Oxfam Mekong Water Governance Program Annual Learning Event’s Communiqué

Hanoi, Vietnam, June 2015

‘Do you have the patience to wait until your mud settles and the water is clear?’

-Lao Tzu

Context:

From the 22nd - 26th of June over fifty Oxfam partners and associates, from Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, joined staff in Hanoi for our Annual Reflection & Learning event on the Mekong Water Governance Program. Our challenge was to try and balance the ancient but good question above with the urgency we experience to support affected communities in the fast changing development context in the Mekong and Salween river basins. The event included a regional training on Legal Frameworks for Water Governance, two and a half days reflection and learning on the Inclusion Project (a key component of the water governance program) and a Roundtable on the Mekong Delta Study.

Event’s Objectives and Expectations:

Partners came with expectations ranging from learning new skills, exploring new methodologies to expanding their networks. Partners included youth CSOs, NGOs and INGOs working nationally and regionally, government and academic institutions and donor representatives who participated throughout-sometimes as presenters in learning sessions or as facilitators.

Our aims were: to strengthen relationships between participants, to build knowledge and skills, to identify opportunities and challenges arising from changes in the operating environment and to identify the implications of our learning and reflection for future work.

What we did:

DAY ONE: Legal Framework in Trans-boundary Water Governance

This workshop really challenged our thinking! We brought partners and community representatives together to increase their knowledge by providing an overview of the main UN instruments and tools including that are used in water governance i.e. UN Watercourse Convention, UN Business and Human Rights, UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and FPIC tools (Free, Prior and Informed Consent).
DAY TWO, THREE AND FOUR:

Some community members left, others joined and we were led through a workshop process as follows:

- Gather Information
- Reflect, Analyse, and Learn
- Develop Ideas, Innovate
- Commit to action

Sometimes we were in groups learning new skills and increasing knowledge about trends in the region. Sometimes we were walking through galleries of partners posters so we could understand each other’s work and the challenges...and solutions! Sometimes we discussed real case studies, we met in World Cafes and met all together in plenary and at one session we were the participating audience in Forum Theatre. All these activities were shaped around 4 learning frames led by a ‘champion team’ for each frame:

- Gender mainstreaming and women’s leadership
- Civil society capacity building
- Community based water resource management
- Convening and brokering policy dialogue

DAY FIVE: ROUNDTABLE ON THE MEKONG DELTA STUDY

A smaller number of partners and donors working on the Mekong Delta Study were joined by key scientists and researchers to discuss the current stage of the study and identify the next steps.

**Results and feedback from participants:**

We all learned a lot and have new ideas to put into practice. This communiqué can only give you a ‘taster’ and we hope you will follow up with participants and from the links below.

- **Regional Networking and strengthening of Civil Society Networks in the region is working**: we could see evidence of this through the experiences shared by participants both inside and outside sessions.

- **The regional water governance program is growing**: there are new partners e.g. youth groups and new faces from long term partners.

- **“Gender is Hot”**: a resonating theme of the workshop was partner’s commitment to gender work, and that we are learning new ways to focus. An important reflection was that we need to ‘walk the talk’ within our own organizations (partners’ and Oxfam’s). There was a lively discussion between donor, partners and Oxfam about how much in a budget is allocated to retain and facilitate women staff to work in the field!

- **Finding space for policy dialogue is a challenge..... but there are ways**: partners from the Cambodian and Lao Government participated at the workshop and joined in conversations with civil society on policy in hydropower development and relationship building. The roundtable on the Mekong Delta
Study brought together government, donor partners, the private sector and civil society to review and plan together.

-Creative methodologies for dialogue and capacity building are popular: The short ‘taster’ of the Forum Theatre methodology was praised by participants for being an engaging and creative way of discussing sensitive issues; particularly in countries where space for public debate on water governance is limited.

-Hydropower is still sensitive: We recognized that aspects of water governance – particularly hydropower remain a sensitive issue in each country that we work in and that it creates challenges for what we can do, with whom and when. Space for civil society to discuss it’s in constant change (but this could also be an opportunity)

-We still need to find new ways to bring partners together to understand and discuss each other’s work: The time we could allow in the workshop was short but partners wished they had more time for the gallery walk so they could learn more about each other’s work and that there had been more time to discuss issues. It’s an ongoing challenge but we will try to find new ways to meet it.

**More information:**


For daily updates on the development of hydropower in the region follow our Facebook Page: [https://www.facebook.com/oxfamsavethemekong](https://www.facebook.com/oxfamsavethemekong)

For stories, case studies and opinion pieces on Water Governance in the region visit the pages of our partners and allies:

Mekong Commons:


IMekong: