

Oxfam Mekong Regional Water Governance Program Inclusion Project Phase 2

End of Project Evaluation
Final Report, 30th September 2024

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This project is supported by:



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Agency for Development
and Cooperation SDC
Embassy of Switzerland



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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



BACKGROUND: Phase 2 of the Oxfam Mekong Water Governance Inclusion Project (IP2) has been implemented since mid-2020 by Oxfam in consortium with International Rivers (IR). IP2 succeeded IP1, which ran from 2014 to 2020, funded by DFAT for a total of \$A9 million as a core investment of DFAT's Greater Mekong Water Resources Program 2014-2019 (GMWRP) with Oxfam as the sole implementing agency.

IP2 is funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and since 2021 the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC). The original timeframe was from June 2020 to June 2024, with a No-Cost Extension to April 2025 later agreed. Total investment in IP2 was AUD 5,431,705 by DFAT, and USD 3,467,281 from the SDC. The project was delivered by a consortium of Oxfam and International Rivers until June 2024, and by Oxfam from July 2024 to final conclusion in April 2025.

The Inclusion Project aims to achieve more inclusive, equitable and sustainable water governance that reduces the impact of climate change and increases social accountability to citizens in the Greater Mekong region. The program envisions that communities living in the Mekong and Salween River basins are able to realise their right to sustainable livelihoods.

Particularly noted from IP2 experience have been:

1. Social inclusion, Gender equality and women's leadership
2. Civil society engagement and networking
3. Government and the private sector.

These are fully articulated in the three End of Project Outcomes detailed below: Evaluation



EVALUATION PURPOSE: The end of project evaluation was commissioned with the following objectives:

1. To evaluate the impacts of the Inclusion Project Phase 2 per the Theory of Change and Theory of Action, as both were revised for the No-Cost Extension to April 2025,
2. To evaluate the extent to which project approaches and strategies contributed to the project's final outcomes and impacts,
3. To identify lessons learned from the project for Oxfam, International Rivers and their partners and to develop recommendations for continuing program work in the key domains of change

The evaluation was conducted by a team of three: Mark Deasey (Team Leader); Bounthavivanh Mixap and Vo Thi Tam, all of whom had substantial prior engagement with Oxfam's inclusion work in the Mekong sub-region.



METHODOLOGY: The Evaluation was managed by IP2's Project Management Unit (PMU), with oversight from a Reference Group including representatives from DFAT, SDC, Oxfam and International Rivers. The evaluation proceeded with preparation of an Inception Report, followed by review of the extensive documentation produced throughout the project, and data collection with key stakeholders across the region. Extensive face-to-face Key Informant Interviews (KIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) including direct community contact were carried out in Vietnam and Cambodia. In Laos, due to the lack of an official project MoU, data collection was largely confined to KIs with key stakeholders in Vientiane and Luang Prabang. Contact with Thai, regional and other stakeholders was via online interviews.

Emphasis was placed on applying a gender lens to the evaluation, consonant with the purpose and structure of IP2 overall.



LIMITATIONS: The most important factors noted were:

- Impossibility of ensuring balance in focus between the different countries and stakeholders in the region, due to factors including security restrictions on movement and direct interaction with programme work in the field; also the relative scale of current project activity in each country. This was partly mitigated by use of online communications to conduct interviews with stakeholders in those locations.
- Continued difficulties in obtaining direct input with private sector actors, as has been documented as an issue throughout IP2 (and IP1) implementation.
- Fewer interviews with government actors than was hoped for, although important data was gathered from local government officials in Laos and Vietnam and from national level officials in Cambodia.
- Interviews sought but not obtained with a small number of stakeholders, several of them key to regional-level activity of IP2, and two being national government figures.
- The Evaluation Team unable to meet in person throughout the process, due to constraints of timetables and budget. This was significantly mitigated by strategic use of online communications, voice and written.



DOCUMENT REVIEW: IP2 has been noticeably more comprehensively documented than the first project phase (2016 – 2020), and with an increased depth of analysis.

Particularly valuable in framing the evaluation was the Political and Economic Analysis (PEA) of the operating context in the Mekong sub-region, in both the original version, and the refreshed version delivered in May 2024; also specific documents for GEDSI planning, and the introduction of Outcome Harvesting as part of the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEAL) framework. Important contextual and implementation elements emerging from the document review included the trend to increasingly authoritarian government and tightened central control across the region and concomitant narrowing of civil society space; the resilience and creativity of civil society actors in the changing environment, and the agility of IR, Oxfam and IP2 partners in working through available channels and platforms. The emergence of new non-hydro renewable energy (RE) generation technologies as a potentially disruptive factor to hydro- and fossil fuel power generation has been significant, as has

increasing government and public consciousness on the impacts of climate change, on the river systems and more broadly.

The evaluation interrogated the Theory of Change (ToC) and Theory of Action (ToA) in the light of both PEA documentation per both the original and refreshed versions, and experience of project implementation as expressed by key informants. Individual elements are explored further under each of the component Outcomes and detailed in the Findings. Broadly, the implementation strategy chosen appears appropriate, and was pursued with nuance and flexibility. Important progress has been made in all three Outcome areas designated, but the stated Outcome 3, of achieving commitment to major change in government and private sector compliance with international standards in hydropower and renewable energy generation, appears optimistic in the current political and economic context of the region, and in IP2's timeframe, although noting that this Outcome was originally set for an eight-year period, in which further progress could be expected.

Key observations and findings per Outcome were:



Regional workshop on 'Civil Society Leadership in the Mekong: Building Resilience, Advancing Inclusion, and Driving Transformative Change'



Women leaders and representatives of marginalised social groups are playing leadership roles in influencing national and regional state and non-state actors in WRG

OUTCOME 1 and energy policy and planning processes.

IP2 appears to have achieved a very high level of success in certain aspects of this Outcome, although the level has varied considerably across different countries of the region. Continuity from IP1 and the initial fostering of women leaders appears to have been significant

in achievements under IP2. Important new directions and strategies have been applied with partners and communities, most notably through different forms of Community Action Research, including the Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) in Cambodia; the Sao

Baan (People of the Village) methodology in Laos; the Tai Baan approach in Thailand; and the People's Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) on the Yuam/Salween Water Diversion Project. Partners, communities and individuals who had engaged with this reported major change in women's roles and confidence in leadership; community cohesion and solidarity; and ability to articulate community concerns and advocate to authorities with a united voice. FPAR and other Community Action Research activities have been complemented by a holistic strategy to support women's resilience and continued development in leadership, based on recognition of the realities of women's roles and social position. One critical element of this strategy has been the establishment of national and regional peer networks of women leaders.

Advances were made in CSO and other partner consistent use and reporting of gender analysis and impact in their work; also, government and private sector agencies using Gender Impact Assessment in their planning and strategy, but at lower rates than initially targeted.

The project also appears to have consistently enabled the inclusion of young women and Indigenous women in community organisation and leadership, with proper incorporation of the principles of intersectionality. Inclusion of people with disability (PWD) and people of

diverse sexual orientation and gender identity or expression (SOGIE) has been less consistent, but some important initiatives and achievements were noted, which could be the basis for more widespread good practices in the future.

Achievements have been uneven across the region, due to factors including government oversight and control of available organising and training space; security; and the level of pre-existing understanding of gender equity principles by partners and communities. Also, it is noted that women leaders' engagement with authorities and key actors in water resource governance has been most consistent at the local and sub-national level to date, although with some important instances in practice of linking local knowledge and concerns to national and regional advocacy. In Thailand, a higher degree of national engagement by women leaders from partners and communities was achieved with government, statutory and private sector bodies largely due to a longer history of community-level organising and greater available space for advocacy and influencing. More consistent, joined-up, bridging of the gap between local and national and regional engagement and influencing should be a priority for future work on inclusion in water resource governance.



Asia Women and Rivers Congress in Chaing Rai, Thailand



Women of Kon Mom community fishery in Cambodia



Riverine communities and civil society actors are engaging with and influencing sub- national, national and regional WRG policy and planning processes, and promoting the

OUTCOME 2 interests and rights of vulnerable social groups.

Direct engagement with sub-national, national and regional WRG policy and planning processes has certainly been strongly and consistently enabled throughout IP2. It is less easy to ascertain or assert the level of influence which has so far resulted. As with Outcome 1 above, engagement has been most readily observable at the local-to-sub-national level, and it is also at that level that influence can be fairly claimed to have been achieved. Significant instances of direct engagement by communities and CSOs to national level are noted, and elsewhere, important progress has been achieved in linking the local to national and regional levels, through CSO umbrella bodies, providing space for women and other

community leaders in national and regional fora.

Some important new strategies have been introduced and mainstreamed in response to assessment of what the most accessible channels of engagement are, and what is most likely to result in response. These have included:

- Effective use of both traditional and new media, to amplify community voices, including regular briefings, media trips and focused training of journalists where relatively open media conditions allow, and further engagement with the IP2supported Women on Air program on the small independent Women's Voice Radio in Cambodia to optimise very narrow available media space and give direct public voice to women community leaders and their concerns. This has been complemented by optimising social media channels for 'soft advocacy', in recognition of government sensitivity to public opinion, even in undemocratic contexts.



Learning exchange on community action research in Cambodia.

- The importance of building an evidence base, integrated into community action research methodologies e.g. FPAR, Sao Baan and People's EIA, and also collaborations with academic institutions and government researchers; and using this evidence as the basis for engagement.
- Deeper and more consistent engagement with the Mekong River Commission Secretariat (and MRC Development Partners, particularly the TROIKA), and the
- linked Cambodia National Mekong Committee Secretariat, as both have displayed greater openness to civil society voices. IR, Oxfam

and partners' engagement and influence can be seen as both result and cause of the greater openness, together with influence from some funding partners of MRC

Nine journalists from Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam have been trained in reporting on GEDSI issues in water governance in October 2023, Thailand.





Target government and private sector actors at the national and regional levels increasingly commit to comply with regional and international standards and good practice: and

3 include the perspectives of civil society in hydropower and

OUTCOME

RE policies and plans.



Mekong Fair in Chiang Kong where a representative from Chinese Embassy was on the panel with Thai academics and Thai Member of the parliament in December 2023

From both the review of documentation and engagement with key stakeholders, it seems clear that there is relatively little firm evidence that increased compliance by government and the private sector has been gained through IP2, although noting that this Outcome was set with an eight-year timeframe in view. Against the adjustment of the original Outcome for the NCE period, to commitment to comply, considerably more progress has been made, and is detailed below.

Important progress has been made on several fronts, particularly opening of channels for dialogue and influence, and that this could work towards a critical mass for future influence, particularly in the event that greater democratic openness occurs in one or more government; that the poor fiscal outcomes of hydropower investment become clearer; and/or that greater pressure comes from a more aware and concerned public for sustainable energy options.

Particularly noted from IP2 experience have been:

- Gender equity, and GEDSI becoming an increasingly open point for engagement with government policy across the region on a wide range of issues.
- Greater receptiveness of Thai banks to considerations of environmental impact, and financial risk, in hydropower development.
- Opening of new channels of influence with the Lao national government, despite civil society space remaining highly constrained.
- Increased openness of the Cambodian government to non-hydro renewable energy initiatives, on both local and large scale.

- Diverse channels of engagement and influence with Thai institutions and actors,
- including on plans and projects related to Thai outbound investments, and transboundary impacts affecting Thai citizens.
- Thai agencies mandated to monitor and raise issues of transboundary impacts on the Thai population of infrastructure built elsewhere.

Issues relating to project design, management and implementation approach are addressed principally under these:

Regarding Effectiveness and Efficiency, we note the high value-add of IR and Oxfam working in concert on this project, with strong complementary strengths including depth of experience, partnership networks and long experience of engaging from community to



The NHRC investigative meeting on Pak Beng dam in Chiang Kong, September 2023

IP2 engagement with RE at national and regional policy level commenced in 2021, but substantial on-ground initiatives commenced only in 2023, and results are relatively sparse to date. It does need to be noted contextually that the IP2 PMU has made substantial input to the design and direction of other non-IP2 RE initiatives by Oxfam and partners, which have significantly complemented IP2 work in this sector.

There have been strong positive comments from other actors on the approaches taken by IR, Oxfam and IP2 partners in using available channels and strategies for influence in RE, and continued application could reasonably be assumed to contribute to more tangible results regarding both policy and practice.

Assessment against the OECD-DAC Criteria:

regional level in the region. The consortium structure was found to be cumbersome, however, and significantly increased transactional costs. Support from both SDC and DFAT has amplified the resource base, the relationships with other development initiatives in the region and the reach of the project, but also resulted in higher demands on management resources to meet accountability requirements.

Oxfam's complex internal architecture has in some instances worked against efficiency, particularly with regard to relationships between the PMU and country teams. In Laos particularly, it has been a contributing factor to diminished project impact and effectiveness, while substantially raising transactional costs.

Coherence of the project has been questioned, given very different levels of reach and modes of implementation across the different

countries of the region; also, the gaps in linkages from activity at the grassroots level to national and regional engagement.

Assessment through this evaluation would indicate that highly disparate elements have been combined towards a unified approach; that gaps are recognised and are being addressed, though further work is clearly needed; and that women and men at the grassroots do recognise strong commonalities of circumstance and priority. This has been most notably evident through national and regional gatherings engaging grassroots leaders, and the networking which has continued from these.

Consciousness of sustainability has been evident, particularly through investment in and empowerment of local communities, organisations and networks, and development of their mutual support, as well as optimising of

in-region expertise within Oxfam and IR. However, it also seems clear that some continued resourcing of local actors and networks will be required if the current momentum is to be maintained. This should include more concerted advocacy to governments for support to community bodies which in fact align with official policy. Partners' continued ability to operate in communities can also be dependent on their ability to respond to immediate livelihood concerns, as well as medium-term influencing.

The relevance of the project is utterly clear, as expressed by all stakeholders engaged with. While there is continuing uncertainty around the extent of achievability of Outcome 3 – presuming a further phase of the Inclusion Project to span the projected eight-year time frame – given political trends within the region, it seems clear that the promotion of



Screening of 'Face of the Mekong' film, followed by the panel discussion at the Cambodia International Film Festival.

women's leadership, the fuller inclusion of marginalised communities and population groups, and the enabling of civil society will remain critically important in the dynamically evolving context of the region.



Recommendations:

The following recommendations have been formulated with the assumption that substantial institutional donor funding will be available for a continuation either of the Inclusion Project, or a coherent regional program of closely related work.

