

CEPF Final Project Completion Report

Organization Legal Name:	International Centre for Environmental Management
Project Title:	Environmental Study of the Lancang-Mekong Development Plan
Grant Number:	65882
CEPF Region:	Indo-Burma II
Strategic Direction:	6 Engage key actors in mainstreaming biodiversity, communities and livelihoods into development planning in the priority corridors
Grant Amount:	\$299,973.00
Project Dates:	March 01, 2016 - December 31, 2018
Date of Report:	April 26, 2019

Implementation Partners

List each partner and explain how they were involved in the project

The Project was implemented with the following key partners:

- **The MRC Secretariat (MRCS) who assisted in integrating the Project with The Council Study and in coordinating and convening meetings with Thai and Lao PDR National Mekong Committees and Joint Committee on Coordination of Commercial Navigation (JCCCN) on the Lancang-Mekong River members**
- **World Fish who provided fisheries expertise to the Project**
- **The National University of Lao PDR (NUOL) who contributed field survey and fisheries expertise to the Project**
- **The Ubon Ratchathani University (UBU) in Thailand who contributed field survey and fisheries expertise to the Project**

Conservation Impacts

Summarize the overall impact of your project, describing how your project has contributed to the implementation of the CEPF ecosystem profile

The Project has provided a foundation for the improved sustainable development and management of the Lancang-Mekong river between the Golden Triangle and Luang Prabang. It has improved the knowledge base on the social and environmental values along this stretch. It has

also identified likely short term and long term impacts from the proposed Lancang Mekong Development Plan (LMDP) and Pak Beng Hydropower Project, and proposed a set of mitigation strategies to minimise the negative impacts of these planned developments in order to safeguard biodiversity and local communities' livelihoods and subsistence. This includes a proposed Mekong Conservation Area Network and implementation steps as a key strategy for maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity and transboundary conservation management along this river stretch, and as a demonstration for its expansion along the greater Mekong river.

As a next step in using the study's analysis and in implementing its recommendations, the MRCS will formally notify member countries of the study reports and linked resource materials with guidance on their use so that countries can decide how best to move forward in integrating results in their respective navigation development plans, the formal ESIA on the LMDP and associated environmental management plan. MRC member countries stressed the importance of the study contributing to development of a sustainability indicator framework with the MRCS for application in transboundary projects and for monitoring.

Recent developments on the LMDP: an informal bilateral meeting between H.E. Mr. Wang Yi, State Councilor and Minister of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China and H.E. Mr. Don Pramudwinai, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand was held 15 – 16 February 2019 in Chiang Mai, Thailand. During this meeting, both Ministers exchanged in-depth and wide-ranging views covering key bilateral, regional and international issues of mutual interest. Among these issues, both sides agreed to support the cooperation framework of the JCCCN, taking into account the development, pace, and readiness of the relevant parties, including the public. In this regard, Councilor Wang Yi noted the views regarding the blasting of rocks and rapids in the Mekong River, which would affect the Thailand – Lao PDR border and the livelihoods of the people along the river, and agreed to cooperate with the Thai side's proposal to terminate the said project. The study was an important part of the science evidence base leading to this informal agreement to halt the plan. However, as there has been no official statement from China or Thailand on the cancelation of the LMDP, it is possible the plan may be pursued at a later stage. The study results will continue to provide important information to decision makers should the plan be resurrected.

Planned Long-term Impacts - 3+ years (as stated in the approved proposal)

Impact Description	Impact Summary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide the rationale and justification for effective conservation of the threatened and endangered (red-list) species in the Mekong River; 	<p>The proposed conservation oriented management framework not only aims to conserve threatened species along the target stretch but also provides multiple social and economic benefits including for fisheries, agriculture, navigation, tourism, subsistence and cultural practices and traditions.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safeguard the diversity and multiple uses of the Mekong River for existing and future generations; 	<p>If the Project's recommendations are implemented, they will help to safeguard the diversity and multiple uses of the Mekong River for existing and future generations through the sustainable design, implementation and management of the LMDP and Pak Beng HPP. The Project shows that there isn't an inevitable trade-off between the proposed developments and conserving the diversity of current</p>

	river uses. Through careful assessment, planning, design and management, including a reasonable increase in development planning time and cost, a sustainable balance can be reached.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustain the health and wellbeing of river ecosystems and livelihoods. 	If the Project recommendations are implemented, they will help to sustain the health and well being of river ecosystems and livelihoods by avoiding or reducing the impacts of the proposed developments and establishing a network of conservation areas that will improve the river ecosystems and livelihoods.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To define and promote the establishment of biodiversity conservation areas and arrangements for effective management; 	The Project has defined an initial network of 14 conservation areas along the study reach between the Golden Triangle and Luang Prabang and detailed next steps and arrangements for implementation and effective management.

