

Technical Co-operation
Mekong River Commission – Federal Republic of Germany

Project Progress Review

“Sustainable Watershed Management in the Lower Mekong Basin”

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Commissioned by

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH, Eschborn
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Brief Project Description (current phase)

Overall Project Objective (revised)	Relevant institutions in the riparian states of the Lower Mekong Basin (LMB) co-operate effectively on the regional level, conduct systematic information and data exchange and agree on improved concepts for sustainable management of watersheds.		
Current Phase Objective (revised)	Relevant institutions in the riparian countries of the LMB use regional co-operation, information and data exchange as well as improved concepts for sustainable watershed management.		
Results	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Concepts for the Management of selected watersheds are developed, documented and disseminated. 2. Structures and instruments for the analysis and further development of national policies and guidelines are in place and functioning. 3. Structures and instruments for ongoing, results-oriented regional co-operation have been developed and are functioning. 4. The regional information, data and knowledge management is improved. 		
Target Groups	The population of the LMB, in particular the population of critical watersheds depending directly or indirectly on their natural resources.		
Project Counterpart	Mekong River Commission (MRC)		
Overall Project Duration, Phasing	Duration (first phase):	from 12/2002	to 11/2005
	Recommended overall duration:	from 12/2002	to 11/2010

Project Progress Review Summary

PLANNING

Quality of Planning and Processes

- Objectives and indicators for current phase (initial and reformulated) have been over ambitious and not sufficiently geared towards the projects comparative advantages and strengths
 - The project should focus more on producing real-life examples of transboundary co-operation/impacts in watershed management than on reaching regional agreements and formulate regional action programmes. This should be done through co-operation with other German and international programmes.
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STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATION

Present Status of Contributions

Due to delayed start, project implementation is behind schedule. The delay explains partly why a lower share of international staff than originally projected for this stage has been provided. The share is also lower because the project co-ordinator decided to convert resources for one international expert foreseen in the project proposal into additional regional/local staff months in the four member countries.

Organisation und Steering of Project Implementation

- The Project co-ordination unit at the MRC Secretariat operates on two "fronts": it works on a policy and technical level within the secretariat and its programmes and provides capacity building and policy advice reaching out to the member countries and their national administrations
 - The project has been successful in creating its own national outreach structures (National Working Groups) to national line agencies. The national working groups are yet to become more independent from project interventions for them to be "partner-owned" sustainable entities
 - Support for the National working groups should take a country-specific approach. Gradually, they should merge with/be part of National Mekong Committees which are at this point only in some cases to play their assigned role as MRC national outreach structure.
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Project Integration into Partner Structures

- WSMP has successfully co-operated with MRCS programmes in knowledge management both practically and strategically. "Integration" is a challenge beyond WSMP as programmes of MRC are Donor-funded and very limited managerial co-ordination takes place. Nevertheless there are opportunities for further integration as WSMP is currently seen as relatively "independent"
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Cooperation with other German Development Projects and other Donor Organisations

- The project is effectively cooperating with KfW and InWEnt.
 - Cooperation with other German and International programmes in pilot watersheds has not yet reached the stage of concrete joint activities and should be enhanced.
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Changes in Framework Conditions and Assumptions

- There is no acute threat to the project arising from the three major framework conditions mentioned in the tender document:
- *Political ownership with MRC*: While MRC is still a largely donor funded organisation and the limitations that brings in terms of ownership, the political relevance of a body that can reconcile different user interests is as relevant as ever.
- *Economic Recovery in South-East Asia*: the individual economic performance of MRC's member countries after the 1997 crisis differs substantially. The persisting vast economic differences keep co-operation among MRC member states difficult but further underline the need for a body like MRC
- *Progress in Governance*: Progress regarding the legal basis for community forestry, the reform of land laws and land allocation practices as well as decentralisation is limited and at best mixed in some countries.

IMPACTS

Use made of Project Contributions and Direct Benefits

- A good part of envisaged results have not yet been achieved, (i) partly because of organisational constraints and obstacles (delayed start, relocation), (ii) partly because objectives and results were too ambitious given the constraints of MRC as an organisation, a difficult "project culture", a very complex political environment given its very violent recent past and (iii) partly because co-operation with existing and planned projects in the region has not yet had practical implications;
- The project has reached a strong standing both within MRC and with partners in MRC member countries
- Practical regional cooperation on a policy level and on the ground has so far been insufficient but has good potential given the project personnel and provided that the second phase will have a very clear focus
- WSMP' information and data management system is working well and its outputs are used by various regional stakeholders, especially on the technical level.

RECOMMENDATIONS

General: Second Phase

The PPR recommends a second phase of the Watershed Management Project. Even with its shortcomings, MRC is still the only organisation in the region with an official mandate to discuss water and related natural resource management issues in a transboundary context. The potential positive impacts of the project outweigh its risks. Organisational foundations to actually achieve outlined objectives (see below) are now in place.

Risks

The risks associated with a successful implementation of the project in a potential future phase (as formulated in the preliminary objectives and indicators, see below) lie in three areas:

- MRC as an organisation will loose support and ownership from member countries (**risk low**)
 - Donors will loose interest in MRC because of a radical change in strategy and incompatibility with donor's programmatic intentions. Redirecting the organisation's orientation from technical expertise and knowledge management to a role as project implementing organisation in member countries could undermine the way MRC's "value added" is being
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	<p>perceived by donor organisations (risk medium).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WSMP will not succeed in achieving relevance and impacts for policy and planning on a national and regional level (risk medium)
Integration into MRCS	<p>Integration of MRC programmes is largely a managerial issue at MRC. Donors should be strongly advocating that Management intervenes in this direction. Within the limits of a single project, WSMP is recommended to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more active networking with other programmes (establishment of informal and formal links); • establishing direct co-operation with “core programmes” at MRC, and to • reduce symbols of GTZ identity.
National Working Groups	<p>For the National Working Groups to be the central “vector” of policy advice and implementation it is recommended to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop individual approaches in the four countries; • Review structure of co-operation with NMCs; • Clarification of Processes and Decision-making; • Analyse motivation/availability of WG members and means to improve it; • Reconsider level of working group members
Co-operation	<p>WSMP has made strong efforts to make co-operation happen and has been succeeding in the case of KfW and InWEnt. For this co-operation to happen in even more cases we think it is important for WSMP to enter the discussion with proposals that are as concrete as possible, with defined practical activities of joint interest. As WSMP is depending on this co-operation more than its potential partners, it needs to take the initiative.</p>
Impact Monitoring	<p>The project is well aware of the need to get practical on impact monitoring and has laid out but not yet implemented the conceptual foundations for it. This needs to be integrated into the operational planning for a second phase.</p>

Objective and Work Packages of the Next Phase

Based on discussions with the WSMP team and resources persons inside and MRC the PPR team recommends a second phase with the following objective. Details regarding the relevant indicators and “work packages are given in section 5.7.

“Relevant organisations in the riparian states of the Lower Mekong Basin use services for improved watershed management with a view to its transbc impacts.”

Work Packages

1) Policy Analysis and Advice

- Finalise selection of pilot watersheds,
- Situation analysis and prioritisation of resource management issues with NWG, analysis of incentives for sustainable resource use,
- Define policy options through dialogue with stakeholders,
- Communicate results to decision-making authorities and support practical adaptation.

... using opportunities for co-operation with other programmes/projects for NRM.

2) Information Management

- Support for MRCS development of information and knowledge management strategy
- Full integration of the WSMC info management system and MekongInfo website into MRCS Data Management System
- Support in establishing capacity to manage MRCS DMS and monitor actual use
- Support for implementation of data and information quality standards

3) Capacity Building

- Identification of training needs
- Organisation
- Quality management
- Impact monitoring

.... of capacity building activities in co-operation with InWEnt and other partners.

4) Methods and Instruments

- Develop/expand methods and instruments supporting sustainable management of water-related terrestrial natural resources in a watershed context (e.g. Natural Resources Governance Manual, land use zoning guidelines)
 - Joint development and implementation of analytical tools in water resources management with MRCS core programmes (e.g. support Healthy River Strategy etc.)
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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AIFP	Agriculture, Irrigation and Forestry Programme
AURA	Contractual Framework BMZ/GTZ (Auftragsrahmen)
BDP	Basin Development Plan (at MRC)
BMZ	German Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development (Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung)
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CIAS	Centre for Information and Statistics
CPI	Committee for Planning and Investment
DOP	Department of Planning
GTZ RDMA	GTZ-Rural Development in Mountainous Areas
InWent	Capacity Building International (Internationale Weiterbildung und Entwicklung)
IUCN	The World Conservation Union
KfW	German Development Bank (Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau)
LMB	Lower Mekong Basin
LNMC	Lao National Mekong Committee
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
MRC	Mekong River Commission
MRCS	Mekong River Commission Secretariat
MoNRE	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment Vietnam
NAFRI	National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (Laos PDR)
NMC	National Mekong Committee
OPD	Operations Division (MRC)
PCS	Programme Coordination Section (MRC)
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
SMRP	Sustainable Management of Natural Resources Project
STEA	Science, Technology and Environment Agency
TSD	Technical Support Division (MRC)
WRCC	Water Resources Coordination Committee
WSM	Watershed Management
WSMP	Watershed Management Project
WUE	Water Use Efficiency
WWF	Worldwide Fund for Nature

1. Procedure

Commission and Schedule

The Government of Germany through the Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development (BMZ) has supported „Sustainable Watershed Management in the Lower Mekong Basin“ since December 2002. The project, implemented by GTZ, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), is in its first phase ending in November 2005.¹ The project co-ordinator in charge of the commission assigned the task of reviewing and evaluating the project's progress with a view to derive recommendations as a basis for the planning of an intended second phase. For this “Project Progress Review” the following three consultants were recruited:

- Dr. Lorenz Petersen, GTZ, Environmental and Natural Resources Economist, Team Leader, responsible for the overall results of the PPR, reporting and effective co-ordination of the team's efforts with the project and its clients.
- Dr. Vitoon Viriyasakultorn, Regional Consultant, Expert in Natural Resources Management in the Mekong River Basin. MRC Co-ordinator of the Agriculture, Irrigation and Forestry Programme (AIFP). assessed the current state of project implementation, elaborated on results and impacts, and formulated recommendations and lessons learned based on his in-depth knowledge of the actual situation in the four member countries of the MRC.
- Dr. Waldemar Kasprzik, Expert on Organisational Development, Planning and Process Design, was in charge of project planning, organisational development, structures, processes and communication within the MRC context.

Subject of the PPR was the current first phase of the commission. It was conducted in three distinct phases:

- A preparatory phase (End-January - beginning February) in which the PPR team was provided with extensive and comprehensive documentation by the project and self-assessments of the project's country co-ordinators. In addition, on January 24th and 25th, a thorough briefing about the terms of reference took place with the GTZ project co-ordinator for the German team members.
- Visits to all four member countries, with opportunities to interview national project coordinators, national administration officials and regional stakeholders, representatives of German and international donor organisations, extensive talks with the staff of the MRC secretariat including senior management. Preliminary findings were presented to and discussed with the project team, and the project's Regional Working Group with representatives from all four member countries. In a wrap-up meeting with the Chief Executive Officer of the Mekong River Commission on March 18th, consolidated team findings were presented to MRC Senior management and minutes of these meetings signed.
- Report writing took place at the home bases of the consultants at the end of March and during the first half of April.

¹ Reference is made to the GTZ-Tender dated 30.01.2003.

Methodological Approach

The applied methodology is fully in line with GTZ guidelines for Project Progress Reviews. By directly involving the responsible co-ordinator for WSMP within the MRC Secretariat into the Project Progress Review team, a conscious effort was made by the project co-ordinator to ensure that the opportunity for joint learning was taken up. Recommendations were discussed within the project team (including the MRC Co-ordinator), with MRC's senior management and project partners in the MRC member countries to ensure maximum transparency. These organisational features of the PPR approach follow recent best practice recommendations of GTZ's internal evaluation division.

The results and findings of the PPR will be presented to BMZ, KfW, InWent, representatives of GTZ's regional co-ordinator and the project co-ordinator with a view to discussing an intended second phase of the project and strengthened co-operation in project implementation between German implementing organisations on April 28th in the Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development in Bonn.

This report summarises the main findings of the joint PPR team effort. It was put together by Dr. Lorenz Petersen drawing upon substantial written inputs from both Dr. Waldemar Kasprzik and Dr. Vitoon Viriyasakultorn.

The PPR team would like to extend its sincere gratitude to all partners, stakeholders and resource persons for making themselves available to the team. Special thanks are in place for the WSMP project team and the project co-ordinator – this was an exceptionally well-organised and prepared progress review mission with an always open and constructive atmosphere for discussing all angles of project planning and implementation.

2. Planning

2.1 Quality of Plans and Planning Process

The design and planning of a project is based on assumptions concerning the links between interventions and results. In this context quality of plans and planning is understood as the degree to which the assumptions of the planning have helped to achieve the objectives of the project. The objective-oriented notion of quality is called “quality at exit” and is used here.

Initial planning exercise

The planning covered the initial phase of three years (December 2002 to November 2005) for the Watershed Management project (WSMP) within MRC’s Agriculture, Irrigation and Forestry Programme (AIFP) with the perspective of a potentially longer term cooperation covering three phases. The planning basis were the findings of the appraisal mission (January and February 2002) and the results of the strategy workshop (beginning of February 2002). Planning was conducted by the participants of a regional planning workshop (Phnom Penh, end February 2002) and resulted in the formulation of the project objectives (ultimate and direct objective) and the identification of four expected outputs with respective activities and indicators.

The time gap between the drafting of the first plan of operations and the beginning of the project as well as the belated approval of the project proposal (eight months), a MRCS environment lacking management capacity (with the CEO position vacant for an extended period) and the additional disturbing factor of moving location - all factors at a time that was crucial for the project, have necessitated ad-hoc measures of procedure and adaptation concerning the plan of operations.

Revision of the initial planning document and drafting of the plan of operations

On the basis of the planning document a plan of operations was drafted in July 2003. Normally the drafting of the plan of operations consists of translating the original planning document into activities and sub-activities for the entire project phase. On this occasion, the MRC GTZ WSM project planning group decided to change the objective, some results, activities and indicators of the project, because it became clear that their actual implementation was unrealistic.

The planning group argued, that the existing planning document had been too ambitious in its objectives and expected results. The project communicated the revision of the original planning to BMZ in its progress report from March 2004 (reporting the project status as of end January 2004). Until January 2005 the plan of operations has been updated several times.

The essential revisions of the initial plan comprise:

- The indicator referring to the preparation of a regional action plan has been dropped.
- The indicator for regional guidelines has been dropped.

- The target group has changed: the target group is no more limited to the critical watersheds but comprises the entire population in the LMB.
- The indicators for the creation of a Regional Coordination Group and three Regional Working Groups have been converted to four National Working Groups and one Regional Working Group.
- MRC should be strengthened (which does not appear as an indicator).

The PPR team reconfirms that the expected results of the initial plan were too ambitious in the given project environment and under the particular implementation conditions. Looking at the indicators in the project document this becomes apparent: (1) a regional coordination committee for WSM is established and (2) at least three regional working groups or partnerships are established. In both cases it is unrealistic to expect implementation in the remainder of this phase.

From the PPR team perspective objectives and indicators were not only too ambitious but also formulated on too high a level to be within the reach of the project. This statement remains valid to some degree even after the revision of the initial plan and the drafting and updating of the plan of operations. Despite the revision of objectives and indicators, the planning for the present phase continues to overestimate the capacity of the project to directly improve the regional cooperation on WSM issues by itself.

A much stronger focus must lie in practical co-operation through other German or international programmes in watershed management. Rather than trying to reach regional agreements and formulate action programmes based on the project's activities, thereby running the risk of replicating the MRC's role, the project should be aiming at supporting MRC itself to be more effective in this role. In section 6 "recommendations", this report will be giving concrete suggestions on how to reformulate objectives and clarify work packages.

Priority planning and working plans for the National Working Groups (NWGs)

The National Working Groups in the four countries were created between July and September 2003. Since their inception and the three meetings (on average) each of them held so far the NWGs are in the process of drafting an annual work plan. The work plans for 2005 are supposed to be finalised by April or May 2005.²

In the planning of NWG work programmes, the question of resource allocation for the implementation of these work plans has been raised frequently by members of the NWGs. While this demand for transparency of the resources at disposal is understandable and necessary for meaningful planning exercises, the project itself is at times not in a position to give reliable figures and enter into lasting commitments because of the uncertainties of annual budget allocation for the project itself. For the project management to deal with this situation is delicate in trying to combine reliability, transparency and professionalism with factors that are outside the control of the project itself.

² For the chronology of the initial project plan and related activities see annexe 1/ table 1, for the NWG planning see annexe 1 / table 2. For NWG priorities and working plans see annexe 10. For major activities realised since the beginning of the project see annexe 5.

2.2 Present Status of Planning

Planned project activities to be implemented in 2005 will continue to build on the foundations laid by the National Working Groups and the Regional Working Group on Watershed Management.

- The pilot watersheds, selected in early 2004 (Cambodia: Stueng Siem Reap, Lao PDR: Nam Ton, Thailand: not yet finally decided upon, Viet Nam: Dak Nung), will be used as reference areas to analyse and work on processes related to and relevant for watershed management;
- The matters to be analysed are: enabling regulations, institutional framework, and consistencies in planning processes, implementing experiences, financial mechanisms and incentives, capacity building as well as impact monitoring;
- Basin-wide exchange and sharing of information related to watershed management will be further improved;
- MekongInfo, the regional internet-based information system for natural resources management, will be integrated into MRCS Headquarters;
- Thorough research and analysis of various major issues relevant for watershed management, such as policies and legal frameworks, regional and land use planning, trade markets for forestry and agricultural products, and long-term impacts of land use changes in uplands on the river system will continue;
- Training courses and policy dialogues will continuously be organised in close cooperation with inWEnt.

PPR assessment of the present status of planning

The concept of “**reference/pilot areas**” is not yet entirely clear to all partners. While the programme coordination unit considers a pilot watershed a real-life example in which existing watershed management processes (activities) and their necessary preconditions are identified, analysed and respective recommendations for improvements made and tested, NWG members understand pilots as areas for financing and implementing watershed management activities which have been selected by them. It seems absolutely necessary to further clarify what is to be expected in the pilot watersheds. The PPR team recommends focusing on co-operation with German/international projects and programmes to make the reference areas valuable learning grounds and keep momentum and partner interest by ensuring that relevant “on-the-ground-implementation” actually takes place. The project has very strongly invested in supporting a potential KfW project in the reference watershed in Laos. This kind of co-operation is seen as essential to make the “reference” concept work also in the other MRC member states.