The recommendations are based on the substantial strengths identified in IP2's implementation, which should inform future practice, as well as areas identified for learning and improvement. Not all current aspects of IP2 practice are covered in this formulation, but the list should be read with the assumption that the successful practice identified under all three Outcome areas and the six OECD-DAC criteria should continue to form the basis of a further implementation phase. **For Future Program Design:**

1. The model to promote and support women's leadership as developed through IP2 should be specifically documented and shared more widely for possible adaptation and use beyond the countries where it has been most visibly used, and possibly in other program contexts. This should also be integral to any future phase of the Inclusion Project.
2. Future work on women's leadership should incorporate monitoring of individual women's stories of change across gender normative practices, and the pathways to transformative change they indicate.
3. The further development of women's leadership from community to national and regional levels should be a core focus of a future project phase, consolidating and expanding from successful practice and learning under IP2.
4. A clearer and more coherent strategy for the inclusion of people with disability, people of diverse SOGIE, and other marginalised groups, drawing on the diverse examples of successful practice in IP2 should be developed for any future phase of the Inclusion Project. OPDs and organisations of people with diverse SOGIE should be directly engaged in this design.
5. The enabling of Indigenous women's leadership, which has been successfully undertaken through IP2, should be further consolidated; extended where possible across the Mekong region, and further supported in developing linkages with Indigenous women's activism globally.
6. Lessons learned from focus on young people's engagement across all components of IP2 should inform the articulation of a specific youth strategy for continued programming.
7. Avenues to ensure the continued resourcing of community fishery groups and other grassroots structures and networks, independent of institutional donors, need to be explored as a priority, particularly advocacy for in-country government funding.
8. Attention should be given to the possible evolution of the partnership model in implementation, noting the increasing strength of community organisation, and ways in which community groups may come to rely less on the intermediation of CSO partners.
9. The significant differences in political and economic contexts and in available civil society spaces in each country need to be specifically articulated in developing a Theory of Change for any future phase of the Inclusion Project, and also clearly reflected in the design of the Theory of Action.
10. Design of a future phase of the Inclusion Project should include clear articulation as to how the successful enabling of local level leadership, engagement and influence can more consistently fully linked up to engagement and influence at national and regional levels; also respecting the differing national circumstances and constraints per Recommendation 4 above.

11. A more detailed strategy for the promotion and support of Renewable Energy initiatives from local to regional levels should be developed as part of any future program, particularly looking to possible engagement with other DFAT-supported initiatives in the region.
12. Lessons learned from engagement with social and 'old' media across the region within the IP2 implementation period should be documented and analysed to develop a component strategy for future intervention. Future media work could include sharing success stories and data that highlight the importance of community and gender considerations in policy.
13. Lessons learned from collaboration with academia, as both a direct channel of influence, and a partner in empowering community development of evidence for influence, should likewise be documented for future strategy development. Specific actions which should be undertaken in this regard include:
 - Strengthening of Research Collaboration: Fostering partnerships between local universities and international research institutions to generate relevant data and evidence-based studies that address community and gender issues.
 - Capacity Building for Local Academics: Provision of training and resources to local researchers with whom relationships have been established on methodologies related to gender studies, community development, and policy analysis to enhance their ability to contribute effectively to discussions.
 - Publication and Dissemination: Promotion of the publication of research findings in both academic journals and popular media to increase visibility and accessibility, ensuring that findings reach a broader audience, including policymakers.
 - Policy Briefs and Recommendations: Support collaboration to development of concise, evidence-based policy

briefs that clearly outline actionable recommendations based on research findings, targeting specific policymakers or government departments which have demonstrated openness to dialogue.

- Engagement in Policy Dialogue: Where official control of space permits, organise forums, workshops, and roundtable discussions that bring together academics, policymakers, and community representatives to discuss research findings and their implications for policy.

14. Oxfam and International Rivers should jointly review both successes and constraints in engaging with the private sector under both IP phases to date, with a view to articulating a clear forward strategy that weighs the relative influence and accessibility of hydro-electric companies; private financial institutions; and private sector actors in RE, and which are likely to be the targets of successful influence, whether directly or indirectly; via CSO partners; media; and/or academia and other researchers.

Operational and Structural Issues:

15. Priority should be given to addressing any remaining points of misunderstanding regarding donor engagement, communication and accountability requirements in order to optimise both donors' engagement with and contribution to the project, and also to harmonise donor accountability requirements as far as possible.
16. The disjuncture between Oxfam regional project management structure and the autonomy of individual Oxfam country teams must be addressed in any future regional program.
17. Oxfam should discuss internally and with donors ways in which current operational management and accountability workload could be streamlined and possibly redistributed to allow greater

engagement of management level staff in matters of program strategy and quality.

18. The benefits of IP2's interaction and crossfertilisation with other IR and Oxfam projects in the area of WRG, RE and Natural Resource Management should be recognised and continued in any further program phase, and also expanded to include more systematic interaction with other projects funded by SDC and DFAT.
2. BACKGROUND

2. Riverine communities and civil society actors are engaging with and influencing subnational, national and regional WRG and RE policy and planning processes and promoting the interests and rights of vulnerable social groups.
3. Target Government and Private Sector actors at the national and regional levels increasingly commit to comply with international standards and best practices; and engage with & include the

2. BACKGROUND

This evaluation was commissioned for the completion of Phase 2 of the Oxfam Mekong Inclusion Project (IP2), which runs from mid-2020 to April 2025 under an agreed No-Cost Extension and succeeded the first phase (IP1) which ran from 2014 to 2020 and for which Oxfam was the sole implementing agency. The project was delivered by a consortium of Oxfam and International Rivers until June 2024, and by Oxfam from July 2024 to final conclusion in April 2025. Total investment in IP2 was AUD 5,431,705 by DFAT, and USD 3,467,281 from the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC). The Inclusion Project forms part of the broader Oxfam Mekong

Regional Water Governance Program (MRWGP), implemented for over a decade, and which recognises the issue of water governance as critical to the rights and livelihoods of people in the Mekong sub-region. The MRWGP further builds on Oxfam work linking water governance, rights and livelihoods in the region which has been conducted since the early 1990s.

The MRWGP aims to achieve more inclusive, equitable and sustainable water governance that reduces the impact of climate change and increases social accountability to citizens in the Greater Mekong region.

The program envisions that communities living in the Mekong and Salween River basins are able to realise their right to sustainable livelihoods.

perspectives of civil society in hydropower and RE policies and plans.

The IP2 project has three interlocking End of Project Outcomes as modified in the May 2024 No-Cost Extension proposal:

1. Women leaders and representatives of marginalised social groups are playing leadership roles in influencing national and regional state and non-state actors in WRG and energy policy and planning processes.

The end of project evaluation was commissioned with the following objectives:

1. To evaluate the impacts of the Inclusion Project Phase 2 per the revised Theory of Change and Theory of Action, ascertaining the factors both contributing to success, and in reducing any final achievement and impact.

2. To evaluate the extent to which project approaches and strategies contributed to the project's final outcomes and impacts.
3. To identify lessons learned from the project for Oxfam, International Rivers and their partners, to develop recommendations for continuing program work in inclusion, civil society strengthening, and policy work in water governance and renewable energy development.

Primary users of the evaluation findings and recommendations will be the consortium partners, in considering their future programming in this thematic area, and the two donors, in planning their further investment in Water Resource

Governance (WRG) in the Mekong sub-region.



THE EVALUATION TEAM:

The team of Mark Deasey (Team Leader), Bounthavivanh Mixap and Vo Thi Tam (Consultants) was appointed following an open competitive process. The team combined has several decades of experience in designing, implementing and reviewing rights-based development projects in the Mekong, and shares fluency in four languages of the region. Mark Deasey and Vo Thi Tam were engaged in the final evaluation of IP1, and Bounthavivanh Mixap was an IP1 team member with responsibility for the development and introduction of the Gender Impact Assessment application and testing building partner capacity to use it. The team acknowledges a positive bias towards the strategy and activities of Oxfam and IR, given substantial previous engagement as Oxfam staff and consultants. This potential bias has been explicitly acknowledged from the outset in dialogue with the Project Management Unit and the wider Evaluation Reference Group, with the expectation that ERG and PMU would be alert to manifestations of this through skewing of methodology or presentation of findings and recommendations, and critique accordingly.

3. METHODOLOGY:

The proposed evaluation methodology was set out in the Inception Report approved by the Evaluation Reference Group (ERG) and implemented with some minor modifications. The key stages were:

- Following granting of contract, initial consultation with the Project Management Unit (PMU)
- Document review. This commenced immediately on finalisation of contract and has continued through the data collection and analysis period. This was due to significant documents still being under preparation during the data collection period, including the revised Political and Economic Analysis, the IP2 GEDSI audit, and the report of the Women and Rivers Congress; as well as gaps in the initial compilation provided.
- Preparation of the Inception Report, including full Methodology and proposed data collection tools. An initial draft was revised on advice from PMU; submitted to the ERG, and revised version approved on 4th July 2024. This included a response to the initial stage of the document review.
- Data collection and analysis began in early July and continued until early September, with final KIs being conducted after submission of the first draft report. Details of process by country and stakeholder type are given below.
- Preparation of the first draft report began 2nd August, overlapping with the final phase of data collection. Some variation to the process per Terms of Reference took place. In particular, a fully articulated list of Key Questions and Sub-questions, based entirely on the OECD-DAC criteria was provided with the ToR.

This list had been agreed at a meeting of PMU with Steering Committee members in February 2024, and was at variance with the DFAT evaluation standards, which stipulate that key questions should be discussed and finalised between the client and the evaluator, and also be more limited in number.

- The first draft report was circulated to the Evaluation Reference Group (ERG) and Oxfam country teams in the first week of August, and a revised draft prepared based on feedback received and returned to the ERG. A Validation Workshop with partners, Oxfam country team members and ERG members was held on 20th September, and the final report draft was prepared on the basis of inputs at the Workshop and direct input from the ERG and was submitted on 30th September.

3.1 DATA COLLECTION APPROACHES PER COUNTRY AND TYPE

In-country data collection took place in Vietnam, Lao PDR and Cambodia, with the latter including interviews with most members of the PMU. Some interviews in each of these countries were conducted online, due to specific logistical issues. All engagement with partners and other stakeholders in Thailand was online only. This was first, because of the prime focus of the 2023 Mid-Term Review of IP2 on these two countries; and secondly because security conditions precluded direct in-country data collection.

In Lao PDR, IP2 has had to operate without an MoU with the national government, which precluded any direct visits by the consultant to community locations. This meant that all data collection took the form of Key Informant Interviews (KIs) and Semi-Structured Interviews (SSIs) in Vientiane and Luang Prabang, with

partners of Oxfam and IR, and other national stakeholders.

In Vietnam, it was possible to meet with the partner, People We Work With (PWWW) and government counterparts in A Luoi, Thua Tien Hue. A visit to DRAGON, the IP2 research partner located within Can Tho University was also arranged, and allowed for several individual interviews with staff, students participating in DRAGON-supported research, and government counterparts. Staff of Oxfam in Vietnam coincided with the consultant on the delta visit, allowing for in-depth conversations within the schedule. Just one interview with a national partner (CEWAREC) was conducted online to spare a trip to Hanoi, as there was no possibility of visiting the project site in the field.

Cambodia offered the widest scope of engagement, given the absence of regulatory controls over access to project areas, partners and communities. Interviews were conducted in person and online in Phnom Penh with national partners and stakeholders, as well as with all members of the PMU, and Oxfam in Cambodia (Oic), followed by visits to partners and communities in Kratie, Stung Treng and Ratanakiri provinces. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with PWWW were conducted in all provincial locations. (NB that the term 'People We Work With/PWWW' is used consistently as both more comprehensive and respectful than 'participants' or 'beneficiaries') Thai and Regional partners were engaged online only; with Key Informant Interviews with stakeholder representatives, including CSOs and academic institutions and individual stakeholders.

A full list of partners, stakeholders and community members engaged with is given at Attachment 4. This includes indication of those whom it was recommended to interview, but did not respond after several attempts at contact.

Having interviewed approximately 95% of those partners and other stakeholders recommended by Oxfam and International Rivers at inception, the evaluation team considers that the findings arising from interviews conducted, and

triangulated with project documentation, can be deemed credible.

3.2. LIMITATIONS

The issue of balance within a regionally focused project has been periodically raised throughout the implementation of IP2, and the issue was to a large degree reflected in the focus of the Evaluation. Ideally, project activity would have been distributed evenly, or in proportion to populations affected by changes to the Mekong and Salween River systems. As is further detailed below, the much more significant determinants have been the extent of available civil society space in each country and government regulations and oversight covering project implementation and access by external agencies.

The issue of balance also arises in relation to the range of stakeholders interviewed. Limited engagement with private sector actors has been noted in periodic project reports, and in the MidTerm Review. This was consistent with experience during IP1 and renewed efforts in IP2 did not significantly change the pattern. A relatively small number of private sector actors were interviewed for the evaluation, and further detail of the constraints are detailed below.



GOVERNMENT:

A relatively small number of government officials were interviewed. In Vietnam there was engagement with seven officials from provincial to commune level (two provincial officers in Thua Thien Hue, two district officers in A Luoi; three commune leaders in Hong Kim, Hong Thuong and Quang Nam commune. In Cambodia, interviews were conducted with three national level officials; In Laos, there was one meeting with staff of the Ministry of Energy and Mines, an online meeting with the Department of Water Resources, informal interactions with others at the I-JET (Influencing Just Energy Transition) forum, and distance interviews with several sub-national

officials – the last-mentioned as triangulation of information provided by a CSO partner working in their area. There were also discussions with researchers attached to government bodies who had engaged in the National Dialogue. A meeting was unsuccessfully sought with one Lao Member of the National Assembly, although this was partly counterbalanced by responses on the Lao National Dialogue from IP2 CSO partners at interview.

The National Dialogue involved high-level policy makers, including members of the National Assembly. More systematic triangulation with subnational government agencies which had been the direct targets of influencing was initially planned, particularly for Cambodia, but did not eventuate, with the noted exception of Laos above; and with local officials in A Luoi (Vietnam).

As is stated further below, the project in implementation has experienced a split between those areas of government which are accessible to dialogue and influencing, and those which make the most significant decisions, and this was reflected in access for the evaluation – this was flagged in the Inception Report as a likely feature.