Planned Short-term Impacts - 1 to 3 years (as stated in the approved proposal)

Impact Description	Impact Summary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage riparian communities, MRC member countries and local government in the comprehensive assessment of the potential impacts of the LMDP; 	The Project engaged riparian communities through an integrated field assessment that included consultations with local fishers, market stall operators, port authorities, boat operators and other community members on their use of the river, changes they have observed and their thoughts on the possible impacts of the LMDP. MRC member country line agencies and National Mekong Committees were also engaged through a series of workshops examining the proposed development plan, the baseline social and environmental conditions of the river stretch, the likely impacts of the LMDP and proposed mitigation measures.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure more complete information on ecological sustainability is available to decision makers in the consideration of the LMDP; 	The Project has produced a comprehensive Baseline Assessment Report drawing together all available social and environmental information on the study reach and contributing new information through the findings of the integrated field survey. The Project also produced an Impact Assessment Report detailing the likely short and long term impacts of the LMDP and, to a lesser degree of detail, the Pak Beng Hydropower Project. The Mitigation Recommendations Report then provides a set of key strategies with detailed measures under each to address the main impacts of the LMDP and Pak Beng HPP.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate the RSEA into development planning for the ADB GMS north-south economic corridor; 	This did not occur during the Project, however, the Project's findings have been taken up by the MRC Council Study and MRC member countries have committed to considering the Project results within their navigation planning frameworks.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the adoption of an environmental management framework that safeguards the effective management of the target reaches of the Mekong River. 	<p>The Mitigation Recommendations Report presents an environmental management framework for minimising the negative impacts of the LMDP and Pak beng HPP and enhancing the positive impacts. The proposed Mekong Conservation Area Network also provides a long term foundation for conservation management of the river. The framework has been promoted to MRC member country line agencies, NMCs and JCCCN members for adoption.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting Mekong Countries in ensuring the potential impacts of the LMDP are managed through appropriate avoidance, enhancement and mitigation measures; 	<p>The Project reports and stakeholder workshops have supported Mekong Countries the potential impacts of the LMDP are managed through appropriate avoidance, enhancement and mitigation measures.</p>

Describe the success or challenges of the project toward achieving its short-term and long-term impact objectives

Although there was some initial resistance to the study from some member countries, the Project was reasonably successful in engaging MRC member countries and riparian communities in the comprehensive assessment of the potential impacts of the LMDP. This occurred through a series of workshops at each stage of the Project and through an integrated field assessment. The Project has certainly ensured that more complete information on ecological sustainability is available to decision makers in the consideration of the LMDP. The integration of the study into development planning for the ADB GMS north-south economic corridor is something that is yet to be seen however, the study has been integrated into the Council Study and MRC member countries have committed to consideration of its recommendations within their navigation planning frameworks. The study has also supported Mekong Countries in ensuring the potential impacts of the LMDP are managed through appropriate avoidance, enhancement and mitigation measures. The Project has succeeded in promoting the adoption of an environmental management framework that safeguards the effective management of the target reaches of the Mekong River.

The study has also provided a rationale and justification for effective conservation of the threatened and endangered (red-list) species in the Mekong River by highlighting the multiple social and economic benefits of a conservation oriented development approach for the river stretch. The recommended design, implementation and management changes not only aim to conserve threatened biodiversity but provide benefits for fisheries, tourism, agriculture and local subsistence, spiritual and cultural practices. If the study recommendations are implemented, they will help to safeguard the diversity and multiple uses of the Mekong River for existing and future generations and sustain the health and wellbeing of river ecosystems and livelihoods. It has also defined and promoted the establishment of biodiversity conservation areas and arrangements for effective management.

Were there any unexpected impacts (positive or negative)?

The influence of the study in leading Thailand and China to agree informally to “terminate” the navigation development plan was not expected. It was assumed that the development plan had such



momentum and political commitment in China supported by funding that it would proceed in some form. The sharing of the CEPF study briefs, power point presentations and other materials as it proceeded was influential in raising sufficient concern about the clearing and potential changing of the international border that Thailand felt compelled to object to the plan in the meeting with the Chinese Foreign Affairs Minister. The study reports and materials had been written as a win win strategy so that the navigation improvements would follow international best practices while investing in biodiversity conservation and local livelihoods through payment for ecosystem services and as part of an overall proposed environmental management plan.

Project Components and Products/Deliverables

Describe the results from each product/deliverable:

Component		Deliverable		
#	Description	#	Description	Results for Deliverable
1	Inception and scoping	1.1	Inception and scoping report on the RSEA of the LMDP.	Completed.
2	Baseline assessment	2.1	CEPF social safeguard report on Indigenous Peoples living in target reaches of the Mekong River.	Completed.
2	Baseline assessment	2.2	RSEA of the LMDP baseline assessment report.	Completed.
2	Baseline assessment	2.3	RSEA Baseline assessment stakeholder workshop report.	Completed.
3	Impact assessment	3.1	RSEA impact assessment workshop report.	Instead of holding an impact assessment workshop, impact assessment findings were presented to MRC member countries as part of Council Study meetings with feedback integrated into the Impact Assessment Report. An RSEA impact assessment workshop report has not been completed.
3	Impact assessment	3.2	RSEA of the LMDP impact assessment report.	Completed.
4	Mitigation and recommendations	4.1	RSEA avoidance, enhancement and mitigation stakeholder workshop report.	A final workshop on the study results was convened by MRCS with attendance of MRC member countries line agencies and NMCs with feedback integrated into all three reports. An RSEA avoidance, enhancement and mitigation stakeholder workshop report has not been completed.
4	Mitigation and	4.2	RSEA of the	Completed.