Due to limited resources, the project can offer only part of the planned **capacity building** schemes in 2005 from its own resources. Intensive and constructive discussions are under way to decide how this situation can be resolved through close co-operation with the InWEnt programme in South-East Asia.

During the time frame of the Project Progress Review **NWGs** were in the discussions on the approval of their **work plans for 2005**, which were supposed to be finalised by mid-March

2005. The NWGs argued that they have difficulties in identifying with the priorities set in the draft work plans. They also wondered if the work plans should not concentrate on one or two core activities given the limited time budget of the NWGs. Given the overall fact, that a considerable number of activities of the plan of operations has not been completed or even started, project management and Working groups decided to review the priorities of action for the remaining months of the present project phase. This review is scheduled for May 2005 with the results of the PPR as one input.

3. Status of Implementation

3.1 Present Status of Contributions

The contributions from the German Government to MRC can be divided into two parts, first, financial and human resource contributions to WSMC being implemented by GTZ, and second, direct financial contributions to MRC. The table below shows Germany's contributions as of 31 December 2004. The contributions from MRCS have been spent mainly on office space, technical facilities, the documentation center and the National Mekong Committees' networks and logistics.

A. Contribution through WSMP	Planned 1/12/02 – 30/11/05	Realized until 31/12/2004
1. Two international staff	108 PM	48 PM
2. National staff	406 PM	251 PM
3. Short term experts (international)	12 PM	12 PM
4. Short term experts (regional/local)	60 PM	Approx 35 PM
5. Procurement	Up to 236,000 EUR	
B. Direct financial contributions to MRC	Up to 451,000 EUR	310,000 EUR

While the original project start was planned for 1.12. 2002, GTZ was actually commissioned by BMZ only in May 2003 and the agreement between MRC and the German Government was signed in August 2003. Accordingly, project implementation was delayed.

The delay explains partly why a lower share of international staff than originally projected for this stage has been provided. The share is also lower because the project co-ordinator decided to convert resources for one international expert foreseen in the project proposal into additional regional/local staff months in the four member countries.

3.2 Organisation and Steering of Project Implementation

The table below gives an overview over initially planned and actually implemented organisational arrangements. The indicated changes follow the reformulated objectives and results. The Project co-ordination unit at the MRC Secretariat operates on two "fronts": it works on a policy and technical level within the secretariat and its programmes and provides capacity building and policy advice reaching out to the member countries and their national administrations.

Formally, the National Mekong Committees are charged to perform the role of intermediaries between the MRC Secretariat and the member countries' national administrations. The reality - with the exception of Thailand - is, that the relationship between the NMCs and the relevant line agencies is often unclear and sometimes strained. The project has therefore opted for its own national outreach structure in the form of national co-ordinators in order to try and access the very small number of persons that are part of the decision-making elite in the line ministries. Focus on representation on the national level and support for National Working Groups aimed at ensuring access to National Mekong Committees (NMCs) and the

line ministries that are actually in charge of policy development and decision-making on resource management. This access to the decision-making level is crucial for a project that is aiming at the provision of policy-relevant advisory services.

Organisational landscape of the project

Organisational issues	Planned	Actual
Project Co-ordination Unit MRC Secretariat, Vientiane	3 international experts at MRC headquarters in Phnom Penh	2 international experts, the third expert was “traded” (shifting of resources) for the creation of national project structures in all four LMB countries; mid-2003: MRC headquarters have been relocated to Vientiane, so did the programme coordination unit.
Programme coordination units for support at the national level	Originally not planned.	In all four LMB countries country offices with country coordinator, support staff and office space have been established (except Vietnam with a combined office manager/country co-ordinator). The country coordinators are supporting the project coordination unit in Vientiane as well as the NWGs.
MRC counterpart	AIFP	AIFP At the beginning of the project, the position of the AIFP programme coordinator was vacant. Appointment took place in mid-2004 by MRC. Very close cooperation with the project. Shares office with the project coordination unit.
Core programme partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 Regional Working Group (RWG) • 1 Regional Coordination Committee • Four National Working Groups • 3 Regional Working Groups on priority thematic areas • NMCs 	<p>The RWG has been established but no Regional Co-ordination Committee.</p> <p>Four National Working Groups established and working - are being supported by national co-ordinators</p> <p>Have not been established The contact to NMCs and to line departments through NWGs.</p>

The major drawback of this approach is the creation of a separate project implementation structure in order to ensure actual communication and impacts. In other words, there is a trade-off between effectiveness and integration. The PPR team considers it crucial for the second phase to move towards a situation where integration and effectiveness can be achieved jointly, as will be discussed in the following section 3.3. For this to happen the PPR recommends taking country specific approaches to country specific situations.

Project and work planning even for the NWG work plans is concentrated at the programme coordination unit in Vientiane. For meetings to take place, work plans to be defined and reference areas to be identified, the project co-ordination unit was required to invest large amounts of energy and time to keep things moving. The dynamics of co-operation in the region, particularly in Cambodia and Laos, are an obstacle as capacity at governmental level is low and there is strong competition for access to and time of relevant administration officials. With salary levels along poverty thresholds (30 USD in Laos), the selective incentives that come along with competing activities are an important factor influencing the allocation of time for the members of the NWGs and the RWG. For the project this means that it has to work on “motivational” aspects of partner commitments and inputs. The three ways to do this is

- (i) to invest in capacity building,
- (ii) to create visibility through effective co-operation with “on-the-ground” activities, and
- (iii) to further clarify the discussion and decision-making processes as well as the actual “entry-points” for decision-making within national administrations.

Without these “incentives” it is doubtful whether the NWG members can identify themselves with the activities foreseen in the work plans. All of them are seen as important preconditions for successful project implementation. Regarding “on-the-ground-activities” it is important to reiterate that the project is to achieve impact through co-operation and relevance. Its role in a transboundary, regional context would be lost if it would get tied up in the “on-the-ground-work” itself.

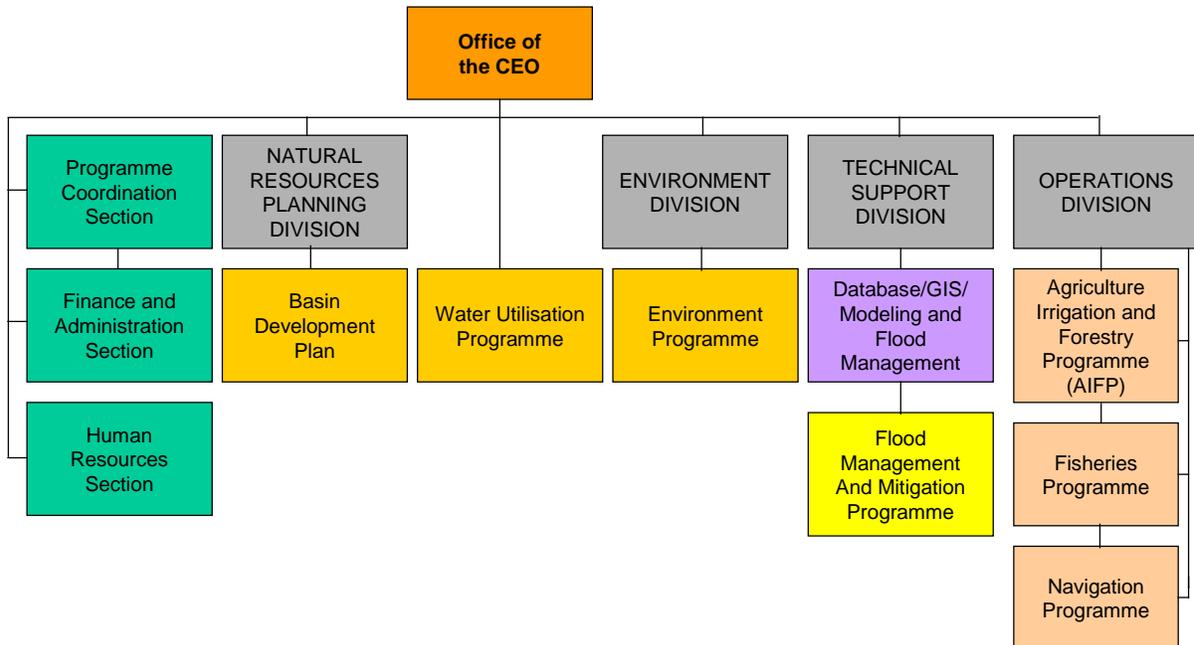
3.3 Project Integration into Partner Structures

The integration of WSMP into partner structures can be considered at two different levels, i.e. the MRC Secretariat (MRCS) and the national level, especially with NMCs in the four riparian countries. At MRCS, the WSMP is one of the three components under the Agriculture, Irrigation and Forestry Programme (AIFP). The other two components under the AIFP are Water Use Efficiency (WUE) and MRC Capacity Building as indicated in the AIFP programme document. The AIFP programme document was produced in October 2000 with a time frame of 5 years (2001 – 2005) for its implementation. However, the AIFP did not start until the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) of Japan decided to fund one sub-component of WUE in February 2002 and the German government agreed to fund the Watershed Management Component in December 2002. The MRC Capacity Building Component under AIFP never got started because it never got funded.

Integration into MRCS

The programmes of MRC are basically divided into two categories, i.e. core and sector programmes. The core programmes include Environment, Water Utilization, Basin

Development Plan and Flood Management and Mitigation Programmes. All sector programmes are placed under the Operations Division, which includes Agriculture, Irrigation and Forestry (AIFP), Fisheries, Navigation, Hydro Power, and Tourism Programmes. According to MRC management, the sector programmes' role is to support the core programmes with technical expertise and policy-relevant inputs. The diagram below illustrates how the programmes are structured within MRCS.



MRCS organizational Structure

The AIFP coordinator responsible for both WSMP and WUE was recruited only in August 2004. He reports to the Director of the Operations Division at MRCS. The AIFP coordinator is a MRCS staff whose salary is funded from the German government's contributions to MRC. Before the AIFP coordinator had been recruited, the MRC-GTZ project coordinator had performed parts of the tasks of the AIFP coordinator. Some MRC staff still referred the MRC-GTZ coordinator as AIFP coordinator at least during the first few months after the AIFP coordinator took his position.

Since the AIFP coordinator started working in mid-August 2004, full co-operation between the GTZ and the AIFP coordinator has taken place in terms of conceptual discussion with inputs from both WSMP and AIFP in the planning of activities (policy dialogue, national working group meetings to prioritise national watershed issues, training on project management and cultural differences, etc). According to the AIFP coordinator, he has been regularly informed and consulted for the planning of future activities of WSMP. It is the perception of the AIFP coordinator that the GTZ coordinator has succeeded in getting the AIFP coordinator involved in all WSM activities as much as possible in a multitude of ways, e.g. through discussions, planning, facilitation of workshops and direct involvement in this Project Progress Review.

Beyond the AIFP, co-operation with other MRC programmes focused on information and knowledge management. In this field, the project has supported both other sector programmes (e.g. fisheries) and the Technical Support Division, the responsible department within MRC, in the implementation and strategic development of MRC information management. The project has made various attempts for closer co-operation, which have remained at the level of declared intentions. This is mainly due to the fact that core programmes as well as sector programmes have the character of donor funded “islands” with very little co-ordination at MRC managerial level. WSMP has a more visible identity of its own than the other programmes which leads to the perception of “independence” by some but is welcomed as “intellectual integrity” by other representatives from the various MRC programmes.

Compared to its predecessor, the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources Project (SMRP), the stronger integration of WSMP into MRC is considered the right approach. However, the PPR team feels that further integration could be facilitated by a reduction of symbols of GTZ identity (without compromising standards of professionalism and integrity), but also – even more importantly – by donor insistence on stronger support for collaboration within the MRCS from the MRC management. This could promote efficiency and effectiveness, consolidate concepts and messages to the member countries and avoid overlapping work areas and conflicting policy recommendations.

Recommendations for WSMP therefore are to

- invest even more in active networking with other programmes (informal and formal links),
- establish direct co-operation with core programmes,
- reduce symbols of GTZ identity, and to
- continue the strong involvement of the co-ordinator, with clear definition of roles and responsibilities.

Co-operation with the national level in the member states

Some general aspects of project integration have already been discussed in the previous section 3.2. After a summary of the general aspects of co-operation with member countries we will be looking at the individual situations of each country and give recommendations. Our three general recommendations are to:

- develop individual approaches in the four countries, since the situation in natural resource management, the persons involved and the capacity of both the NMCs and the line agencies differs from country to country.
- clarify processes and decision-making in the National Working Groups, and to
- analyse the motivation/availability of working group members and means to improve it. Also, the level of working group members should be reconsidered: involve technical-level staff for concrete tasks, rather than depending on decision-making level.

Recommendations for Laos:

- i) Support KfW investment in Laos, “bridge“ start of KfW activity in line with KfW plans

- ii) „Bridge“ start of KfW activity by visible relevant action in line with KfW plans,
- iii) Add „ad-hoc“ technical level for concrete short-term tasks to NWG with clear mandates and work plans,
- iv) Have watershed expert/country co-ordinator of WSMP focus on relevant work in pilot watershed

Recommendations for Cambodia:

- i) Help coordinate and plan Rural Development Project in Siem Reap in Cambodia (up for governmental negotiations in summer)
- ii) „Bridge“ start of Rural Development Project with preparatory, relevant analysis in line with project plans
- iii) Add „ad-hoc“ technical level for concrete short term tasks to NWG with clear mandates and work plans
- iv) Have watershed expert of WSMP focus on relevant work in pilot watershed

Recommendations for Vietnam:

- 1) Clarify expected outcomes of work in pilot area , make sure existing experiences (Black River Project, Dak Lak Rural Development Project) are being used
- 2) Use network of existing projects for active role on pilot and national levels: GTZ (plus green group), Danida, WWF
- 3) Include MoNRE into working group
- 4) Keep NWG as a standing committee, but concentrate on expert level, focused, concrete pilot work and capacity building,
- 5) Reiterate mandate of NWG, functions of members, role of chairman
- 6) Clarify decision-making process and formulation of work plan
- 7) Relevant issues: water quality monitoring (e.g. bio-indicators, entry point appraisal of wetlands project), water abstraction regulation (with DANIDA in Srepok and Ca River Basin)

Recommendations for Thailand:

- i) The situation in Thailand is different from the one in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam due to the fact that Thailand has much longer experiences in watershed management that are not yet well documented. Thailand's potential to take up a "donor-role" by providing expertise and experience in the region should be examined.
- ii) The function of the reference/pilot watershed has to be clarified further; its identification should be conducted jointly with BDP process at MRC and with Thai NMC stressing participation of population with regard to its selection and the used criteria.
- iii) The project's existing independent country representation should be integrated into the Thai NMC.

- iv) The WSMP's watershed expert should focus on work/documentation of experiences in Thailand.
- v) Co-operation with the existing 27 watershed committees should be clarified.
- vi) The membership level of the National Working Group should be adjusted to ensure it's functioning (– involve technical level).

3.4 Co-operation with other Projects and Donor Organizations

The Project's potential and need for close co-operation with other German development programmes and initiatives as well as international donor activities has been highlighted in the tender document. For the project to achieve its objectives, co-operation is a necessity (see next section). Both the team co-ordinator and the team's information management/natural resources management expert are well suited to perform this task as they bring in extensive regional experience and strong personal networks in the German and international development programme community.

Co-operation in a practical sense has been focused on KfW (in providing baseline analysis for the preparation of an investment project in Laos) and InWEnt (in jointly preparing capacity building on watershed management concepts in the four MRC member countries). In spite of the project's expected comparative advantage with its regional scope and network, actual concrete results of co-operation beyond KfW and InWEnt have not yet lived up to expectations. Contacts do exist with a large number of projects and programmes and there is an expressed willingness to co-operate. This, however, has not been developed to a stage where concrete joint activities have been defined.

The PPR team sees reasons for the project not yet having concluded a larger bundle of concrete activities with co-operation partners beyond KfW and inWEnt in the following issues:

- The project has concentrated on the building-up of National Working Groups, the definition of work plans and the identification of pilot watersheds in order to become operational in terms of outreach;
- Before this structure has been put into place and work plans could be defined, areas of mutual interest could not be defined concretely enough to become tangible joint activities;
- Co-operation is time consuming. For this investment to pay off for co-operation partners, mutual benefits need to be clear and the sharing of work and costs needs to be transparent.

With the national project infrastructure now in place and the pilot watersheds defined in two countries (Vietnam should follow soon) co-operation opportunities can and should be narrowed down. The PPR team recommends focusing on co-operation in the pilot watersheds taking up opportunities in project design and appraisal (e.g. Siem Reap rural development in Cambodia and Wetlands Project in Soc Trang and/or DANIDA River Basin Management, both Vietnam) as well as focusing on defined strategic thematic areas like payments for environmental services and natural resource governance for co-operation with regional actors like IUCN, WWF and other international donor organisations. Co-operation with Thailand should be geared towards making existing Thai experiences in watershed management available in the other MRC countries.

3.5 Changes in Framework Conditions and Assumptions

The project's tender document stresses three factors that constitute critical conditions and assumptions for overall project success and the achievement of the envisaged impacts. These three factors are

- Political support for and sense of ownership with MRC as an organization by member states and donors;
- Continued economic recovery in South-East Asia
- Progress in governance: rules and regulations governing access, control and use of natural resources

Political support/ownership with MRC

It is the view of the PPR team, that MRC is still seen as the only organisation in the region with an official mandate to discuss water and related issues in a trans-boundary context. MRC's relevance differs in member countries, depending on the size of the territory within the Mekong watershed, the position along the river and the potential political and economic benefits to be obtained. Stakes in MRC are therefore clearly higher for Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam than for Thailand. Funding for MRC as an indicator of ownership is still largely coming from donor agencies with only around 10 % coming from member country contributions.

As an indicator for political support and ownership, the tender document formulates the creation of a Regional Co-ordination Committee with a recognized mandate and clear terms of reference. This body exists in the form of the Regional Working Group that has just started to operate. Neither mandate nor terms of reference are clear yet. Priority thematic areas have not been agreed upon. While the existence and functioning of a Regional Committee is not a conclusive indicator of political support, funding is and the continued dependence on donor sources leaves doubts about the sustainability of MRC in the longer term. Given the history of the MRC member countries and their rather recent traumas, however, the very existence of a transboundary work and communication forum can also be seen as an impressive sign of political support.

Continued Economic Recovery in South-East Asia

While the region's economic recovery after the 1997 crisis is continuing, member countries have been performing very differently (depending on political factors, the dominating economic sectors and, above all, very different baselines). Although economic recovery has occurred to a rather different degree from country to country – in none of the countries the aftermath of the Asian Crisis is still a dominating factor for low economic performance.

Progress in Governance

With this indicator, the authors of the project document referred mainly to

- The legal basis for community forestry (which is still not yet in place in Laos and Thailand, while there seems to be progress in Cambodia and Vietnam);
- Reform of land law and allocation practices which are still complex in all countries – but a particularly difficult problem and not yet resolved in Cambodia in spite of strong donor efforts and therefore remain obstacles for development;
- Only modest progress on decentralisation which is differing from country to country

According to the three criteria mentioned there is no acute threat for the project arising from the overall framework conditions. Resource governance regimes, inadequately defined and implemented access and control over land and slow progress in the decentralisation process are still hampering the effective implementation of watershed management programmes. In addition to the mentioned conditions the PPR team feels that there are two additional framework conditions that are considered essential for project success:

- Sense of ownership towards WSMP: National and regional working groups will be operating with much less support from WSMP. Ownership with WSMP will also depend on the degree to which „on-the-ground“ impact expectations will be met in the coming phase. How the MRC vision - which is currently under review – will be redefined (“from knowledge organisation to implementation”, role of sector versus core programmes, and the ambitions related to it). This will affect the future work of WSMP, but not question its relevance and importance also under a potential changed overall strategy.

3.6 Perceptions of the Project’s Strengths and Weaknesses

The following reflections on the project’s strengths and weaknesses are perceptions solicited in interviews with partners, stakeholders, and resource persons throughout the team’s visits in all four MRC member countries. They give an impression of how the project is being viewed – but do not hold up to scientific standards for empirical research. These reflections do not indicate what is “right” or “wrong” in terms of the project approach. The team feels, however, that these reflections are a helpful tool for the analysis of impacts in the following section.

“Strengths” of WSMP

- All project staff are seen as highly professional, technically capable and quality orientated;
- Within the MRC secretariat, the project through its GTZ co-ordinator is viewed as articulate and associated with a certain intellectual integrity; it is also considered as the only real partner for the Basin Development Plan staff in strategic discussions;
- The quality and the extent of the personal and organisational networks of the international and national experts both in the region and in the German and international development community are strong assets of the project;
- The project plays a widely acknowledged strong role in information and knowledge management regarding the management of natural resources in the region – going well beyond the boundaries of MRC structures;
- The project’s process orientation is seen as a promising approach to cause lasting changes in sustainable natural resources management, and
- The ability and flexibility to do pilot work being able to take risks was mentioned by a number of people who were asked about the strengths of WSMP.

“Weaknesses”

- From a national perspective no „on-the-ground-impacts“ can be identified yet. The project is therefore perceived as „too philosophical“, rather than „practical“.
- The flip side of “intellectual integrity” – some perceived the project as „too independent“ from the rest of the MRC, i.e. not sufficiently integrated into the MRC structure and creating own representative structures in the member countries that are not integrated into national structures (either governmental or non-governmental): This is both a strength and a weakness.
- National Working Groups are considered as WSMP/GTZ “driven”, i.e. depending on inputs from the international experts in Vientiane;
- Lack of focus: „digging a well that is rather wide that deep“, impact orientation (and monitoring) to be strengthened;
- Missing Concept consolidation with the Basin Development Plan on conceptual framework for “River Basin Management” versus Watershed Management, how do these concepts relate to each other?

4. Contributions and Impacts

A system of impact-oriented monitoring for WSMP is at its infancy stage - work on the conceptual foundations has been done, but no working system is operational yet. With delays in project start-up, relocation from Phnom Penh to Vientiane and strong involvement in getting the structural conditions into place both at MRCS and the four member countries, this is explicable. This deficit, however, should be addressed swiftly in the next phase, which would help to maintain focus and staying on track.

Because the impact monitoring is not yet operational we will be looking more closely at the planned results and their indicators in order to assess impacts, before we will be reviewing the actual project objectives.

4.1 Results

Result 1

„Concepts for the management of selected watersheds have been developed, documented and disseminated.“
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The indicators for assessing the actual achievement of this result have changed considerably compared to the ones formulated in the initial project document. They are not quantitatively measurable, it is therefore difficult to assess to what extent this result has actually been achieved:

(1) A number of studies have been produced about watershed management, its conceptual foundations and watershed management under the conditions of the MRC's member countries. These studies seem to have been somewhat detached from the "real life working situation" of the members of the national working groups. The main aim of the project was to establish a solid basis of mutually understood conceptual foundations of what watershed management actually means. This has also been the subject of skill-sharing workshops, capacity building and policy dialogue jointly conducted with InWEnt. While the perception of many of the interviewed resource persons was that these were very well organised events, the PPR team also had the impression that the approach taken was rather fundamental in its focus on the conceptual side of watershed management. For a larger segment of participants the immediate relevance for their own work was not yet evident. In addition, processes and linkages between the local, national and regional level are only partly understood.

(2) Priority areas of work have been selected and support by National Working Group is there - but not to an extent that they would be functioning without WSMP intervention from Vientiane. Support and commitment also differs from country to country – in the case of Thailand, support has its reservations (see section 3.3).

(3) The watershed selection process has been documented, but this documentation has not yet been disseminated. The work plans for 2005/2007 have been prepared, but await final approval from the National Working Groups.

Result 2

Structures and instruments for the analysis and further development of national policies and guidelines have been developed to operational level.

- (1) Best practices are not available yet.
- (2) A regional inventory of national WSM policies and guidelines has been completed (except for Thailand). With regard to gender differentiation in the project's outputs, the project has been inquiring within the MRC Secretariat about its policy. Clear guidelines are not available which makes implementation difficult.
- (3) The existing National Working Groups are formally established (except Thailand) and have formal work descriptions, but they do lack focus and initiative.
- (4) A Regional Working Group has been established. It has formulated terms of reference but it is not yet operational in the sense of these TORs.
- (5) Watershed Management guidelines have not been worked upon yet.

Result 3

Structures and instruments for continuous, effective regional co-operation are in place and operational.

- (1) A Regional Working Group has been established but this is not identical to the planned Regional co-ordination committee. The required endorsement of its mandate by the Joint Committee of MRC is therefore also not in place.
- (2) The three thematic regional working groups have not been established.
- (3) An analysis of the feasibility of regional guidelines and standards has not yet been conducted.

Result 4

The regional information, data, and knowledge management is improved.

This result has very clearly been achieved to the maximum extent possible:

- (1) The WSMP's information management and Mekong-Info are highly appreciated; and their use is documented on the regional level. A detailed information management strategy has been prepared including detailed information about users and actual use. National level integration is not yet in place, due to resource and capacity constraints that are beyond the influence of WSMP.
- (2) The integration of WSMP's information management into MRC's core programmes has been only partially successful, in spite of strong efforts by WSMP. Other sector programmes (e.g. fisheries) have benefited greatly from WSMP and the Technical Support Division relies heavily on support from WSMP. The main constraint here is the limited coordination within MRCS – a management issue for MRC that is beyond the reach of WSMP (see 3.3).
- (3) Gender differentiation indicator – see Result 1

4.2 Use Made of Project Contributions and Direct Benefits

Overall Project Objective (as formulated in the progress report to BMZ)

Relevant institutions in the riparian states of the Lower Mekong Basin co-operate effectively on a regional basis, conduct systematic information and data exchange and agree on improved concepts for sustainable watershed management.

Objective of current phase (as formulated in the progress report to BMZ)

Relevant institutions in the riparian countries of the LMB use regional co-operation, information and data exchange as well as improved concepts for sustainable watershed management.

Indicators for the objective of current phase (as formulated in the progress report to BMZ)

- (1) A regional action plan for co-operation in sustainable watershed management has been formally agreed upon by MRC and the responsible national organisations represented in the Regional Working Group (RWG).

PPR Assessment: The regional action plan, the MRC and the Regional Working Group have agreed upon does not seem realistic until end-2005 and the end of this phase. As discussed in the context of project planning (see section 2) even the objectives reformulated in 2003 seem to be very ambitious given the organisational situation at MRC and at the level of the member countries. The challenges of a regional project and the transactions costs associated with an agreement in a difficult political environment have been underestimated.

- (2) In a survey, at least 50% of members of National Working Groups state that,
 - co-operation with the project activities has been useful,
 - regional co-operation has had positive impacts on their work, and
 - regional data and information exchange has led to improved decision-making in their area of responsibility.

PPR Assessment: Although the survey has not yet taken place, from our interviews with a large number of NWG members we gained the impression that there would be a clear majority stating that co-operation has been useful. Actual regional cooperation is still at its infancy. It would be unrealistic to expect statements of positive impacts of regional co-operation. Regional data and information exchange is very effective and highly praised on a technical level, its relevance for the policy level, however, is much less clear and difficult to measure.