Interviews were sought, but not obtained (after multiple attempts at contact) by a total of five stakeholders across the region, out of a total of over a hundred initially targeted. The sample of stakeholders interviewed therefore represents the maximum number of those who could be reached and engaged in each country, and relating to each thematic Outcome, rather than a calculated balance.

Constraints of both budget and time commitments meant that the Evaluation Team communicated entirely at distance, and there were limited opportunities for all three members to meet and confer synchronously. This was somewhat counterbalanced by constant bilateral communication through the data collection and analysis period; three-way meetings to deliberate at all key stages of the process, use of a dedicated WhatsApp group for daily interaction and checking, and of shared

document drive for maximum possible transparency and sharing of all stages of documentation.

3.3. APPLYING A GENDER LENS TO THE EVALUATION PROCESS:

The Terms of Reference required that a gender lens be integrated into the evaluation. This was relatively straightforward given the explicitly gender-transformative aim of the project, and integration of gender or GEDSI objectives and activities throughout the design. Project documentation, including original proposals, the IP2 GEDSI Strategic Framework periodic reports and several of the Most Significant Change stories gathered for Outcome Harvesting provided a particularly strong initial data set. Annual reports also include fully genderdisaggregated data and analysis. The project GEDSI Audit was underway at the same time as the Evaluation, and findings of the report, due in September, were intended be integrated into the final draft of this evaluation report; but final timetabling meant that this was unfortunately not possible. (Informal conversation with PMU indicated that the GEDSI Audit findings were broadly in line with those of the Evaluation with regard to GEDSI.) Where direct engagement with communities has been possible, there has been prioritisation of women leaders as key informants, and focus groups predominantly or solely of women. Design of the basic tools for data collection referred to the Gender at Work quadrilateral, outlining the domains of individual and collective, formal and informal factors bearing on gender norms and pathways to transformation, and this has helped to frame the findings under Outcome 1, regarding women's leadership and voice.

The team was very cognisant of the concept of intersectionality; that gender intersects with factors of ethnicity, socio-economic status, disability, sexual orientation and others in driving identity and position within community. In pursuing data collection with partners and PWWW in the field, the team sought to integrate questions regarding inclusion of people with

disability and people of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity or expression (SOGIE). Several individual examples were given both of inclusion of specific individuals, and approaches to inclusion broadly. These do point to possible future strategies for greater inclusion but cannot be claimed to give a full analysis of understanding and practice of intersectionality across the project.

their experience of the project. This led in most cases to opening with very general questions, allowing women and men to take the conversation in the direction they felt was most important, and with the evaluator following up with further questions to clarify and amplify issues of most direct evaluation.

3.4. DATA COLLECTION TOOLS, KEY QUESTIONS AND PROCESS

As noted above, a fully articulated set of Key Questions and Sub-Questions to was provided to the evaluation team at time of drafting of the Inception Report. These had been prepared as part of the ToR and reviewed and approved in a meeting of the PMU with Steering Committee members. The Key Questions were based fully on the seven OECD-DAC criteria for evaluation; but this approach did not fully comply with the DFAT guidelines for independent evaluation, first in terms of numbers (ideally no more than five), secondly in terms of process, which indicates that key questions should be finalised in consultation between the client and the evaluator. A full set of data collection tools was nonetheless developed with reference to the Key Questions as provided, and submitted with the Inception Report, which was signed off by the ERG. These did guide the information sought through the data collection process; but were not necessarily applied in the format as originally presented. Team members used their own judgement to adjust questioning approaches in each circumstance, in order to ensure that the report could give meaningful reference to the IP2 projected Outcomes and Theory of Change; to steer around likely political sensitivities which could be triggered by direct questioning; and to accommodate nuances in the language used for each specific interview.

Our approach particularly sought to allow stakeholders, particularly at the community level, to drive the discourse and to highlight what for them had been most important in

4. FINDINGS OF DOCUMENT REVIEW

IP2 has been a particularly well- and clearly documented project, with a large set of documents provided for review at the outset, and further added to throughout the process as missing documents were chased, and initiatives completed. A full set of documents consulted is provided at Attachment 5. Beyond the standard suite of proposals (original and for No-Cost Extension) and periodic reports, documents of most significant value included the Political and Economy Analysis, in both original (2021) and refreshed (2024) formats; the Partner Reflection Report; Report of the Mid-Term Review; reports of Regional Learning Events; GEDSI strategic framework; findings of the Partner Capacity Assessment; the full set of Outcome Harvesting stories as gathered to date and individual country reports.

Overall, there was a notably greater volume and evidence of more thorough analysis applied in comparison to IP1. Documentation as available at inception gave a strong base for the evaluation team to work from.

Significant in informing the approach of this evaluation was the Cost Effectiveness Analysis of the Project “Investing in Women’s Leadership and Civil Society Organisation Engagement in Transboundary River Water Governance in the Mekong Region” commissioned by SDC in 2021, with its emphasis on the approach required to assess qualitative change.

The evaluation was also informed by both the findings of the 2023 Mid-Term Review and the management response to the document.



DOCUMENTED CHANGES IN IMPLEMENTATION

CONTEXT:

The original comprehensive Political and Economy Analysis (PEA) undertaken under completion of the initial design clearly served as a sound contextual reference framework for the ongoing planning of the project. Given the project’s intended Outcome of achieving greater responsiveness to and integration of community

voices in policy and planning by both government and private sector, this seemed to be a necessary and responsible step and is explored further in the response to the project Theory of Change below. It is noted also that the 2024 refreshed version of the PEA, reviewing the changes in implementation, directly aligned with the modifications in strategy for the No-Cost Extension period. (The NCE design was informed by an internal workshop review of the original PEA.) The above both pointed to the need to interrogate the assumptions in the Theory of Change and Theory of Action as set out below.

The impacts of the Covid pandemic are detailed; both in the immediate instance of

slowing and altering project communication and implementation during periods of restricted movement, and ill health of personnel, and in the knock-on effects of increased government control of public and civil society space, whether intentionally, under cover of public health requirements, or as an unintended side-effect. These are addressed in several sections of the Report below, as having had major effects on the achievability of all the three original End of Project Outcomes.

Further key contextual factors identified in the PEA were:

- The trend to more ~~authoritarian~~ state control. Southeast Asia has seen a growing trend of ~~stronger authoritarian~~ state control, ~~marked by the consolidation of power by ruling parties and military-backed regimes.~~
- Resulting restrictions on civil society space across the region, though with widely varying manifestations from country to country.
- Despite the above, notable resilience of civil society activism and optimisation of available space, e.g. NGOs operating remotely; Cambodian NGOs not fully subject to systematic control and repression; new manifestations of Thai civil society structures and their agility, with resulting options for Oxfam-IR partnership.
- Diminished role of International Financial Institutions in the funding of hydro dams and other energy infrastructure, but increased role of Chinese and Thai banks.
- Some subtle changes in Chinese approach to Mekong WRG, while still not a member of the MRC, and setting up its own structures for regional consultation and agreement. As examples, China has engaged in joint studies with the MRC, and the MRC now has observer status

with the China-organised Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC).

- Emergence of solar and wind power as significant viable non-fossil fuel, non-hydro energy sources in the region; potential for disruption of the hydro agenda, but also the current lack of direct impact on power development and hydro plans – recognition that the hydro agenda is driven by other forces besides economic and energy security rationales.
- The impact of growing regionalism in energy policy and cross-border energy trade, including the emergence of Singapore as a major RE power consumer.
- Greater awareness of climate change has had impact broadly across the region, notably through the low-flow episode in the Mekong in 2019-2020. Governments and others citing climate change as the principal driver of altered river flows, to distract attention from the impact of hydro dams and other diversions on the upper stream.



TRANSBOUNDARY AND REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS AND STAKEHOLDERS:

It appears that the responsiveness and openness of the Mekong River Commission (MRC) Secretariat to engagement with civil society and to concepts of gender equity has advanced measurably since IP1; but that there are still significant limitations, compounded by the MRC's relative lack of power amongst government and corporate stakeholders who drive energy policy and infrastructure plans. Also, the IP2 consortium seems to have taken full cognisance of the increasing role of China, and of Chinese banks in the Mekong region, including some possibly unexpected positive features of this, noted further below. These have included developments in adoption and issuance of guidelines related to Chinese overseas investment in recent years, including

the government's Green Finance Guidelines, which require both state and commercial banks to establish grievance mechanisms for affected communities. These are oversighted by the new National Financial Regulatory Administration. One small but significant sign was the Chinese Embassy in Thailand accepting Chiang Khong Conservation Group's invitation to participate in the 2023 Mekong Fair, at which their representative spoke publicly.

triangulation of some evaluation data collected in the field.



PRIVATE SECTOR ENGAGEMENT:

The limited level of achievement in this area in IP1 was noted in the final evaluation of that project phase. From the documentation of IP2, it appeared that there have been some specific instances of engagement, with some notable impacts, especially relating to the finance sector as below, although overall less than the original vision. Oxfam and partners appear to have remained very conscious of the role of the private sector and its evolution in the changing country and regional contexts, but this did not seem to have been possible to translate into a clear region-wide stream of action. The data collection process around Outcome 3 particularly did note several important instances of engagement and resulting influence, particularly for Thai and Thailand-based institutions and actors.



PRIVATE SECTOR ENGAGEMENT:

A particular value of IP2 documentation as provided is the extent of items which go beyond immediate accountability requirements, and the direct feeding of the MEAL framework. This included reports of workshops with communities, partners and others; and documents intended for broader external communication, in both print and video format.

This combination allowed for a greater depth of understanding of the whole of project implementation and particularly strong

5. FEATURES OF PROJECT DESIGN

GEDSI focus is articulated in a deeper and more detailed manner than for IP1 and is reported as having been pursued through the Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) approach, in addition to an integrated combination of activities and supports. The scope of gender equity work has been expanded to include people of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity or expression (SOGIE); there has been initiative taken to pursue partnership with organisations of people with disability (OPD) and to include community members with disability in project activities. This is in line with the articulation of Outcome 1, as a gender-transformative goal, and was one of the most substantial foci of investigation through the evaluation.

The question of young people's inclusion, both as a specific target group, and with youth as a factor in multi-identity and intersectionality is not stated as a specific target, but is strongly reflected in practice across the project, looking at the proportion of young women participating and speaking in major regional events, and the high visibility of young women community leaders, in Indigenous and other communities. This reflects the increasing importance of young people's expectations and voice as spelled out in the refreshed PEA.



MODEL OF IMPLEMENTATION AND REFLECTION IN MEAL:

From close reading of progress reports, and also of the Indicator Tracking Table there seems to be thorough and consistent monitoring of activities undertaken, participant numbers, and overall consistent disaggregation of participant data. How activities, particularly training, workshops and other consultations, have translated into increased awareness, empowerment and united action, is less clear. Some of the indicators used in tracking, particularly for intermediate outcomes, provide for clear entering of quantitative data, around numbers participating in training, workshops or other events, but these do not necessarily amount to evidence of change achieved. These are explored further below under individual

Outcomes. This is not to suggest that awareness and empowerment have not increased as a result of IP2's work, but the linkage of activities to outcomes is not always immediately identifiable through the documentation.

Noted the introduction of outcome harvesting as a MEAL instrument; with the relatively small amount of documentation generated being included in the document review. The Outcome Harvesting reports relating to specific advocacy and influencing activities by IR and partners in Thailand and/or focussing on Thai actors, are particularly clear and valuable in providing a summary of complex combinations of activities and results, and analysis of contributions. This is clearly easier when the focus is on a well-defined and time-limited focus and target. Other Outcome Harvesting records give valuable summary representations of training and activities towards awareness and empowerment at partner and community

level; but it is not realistically within their scope to give analysis of a defined final outcome. Further consideration and refinement of the use of this tool could add considerable value to future MEAL, and also help in bridging some of the gaps in linkage between activities and outcomes as noted above



CONSORTIUM STRUCTURE:

Noting that IP2 has been undertaken by Oxfam in consortium with International Rivers (IR); and with funding from both DFAT and SDC. From the documentation, it would appear that the consortium approach added significant value, up until the mutual decision of IR and Oxfam that IR should revert to the role of regional partner of Oxfam for the No-Cost Extension period. The evaluation briefly examined the structure and the joint funding arrangement, and particularly the balance of transactional costs and intraconsortium communication, under the headline qualities of Efficiency and Coherence



MID-TERM REVIEW AND RESPONSE:

The MTR final report was thoroughly read. Reading did raise questions about the review methodology and basic models, and we note both DFAT's expressed critique of the MTR team failing to consult properly on methodology before proceeding, or to engage with feedback on the first draft report. The assertion of the centrality of 'mental models' was difficult to understand, or what was actually proposed in terms of 'changing mental models' as a means to achieve the high-level Outcomes; also, the 'iceberg' model which was at the centre of the MTR's conceptual framework was difficult to comprehend and integrate. The MTR's questioning of the achievability of Outcome 3

per ToC was noted, while also acknowledging the relative emphasis to be given to the Theory of Action. Outcome 3 has therefore been the necessary focus of much of the data collection and analysis undertaken for the MTR but less in the light of its ultimate achievability, or what might be changed in the IP approach; and more on the relevance of continued emphasis on gender justice, capacity building and empowerment while changes in the approach and conduct of the most powerful actors continue to appear relatively slight and slow in comparison.

The MTR also raised the issue of program coherence, and in particular, the extent of linking up between community-level work in Cambodia with the wider region and with engagement with stakeholders at higher levels. This was a legitimate question to raise, though also reflects back to the detailed project documentation about the widely differing contexts in each of the countries of the region, necessitating different channels and targets of approach – whether, in fact, a distinct ToC for each country is called for. The evaluation has sought to address this issue; how successful the multi-layer and locally differentiated approach taken by IP2 has been in responding to both the diversity and the interconnectedness of the region.

6. INTERROGATING THE THEORY OF CHANGE AND THEORY OF ACTION

The Theory of Change and Theory of Action (Logic Model) have driven and underpinned the design and implementation of IP2, having been initially articulated for the project proposal, and revised for the No Cost Extension in 2024, with the findings of the Mid-Term Review having been a significant driver. Diagrams of both are presented as Attachments 7 and 8.

It is appropriate to interrogate these both at the outset, and so to set the findings of the evaluation in their context. While the full set of summary Findings are given in section 11 below, some headlines of the evaluation team's assessment are set out here.

It is essential to note first, that the Outcomes per the ToC were set with an eight-year timeframe in view, rather than the four-year implementation period of IP2; secondly, that in the light of implementation experience and the contextual analysis of the refreshed PEA, the wording of Outcome 3 was modified from 'actors at the national and regional levels will increasingly comply with international standards..' to 'will increasingly commit to comply...' as a more realistic goal.

From review of documentation and engagement with partners, PWWW and stakeholders in the field and online, it can be asserted that IP2 has:

- Successfully fostered women's voices and leadership from community to national level and beyond across the sub-region; and the ability of women to articulate and carry forward issues relating to their own and their families' and communities' rights with regard to governance of water and other natural resources.
- Creatively and flexibly supported many civil society bodies from local to national

and regional level to engage with official actors and the broader community around issues of water governance.

- Achieved a greater degree of engagement with government, transboundary actors, and some private sector bodies to open evidence-based dialogue on issues relating to WRM and RE.

Quantitative results relating to these from the IP2 Indicator Tracking Table are given under the respective Outcomes below.

It could be argued that, given the resources available and the constraints present, Oxfam and International Rivers have achieved,

directly and via their partners, as great a level of progress as was possible in these areas for international civil society bodies and their

allies. More detail is given under each of the Outcomes and OECD-DAC criteria below.

However, the ToC whether as originally articulated or in the revised version presented with the NCE does seem optimistic, and particularly when read in conjunction with both the original and refreshed PEA, and further when viewed in relation to the findings of this evaluation. It is noted that the original ToC was developed prior to the Covid19 pandemic; continuing military influence over government in Thailand, as well as the ratcheting-up of controls of civil space in some Mekong countries. It is clearly arguable that greater progress towards change at the level of national governments could have been achieved without these. The fact stands, however, that democratic institutions and processes of access and transparency have proven more fragile than the ToC Assumptions would appear to indicate. At the same time, IP2 implementation has demonstrated their resilience in some areas, and that possible green shoots are emerging.

Some key points relating to the modified Assumptions are:

ASSUMPTION PER DESIGN

Comprehensive analysis of impact (including social & ecological) of current WRG & energy strategies & other alternatives is able to be presented in monetized terms for policy makers.

COMMENTARY

Access to those within government who actually make and implement policy has remained very limited, although some important breakthroughs have been noted.

ASSUMPTION PER DESIGN

GMS countries continue to engage in transboundary WRG platforms and processes

COMMENTARY

Engagement has continued, and is likely to continue to do so, but there is a weak apparent connection between transboundary bodies, especially the MRC, and national policy and decision-making. Transboundary platforms have not emerged as one of the stronger levers for change.

ASSUMPTION PER DESIGN

Within GMS governments across the region, influential ministries related to water resources, agriculture, fisheries and/or energy policy are open to alternative analyses in decision-making and influenced by public opinion.

COMMENTARY

Experience in IP2 indicates that some branches of government, or individual officials within them, are increasingly open to new analyses, and that in some countries, public opinion carries weight, but these are not usually the ministries, or the officials, which carry greatest weight in policy and decisionmaking, or which control the essential budgets. To date there is relatively little conclusive evidence to suggest major shift in this area, although there have been a couple of notable and possibly unexpected shifts.

ASSUMPTION PER DESIGN

CSO political space is highly dynamic, and opportunities are available in each country and across the region to constructively engage in WRG planning & decision-making processes at sub-national, national and/or regional levels.

COMMENTARY

Space for civil society could still be argued to have been dynamic through the period of IP2; and Oxfam and partners have been demonstrably agile and creative in optimising use of the restricted and shifting space, but as per the refreshed PEA, the prevailing direction has been towards greater restriction.

The findings of this evaluation appear to validate numerous elements in the ToC flow, particularly

- Effective women and riverine community leaders, accepted and supported by the public
- Affected communities presenting a compelling case for the cultural, ecological and environmental value of rivers
- Analysis and evidence of the impact of large-scale hydro power and RE alternatives [is developed and presented] And other elements lower down in the flow, to which Oxfam, IR and partners have had the most direct input and influence.

Regarding intermediate steps, such as:

- Linked and coordinated national and regional stakeholder coalitions • Targeted multi-media messaging and engagement, and
- Market demand (for ecological services, RE alternatives),

there is evidence of significant progress, for which IP2 activity has been a significant contribution; but not yet reaching the critical mass that could trigger change higher up in the flow.

Thus achieving the flow to:

National and regional WRG decision-makers balance community, energy and environmental priorities

and other elements at that level seems difficult to attain even in an eight-year timeframe. The factors informing this assessment are explored further under the individual Outcomes below. It does also need to be asserted that activities and achievements under all three Outcomes appear very creditable, and that overall, they have

demonstrated a high degree of effectiveness given the operating context.

Accordingly, several of the boxes in the ToC flow chart are questionable. The overall strategy, as articulated in the ToA, still seems largely appropriate, but the timeframe and scope of its ultimate full achievement may still not fit within an eight-year period.

From conversations with communities, the final projected Impact,

More sustainable livelihoods of riparian communities through access to river resources and the environmental services they provide also needs to be viewed in the larger economic context, looking beyond issues of water resource governance, including issues of increased population pressure on existing resources, increasing reliance on industrial and service sector employment and different expectations arising from increased education levels.

THE THEORY OF ACTION

The Theory of Action or Logic Model has more obvious consonance with the pattern of both implementation and achievement, particularly for Outcomes 1 and 2. The Intermediate Outcomes, expected Outputs, and Activities designed to achieve the Outcomes all appear achievable and to match with the actual progress of implementation. This is less consistently the case for Outcome 3.

Regarding the final Outcomes themselves, initial findings of the evaluation are that:

- Per Outcome 1, women and leaders of marginalised social groups are now playing leadership roles in influencing. Engagement so far most obvious at the sub-national level, but with important engagement increasing at national and regional levels. Advances have been made in CSO adoption and use of gender analysis and impact in planning and reporting, and

government and private sector actors using Gender Impact Assessment in their planning and strategy, but at a lower rate than targeted.

- Per Outcome 2, riverine communities and civil society actors (which are inclusive of those communities) are engaging with and influencing policy and planning processes, and definitely promoting the rights and interests of the communities and groups concerned. To date this has been mostly evident at sub-national rather than regional and national levels, but with important national advances in some countries, and increasingly strong regional networking and visibility. Engagement does not consistently translate to observable influence, at least with policy- and decision-makers; but is a necessary condition to achieve influence.
- Given the limits to date of civil society and riverine communities' influence, it follows that per Outcome 3, evidence of state and other actors formally committing to compliance with international standards in hydropower development and renewable energy is so far limited; but also noting some individual early promising signs and examples.
- As this report will explore and detail, the above headline findings do not mean that IR and Oxfam's strategy in practice has been at fault; nor is it a deficiency in 'mental models', but per the final Recommendations, recalculation of feasible timelines and some modification of practice and strategy is indicated if a further phase of Inclusion programming is to be pursued.

7. FINDINGS AGAINST OUTCOMES

7.1. OUTCOME 1: INCLUSION, GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

7.1.1. OVERVIEW

The full wording of the planned Outcome is:

Women leaders and representatives of marginalised social groups are playing leadership roles in influencing sub-national, national and regional state and non-state actors in WRG and energy policy and planning processes.

More women, including young and Indigenous women are actively engaging in WRG and Related public events, platforms, and forums at local, national, and regional levels.

And

Increased use of gender and social analysis among CSOs, private sector and policy makers in WRG and RE development.

IP2 appears to have achieved a very high degree



Kuoy indigenous women leader from Kratie Province, Cambodia.

Two Intermediate Outcomes are set for reporting, namely:

of success against the first intermediate outcome, and this has been borne out both through project documentation by Oxfam, IR and

partners, and the findings of the independent evaluation through direct engagement with women leaders themselves in KIs and Focus Group Discussions. The impact of the training and accompaniment provided by the project appears exceptional, as detailed in dedicated reports on the Feminist Participatory Action Research model, and through confirmation in interviews by those who have participated. This has been noted in country locations where access to communities has been relatively open and flexible. This impact has the potential to deliver sustained change from community level upwards. Instrumental in this appears to be a closely integrated approach, which has combined individual face-to-face training with sustained accompaniment and establishment of continuing networks for peer support. From conversations with Oxfam staff; the communiqué from the December 2023 Feminist Leadership Retreat and conversations with other international NGOs supporting women's engagement in WRG, this has been structured intentionally, with recognition of women's multiple roles and responsibilities within family and community, and the need to integrate leadership functions with these. The power of peer learning and example also seems to have been particularly potent: women leaders interviewed in the field remarked on the impact of meeting women of comparable circumstances to their own and hearing of the roles they had taken on in advocating for their own and their communities' rights. This was also echoed by representatives of other organisations who had seen the impact on others of women leaders speaking in regional and global gatherings.

The model used within IP2 has combined apparently simple elements to achieve a quite unusual degree of change, as is explored further below.

Regarding the second intermediate outcome: documentation records multiple instances of engagement with CSOs, the private sector and policy makers, and very sound practice in doing so. Introduction of the Gender Impact Assessment tool, developed under IP1, has been one important element of this. However, achievement of verifiable change in gender and

inclusion practice by government and private sector actors is not as clearly in evidence.

For 2022, the target was of 70% of targeted stakeholders using and reporting on gender analysis and impacts in WRG and RE; with an actual result of 17% (acknowledging that this was in a year of serious pandemic impacts). Of a target of three government and private sector stakeholders using Gender Impact Assessment in Environmental or Social Impact Assessment, the annual result was one. There was improvement reported in 2023, with 43% (against a target of 70%) of stakeholders using and reporting on gender analysis and impact, which held for the final aggregate reported for the project in June 2024, and five out of six targeted stakeholders using GIA in their planning and strategy.

This could be seen as a high bar to set. GIA was introduced under IP1, and had an enthusiastic response from some government stakeholders, notably the Lao Women's Union; but as is noted in more detail under experience with Outcome 3, international NGOs and their partners actually have minimal leverage with large private sector actors, and particularly those investing in hydropower infrastructure.

Further, it could be argued that anticipating wide and action-focused uptake of gender analysis and impact assessment by government and private sector within the project timeframe is an ambitious goal. In the focus on raising awareness and skill of gender analysis and principles of inclusion among government actors, it is clear that access has increased, with key examples cited below. All points listed are recorded in project documentation, and were independently cited by partners, and in some cases communities, through interviews in the field assessment. **LAOS:**

- Gender and Development Association conducting GEDSI training for all IP2 partners
- Direct capacity building inputs to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment's Gender Technical Group

- Use of participatory and gender-inclusive community impact research findings to inform the co-design of further research by the National University of Laos; and integration of gender impact analysis into the four curricula in Faculty of Water Resources syllabus.
- Submission of the research findings to the Nam Ou hydroelectric company. (This was courteously received by the Chinese-owned company, who indicated that any requests for funding contribution for activities identified would need to be submitted in accordance with the company's financial cycle.
- Input by women community leaders to the Procedures for Prior Notification, Prior Consultation and Agreement (PNPCA) for the Don Sahong hydropower station's expansion (also including Cambodian women leaders)

CAMBODIA:

- Direct input by staff and partners to the Ministry of Environment's gender mainstreaming strategy
- Engagement of Oxfam staff and women leaders in the women's leadership forum on fisheries; direct input to the revised SubDecree on Fisheries
- The development of the 5-year strategic plan of women leadership network on fisheries that addressed the root causes and barriers and encompassed public representation, decision making and economic empowerment to advance women's leadership in this sector
- Women in Cambodia, including Indigenous, Khmer and ethnic Lao women engaged through the FPAR process to prepare guidelines for gender-aware guidelines for WRM and mining
- The key findings from FPAR activity at community level providing an essential foundation for evidence-based policy influencing in water governance

VIETNAM:

- IP2 partner CSRD's collaboration with the Vietnam Women's Union on research on
- women's role in Natural Resource Management (NRM); engagement with different
- technical departments at district and provincial level
- DRAGON Institute at Can Tho University enabling support to a women's cooperative for circular economy and toxic waste reduction

It is crucial to consider the differences between individual country contexts in measuring project achievements. In Thailand and Cambodia, there has been far greater activity and resulting measurable success. In some locations, despite continuing conflict and military-dominated governments, partners and communities have achieved some significant successes. In Laos and Vietnam government control and scrutiny is much closer, restricting the scope for activity and routinely delaying official approvals. Where it has been possible to engage constantly with CSOs over time, many are now poised and ready to push for further and more concrete change. Local partners are offering up analysis and have some important new research and implementation tools, often directly managed by communities. This can be seen as building towards critical mass for more confident engagement and eventual influence. As is further detailed under Outcome 3, the presence of sympathetic streams in government has become more evident, though not often in those areas where government agencies are empowered to making the most difference.

Numbers of women assuming public leadership roles are presented in the annual progress reports. These are often based on single events; though the degree of preparation and confidence building required for women from the grassroots to be present and speak in large public gatherings is not to be underestimated.

From both documentation and evaluation fieldwork, it is clear that significant progress has been made in enabling women's leadership across all countries of the region, but with

notable differences between them. This appears to be due to the relative ease or otherwise of introducing training in Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) method, and/or applying related models of Community Action Research. Due to relatively low regulatory barriers, this had the greatest penetration in Cambodia. One IP-2's partner successfully implemented this at community level after joining a Training of Trainers course, and conducted research with five women community leaders as coresearchers, further building confidence and capacity of both the leaders and the community as a whole. In Laos, as is noted above, there was no opportunity for the consultant evaluator to engage directly at community level, but documentation and interviews indicate that the Sao Baan ('People of the Village') research model used by partner CLICK had close parallels to FPAR, and comparable impacts. Lao Gender Development Association (GDA) staff received training in FPAR but have not yet had the opportunity to run training for other organisations or communities to date.

7.1.2. RESPONSES FROM CAMBODIAN WOMEN LEADERS

The most extensive feedback on the training, the accompanying follow-up support and its results was gathered through interaction with communities and individual women leaders facilitated by partners in Kratie, Stung Treng and Ratanakiri provinces of Cambodia. In some locations, women-only meetings and FGDs were organised; in others, men who had also participated in the training were also present. The broad findings from this community sample were triangulated against individual FPAR project reports.

