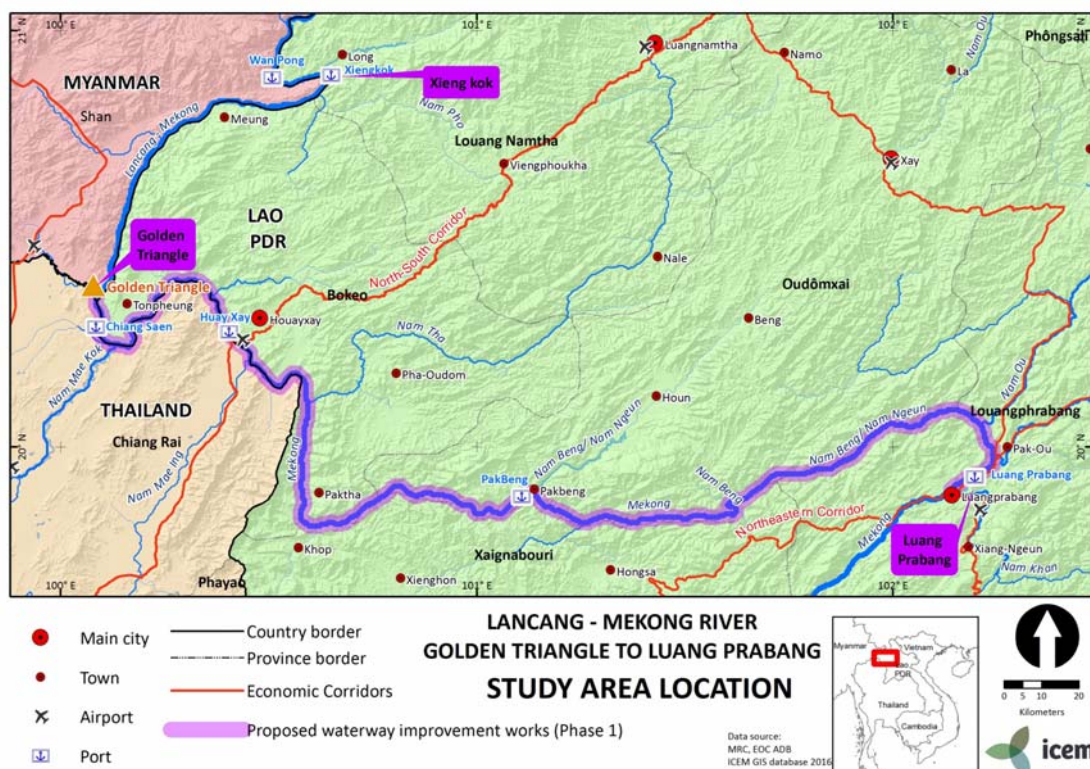


Figure 1: Proposed study area for RSEA

Local communities rely on fisheries and riverine natural resources to sustain livelihoods. Also, inland water transport (IWT) remains critical for local trade and access to social services and markets. A socio-economic assessment of riparian communities and their ecosystems dependence, and local

and regional economic activities, including hydropower, agriculture, sawmills and the existing trade and navigation will be carried out as part of the baseline for the RSEA.

The RSEA will consider the social impacts of increased trade and transport in the project. The movement of people through the opening of new transport routes can lead to increases in migration from urban to rural areas and between countries, often through illegal means. Research has shown that migration can increase the prevalence and rate of HIV/AIDs, transportation of drugs, human and wildlife trafficking.

**Local communities and indigenous peoples in the project area:**

The proposed RSEA will cover local communities living within 5km of the mainstream Mekong River from the Golden Triangle to Luang Prabang. These communities are most vulnerable to changes in natural systems and resources (Hall & Bouapao 2010). Households most vulnerable to changes in the natural resource base from developments, such as mainstream dams, navigation, agricultural diversions and land use changes include households that:

- depend primarily on fish from the Mekong for food and/or income;
- have no alternative occupations to fishing and/or little or no land; and
- belong to ethnic minorities.

Many of the people living in the project area have a high poverty incidence (*number of households having an income below the poverty threshold*) (Figure 2), particularly ethnic groups living in the hillside areas of Laos. Communities in these areas consist of more scattered, discrete hillside and river valley villages, more populated by minority ethnic groups traditionally heavily reliant on subsistence production and livelihood diversification depending mainly on natural resource use (e.g. non- timber forest products [NTFPs]) and traditional agricultural techniques (e.g. swidden cultivation)(ICEM 2010).

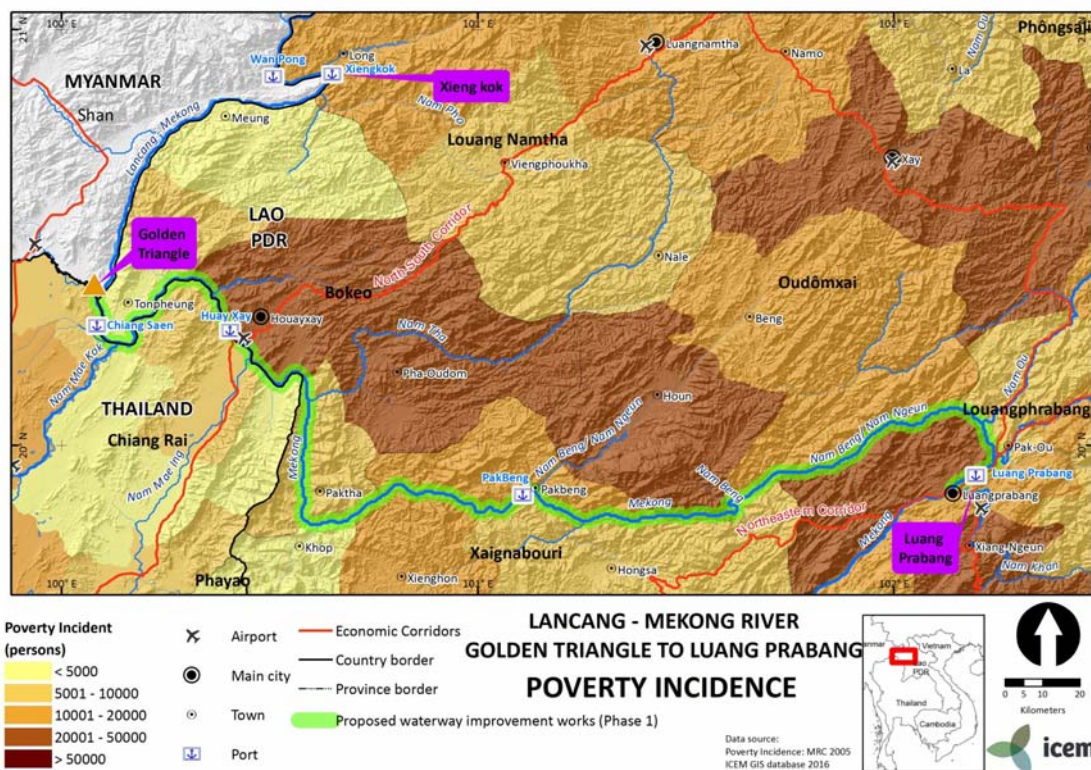


Figure 2: Poverty incidence in proposed study area Source: MRC 2005 based on statistical data by district in LMB

Natural resources and livelihoods will be considered during the baseline and trend analysis of the proposed RSEA, to determine the impacts of the LM DP on the livelihoods of local communities and

indigenous peoples living in the target river reaches and surrounding areas. The impacts of the LMDP on livelihoods and natural resources is likely to have disproportionate effects on the lives, well-being, and cultural integrity of indigenous and ethnic minority groups in Laos and Thailand.

The Mekong region is ethnically diverse with over 100 different ethnic groups reflecting the diversity of their surrounding natural environment. Many of these ethnic groups have distinct languages, beliefs and cultural practices, including agriculture and animal husbandry, closely associated with the landscape and biodiversity of their area (ICEM 2013). There are a number of ethnic groups living along the Mekong River in the proposed project area from the Golden Triangle to Luang Prabang (Figure 3). The ethnic groups include Lao, Khmu, Lamet, Lu, Lahu and Yuang (EOC 2012).