4.3 First Phase Evaluation Summary

- In its first phase WSMP has been concentrating on structural and process foundations of watershed management;
- The project has reached a strong standing both within MRC and with partners in MRC member countries;
- A good part of envisaged results have not yet been achieved, (i) partly because of organisational constraints and obstacles (delayed start, relocation), (ii) partly because objectives and results were too ambitious given the constraints of MRC as an organisation, a difficult “project culture”, a very complex political environment given its very violent recent past and (iii) partly because co-operation with existing and planned projects in the region has not yet had practical implications;
- The important step of NWG formation and pilot watershed selection took much of the project’s energy and time;
- Concrete work in pilot watersheds through project and programme partners has started and will have to be even more important in the next phase;
- There is a strong perception that more focus and a more concrete orientation are needed for the second phase.

5. Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the discussion of the project's performance in the previous sections. They aim to summarise the PPR team's recommendations.

5.1 Second Phase: Opportunities and Risks

The PPR recommends a second phase of the Watershed Management Project. With its shortcomings MRC is still the only organisation in the region with an official mandate to discuss water and related natural resource management issues in a transboundary context. MRC's relevance differs in member countries, depending on the size of the territory within the Mekong watershed, the position along the river and the potential political and economic benefits to be obtained. Given the history of the MRC member countries and their rather recent traumas, however, the very existence of a transboundary work and communication forum must be seen as an important foundation for progress in sustainable resource management.

In spite of delays in project implementation, this evaluation sees WSMP play an important role in

- Policy Analysis and Advice
- Information Management, and
- Capacity Building

In order to actually play this role and achieve critical impacts in regional natural resources management, this report gives a number of recommendations in terms of organisational aspects and focus. The evaluation also stresses the fact that expectations towards regional projects tend to be relatively high without giving enough attention to the additional challenges coming along with the implementation of a regional project. Some of these are rather practical in terms of heavy travel schedules, large numbers of relevant actors, difficult definition of the project's roles. These are experiences that are recurrent in regional projects and that have not been addressed systematically enough to enter project design and appraisal procedures within GTZ.

The risks associated with the project for a potential future phase lie in three areas:

- MRC as an organisation will loose support and ownership from member countries (risk low). As water-related natural resources management issues are currently very high on the agenda in all member states this risk is considered low. The issue of resource governance is very much on the political agenda; the question is whether MRC can play a constructive role in it. As this role is currently under discussion with the future strategy being written, it remains to be seen how MRC will position itself. As any new strategy will take considerable time to change the course of the organisation, it will affect any possible second phase only gradually
- Donors will loose interest in MRC because of a radical change in strategy and incompatibility with donor's programmatic intentions (risk medium). This risk depends on how a new strategic outlook will be in line with the programmatic intentions of donors.

MRC enjoys long term support from a variety of donors, frustrations have been revolving around lack of co-ordination within MRC, transactions cost associated with two relocations and what some donors view as slow progress on independent funding of the organisation. Redirecting the organisation's orientation from technical expertise and knowledge management to a role as project implementing organisation in member countries could undermine the way MRC's "value added" is being perceived by donor organisations.

- WSMP will not succeed in achieving relevance and impacts for policy and planning on a national and regional level (risk medium). Regional projects present particular challenges that are often underestimated when highlighting the particular benefits of regional approaches. The much higher co-ordination efforts, intensive travel, the difficulty in establishing a role and standing in a larger context are challenges that are not to be underestimated. It is the view of this evaluation that the WSMP outfit is in a good position to overcome these.

5.2 Integration into MRCS

The integration of a project like WSMP into an organisation like MRC is positive as it ensures that the project's outputs are used in the overall organisation, i.e. that they are "mainstreamed". Comparative advantages are taken into account for overall coordination, maximum efficiency and impact. It is important to note that this is not yet the situation of MRC. To a large extent, programmes are relatively independent "islands" of donor support. The demand for more integration is justified, but not something WSMP can achieve on its own. The PPR team believes that this will not come about unless concerted donor efforts will push in this direction. The current phase of a general review of the MRC's strategy would be a good occasion for a more direct involvement of donors in the design of the MRC's future.

WSMP has been following a course of adhering to standards of professionalism and independence, which has led to an image of autonomy viewed with some scepticism by some and with great respect, and hints of envy by others. WSMP cannot ensure integration on its own but it can facilitate integration by

- intensified reporting towards MRC management (– the AIFP co-ordinator should be playing an important role to facilitate this part of integration);
- more active networking with other programmes (establishment of informal and formal links);
- establishing direct co-operation with core programmes, and by
- reducing symbols of GTZ identity.

5.3 National Working Groups: General

In section 3.3 we have discussed the situation in the four member countries in some detail. As a summary of this discussion we would like to highlight the following issues that we consider important for the situation of all working groups in the four member countries.

- Develop individual approaches in the four countries;

- Review structure of co-operation with NMCs;
- Clarification of Processes and Decision-making;
- Analyse motivation/availability of WG members and means to improve it;
- Reconsider level of working group members.

5.4 Co-operation

In section 3.4 and throughout this document we have repeatedly stressed the importance of co-operation for WSMP in order to achieve the intended impacts and make use of its transboundary role for knowledge management and policy advice, capacity building and provision of methods and instruments. This role is a difficult one given the fact that counterparts always tend to have a preconceived idea of what is “concrete” and “on-the-ground”³. The project’s impacts would go wasted if its staff were drawn into exclusively doing watershed management work in the pilot watersheds themselves. Their role is rather to act as practical organisers/coordinators for a variety of existing and planned projects in the region who apply concepts of sustainable natural resources management with a view to improving natural resource management policies. WSMP can make this impact, if it co-operates closely with other projects and programmes.

We feel that in order to achieve this, WSMP also has to move on “from concept to practice”. Rather be practical organiser of coordination/collaboration than a watershed management „missionaries“ – conceptual foundations are important, but even more important is what they mean in practice. Based on the work in the first phase WSMP will now be moving closer to the “real-life” policy formulation and decision-making situations.

WSMP has made strong efforts to make co-operation happen and we gained the impression that it is succeeding in the case of KfW and InWEnt. For this co-operation to happen in even more cases we think it is important for WSMP to enter the discussion

- with proposals that are as concrete as possible,
- with defined practical activities of joint interest, and
- ideas about sharing costs and work.

5.5 Information Management and Communication Strategy

Information management is one of the project’s strengths. The PPR team feels that its communication strategy could be further improved. What we mean by that is that the WSMP should

- gear policy advice even stronger towards the needs of the recipients and define clearly who they are,

³ Classically this refers to some sort of project hardware.

- distinguish clearly between core and marginal information (clearer focus) in the information management strategy, and
- think even harder about formats that decision makers can „digest“ (timing, length, mode of delivery).

5.6 Impact Monitoring

The project is well aware of the need to get practical on impact monitoring and has laid out but not yet implemented the conceptual foundations for it. This needs to be integrated into the operational planning for a second phase.

5.7 Objective and Work Packages of the Next Phase

Based on discussions with the WSMP team and resources persons inside and outside MRC the PPR team recommends a second phase with the following elements in terms of objectives. Formulation of both objectives and indicators will be further defined in the tender documents for a second phase. In addition, we are also suggesting four “work packages”, describing how the next phase objective would be achieved.

Next phase objective and indicators

“Relevant organisations in the riparian states of the Lower Mekong Basin use WSMP services for improved watershed management with a view to its transboundary impacts.”

Indicator 1

By the end of this phase (November 2008) an analysis of incentives for sustainable resources use has been used by district/province authorities for policy / planning processes in three of the four pilot watersheds.

Indicator 2

WSMP support has been used in multi-stakeholder negotiations in at least two of the four pilot watersheds.

Indicator 3

The WSMP info management system and MekongInfo websites are fully integrated into MRCS and support of other programmes has substantially increased (half of operational costs born by other sources).

Indicator 4

In interviews at least 50% of government officials state that they use skills acquired (able to give concrete example) through WSMC capacity building in their WSM related activities.

Indicator 5

Other programmes/projects for natural resources management in at least two countries use WSMP services through formally established co-operations (monitored co-operation agreements).

Indicator 6

At least two MRC core programmes/TSD utilise WSMC expertise, as reflected in planning and monitoring documents.

Work Packages

5) Policy Analysis and Advice

- Finalise selection of pilot watersheds,
- Situation analysis and prioritisation of resource management issues with NWG, analysis of incentives for sustainable resource use,
- Define policy options through dialogue with stakeholders,
- Communicate results to decision-making authorities and support practical adaptation.

... using opportunities for co-operation with other programmes/projects for NRM.

6) Information Management

- Support for MRCS development of information and knowledge management strategy
- Full integration of the WSMC info management system and MekongInfo website into MRCS Data Management System
- Support in establishing capacity to manage MRCS DMS and monitor actual use
- Support for implementation of data and information quality standards

7) Capacity Building

- Identification of training needs
- Organisation
- Quality management
- Impact monitoring

.... of capacity building activities in co-operation with InWEnt and other partners.

8) Methods and Instruments

- Develop/expand methods and instruments supporting sustainable management of water-related terrestrial natural resources in a watershed context (e.g. Natural Resources Governance Manual, land use zoning guidelines)
- Joint development and implementation of analytical tools in water resources management with MRCS core programmes (e.g. support Healthy River Strategy etc.)