Almost universally, when women were asked about change in the community, and their role in that, they immediately and emphatically reported major change, and ascribed it to the training they had participated in. There was some variance when an initial question was put about experience of the training itself – in one Kratie community, the first woman said **“That was a long time ago, and I’ve forgotten it all.”**

in Tropeang Chres community in Ratanakiri, initial hesitant response from the group was **“We remember a bit, but we’ve forgotten a lot.”**

However, this was in all cases followed by emphatic affirmation of the resulting change in practice in the community, as well as specific details of the training recalled and emphasised by others in the groups who had undergone the same training.

When asked what it was about the training that had allowed the changes to happen, responses in all communities were closely parallel, emphasising validation of their knowledge and their views:

“Now I know that I’ve got knowledge which is valuable.” “I know that my opinion matters.” “We learned about gender roles and sharing responsibilities in the family.” (This from both women and men).

They also emphasised practical skills learned, in research, knowledge of the local environment and fish ecology; around vegetable growing, and possibilities for diversifying their economic activities so they would not need to migrate elsewhere looking for work.

Women in one group said the training had been structured in such a way that it gave a great opportunity for women who are normally tied down with multiple responsibilities with family and livelihood to fully participate. In one island community in Kratie province, a woman participant said she had subsequently been elected as village head, which was the first time ever in that commune. She ascribed it to her history of action and engagement in the community, but also changed attitudes and greater receptivity to women assuming public leadership roles.

In one community, women said there had been a decrease in gender-based violence since introduction of the training. In more than one, both women and men reported changes in gender

roles in the family, with men taking on household tasks such as cooking and childcare, to enable women to engage in meetings. There had been a deliberate strategy of including men in the FPAR training process, recognising the need for the principles to be recognised and owned by men as well as women; and for men's as well as women's roles needing to change.

Constantly surfacing in all communities was the term *klahan* – meaning 'confident', but also 'brave'.

“Before I had no courage/confidence (*phiep klahan*); now I can speak up and share my opinion and knowledge in public meetings.” “I’m confident/brave now to go and speak directly to the village head/ commune chief.”

Those who had directly participated in the

but that others had readily taken up the new approaches.

One young woman in Stung Treng spoke about how she went about disseminating new ideas and approaches – not waiting for people to come to meetings but approaching groups of people wherever they were gathered – such as men sitting together to drink beer and talk – and engaging them in discussion.

In all locations, women spoke about the importance of supportive relationships, and also of setting an example in their own families and lives:

“If people know your husband is a drunk, they won’t listen to you. You have to fix that first if you want people to engage.”

This particular example indicates that some older gender norms were persisting in amongst the change, with women still being considered



Asia Women and Rivers Congress in Chiang Rai, Thailand.

training talked about how they had gone on to spread the new knowledge and approaches in their own communities. Differing responses were given regarding the extent of uptake; in Sandan (Kratie), one woman in the group said around 60% of the community still stuck with old patterns and ways of doing things – specifically mentioning families involved in gambling, or where men were heavy drinkers –

responsible for their husbands' behaviour.

7.1.3. FAMILY AND COMMUNITY REACTION AND WOMEN'S RESPONSE

In all focus groups and community meetings, the question was put as to whether there had been push-back or reaction from male family members and the wider community, and if so, how they had dealt with it.

Several women reported that their husbands had been completely supportive from the outset.

This included both older and younger women, majority Khmer and Indigenous women. Others gave different examples – no-one mentioned violence or the threat of it.

One young woman in Stung Treng said her husband had initially grumbled about the amount of time she was spending away at meetings. She resolved this by getting him to accompany her to several meetings, where he realised that what his wife was engaged with was of practical use to the family and the community and made no further complaint.

Another young woman said her husband was initially jealous of her involvement in meetings and activities, and resented the fact that she was literate, while he wasn't. Things changed when the husband was (incorrectly) charged with using the tractor he hired out for illegal forest cutting.

With guidance from staff at MVi, the CSO partner, she undertook all the complex processes and gathering of documentation to prove that the charges were incorrect and to ensure he did not suffer any legal penalty. From that, he appreciated the value of what his wife had learned and was doing in the community.

One husband fussed when he saw a photo from a training event organised by the partner, seeing a tall young man standing behind his wife. She explained that he was a trainer (staff of the organisation), and he continued to grumble for a while, but gradually came to accept both the value of the training, and his wife's freedom to attend that and other outside activities as required.

One older woman said that she came under comment from neighbours who came to criticise her for supposedly neglecting her family responsibilities in order to attend meetings and engage in community activities. She reported that when the neighbours came to scold her, she was engaged in a regular food-preparation task, cutting up fish to be preserved. She did not respond to the criticisms, but just kept on with her work. Eventually, the neighbours fell silent

and left, and did not make any further criticism – she said this was because she had demonstrated practically that she could still fulfill all her traditional family role while taking on community leadership. This specific instance could indicate that the community members concerned found her taking on a leadership role acceptable, so long as she continued to shoulder all the 'traditional' gendered workload. The meeting context did not allow time to explore whether she had in fact worked out more equal sharing of domestic tasks with her husband, as was reported by women and men in other community groups interviewed.

Indigenous women reported a range of factors that were particular to their communities. One older woman from the Kuy minority in Stung Treng said that the Indigenous cultures were very patriarchal, and there was more resistance – although from her description of her subsequent activities and community response, it appeared that she had enabled even greater change in gender roles and leadership than was reported in several other communities visited.

7.1.4. EXPERIENCES AND INSIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN LEADERS

3SPN, the chief Oxfam partner in Ratanakiri province, organised a focus group of young women from different Indigenous communities, who reported similar changes in skill and confidence in both community engagement and practical livelihoods measures as in other groups and communities interviewed. A common view they expressed was that in the past, parents had not been happy to have their daughters go far from the community for education, training or employment. All of them reported that their parents and families were now accepting of the young women's changed roles, their community organising activities, and the fact that they were regularly travelling outside the community. They ascribed this both to direct recognition of the value that their training and activism had delivered, and the greatly changed socio-economic conditions in the area. Shifting cultivation was no longer viable, as Khmer settlers had come and taken up land, and large commercial plantations had replaced forest;

fisheries catch was reduced; improved roads had made travel easier, and acquiring new skills was essential to earn income.

The young women were still emphatic about the marginalisation they had experienced in education and employment and spoke very specifically about the importance of the approach taken by 3SPN, in consistently engaging Khmer, ethnic Lao and Indigenous people on a fully equal footing in all activities – and that this was quite different to social norms in the area.

One other significant Indigenous perspective came from Chovy, a young woman participating in the focus group discussion organised by MVi in Stung Treng. Chovy identified herself as coming from Kbal Romeas, a Bunong Indigenous community on the Sesan river. Chovy reported that prior to the training, she had been ‘just an ordinary housewife’, but that in the training, she had learned about gender roles, fish spawning and migration, and conducting research. She ascribed a lot of the change she had helped to engender having a very supportive husband and spoke about her new role as showing a major cultural shift in the village. This was interesting given that Kbal Romeas had been a significant locus of

activism and change during IP1, when the community was displaced for the Lower Sesan 2 hydro dam and had successfully organised to protest and reclaim some of their rights. Community members interviewed for the IP1 final evaluation spoke about major change in the community stemming from this, particularly regarding women’s leadership and the role of young people. From Chovy’s story, it appeared that continuing engagement and inputs were needed to completely embed that change across the community; one major period of activism and organising did not guarantee complete and enduring change.

7.1.5. PARTNER PRACTICE AND EXPERIENCE IN VIETNAM

FPAR and other training programs had lower penetration in Vietnam compared to Cambodia or Laos, primarily due to regulatory and approval processes affecting partners. In the two main project initiatives that it was possible for the evaluation consultant to directly engage with, there was clear evidence of progress in women’s leadership roles, and wider understanding of the principles and significance of gender equity and inclusion but coming from a much lower base.

The A Luoi project for water resource management and livelihoods of an Indigenous



Kuoy indigenous women leader from Kratie Province, Cambodia.

minority community in an upland region of Thua Tien Hue province. The Sekong River, one of the major Mekong tributaries, flows through A Luoi district before crossing Laos and joining the Mekong in NE Cambodia. The project was negotiated successfully by the partner after considerable delays in official processes, significantly because of the integration of livelihoods with WRM, and therefore aligning closely with official government priorities, for the economic and geographic stabilisation of poor and remote communities.

The project introduced fish-raising activities, through the establishment of ponds managed by community groups. In order to ensure the right conditions for fish raising, there was a need for change in practice around disposal of agricultural poisons (previously dumped in waterways) and management of vegetation used for fish feed. The fish raising activity was aimed to provide income for women, while also reducing their dependence on forest foraging for food and marketable products.

The project had explicit targets of providing opportunities for women to undertake leadership roles and to establish greater community awareness of women's capacity; to improve trust, and the voice of women in their families and in the community.

Women participants who engaged in a FGD with the evaluator spoke of achieving greater knowledge and confidence through the project, also of taking on management roles in the groups. It was noted however that in many cases, men had been elected as group heads, with women saying that men 'were more confident, and were better at communicating' while women took roles as group secretaries or treasurers.

It was noted by the consultant evaluator and the local Women's Union representative that this was the first time a cooperative livelihoods project had been established with a minority community in the province. The project duration of two years was not long enough to assess whether the fish raising initiative would be economically successful (though initial indications were good), or to undertake the level

of training and accompaniment which could address established gender norms to a greater degree. However, the training provided by CSRD, the IP2 partner, was targeted to women, who then had the role of passing on knowledge and awareness to their families, and CSRD reported that women selfreported as being more confident in their new economic and management roles. One visionimpaired man was elected as a group head in the community. The local agriculture office and the fisheries sub-department also made a very favourable assessment of the project.

The DRAGON Institute is implementing a project under IP2 for capacity building of young people in the application of renewable energy to farming in the Mekong Delta, running a series of trainings, seminars and preparation for initiation of student research projects in line with the general strategy of Can Tho University.

IP2 support was critical to this: students in this area are required to undertake a research project of their choosing. As the education system does not provide funding support for researchrelated costs, most students would normally take up low-cost options, few of which give the opportunity to engage in the field and uncover new and valuable knowledge. IP2 support via DRAGON made funding available to cover the costs of research around issues of climate change, changing water resource patterns and livelihood impacts in the Mekong delta, and integration of gender perspective into the curriculum and research agenda. The project has consistently sought to promote women's participation in these research areas.

From the evaluator's engagement, it appeared that there had been some real successes in a particularly challenging context, and that there was continuing openness to understanding and inclusion of gender perspectives.

The project had been stalled by the long lag in approval time. Approval was initially sought at inception of IP2, but not granted until July 2023 – fully 36 months into the IP2 project implementation. DRAGON's targets of 60% participation of women students in the university research program were not achievable, as

enrolment was under the control of the university. In the end, an estimated 35 – 40% of participants were women, and just two out of eleven research studies undertaken were headed by women.

Despite this, some important initiatives were made: the seminar received a presentation from Ms Lu Thi Nhat Hang, a rural woman who had been struggling to establish a ‘circular economy’ women’s cooperative with other women, recycling agricultural waste products. She had received significant assistance from the provincial Agricultural Extension Centre but reported that she had not even been aware of the Women’s Union, or the support she could be able to tap into from there, as well as other technical supports that could be available. The local branch of the Women’s Union had reached out to invite her to the “Women Startups in the Mekong Delta” contest a few months previously. Through this platform, DRAGON realised that her circular economy cooperative model had a meaningful fit with the criteria, so invited her to present at the stakeholder meeting they had organised. Through this engagement, she learned that there were further resources she could draw on both through the university and other government technical bodies. This was actively facilitated by DRAGON, in its role not as a donor organisation, but in enabling linkages between rural practitioners in RE and climate change-related fields, and academic and official bodies which are able to provide resourcing and continued support.

The stakeholder meeting also included a presentation from the Vietnamese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI) on the barriers to economic improvement faced by women in the Mekong Delta — an indication that gender considerations have come on the radar at that level. The presentation was found to be very directly relevant and in fact moving by Ms Lu Thi Nhat Hang and other participants.

Ms Ngo Thi Tuyet Em, of the Women’s Union affiliated Centre for the Development of Women in the Mekong Delta, spoke of her own experience as an environmental engineer who had consistently been rejected for positions

matching her technical qualifications, apparently on the grounds that she was a woman. The Centre (not affiliated with IP2) offers assistance with livelihoods and related skills for women survivors of gender-based violence, and Ms Tuyet Em spoke of the challenge for women in understanding their own capability and potential to take on unfamiliar activities.

7.1.6. BROADER GEDSI INCLUSION: PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY; PEOPLE OF DIVERSE SEXUAL

Orientation and Gender Identity or Expression (SOGIE) IP2’s GEDSI strategic framework detailed both mainstreaming and targeted approaches to broaden inclusion beyond gender to specifically cover People with Disability and people of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity or expression (SOGIE). Inclusion strategies were integrated into IP2 design from the outset, with engagement of one established Thai organisation of people with disability (OPD) in the design, and also consultant input and training on diverse SOGIE inclusion (although the latter was unfortunately not completed).

Project reporting noted that integration of disability inclusion did not progress as well as hoped in all locations. Approaches to one central Cambodian Organisation of People with Disability (OPD) had been met with the response that water resource governance was not an area which their members felt was of direct relevance to them, and they declined the offer to partner. The more successful partnership with the Lao Disabled People’s Association is detailed below.

Some assessment of the degree to which inclusion of both people with disability and people of diverse SOGIE had been achieved at community level was included in direct engagement with communities and community leaders in local community fisheries organisation and water resource management in Cambodia, as well as through interviews with representatives of Lao and Cambodian OPDs, and one Cambodian organisation of people with diverse SOGIE. The question was raised in all Cambodian communities visited as to whether and how far people with disability and people of diverse

sexual orientation and gender identity had been included in community activities and leadership. Responses varied — in one Kratie community, a man with a visible disability (leg amputation) was engaged in the meeting, though did not speak. In more than one community, it was stated that measures were taken to ensure that People with Disability were included in community fisheries meetings and activities, including providing transport to people with mobility restrictions: leading in people with vision impairment, and using sign language to include hearing-impaired people. (It is important to note that all speechbased IP2 communication materials include sign language medium to ensure access for people with hearing impairment.) In no case was there a possibility of speaking directly with People with Disability to hear their experiences and views.