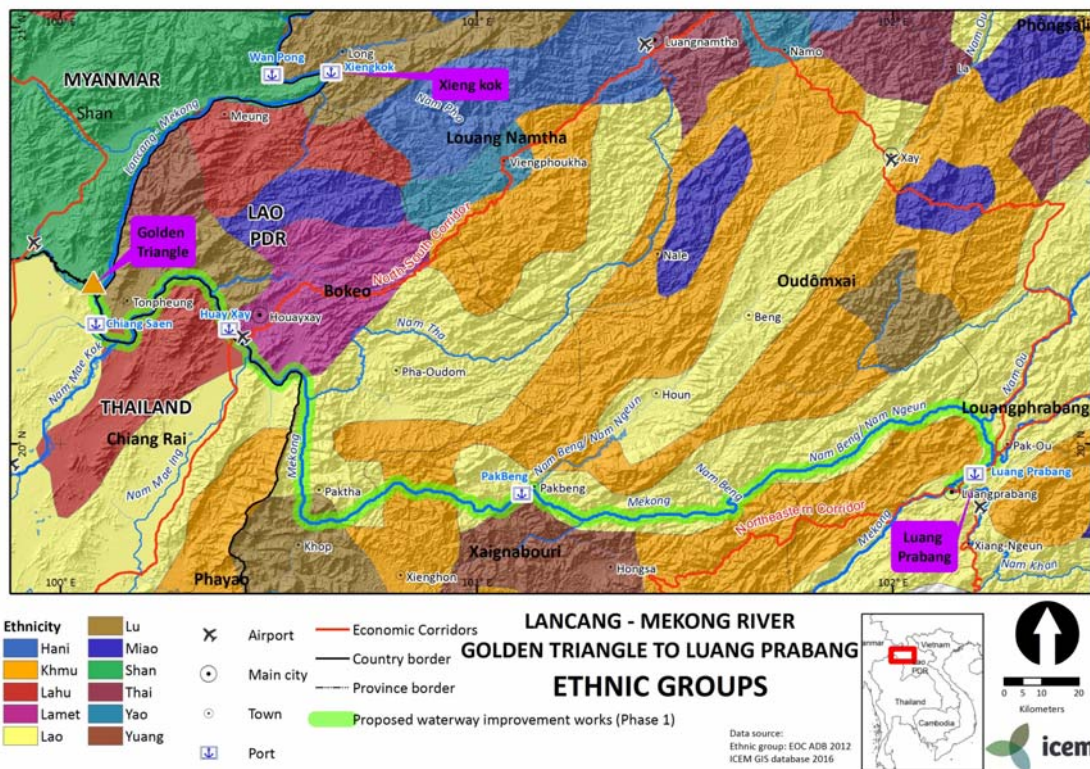


Figure 3: Ethnic groups in the proposed study area Source: EOC-ADB 2012

The baseline assessment will establish the trends for the key issues of biodiversity, fisheries, water resources, hydrology and sediment, climate change and socio-economic development. This phase involves data collection and review and additional ecological/biodiversity studies of target reaches of the river to identify critical habitats for threatened and endangered (red-list species), important wetlands and potential protected areas. ICEM will carefully consider the rights of indigenous peoples prior to undertaking any additional biodiversity studies and ecological assessments.

**Locations of biodiversity studies and ecological assessments:**

The locations for intensive biodiversity studies and ecological assessments will be confirmed during the inception/scoping phase as detailed in the Project proposal. The target reach of the river will be assessed in three key sections:

1. Golden Triangle to Chiang Khong/Houie Xay;
2. Houie Xay/Chiang Khong to Pak Beng; and
3. Pak Beng to Luang Prabang.

Additional ecological and waterway assessments may be required at the location of the proposed ports in Pak Beng and Luang Prabang and/or the locations of major rapids/reefs/shoals, identified in

the NAP surveys of dangerous areas. For example, in the Golden Triangle to Chiang Khong/Houie Xay section the Khon Phi Luang or Pha Lac (Km 2,328.6) zone of multiple rapids may require special study (Figure 4).

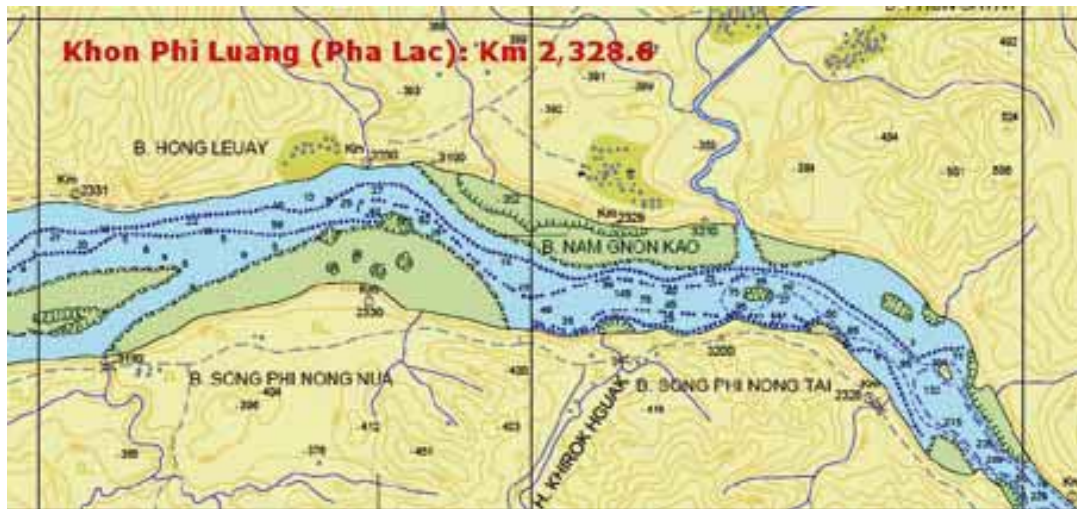


Figure 4: Location of Khon Phi Luang (Pha Lac) rapids: Km 2,328.6

Indigenous peoples may use these target river reaches for fishing and the collection of non-timber forest products (NTFPs). Areas such as rapids along the Mekong River also have high social and cultural significance for ethnic communities, as meeting places and for women and children to wash and collect other aquatic animals (OAAs). ICEM will ensure environment and social screening of these sites to ensure compliance with CEPF Indigenous Peoples (OP/BP 4.10) policy.

#### **Measures to avoid negative impacts to Indigenous People in Project Areas:**

Prior to undertaking the additional biodiversity surveys and ecological assessments, ICEM will identify the indigenous peoples and local communities in the area. We will seek to introduce the SEA team to the village representative and/or respected representative of the community leadership and discuss the overall objectives of the biodiversity survey and ecological assessments, and also the proposed LMDP. The perceptions of natural resources and land uses and any environmental concerns of the Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities will also be discussed using an open and flexible process.

Subsequent to this initial discussion, field researchers may proceed by engaging in open-ended discussions with small groups of villagers or individuals to learn more about the natural resource and land use in the project area. Perspectives attributed to these interviewees will be recorded, but unless otherwise requested by the people themselves, interviews will be conducted under a condition of anonymity given the sensitivities surrounding water related development in Laos and Thailand.

The outcomes of the RSEA will support community-based conservation and activities and protect biodiversity and natural resources in the Mekong River. The project will seek to reduce and eliminate activities by third parties which damage and reduce the conservation values of the target areas and which deny access of local communities to pursue traditional activities consistent with protected area management objectives. Some areas could be nominated as potential protected areas or conservation zones for freshwater species. This could trigger different kinds of restrictions on land use and resource use for indigenous peoples and local communities. ICEM will collaborate closely with national and provincial governments in Laos and Thailand to minimize potential impacts and if deemed necessary by insure proper mitigation measure for potential impacts. The following steps will be recommended as mitigation measures

- Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) must be applied before any nomination of protected area or freshwater conservation zone
- Natural resource use and land use of indigenous peoples and local community must be assessed and documented
- The boundary of proposed protected area or conservation zone has to be drawn with the consensus of indigenous people and local community in accordance with their land use and resource use.

To ensure that indigenous peoples and local communities are broadly supportive of the RSEA the results of the study will be communicated to all key project stakeholders during the baseline, impact and mitigation phases.

#### **How Measures will be monitored**

Social safeguards and monitoring will be incorporated in the project monitoring and evaluation (M&E) activities for the overall REA. The RSEA consultant team carrying out fieldwork will meet regularly with representatives of affected communities to ensure they have a voice in the SEA process – and to monitor the effectiveness of the assessment in reflecting their views and interests. A monitoring framework of key questions will be prepared and indicators defined for the purpose reflecting CEPF safeguards.

#### **ICEMs Grievance Mechanism**

ICEM welcomes feedback from its partners, the riparian communities it works with, as well as from the general public. Should any complaint be made either verbally, written or via a third party, the ICEM Team Leader will be responsible for recording all of the information related to it and carry out any necessary investigations and then promptly report the complaint and findings to our Director of ICEM Asia, in order to determine appropriate remedy to ensure that our staff members and the advocacy work that we do is for the benefit of local communities. Furthermore, wherever ICEM or its sub-grantees work in a community with indigenous peoples, they will be provided with the contact details of ICEM Asian and the CEPF Regional Implementation Team. If any grievances are raised with ICEM, we will immediately bring them to the attention of the CEPF Regional Implementation Team and the CEPF Secretariat.

**References:**

<http://www.gms-eoc.org/resources/biodiversity-conservation-corridors-project-2012-onwards->

Hall, D, Bouapao, L 2010. *'Social Impact Monitoring and Vulnerability Assessment: Regional Report'*. Mekong River Commission, Vientiane, Laos.

ICEM 2010, *'MRC Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of hydropower on the Mekong mainstream'*, Hanoi, Vietnam.

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