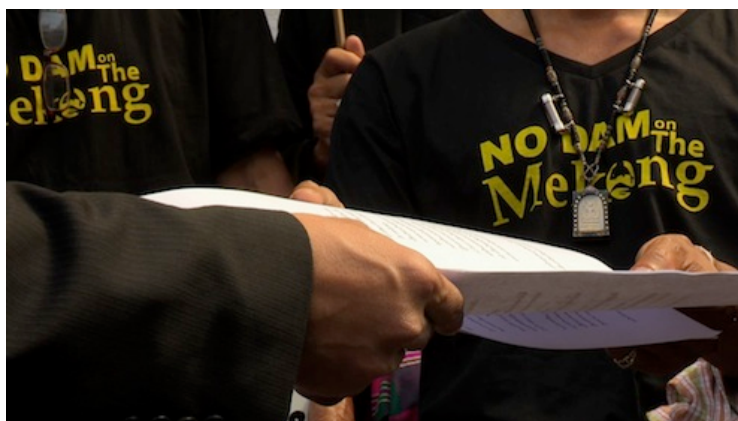




Water Wars over Mekong Dams an Unlikely Future

[Mekong Citizen Page](#), [Sauce Blog](#) — By [TerryClayton](#) on November 1, 2012 10:06 am



Cooperation, not conflict, is the real story of hydropower development in the Mekong.

Recent reports in the regional media speak of rising tensions over dams on the Mekong mainstream. One official went so far as to suggest the possibility of “water wars”. A look at the record of cooperation over water in the Mekong indicates this is highly unlikely to happen. History shows that when it comes to water, cooperation is the norm among the Mekong countries and far outweighs incidents of conflict.

The 2nd Mekong Forum on Water, Food and Energy in Hanoi (13-14 November) is one more example of that cooperation. Senior government officials from the four countries will sit down with representatives from the hydropower sector, researchers, NGOs, M-Power research fellows, and experts in a range of scientific disciplines to discuss the connections between water, food and energy, and how those relationships shape development, economic growth, livelihoods and environmental sustainability.

“Disagreements over dams don’t have to end in conflict,” says Kim Geheb, Mekong Basin Leader for the Challenge Program on Water and Food. “Most discussions about dams tend to degenerate into a contest of pro and anti facts. That’s not what this forum is about,” says Geheb. “This is a space for open dialog based on the premise that all issues can be resolved in a fair and transparent manner.”

In light of recent media coverage, this may sound like a utopian ideal. The arguments for and against dams are well known. More dams would bring Mekong countries much needed income by generating power for domestic use and sale to neighboring countries and would spur agricultural growth through irrigation and help mitigate floods and droughts. On the other side, dams radically alter the environment and can lead to upheaval in traditional water-related livelihoods. A particular concern in the Mekong is the loss of local fish stocks, which are a major source of income and food for millions of people, many of whom live below the poverty line.

“These are the kinds of pressures that increase the potential for conflict but don’t necessarily lead to conflict” says Mark Giordano, one of the principal researchers involved in the Basins At Risk project.

Basins At Risk was initiated in 2002 by researchers at Oregon State University. One of the main project outputs was the International Water Events Database, a library of documented cases of conflict or cooperation in 144 river basins worldwide. Collaboration carried over to the [International Water Management Institute](#) when Giordano moved from Oregon State to IWMI where he is the research Theme Leader for Water and Society.

“We now share a database of the largest treaty collection in the world,” says Giordano.

Since 1952, there have been 166 water related events recorded in the Mekong River Basin. Each event is rated on a scale from -7 (a formal declaration of war) to +7 (voluntary unification into one nation).

Mekong countries have an impressive record of cooperative action on water related issues. In all those years, which include the years of the American War, there have been only 15 instances of events rated -1 or -2 (mild/strong verbal expressions at an official level). Eighty events rate

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River Basin, which resulted in the creation of the Mekong River Commission.

The Hydropower Forum in Hanoi will focus on the connections between food, water and energy and how those relationships shape development, economic growth, livelihoods and environmental sustainability.

The Forum is convened by the CGIAR Challenge Program on Water and Food and is co-hosted by the Institute for Water Resources Planning; the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Vietnam; and the **International Water Management Institute**. The Challenge Program is a partner of the CGIAR Research Program on Water, Land and Ecosystems. The event is funded through a grant from the Australian Government through AusAID.

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