There was a range of responses regarding people of diverse SOGIE. The Khmer language terms used were ‘people who love the same sex’ or ‘thirdgender people’. In a couple of instances, the response was that they didn’t know of anyone in the community. In one community visited in Stung Treng, the evaluator was told in advance that there would be one person of diverse SOGIE in the meeting, as he regularly participated in activities. He was discreetly pointed out in the meeting, but did not engage substantially, saying that he was not at ease in Khmer language (the community is ethnic Lao), and left the meeting early. There was no chance to explore more thoroughly what his degree of engagement was in community activities where there was no language constraint, so not possible to draw any further conclusion on how intersectionality manifests in this particular circumstance.

Kha Sroh, the Kuy woman elder in Stung Treng, was very emphatic on the need to include people of diverse SOGIE and spoke of how it had been done. She said that gender non-conforming men (the term ‘gay’ does not necessarily directly correspond to Cambodian usage and culture) had been very hesitant to be involved, because they were used to being called derogatory names, like ktoey, and were

embarrassed and ashamed. She said she had overcome this by directly and repeatedly engaging with them, addressing them as ‘nephew’, and stressing that they were part of the community, that they had a right to speak, and that the community needed their input and their voice. In speaking with the group of young Indigenous women in Ratanakiri, the response voiced by one, to which others appeared to assent, was that ‘of course they’re included they’re people just like us’, and that in engaging them the young women leaders stressed that the work needed everyone in the community to participate, though no further detail or specific examples were given.

Partnerships with Diverse SOGIE organisations: Another route to inclusion of people of diverse SOGIE was through a small grant provided to Men’s Health Social Service (MHSS), a Cambodian CSO established primarily for support to people living with HIV and AIDS, and which has a particular focus on men who have sex with men (MSM) and other gender diverse people. The project was short-term, but as reported by an organisation representative at interview, and also in project documentation, achieved significant success in enabling people of diverse SOGIE to engage in community-wide activities around clean water access, community fisheries, and environmental rehabilitation, where they had previously been excluded. Participants had reported an overall drop in discrimination in the communities concerned, and the project had also given the impetus to set up community focal points to help people of diverse SOGIE obtain government ID cards, which had previously been one aspect of discrimination they had experienced.

The project also provided a small grant to Cam-ASEAN, an informal group advocating for the rights of people with diverse SOGIE. These enabled members to engage in water governance events and raise awareness about their rights. In water and fisheries related events, they used social media and art performances to collectively voice their concerns.

Partnership with Organisations of People with Disability: Two major instances of this were

followed up. In Cambodia, a small grant was made to Women in Leadership, Advocacy and Disability (WLAD), which enabled them to engage directly in specific activities around water resource management, including fisheries management and clean water management. Ms. Sun Sreytouch, the organisation's head of program, reported at interview that this had been revelatory for the organisation's members, as it was the first time that, as women with disabilities, they had been able to participate and have a voice in areas they had previously felt excluded from. Ms. Sreytouch also spoke about the value of the training they had received in how to conduct surveys, as part of the package of support from IP2, and this had enabled them to research and present clear figures on the needs of People with Disability in several communities for the first time. The organisation had not since had any further engagement with IP2, but the experience had given clear evidence of how inclusion of People with Disability could be advanced with a relatively small level of resourcing. This therefore could be an entry point to build organisational capacity of OPDs for long term voice and engagement in WRG and related areas. other major example of engagement with an OPD was IP2's partnership with the Lao Disabled **People's Association (LDPA). A representative of the organisation was interviewed by the evaluation team consultant and gave the following reflections:**

- Through the project, the LDPA staff had the opportunity to learn more about the livelihoods of People with Disability in riverine communities and reported that they themselves had found out that rural People with Disability 'could do more than they [the staff] had previously thought'.
- Increased knowledge of GEDSI analysis, coaching and influencing skills was a major benefit of the project; it had been good to see that at least one or two People with Disability were included in each training session, and that training venues had been chosen with a view to easier access.

- They found that the Gender Development Association had started to expand its practice to be inclusive of People with Disability and invited LDPA staff to codesign interventions with them.

Continuing challenges and needs reported were:

- Widespread lack of awareness of People with Disability needs capability and possibilities for inclusion and contribution
- Current lack of role models of People with Disability included and active in WRM and other community activities
- Lack of systematic inclusion in IP2 events – one LDPA representative was invited to the National Dialogues, but no specific research topic was analysed through a disability lens. LDPA staff and other People with Disability still feel self-conscious in meetings, and just want to be considered and treated like everyone else.
- GDA had been welcoming, but omitted basic measures, such as providing sign interpreting in meetings. This was reported as partly due to oversight, and partly to limited resourcing.
- Understanding of intersectionality has so far been neglected, particularly the needs of women with disability; noting that many OPDs lack gender sensitivity and/or awareness of the specific needs of women with disability.
- As one target, the program needs to ensure that village leadership does not make any decisions on behalf of People with Disability without consultation, rather than working from their own judgement and assumptions.
- There is an apparent lack of consensus and different levels of understanding regarding the meaningful inclusion of People with Disability, and that it is not solely the role of LDPA.

LDPA staff also said they had had no chance to participate in the design of IP2. This was confirmed by Oxfam staff, who underlined that at the time of design, LDPA was not known to them, but did note that, as mentioned above, a Thailand-based regional OPD participated in the initial IP2 design workshop.

7.1.7. GENDER AND POWER DYNAMICS OBSERVED

- At the 3SPN FGD with young Indigenous women, two participants had brought

INTEGRATING INCLUSION PRACTICE FOR THE WOMEN AND RIVERS CONGRESS

When Oxfam sent the invitation to participants for the Asia Women and Rivers Congress, questions were asked on specific needs to ensure meaningful inclusion in the Congress. These included languages and translation, Indigenous practices, Disability specific needs, food and dietary needs. Based on the needs identified, the organising team worked on putting in place measures to address them.

Ms. Huyen Do from the Hanoi Association of People with Disabilities (DP Hanoi) was invited to the Congress as a resource speaker. Huyen identified herself as Woman with Disability, and she requested specific access to a hotel room with restroom and bathroom with wheelchair access. The Congress logistics team made this specific request to the hotel management; and inspected the room a day before the arrival of Ms. Huyen to verify. All was found to be in good order and Ms. Huyen was happy for her stay throughout the congress. Disability Inclusion in practice can simply mean asking PwD what they need and discussing how this can be met by the provider.

Some broad observations of process and dynamics in the riverine communities visited and FGDs in provincial capitals were noted. These are limited in number and anecdotal only, so cannot be taken as indicating a broad pattern across IP2. They are cited here as instances of changes possibly attributable to the project approach, and particularly the feminist approach to

young children with them, with one small child being breastfed at intervals through the meeting, and another older child clearly familiar with the office and staff keeping happily occupied and entertained through the morning, with the appearance that this integration of parental responsibilities into the work settings was the norm.

leadership which is further articulated below:

- Senior leadership of partner organisations is predominantly male, which is arguably removes opportunities for women at community level to have appropriate role models in leadership. In most partner situations observed, male leaders appeared to be enabling of women reporting to them in both office and field situations; and would make formal
- introductions at the beginning of meetings but then make minimal or no interventions in the process, or in one case, absent themselves completely from the room.
- Where village meetings included both women and men, in most cases, women significantly outnumbered men, and men did not appear to be trying to dominate the discourse. This was most obviously the case when participating men had joined earlier FPAR trainings Women were not interrupted; men took up no more of the airtime than was proportional to their numbers. In one instance, a woman interjected 'listen to the man!' at a point when one of the men participating had tried several times quietly to raise a point but had been cut across by other (women) participants – a possibly indicator that in this community, the training and action

research process had substantially altered some older gender norms.

7.1.8. PURSUING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN COMPLEX CONTEXTS

- Despite conflict in the region, significant achievements appear to have been made by Oxfam and its partners. Due to logistical obstacles in some countries, information for the evaluation was gathered only through online interviews, with local Oxfam staff and representatives of partners. Application of FPAR had been possible for one partner, which operates in an area which is conflict affected, but sufficiently stable to allow some project activities.
- Ten women from five villages were enabled to join in FPAR training, and on a model similar to that pursued in multiple countries, took this back to their own villages, where they pursued the development of village profiles, which served as the basis for dialogue with local authorities and the development of action plans. Oxfam staff reported that participants in FPAR and other community members affected had reported similar experiences in countries where FPAR was implemented: that they felt validation of their own knowledge and voice; that other women in their communities were inspired by their experience as they reported it, and were keen to participate in the processes they initiated in the community; that women leaders' voices were respected in the community in a way that they had not been before – noting that fostering women's leadership was a quite new departure in the target area, with little groundwork in gender equity from previous project interventions.
- The Oxfam staff's view was that the training and resulting activities gained credibility because they offered concrete benefits to the community. These assessments by Oxfam staff closely matched with the specific previous report

on implementation and outcomes of FPAR training in other communities. Undertaking FPAR training was not feasible for another partners, due to local security. The partner currently provides support remotely. Staff were interviewed online by the evaluator. They said that, despite the impossibility of providing direct training or other engagement, development of women's leadership in WRM and related areas had continued. The same goal remains in place for this and other civil society partners, to retain and strengthen community control over fisheries and other water and natural resources in the area. The partner had promoted women's leadership in WRM through IP1 and stated that the momentum had continued in IP2. The challenging context had in fact accelerated women's taking up of community leadership roles, as many men had left the area, so a larger burden of management fell to women.

- Local Oxfam staff also emphasised the crucial role of peer support between women leaders in the communities. Other stresses and effects included price inflation, increased authorities' presence and pressure, and much else. For women to continue to undertake leadership functions as well as their existing multiple responsibilities, debriefing with peers had proved essential. For the remaining NCE period, Oxfam is planning to set up a structured peer counselling service, accessible to women experiencing high stress. The initiative will also
- facilitate a safe virtual space for women to offer and receive peer support and enable joint actions to respond to their shared concerns.

7.1.9. WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP NETWORK IN FISHERIES: CAMBODIA

The Network has been established by linking up women involved in community fisheries

organisations in the three main fishing areas of coastal Cambodia, the Tonle Sap Lake, and the Mekong. Mrs. Kha Sros, an older Kuy Indigenous woman mentioned above joined in the meeting in Stung Treng hosted by MVi and spoke afterwards about her engagement in the Network.

She said she had initially joined in several WLN sessions at the suggestion of one of the MVi trainers, then gradually undertook a lot of work on a voluntary basis, out of solidarity. Drawing on the strength and back-up she drew from the network, she often had very frank words with commune authorities. She had participated in a lot of activities and got lots of experience.

She has joined workshops at village, commune, province and now national level.

When asked about the usefulness of the national workshops, she responded that they were very useful, and allowed women to do more and further, and to share their experiences.

‘The network allows us to do better. What we hear from others helps us to fill in the gaps of needs in our own communities.’ ‘Contact and relationships are the absolute foundation. They allow us to help each other out. We can contact each other directly in between meetings, either using our own means, or else through the NGO partner.’

(NB Mrs. Kha Sros cannot read or write, though speaks both Kuy and Khmer fluently).

“Last night I was afraid, would I be able to speak, and to get it all out. Now I have shared everything that is in my heart.”

7.1.10. REGIONAL AND GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT BY WOMEN LEADERS

IP2 significantly progressed engagement at regional and global level for women leaders in WRG from the Mekong, with particularly strong increases in profile, opportunity and effect for Indigenous women. This is detailed through the IP2 Annual Reports and in specific project reports from key partners – the Asian Indigenous People’s Pact and IWRAW. The

evaluation team spoke with staff of both organisations, and the evaluation team and also with both community leaders and Oxfam staff who had participated in the Asia Women and Rivers Congress in June 2024.

This gave clear evidence of substantial engagement, voice and networking by women community leaders at levels and in fora that were previously not accessible, and the further building of capacity, confidence, and mutual support which all partners and participants saw as essential for continuation.

In tandem with these, IP2 has enabled women leaders’ direct engagement with regional targets for influence, particularly through participation the Mekong River Commission Regional Stakeholder Forum, where there was previously little engagement or voice for **women community leaders**, and particularly Indigenous women.

AIPP work supported by IP2 included organising of the annual Mekong Indigenous Women’s Exchange, to facilitate engagement, capacity building and peer support; direct support to Indigenous women in advocacy spaces, and provision of small grants to Indigenous women’s networks to build capacity. AIPP staff stressed the importance of building women’s knowledge base, to enable them to speak with greater confidence and impact. Progressive capacity building and facilitation has meant that Indigenous women leaders have now spoken at global gatherings, including successive International World Water Week. This had led to changed perceptions of other actors in the sector – AIPP staff said that previously, Indigenous women were discounted and/ or excluded, as not having anything of value to contribute, whereas now they are highly sought after to speak at conferences and gatherings. Also, the importance of making and holding safe space for women as a condition for successful capacity building and greater voice was underlined, as by several other partner and staff representatives interviewed in relation to women’s leadership.

IP2 facilitated the participation of eight Cambodian women leaders at the June 2024 Women and Rivers Congress in Chiang Rai, along with Oxfam and IR staff. Australian Indigenous women were also enabled to participate. Over one third of total Congress costs were covered by IP2, and additional funding from DFAT covered measures to ensure better inclusion, including disability access, translation into the main Mekong languages, and communication support.

In the FGD organised by CEPA in Stung Treng, Ms. Ream Sreyrath, a young woman leader from Kaoh Khadin in Stung Treng, joined in the FGD at CEPA, and gave this feedback on her participation in the Congress and its impact:

“Women from 18 countries in Asia were present. They discussed women’s role in protecting rivers and WRG generally. The participants went down to village level to meet women directly affected by the hydro dam nearby [built several years earlier], and the local women talked about the impacts and how they could protect their village.”

Ms. Sreyrath was asked if there were lessons from this that could be transferred to Cambodia. Her response was that the women they visited in the Thai village were a very long-established group. The key elements in their success were:

- Working strongly together
- ‘Protect the water, and you will have water.’
- ‘Protect the rice, and you will have rice.’

Ms. Sreyrath affirmed strongly that these were lessons that were readily transferable to her own community and to Cambodia generally:

‘If we just leave it to men to talk to men – i.e. from community to company and government – then it can easily lead to confrontation. Women are more solution-focused.’

This last observation was made independently in more than one other village meeting during the Cambodian field work.