Annexes

- I. Terms of Reference**
- II. Agreed Minutes of Mission Debriefing**
- III. List of Persons met**
- IV. List of Reference Documents**

Terms of Reference (ToR)

Project Progress Review (PPR), February-March 2005

“Sustainable Watershed Management in the Lower Mekong Basin”

PN 2002.2076.4

Background

With its water and land resources, the Lower Mekong Basin is the basis for the livelihood of about 60 million inhabitants; it provides food for 300 million people. First steps to institutionalize the cooperation of the States of the Lower Mekong Basin on issues of water resource management have been undertaken as early as 1957, when the Mekong River Committee was established under the umbrella of the UN. In 1995, after periods of instability in the region, the four States of the Lower Mekong Basin renewed their cooperation and reshaped it: The Kingdom of Cambodia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, the Kingdom of Thailand and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam concluded an “Agreement on the Cooperation for the Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin” and established the Mekong River Commission (MRC) as regional intergovernmental body.

MRC works consensus-based, with the MRC Council being the political body, the MRC Joint Committee serving as implementing body and the MRC Secretariat (MRCS) working as technical and administrative service provider to Council and Joint Committee. Compliance is voluntary; non-interference is a guiding principle. The upstream riparian States China and Myanmar are not party to the Agreement but have observer status and participate in yearly dialogue meetings.

Since 1992, Germany and the riparian States of the Lower Mekong have been cooperating in the field of sustainable management of natural resources and in the forest sector. In 2002 the cooperation was scaled up to the regional level, with the management of the Mekong watersheds as central concern and the MRC Secretariat as executing partner. Here, the cross-sectoral origin of impacts, the strong interrelationship between upstream and downstream interests, the complexity of cross-border impacts and the heterogeneous context of member countries are major challenges for successful political cooperation of the Basin States.

Objectives of the Project Progress Review (PPR)

Main objective of a PPR is to analyse and evaluate results and impacts of projects and programmes, in this case phase I of the MRC/GTZ Cooperation Project on Watershed Management (April 2003 – March 2005): “Sustainable Watershed Management in the Lower Mekong Basin”, called “the project” here. Main quality criteria is satisfaction on the side of GTZ's clients/partners at the Mekong River Commission and member country governments in achieving regional cooperation for the purpose of sustainable watershed management in the Lower Mekong Basin. The PPR is orientated towards producing useful lessons for the project's future successful implementation. In order to produce useful results, the PPR will be conducted in closest cooperation with the GTZ project management and partner organisations.

Together with the project management and partners the PPR team will

- assess the relevance, outcome, overall impact and sustainability of the Project's activities
- identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats with regard to Project implementation and modes of delivery
- review the institutional setting and evolution of the Project with respect to issues of efficiency, governance, accountability, regional/national and sectoral outreach, as well as networking and stakeholder and donor involvement (financial and non-financial)
- aim to formulate lessons learnt for application in other transnational environment and natural resource management approaches in German Technical Assistance
- make concrete recommendations for the planning and implementation of phase II (planning workshop).

The PPR will be carried out in accordance with GTZ's Policy on Contract and Cooperation Management (Eschborn 2004), and PPR guidelines.

Tasks

For the PPR Mission to obtain its objectives it will focus on the following areas:

I. Project Planning

- Quality of Plan and Planning Process
- Stage of Planning to-date

II. Stage of Implementation

- Results of the first phase
- Organisation of Project Implementation, Efficiency and sustainability of project management incl. Ownership, communication (management and methods)
- Integration into MRC programmes and structures. Co-ordination of objectives and project activities with Member Countries, Quality of linkages to implementing levels
- Organisational framework and project-related capacity of MRCS
- Collaboration and synergies with other instruments and contributions of German cooperation in the region (Financial Cooperation/KfW; contributions through other agencies /Inwent, DED; contributions to other regional organisations / ReFOP ASEAN)
- Coherence with SSP and other relevant sector strategies and cross-sectoral contributions

- Appropriateness and effectiveness of organisational solutions to transboundary/regional cooperation (National Working Groups, Regional Working Groups)
- Changes in overall conditions/project assumptions

III. Results and Impacts

- Use of project outputs and direct benefits
- Ability to respond to cross-sectoral nature of watershed management and to requirements of multi-stakeholder involvement
- Ability and Effectiveness of linking up with major NRM-related policy issues and processes comprising but not limited to trade, land management, forest policies
- Effective contribution to translating regional needs of watershed management in the Lower Mekong Basin into national action and standards
- Unintended positive and negative impacts
- Aggregated development impacts

IV. Recommendations

- Appropriateness of modes of delivery and organisational set-up
- Relevance and quality of the project concept within the MRC objective of transboundary co-operation for sustainable development and management of the river basin and with regard to activities of other donors
- Impact monitoring vis à vis key issues, instruments applied and use of data generated
- Future TC/FC-Cooperation; to be jointly developed with KfW
- AURA-compatible concept for Phase II

V. Lessons Learned

- Value added by cooperation on regional level; strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, risks

The PPR Team

The PPR Team comprises of the following persons:

- Dr. Lorenz Petersen, GTZ, Environmental and Natural Resources Economist, Team Leader. Responsible for the overall results of the PPR, reporting and effective co-ordination of the team's efforts with the project and clients.
- Dr. Vitoon, National Consultant, Expert of Natural Resources Management in the Mekong River Basin. Based on the performance compilation provided by the project, Dr. Vitoon will be assessing the current stage of implementation and elaborate within the team on results and impacts, recommendations and lessons learned based on his in-depth knowledge of the actual situation in the four member countries of the MRC.
- Dr. Waldemar Kasprzik, Expert on Organisational Development, Planning and Process Design, will be in charge of all aspects related to project planning, organisational development, structures and processes (including communication) within the MRC context and its partner organisations as they relate to an effective implementation of the GTZ project.

Details of team co-ordination and division of tasks will be agreed upon at Team meeting on the 22 February in Vientiane.

Mission schedule and travel arrangements

All necessary arrangements for meetings with representatives of relevant organisations will be conducted by the project office in Vientiane. This comprises but is not limited to

- MRC Management
- Lead Agencies of MRC countries
- National Project Directors, National Project Coordinators of MRC Countries – or working group representatives respectively
- KfW/ InWent/DED in the region
- ASEAN
- ESCAP
- ADB
- IUCN
- Oxfam
- WWF
- National Donors
- Provincial and Local Organisations

Reference documents

By the end of January, the Team will have been provided with all relevant documentation regarding project design and implementation. This includes but is not limited to

- a) **MRC**
 - publications and documents

- b) **BMZ / GTZ**
 - BMZ Sector and country strategy documents

- c) **Project**
 - Project Progress Reports
 - Plan of Operations
 - Relevant technical reports
 - Write up of results so far with reference to indicators

- d) **Other relevant publications**
 - ADB
 - ReFOP /ASEAN
 - KfW
 - InWent

Output and Reporting

The Review Team is required to produce the following reports as hard copies and as electronic files based on Microsoft products in the German and English languages:

- Minutes of Meeting (incl. concept phase II), reconciled with MRCS and Member Countries by 18 March 2005 (English)
- PPR (draft) report by 08 April 2005 according to GTZ format in English (see Annex 1 for an Outline).
- PPR (final) report by 22 April 2005
- Draft of GTZ tender by 22 April 2005 (German)

Time schedule (tentative, to be specified)

The following time schedule is tentative. It will be refined in due course.

Date (2005)	Activities (to be substantiated at later date)
24-28 January	Briefing with BMZ, KfW, Inwent and GTZ headquarters staff in Germany
Until 16 February	Documents review
21 – 22 February	Team constitution, final confirmation of Mission organisation and arrangements, introduction at MRC Secretariat
23 – 27 February	Meetings and visits in Laos
28 Feb. – 2 March	Meetings and visits in Cambodia
3 – 7 March	Meetings and visits in Thailand
8 -11 March	Meetings and visits in Vietnam
12-14 March	PFK Team: Mission findings and preparation of presentation
15 - 16 March	Open and regional working Group meeting
17 March	Intermediate briefing at MRCS, PMU, GTZ Office and preparation of MoM
18 March	Special MRCS meeting: Planning workshop Concept for Phase II; Minutes of Meeting and debriefing
March 19	Return to Germany
April	Submission of documentation and de-briefing in Eschborn

Vientiane, 19.01.2005

Dr. Cornelis van Tuyll

Minutes of Meeting

Between

Mekong River Commission

And

Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ)

On the

**Project Progress Review (PPR)
of the**

**AIFP Watershed Management Project:
“Sustainable Watershed Management in the
Lower Mekong Basin”**

Vientiane, 18 March 2005

I. Background

From February 21 to March 18 2005 a Project Progress Review (hereafter called "PPR") of the "Watershed Management Project" (WSMP) within the Agriculture, Irrigation and Forestry Sector Programme ("AIFP") at the Mekong River Commission Secretariat took place following Terms of Reference from 19 January 2005. The PPR Team, consisting of Lorenz Petersen (Environmental Economist, Team Leader), Waldemar Kasprzik (Organisational Development Specialist), Vitoon Viriyasakultorn (AIFP Co-ordinator), analysed the extensive project documentation and had the opportunity for intensive discussion with Senior management and technical experts of MRCS in Vientiane but also with national partners of the project in the four MRC members countries as well as resources persons in the field of Watershed Management.

II. Main Findings

Changes in Framework and Assumptions

The PPR team reviewed framework and assumptions formulated as preconditions for a successful implementation of WSMP in the appraisal and tender documents.