	recommendations		LDMP avoidance, enhancement and mitigation report.	
4	Mitigation and recommendations	4.3	Final RSEA of the LMDP summary paper.	Completed. These are presented as three four short (less than 10 page) briefs - 1) Study Background; 2) Baseline Assessment; 3) Impact Assessment; 4) Mitigation Recommendations.

Please describe and submit any tools, products, or methodologies that resulted from this project or contributed to the results.

'From space' assessment: Google Earth or *'from space'* analysis was used to show for the first time locations of rapids, shoals, deep pools and in-stream wetlands and other important natural features in addition to dangerous areas for navigation. The *'from space'* analysis was then used to identify critical habitats and geomorphological features of interest to each of the key biodiversity themes.

'Swim Under' assessment: Existing hydrographic surveys were used to identify the critical habitats for fish and aquatic species. This information was used by the navigation team to determine the extent of rapid/reef blasting and dredging required to allow passage of 500DWT vessels through target reaches of the river.

Drone survey: drone survey was used to assess in-stream habitats, identify areas of potential biodiversity significance and assist in the identification and mapping of the proposed conservation areas.

Lessons Learned

Describe any lessons learned during the design and implementation of the project, as well as any related to organizational development and capacity building.

Consider lessons that would inform:

- Project Design Process (*aspects of the project design that contributed to its success/shortcomings*)
- Project Implementation (*aspects of the project execution that contributed to its success/shortcomings*)
- Describe any other lessons learned relevant to the conservation community

ICEM had hoped that the government partners and MRC would be able to provide information on the environmental, socio-economic and inland navigation during the baseline assessment and participate in stakeholder workshops. However, it became evident prior to the inception phase that the MRC, NMCs and government line agencies were reluctant to be involved in the study. The main lessons learned during this period related to the political issues reported to the CEPF regional team from

March to June 2016. In this stretch of the Mekong River there are several complex political issues, including:

- The JCCCN gave conditional approval of the LMDP in February 2016 but provided no information on the plan or any additional environmental and social assessments;
- Emergence of the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Mechanism (LMCM) promoting the coordination and economic development of the Mekong Basin by all six countries;
- Reduced funding of the Mekong River Commission (MRC) to provide support or in-kind contributions;
- Limited willingness of the TNMC and LNMC to participate in transboundary studies in this stretch of the Mekong River; and
- Ongoing border issues between Lao PDR and Thailand on the Mekong River.

Sustainability / Replication

Summarize the success or challenges in ensuring the project will be sustained or replicated, including any unplanned activities that are likely to result in increased sustainability or replicability.

The main challenge to ensuring the Project recommendations are adopted and sustained or replicated was the reluctance to participate and resistance to the study from the NMCs of the riparian countries, which meant that the study did not involve them as intimately as was originally envisaged. Through the Project's integration with the MRC Council Study and final endorsement of its findings and commitment to consider them in navigation planning by MRC member country line agencies this challenge has been lessened but not eliminated.

Safeguards

If not listed as a separate Project Component and described above, summarize the implementation of any required action related to social, environmental, or pest management safeguards

n/a

Additional Comments/Recommendations

Use this space to provide any further comments or recommendations in relation to your project or CEPF

Additional Funding

Provide details of any additional funding that supported this project and any funding secured for the project, organization, or the region, as a result of CEPF investment

Total additional funding (US\$)

\$51,500.00

Type of funding

Please provide a breakdown of additional funding (counterpart funding and in-kind) by source, categorizing each contribution into one of the following categories:

- A Project Co-Financing (other donors or your organization contribute to the direct costs of this project)*
- B Grantee and Partner Leveraging (other donors contribute to your organization or a partner organization as a direct result of successes with this CEPF funded project)*
- C Regional/Portfolio Leveraging (other donors make large investments in a region because of CEPF investment or successes related to this project)*

In-Kind Contributions -(A)

ICEM in-kind contribution of US\$51,500 covering management staff costs (inputs of Project Director and other technical support staff) as well as ICEM's extensive biodiversity and natural resources data for the Mekong region, GIS database and other technical support.

Information Sharing and CEPF Policy

CEPF is committed to transparent operations and to helping civil society groups share experiences, lessons learned, and results. Final project completion reports are made available on our Web site, www.cepf.net, and publicized in our newsletter and other communications.

1. Please include your full contact details (Name, Organization, Mailing address, Telephone number, E-mail address) below

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