AIPP staff interviewed also affirmed the knockon effects of Indigenous women leaders’

visibility in international fora; stating that their presence and voice changes perceptions of what is possible, and recognition of the value of Indigenous knowledge, both for other actors present, and also for members of the Indigenous women’s own communities and networks, leading to further openings for engagement.

The effectiveness of IP2 initiatives to support Indigenous and other community women leaders in regional and global events was strongly endorsed by representatives of other bodies who were present at the Women and Rivers Congress and at World Water Week. One staff of Simavi, a Netherlands-based organisation which promotes women’s rights to water and sanitation reported on how she was inspired by the presentations of Mekong women leaders at the Women and Rivers Congress, and how their activism gave her a stronger sense of what could be achievable by women organising in other contexts.

Shreya Gyawali from Australia Water Partnerships reflected on what she had experienced both at World Water Week and at the Women and Rivers Congress; that the presence and voice of Indigenous women leaders had been new and significant and had linked to AWP’s enabling linkages with Australian Indigenous women activities. Shreya spoke very positively about the connections that the Women and Rivers Congress made possible; noting that there was excellent networking taking place, but not so far leading to direct influence on governments. She noted that previously, women’s organisations and advocacies in water resource management had largely been focused on WASH. The focus on broader water resource governance and rights at the WRC opened up new networks and possibilities for linkages.

7.1.11. ASSESSMENT: REASONS FOR SUCCESS OF IP2’S DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP

Responses from women who have engaged in IP2 leadership training were emphatic and unambiguous, in terms of their readiness to assert the change that it has brought about in

terms of their own capacity and confidence; their ability to speak out and engage; the validation of their existing knowledge and roles; and the impacts they were seeing on the community and beyond.

This appeared to be well outside the range of other gender trainings or capacity building programs that the evaluators had experienced.

The key elements enabling this impact appeared to be:

- Consistent pursuit of an explicitly feminist approach to leadership
- Holding safe space for women leaders only, linked to ongoing accompaniment
- Validation and recognition of women's existing knowledge
- Recognition of the complexity of women's existing multiple roles and responsibilities in family and community
- Training within women's own cultural context, or situations closely comparable - some
- Cambodian Indigenous women leaders spoke about the importance of having had Indigenous women as trainers.

Recognition of women's need for peer networking and ongoing support – one benefit of the training reported in several communities was that 'women now talk to each other much more', implicitly to share knowledge and address issues.

Accompaniment has gone beyond provision of training and safe space to ensure that women leaders are confident, feel safe to speak and have access to the information needed to make informed decisions.

Linked to this, the establishment of ongoing structures for support, including the Women's Leadership Network in Fisheries, and the system being established in one Mekong country; created in a way which is accessible and

meaningful to women who may have limited formal literacy and are often without internet access.

The above points were gathered through interviews and FGDs at community level and with partners and are also closely reflected in the communiqué from the December 2023 Feminist Leadership Retreat, and also supported by the 2024 Women's Leadership Report, in which respondents rated their degree of increasing self-confidence; support and training received, and other related factors.

Oxfam staff directly engaged also stated that trusting relationships and ownership building through the FPAR process and increasing awareness of the social and environmental risks of the upstream development projects and climate change had led to increased confident leadership and collective actions among women leaders.

It was also affirmed by several internal and external stakeholders that the project's consistent and long-term demonstration of and support to women in leadership roles has been an important factor in building other women's confidence in their own capacity and potential.

7.1.12. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS PER OUTCOME 1:

- IP2 has achieved a high degree of success against this Outcome overall, with particularly strong results against interim outcome 1.1, with women and members of marginalised groups taking leadership roles and engaging with power holders around issues of WRG.
- Against Outcome 1.2 Increased use of gender and social analysis among CSOs, private sector and policy makers in WRG and RE development results have been more limited, but with some significant successes including further uptake of Gender Impact Assessment by several government and private sector bodies; direct input to the revised national subdecree on fisheries in Cambodia; and integration of GEDSI into curricula at the National University of Laos.

- A significant number of partners and other civil society actors have now incorporated gender analysis and impact into their planning and reporting, but at lower rates than anticipated.
 - Findings from both field assessment and documentation showed a particularly high rate of impact in fostering women's leadership and voices in Cambodia and other Mekong countries.
 - Indications from field research show that there has been some negative reaction and pushback against women's greater empowerment and voice, but also that in individual instances reported, women had found approaches to successfully counter this.
 - Development of the Women's Leadership Network in Fisheries in Cambodia has been a significant step towards women's leadership and collective voice, demonstrating the effectiveness of networking to support ongoing women's leadership, and providing a base for concerted influencing of relevant policy makers in the areas of fisheries and WRM more broadly.
 - In Vietnam, success in this area has so far been more limited, but significant in those areas and communities where it was possible to target, noting the very entrenched patriarchal norms and structures in targeted communities.
 - Indigenous women reported achieving important changes within what they described as particularly patriarchal norms, although significant work still remains to be done.
 - The profile and voice of women leaders at national and regional levels has been visibly raised as a direct result of IP2 intervention.
- Engagement in regional networks and events by community-level and other women leaders has also created or strengthened platforms for engagement and potential influence at a level not previously feasible for most women leaders from the community level.
- Under IP2 an integrated process for the development and support of women leaders has been built, integrating specific feminist training; recognition of women's multiple roles and burdens; ensuring peer support; building of networks from sub-national to regional level, and ensuring safe space and continuing support and accompaniment. Successful advancement of women's leadership at multiple levels is largely due to this.
 - Integration of disability inclusion has been very uneven across IP2, and there has not been a clear unified strategy. There has been significant success in partnering with the Lao Disabled People's Association and change achieved through their engagement with IP2 partners and with communities; individual Community Fisheries Groups have shown strong practice in meaningful inclusion of People with Disability, and one small-grant partnership with an organisation of women with disability in Cambodia achieved very strong results. These examples could provide the basis for a coherent project-wide strategy going forward.
 - Inclusion of people of diverse SOGIE has also been uneven across the project, though with two very successful small-grant partnerships demonstrating new strategies for inclusion in WRM, and several individual communities and organisations showing strong practice in active inclusion. As with disability inclusion, these could form the basis for a clearer project-wide strategy in the future.



Asia Women and Rivers Congress in Chiang Rai, Thailand.

7.2. OUTCOME 2:

RIVERINE COMMUNITIES AND CIVIL SOCIETY

ACTORS ARE ENGAGING WITH AND INFLUENCING SUB- NATIONAL, NATIONAL AND REGIONAL WRG POLICY AND PLANNING PROCESSES, AND PROMOTING THE INTERESTS AND RIGHTS OF VULNERABLE SOCIAL GROUPS.

7.2.1. OVERVIEW

From the project documentation and data collected during the evaluation process, it is indisputable that civil society actors have been supported by IP2 to engage with national and regional planning processes; and demonstrably promoting the interests of vulnerable social groups, including people with disability (People with Disability), people of diverse SOGIE, and

Indigenous communities. How far this has resulted in the influencing of national and regional WRG policy and planning is less clear.

The case can be made that through IP2, Oxfam and IR have very ably identified the accessible points of engagement according to each specific national context in the region and have facilitated and supported CSO partner access. The issue of how far this has resulted

in actual change in policy or practice is dealt with in more depth and detail under Outcome 3.

Impacts of the larger political changes and restrictions on civil society space during implementation have been a significant factor. The project design included priority focus on



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the roles of several national and regional river networks which were stronger and more active at the time of inception. Most of these, including the Vietnam Rivers Network; the Save the Mekong Coalition; Rivers Coalition of Cambodia and the Save the Salween Network, became considerably less active in the early stages of IP2, mainly due to strong external pressures, including both increasing government restrictions, and the weakening of direct network connections that were one effect of the Covid pandemic. This considerably affected the viability of the project strategy, diminishing a key link between local, national and regional action and impact. There were some notable exceptions, particularly with relatively well-established Thailand-based networks, including Fair Finance Thailand, ETO-Watch Coalition and the Thai Mekong Peoples' Network, progressing its campaign on fair electricity prices. The relative strength and comparative independence of the Thai legal and judicial system was a significant enabling factor in this.

The impacts of the Covid 19 pandemic over the first 18 – 24 months of the implementation period were also severe in that they drastically reduced the opportunities for any in-person gatherings of networks and coalitions. CSOs and community leaders showed remarkable resilience and adaptation to pandemic circumstances, particularly in innovative use of social media and distance communication, but the importance of face-to-face interaction in forging common understanding and strategy among widely disparate actors cannot be overstated.

Engagement by riverine communities themselves has largely been indirect. Where community representatives interviewed gave instances of engagement, it was focused on local and up to provincial level. Most engagement and influence at national level has been via CSOs; although it is also important to note the opening of new platforms, most obviously the national Women's Leadership Network on fisheries in Cambodia, which give a direct voice for local women leaders to national level. As noted under Outcome 1 above, support

to local-level women leaders to participate in events such as the Asia Women and Rivers Congress and World Water Week has opened up new opportunities for direct engagement. Instances were given where direct exposure of policy makers to issues at community level has been a crucial element of engagement and influence. This has been the case particularly in Laos, cited by CLICK. There is a dynamic tension between provincial and national levels of government, and if villagers can be heard at provincial level, getting government to connect and act on their voice, the effects can flow upwards. When local communities have succeeded in taking their issue to the Provincial People's Parliament, it has sometimes resulted in prompting debate at national level.

There has been some significant difference in Thailand, with numerous instances of direct community engagement with national actors including the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), different parliamentary committees, government agencies, the Ombudsman office, some Thai banks, and individual Members of Parliament. Several civil society-led forums which had high numbers of community participants also invited representatives from government bodies, creating avenues for direct community engagement.

The phrasing of the Outcome also raises the question of the role of current regional planning and policy processes. On the evidence of the PEA, and conversations with different regional and national stakeholders, regional policy and planning processes currently carry relatively little weight in comparison to national ones. This does not subtract from the importance of engagement with regional actors and processes, or the demonstrable and significant success of IR and Oxfam in engaging with these; but does require further examination of what the balance of focus between national, regional and global approaches needs to be in future influencing.

Intermediate outcomes: Three of these are set out in the Annual Progress Reports:

- Communities and CSOs are more informed, and networks are strengthened to influence. The indicators used to measure this are CSO partners' knowledge of WRG and RE issues, skills in influencing, and membership in networks. Against each of these, a high aggregate success rate is scored to June 2024, measured principally from the Partner Capacity Assessment (PCA) surveys.
- Communities and CSOs are engaging with and influencing institutions, government and the private sector on WRG and Renewable Energy (RE) policies. Indicator used for this is evidence of engagement and influence gathered through the PCA surveys, and a high score is given for CSO partners reviewed
- CSO partners are more inclusive of women, people with disability, youth and Indigenous people, and better able to promote the issues affecting them in WRG and RE development. Indicators measuring this are capacity to promote gender and women's leadership; and

training and dialogue events designed and tailored with GEDSI considerations.

- On both the documentary evidence from the Annual Reports; PCA, and Indicator Tracking Table as above, and information gathered during the evaluation, IP2 has achieved significant success with the first and third of these; for the second, the issue highlighted above stands: that influence has so far not necessarily followed from engagement – although the latter has been successfully pursued and is the essential precursor to influencing.

7.2.2. DIFFERENTIATION ACROSS COUNTRIES AND REGIONAL BODIES

Broadly, the patterns of support and enabling of civil society and community access and voice have corresponded with the particularities of available space in each country:

- In Thailand, considerable open space for direct advocacy and civil society organisation persists, despite the extent of military control and the increase in restrictions on space for organisation and voice. Thai partners of IR and Oxfam have been able to engage in direct



Regional workshop on 'Civil Society Leadership in the Mekong: Building Resilience, Advancing Inclusion, and Driving Transformative Change'

advocacy, including joint partner collaboration on the proposed diversion of the Yuam river (tributary of the Salween), supporting affected communities to prepare the People's EIA to contest the flawed official document; direct engagement with the national government and parliamentary committees, advocacy to banks engaged in funding of hydroelectric dam projects, via Fair Finance Thailand (FFT). There has been direct engagement with the Thai National Human Rights Commission in investigating transboundary impacts of the Pak Beng dam planned to be built across the Mekong mainstream in Oudomxay province of northern Laos, and for which Thailand would be the essential customer for electricity.

- Substantial civil society space remains open in Cambodia despite the emergence of a defacto one-party state and tightening controls on the media and activism. The boundaries to public advocacy were made starkly clear during the course of the evaluation when the spokesperson for one former IP2 partner was arrested for publicly criticising the joint CambodianLao-Vietnamese governments' revived plan for a 'growth triangle' in their shared border area. IP2 partners have made thorough use of available space most obviously through the strengthening of community fisheries groups and their national level networks – both through formally constituted umbrella groups, and the Women's Leadership Network. Creative use of social media has also been made, as well as the stand-out role of Women's Voice Radio.
- In some Mekong countries, directly influencing national governments is off the table due to the political context and unstable governments
- Civil society and advocacy space has been most obviously and seriously

restricted in Laos and at least one other Mekong country. At community level, the principal forms of influencing have been the development of locally driven models of WRM which are compatible with government policy, and focus on development of evidence-based solutions, through community and academic research. Use of social media space has remained a channel for some dialogue, though apparently at a more cautious level than in Thailand or Cambodia, and in some cases, postings by government members have been a useful indicator as to the 'acceptable' bounds of discourse.

A very notable development during the lifetime of IP2 has been the opening up of influencing space with the Mekong River Commission (MRC) Secretariat, and concomitant access to dialogue of the National Mekong Committees, especially in Cambodia. This appears to have been both a result of, and opening for, more structured civil society engagement.

There are common threads to mobilising and influencing strategies used across the region. Key elements identified through documentation review and field data collection are listed in the sections below.

7.2.3. NETWORKS: DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT

This has been most clearly exemplified in ongoing support to the Fisheries Action Coalition Team (FACT) in Cambodia, and through them to the established fisheries networks across the country.

Those include NGO Coalition on Fisheries, the umbrella body which engages directly with government; the Coalition of Cambodia Fishers, which is a platform supporting community groups' internal capacity and sharing of experience and tactics; and the Community Fisheries Network, which brings the two Coalitions together with representatives of the Ministries of the Interior, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries,

and Land Management for periodic meetings and an annual national forum. Meetings are convened to address issues of community fisheries groups on the ground, including combatting illegal fishing activity and the establishment and maintaining of conservation areas. Community fisheries organisation enjoys a high degree of government policy approval. Mr. Ek Chamroeun, Network Coordinator of FACT, spoke about how the network has been a vehicle for increased engagement by women in fisheries management:

“Women are now confident to speak up in workshops at all levels. They can understand the full context and communicate this to the authorities. This has been an important contribution from the program. It helps women with their plan to develop the family and community and participate in the commune investment program. A lot of women contributed to the national policy, also to inundated forest

protection measures around the Tonle Sap Lake. Women understand the whole context.”