- **Political support/ownership** with for by the member countries was communicated to the Team in its meetings with officials in both the National Mekong Committees and the line agencies. This support/ownership obviously depends on national country interests, share and position in the overall Mekong River Basin, but also stages of development and political strength.
- **Progress in Governance** referring to community forestry, land laws and allocation as well as decentralisation varies strongly among member countries and is modest overall. While progress in these areas will help achieve impacts for the project, the current situation is not seen as threat to potential project continuation.
- **Sense of ownership towards WSMP** by member countries is clearly an important condition for success in achieving actual impacts. The actual work in pilot watersheds is expected to boost the sense of ownership within National Working Groups and should therefore be crucial element of a potential next phase.
- **Cooperation with other Natural Resource Management Programmes** in the pilot Watershed context is essential for WSMP to achieve impacts given its resource limitations. Critical step will be to come to concrete working agreements beyond identifying potential.
- **MRC Strategy Development** currently under way will be critical for the future of WSMP and the contribution it can make to the implementation of the 1995 agreement. As the process of strategy is in its early stages the PPR team considers it premature to comment at this stage.

Impacts

Overall as well as current phase objectives of the project and their indicators have been reformulated during the first phase in order to take into account the focus on impacts that has taken place in German development policy.

- **Objective (First phase):** Impacts vary in that a planned regional action plan has not been achieved nor does it seem realistic during the remainder of the first phase and actual regional co-operation is just starting to take shape. In the National Working Groups the PPR team heard a strong sense that co-operation is useful, particularly if work in the Pilot watershed will start and a stronger thematic focus will be defined. Regional data and knowledge management by the project is unanimously seen as successful.

- **Results:** Out of the four defined results to be achieved during the first phase, impacts expected from the first three related to (i) working in selected watersheds (pilots), (ii) structures and instruments for policy analysis and advice and (iii) structures and instruments for regional co-operation have only partially been achieved. National Working Groups have been established but this process - like the one to define pilot watersheds - has taken up much more time than expected. Result (iii) at this stage seems unrealistic to achieve. The team is doubtful whether "structures and instruments for continuous regional co-operation" is useful beyond the existing structures of MRC. The fourth result related to improvement of regional data-, info-, and knowledge management has been successfully achieved.

Strengths and Weaknesses

In its conversations and discussions with a wide range of persons closely and loosely related to the project the team has been drawing a picture of the perceived strengths and weaknesses of WSMP. It is important to stress that this is not a survey based on rigid scientific analysis but rather the subjective view of the PPR team after numerous structured interviews.

Strengths

- Very professional with high level of technical quality
- Articulate (intellectual integrity), only real partner for BDP in strategic discussions
- Quality and extent of personal and organisational network
- Widely acknowledged strong role in information management
- Process orientation
- Ability to do pilot work

Weaknesses

- Orientation: from national perspective no „on-the-ground-impacts“ project is perceived as „philosophical“, rather than „practical“
- Identity: „Independence“ – i.e. at MRCS by some WSMP not perceived as MRC – flip-side to strength of being articulate
- Working Groups still depend upon WSMP for keeping up momentum
- Lack of focus: „digging a well that is rather wide than deep“
- Missing Concept consolidation with BDP on RBM versus WSM
- Impact orientation to be strengthened

III. Mission Recommendations

From Concept to Practice

The PPR team picked up strong feedback in the member countries that the project should move from defining conceptual foundations, structural and process set-up to actually applying them. The PPR team encourages the project to co-operate practically with other programmes in Natural Resources Management to gain leverage in the application of its concepts, methods and instruments. WSMP will be able to promote watershed management more successfully if it has a more focused "thematic entry point".

Integration into MRCS

Taking into account the established contractual relationship between MRC and German technical assistance, the PPR team has the impression that more WSMP integration into MRCS would be useful. WSMP has been collaborating successfully with TSD and Fisheries in Information management. WSMP could further contribute by

- Active networking with other programmes (informal and formal links) and establishing direct co-operation with core programmes
- Reduce symbols of GTZ identity
- Continue strong involvement of AIFP co-ordinator, with clear definition of roles and responsibilities

National Working Groups

With regard the important task to further boost the role of National Working Group the PPR team proposes to take individual approaches in the four different countries as a one-size-fits-all concept would be against the expressed preferences of Working groups and National Mekong Committees. For efficiency and effectiveness it is proposed that specific tasks will be delegated to expert level teams with clear short-term assignments not to overburden Working Group members on the decision-making level. This would go along with further clarification of decision-making processes.

Co-operation and Cooperation Partners

The PPR team found ample scope for co-operation in the four member countries. The negotiation and organisation of such co-operation/co-ordination is time consuming but in our view worth the effort. This would include but is not limited to

- LAO: Potential partners would include UNDP/IUCN, close co-operation with a financial co-operation project by KfW as instructed by the German Ministry of Economic Development, as well as the GTZ Rural Development Programme
- CAMBODIA: participate GTZ appraisal Siem Reap rural development project with the opportunity to integrate Watershed Management Concepts
- VIETNAM: GTZ Forest Administration project (Refas), Appraisal GTZ Wetlands Project Dak Lak,
- THAILAND: Establish co-operation partnership with Thai authorities aiming at making Thai WSM experiences available in the LMB

IV. The next phase

The PPR team will be recommending a second phase of the project. For this next phase indicative Objectives, indicators and work packages are given below, all of them subject to review within GTZ and approval of the German Ministry of Economic Development, as is the general decision about a second phase.

Objective and indicators

Next phase objective

"Relevant Organisations in the riparian states of the Lower Mekong Basin use WSMP services for improved Watershed Management with a view to its transboundary impacts".

Indicator 1:

By the end of this Phase (November 2008) in 3 of the 4 pilot WS an analysis of incentives for sustainable resources use has been used by district/province authorities and/or other agencies for policy / planning processes

Indicator 2:

WSMP support has been used in multi stakeholder negotiations in at least 2 of the 4 pilot WS.

Indicator 3:

MRCS has fully integrated the WSMP info management system and MekongInfo website into overall DMS of MRC, support of other programmes for DMS has substantially increased.

Indicator 4:

In interviews at least 50% of trained persons state that they use skills acquired (able to give concrete example) through WSMP capacity building in their WSM related activities.

Indicator 5:

Other programmes/projects for NRM in at least 2 countries use WSMP Services through formally established co-operations.

Indicator 6:

At least two MRC core programmes/TSD utilise WSMP expertise, as reflected in planning and monitoring documents.

Work Packages

Package 1: Policy Analysis and Advice

- Finalise selection of pilot watersheds,
- situation analysis and prioritisation of resource management issues with NWG,
- analysis of incentives for sustainable resource use,
- define policy options through dialogue with stakeholders,
- Communicate results to decision-making authorities and support for practical adaptation and implementation

... using opportunities for co-operation with other programmes/projects for NRM.

Package 2: Information Management

- Support for MRCS development of information and knowledge management strategy
- full integration of the WSMP info management system and MekongInfo website into MRCS Data Management System
- Support in establishing capacity to manage MRCS DMS and monitor actual use
- Support for implementation of data and information quality standards

Package 3: Capacity Building

- Identification of training needs
- Organisation
- quality management
- impact monitoring

.... of capacity building activities in co-operation with InWEnt and other partners

Package 4: Methods and Instruments

- Develop/expand methods and instruments supporting sustainable management of water-related terrestrial natural resources in a watershed context (e.g. Natural Resources Governance Manual, land use zoning guidelines)
- Joint development and implementation of analytical tools in Water resources management with MRCS core programmes (e.g. support Healthy River Strategy etc.)

V. Next Steps

After finalisation of the mission in Vientiane and member countries, a full written version of the Project Progress Review will be drafted (mid-April) and the Ministry of Economic Development briefed about the PPR and Mission recommendations (28 April). Subject to agreement by the Ministry a tender document for the next phase will be prepared and submitted for BMZ approval (May/June).

(1) The signatories a) have taken note of the results of the evaluation mission; b) agree to submit these Minutes for consideration by the German authorities.



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MRC



Dr. Cornelis van Tuyll
WSMP/GTZ
Programme Co-ordinator



Dr. Lorenz Petersen
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Annex III: List of Persons met

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Annex IV.

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Internal WSMP Documents

Document #1, Institutional Landscape: Overview of the institutions and organizations the WSMC has linkages with (Graph)

Document #2, Plan of Operations: Outputs and related activities with Indicators and Assessment of Achievements (Table)

Document #3, Overview of priorities on which the national work plans of the MRC member countries for the phase 2005 – 2008 are based (Table)

Document #4, List of individuals in the MRC member countries met by various WSMC consultants (Table)

Document #5, Information Needs Assessment for Watershed Management Questionnaire, October 2004

Document #6, Portrait and assessment of MRC as a partner organization

Document #7, WSMP's current understanding of the function and relevance of pilot Watersheds

Documents #8-15, Presentations held in the four meetings of the National Working Group Cambodia

Document #16, Presentation held in the 1st meeting of the Regional Working Group held in Vientiane (Laos), 15 March 2004

Documents #17-18, Presentations held at the two in-house dialogues of the WSMP about watershed management and WSMP activities in 2004

Maps

Draft overview of critical watersheds as identified by WSMP

Detailed overview of critical watersheds as identified by WSMP

Overview maps of selected pilot watersheds in Cambodia

Satellite image time series of selected pilot watershed in Cambodia

Overview maps of selected pilot watersheds in Laos