- Mr. Ek Chamroeun also noted the proliferation of social media networks among local fisheries cooperatives, for which the initial impetus came under Covid-19 restrictions on movement, but which have resulted in a high degree of ongoing communication and collaboration. He also spoke of the importance of getting the Ministry of the Interior to support commune councils making budget allocation for fisheries groups activities - sustainability is a major issue, addressed below.
- Ms. Thach Phanady, of the Deputy Director of Fisheries Affairs Department, Fisheries Administration (FiA), also spoke of the importance of local fisheries organisation and of the national networks. She spoke very positively of IP2-supported fisheries workshops she had attended, and the increasingly strong and vocal role of



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women in fisheries management -
enabled through the Women's Leadership
Network in Fisheries, detailed below. She
reported

that FiA is developing its own activities to support women's leadership in fisheries, as part of implementing its second five-year Action Plan for Gender Equality Promotion and Child Labour Elimination in the Fisheries Sector 2022-2026. No direct link to IP2 was mentioned in these; but consistent gender advocacy by Oxfam, its partners and other international and local NGOs was implied as being an important impetus. Oxfam staff confirmed that IP2 is supporting the Fisheries Administration in the Action Plan, which has the specific target of increasing women's leadership in community fisheries organisation to a minimum of 30% by 2026.

- Against this high level of official policy support, the relative dearth of actual government resourcing has to be noted. The Fisheries Administration 2023 study Assessment of the Effectiveness of Community Fisheries in Cambodia reported that 39% of those groups surveyed

were assessed as 'strong' in their performance, an improvement on the 2018 figure of 9%; and noted the importance of capacity building. The report also did note the importance of sourcing continued funding for community fisheries groups operations, suggesting charging of fees for non-group members fishing in their waters, member subscriptions and tourism initiatives. Other anecdotal sources suggested that a large proportion of the strongly functioning fisheries groups are receiving funding and capacity support from local or international NGOs, such as that currently provided by IP2 partners. Some groups have received small grants from their local commune councils – these funds have come from an EU grant.

The creation of the Women's Leadership Network in fisheries with more than 400 members and hosted by CEPA is noted under Outcome 1 above, and its essential role is offering peer support to women leaders. With WLN, the use of digital media and communication channels has been

highlighted, allowing peer contact across the country, and starting connection with regional network in Thailand and Laos through a virtual meeting convened by Oxfam. Oxfam staff asserted that WLN is more consistently active in peer support and direct engagement with government than the two longer-established Coalitions.

Regional networking has not been established on as formal a basis as the above; but community and CSO leaders who had participated in regional events spoke of these as a major source of motivation and strength. The impacts of the Asia Women and Rivers Congress on participants are noted under Outcome 1, as is the ongoing IP2-funded work of the Asian Indigenous People's Pact. Despite barriers of language, and the widely differing social and political circumstances of the different countries of the region, participants appear to have immediately latched onto commonalities of experience and circumstance. The Global Women and Rivers Network, which was established with IR support in 2019, convened the Congress, and is intended as an ongoing platform for engagement by women leaders of riverine communities. IR and Oxfam have been key supporters; the experience of the June 2024 Congress in expanding the voice, motivation and connection of women leaders indicates the potential of the Network as a channel for influence if it can be supported to maintain activities beyond organisation of the periodic congresses. **7.2.4. DEVELOPMENT OF AN EVIDENCE BASE**

The need to be able to offer evidence for the need for policy and practice change was a constant theme emerging through the data collection process. This was underlined in initial discussions with the PMU; in several instances of project documentation; and both in KIs with advocacy-oriented CSOs and FGDs with communities engaged with community action research. In community FGDs, this was

consistently raised by respondents without specific questioning by the evaluation team.

The practice combines three key purposes:

- The offering of 'hard' scientific or economic data and analysis is an acceptable way of approaching government bodies, including policy makers, when any form of direct criticism of policy is unacceptable.
- The process of gathering and presenting evidence is directly empowering to communities, and particularly to women and marginalised individuals within them.
- In a rapidly changing context, influenced by climate change, population movement and other factors in addition to hydro dam development, there are large gaps in available knowledge up to and including decision-making levels of government.

7.2.5. IMPACT OF COMMUNITY ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

The introduction of Feminist Participatory Action Research detailed under Outcome 1 above has been an important mobiliser and empowering agent in communities. It has been complemented through IP2 implementation with

closely related community action research (CAR) methodologies, including the Thai Baan approach which originated with community organisation around dam impacts in Thailand, and was used by IP2 partners and communities there; the Sao Baan approach in Laos, which IP2 partner CLICK adapted from Tai Baan for use in the Lao context, and the development of the People's EIA on the proposed Yuam River diversion mentioned above. It is important to recognise the commonality between these, in that they aim to empower communities and individuals; assert the validity of their knowledge and their ownership of research results.

One IP2 partner operating found that applying FPAR methodology mobilised women and others previously excluded from village-level decisionmaking processes to gather and analyse evidence which formed the basis for community-level cooperative action plans. In the context where IP2's goals have been recalibrated to ensure resilience of civil society space and functioning; this has not translated yet into influencing subnational government but has left the communities in a stronger position to articulate needs around resource management. Also, Oxfam staff reported that



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engaging in this and related processes had strengthened the partner's profile and functioning in key CSO networks.

The community of Koh Sneng, a Mekong Island community in Stung Treng province of Cambodia undertook an FPAR study on the impacts of river flow and other changes on the flooded forest, which is an important resource for the community's livelihood. Clear evidence was produced in the published report on the impacts on the ecosystem of altered river flow due to climate change and upstream hydro dam construction, and the resulting effects on livelihoods and labour burden, particularly for women and the elderly in the community. Since the original FPAR exercise was undertaken, specific research tools have been kept in constant use, particularly the gauge for measurement of river depth, which is checked with data recorded three times daily. Community experience of this was confirmed in the group discussion held as part of the evaluation. Results of the particular study were also presented and discussed at the Regional Exchange and Learning on Community Action Research in October 2023. Oxfam staff report that since that exchange, steps have been taken to facilitate further cross-boundary exchange and learning on fisheries between communities.

In talking with the community in Tropeang Chres, Ratanakiri province of Cambodia, the practice of research surfaced spontaneously, when talking about preservation of local natural resources. When discussing the need to preserve natural cover on a nearby island in the Sreh Pok river, one man mentioned that the vegetation included a large number of medicinal plants, and it was important that the community undertake a detailed study of these, to present as evidence for its preservation.

As mentioned above, the Sao Baan (People of the Village) community action research model had adapted for use in Laos by CLICK, the Lao social enterprise partner of both IP1 and IP2, prior to commencement of IP2. In an interview with the evaluator, CLICK staff spoke of the

impacts of Sao Baan research in villages in Northern Laos (Pak Ou district). They said that when villagers had gathered and recorded clear evidence, it was much easier for them to approach district authorities and obtain necessary official support. It also built a stronger relationship between villagers and local authorities. The partner stated that the relationship with authorities outside the village was still far from satisfactory,

The people's EIA conducted with IP2 support as part of the campaign to halt the Yuam/Salween Water Diversion Project in Thailand is one clear example of the use of Community Action Research to strengthen community capacity and voice as part of a larger advocacy and influencing campaign. This was documented in detail as part of an IP2 Outcome Harvesting study. The People's EIA was conducted by people from two affected villages, with support from Chiang Mai University, and presented thoroughly researched data on expected impacts, in contrast to the official EIA, which was seen as deeply flawed. This process was complemented by a lawsuit [not funded by IP2] filed in October 2023; continued capacity building of local communities and networks; sustained media work by IR; and preparation of detailed critique of likely environmental and social impacts.

The result of this integrated campaign has been agreement by a sub-committee under the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives to set up three working groups to review the original EIA and anticipated environmental and social impacts; engineering needs; and economic feasibility of the proposed projects. At time of submission of this evaluation, the working groups have not yet been activated, but the dialogues continue, and the project has been delayed.

7.2.6. ACADEMIC CHANNELS OF INFLUENCE

The DRAGON Institute, one of IP2's Vietnam partners, also the Research Institute for Climate Change of Can Tho University, has

focused on student research on impacts of climate change, saltwater intrusion, and introduction of renewable energy in the Mekong delta. Experience in IP1 demonstrated that collaboration with academic research institutions was one of the most acceptable as well as effective channels to influencing government. DRAGON's particular position has allowed it to collaborate through Mekong Net, a network of government, civil society and academic actors. Under IP2, DRAGON has supported a series of seminars and workshops on climate change impacts in the Delta, and also (per Outcome 1 above) the initiation of eleven student research studies into climate change impacts and the implementation of renewable energy (RE) initiatives in the Delta. DRAGON networks actively in academic and technical spheres to share and promote research results. Although there is little concrete evidence to date of influence on policy or practice decisions coming from research by DRAGON students, policy recommendations from the two regional technical fora DRAGON have hosted have been delivered to relevant government bodies. The organisation has very thoroughly pursued its activities as agreed under IP2, in terms of ensuring very direct engagement of students with grassroots women and men farmers; moving from there to integrate local knowledge and academic theory; disseminating results among MekongNet members and government representatives from related Ministries and Mekong delta provinces; and consistently pursuing uptake of this approach in wider academic and technical circles.

Collaboration with academic research institutions has also been used as a channel for influence in Laos. The example of integration of gender into four curricula in the WRM syllabus at the National University of Laos, supported by the Gender Development Association, is noted above. Noted also that Champassak University joined together with the Gender Development

Association in following the results of a Sao Baan research exercise conducted by CLICK in southern Laos. This exercise combined with strong GDA female professionals as role models, was reported as having motivated Champassak University to empower their female staff to further develop their research skills.

Strengthening collaboration between academics and researchers, and CSOs and communities, has been a key IP2 focus on Thailand. The Centre for Ethnic Studies and Development (CESD) of Chiang Mai University has been an important partner, as in the example above of supporting the People's EIA on the Yuam/Salween Diversion project; also, in direct facilitation of dialogue between academics and CSOs around Water Resource Governance and related issues. Dr. Malee Sitthikriengkrai of CESD was interviewed for the evaluation, and described CESD's role as enabling community knowledge, both through support to community action research, and also through developing relationships between technical researchers in different disciplines, and communities, to allow for mutual understanding, respect for each other's particular knowledge and skills, and establishment of collaboration on that basis.

The relatively open context of Thailand has allowed for very frank exchange among CSO representatives, academics and others from across the region in a way which is not safely possible in more authoritarian contexts, with one example being the regional seminar on water governance and water politics in the Mekong Countries organised in collaboration with IR in November 2023.

Linking Community Action Research to Policy Influencing - Collaboration with the Stimson Centre.

Beyond academia, one example of integrating community research findings to policy influence has been IP2's collaboration with the Washington D.C.-based Stimson Centre which conducts scientific research on river flows and their impacts in the Mekong river basin; explores the evidence and pathways for non-

hydro renewable energy options, which recognise the need to conserve the natural resource base of the river and the ecosystem services they provide. Stimson's Mekong Dam Monitoring project combines remote sensing data with data gathered by the MRC, and more recently, river flow data gathered through community research, including communities where this has been initiated with IP2 support.

Brian Eyler of the Stimson Centre said frankly that policy makers 'don't want to listen to communities', but that community-generated data can have impact on policy when it is integrated with what is recognised as 'scientific' data and branded as coming from the Stimson Centre. He spoke of the importance of respectful engagement with community researchers, rather than an extractive approach, and gave the particular example of using community data from the Sesan river basin to address the issue of dry season flash flooding caused by sudden releases from upstream hydro dams. He noted that enabling and including community voices in public and regional fora had been a consistent approach with IP2, and particularly with regard to the voices of women and indigenous communities. He also pointed out the consistent enabling of intra-regional linkages for learning as a distinctive feature of IP2. This differentiates it from the usual practice of OECD-based organisations in establishing channels only between individual Mekong countries and the West.

The river gauge installed by the MRC had clearly not provided data to allow prediction of and early warnings for floods. Presentation of data from communities, together with that from other sources, ultimately led to the MRC installing a further gauge and improving data for predictions. Community data has also fed into the combined feed shared with the MRC from all Vietnamese, Lao and Cambodian dams in the 3S (Sesan, Sekong, Sreh Pok) basin. The Centre's 3S report, while highly technical, is now one of their most popular, with a high number of views on their website.

7.2.7. CHANNELS TO INFLUENCE POLICY MAKERS IN LAOS

The establishment of the National Dialogue process in Laos has opened a potential channel for greater influence, which Oxfam has taken up. The Dialogue was initiated by IP2 partner Green Community Alliance (GCA) in collaboration with members of the National Assembly during Covid, with funding from IP2 and other partners. The group then engaged with the Lao Academy of Social and Economic Sciences (LASES), and further included academic researchers. CSOs, including Oxfam and all IP2 partners, were invited to join the second and third dialogues. As an officially sanctioned process, this does provide a very safe space for influence. NB that other IP2 partners could not officially identify themselves as such due to the lack of an MoU.

The Gender in Just Energy Transition event in Vang Vieng was organised by Oxfam in Laos in partnership with the Ministry of Energy and Mines (MEM) with the aim of ensuring no one is left behind and everyone benefits equally from the energy transition. The event was not formally part of IP2, being funded by DFAT through another project. This did however form part of the group of closely related projects with very direct IP2 team input, which have effectively formed an 'ecosystem' reinforcing IP2 effects. The majority of the participants (58 total) at the Vang Vieng event were government officials from various ministries (at least about ten were MEM's Women's Union members) and about six from INGO/CSOs. No IP2 partners were present. The event included a presentation by MEM, the

Ministry of National Resources and Environment (MoNRE), Lao Women's Union, ASEAN Centre for Energy and six presentations by Oxfam (all presented by Oxfam staff, except one presented by an Oxfam consultant); panel discussions (all moderated by Oxfam staff, with the exception of one by an MEM cadre) and small group discussions to put forward a vision and plan for the next four years for just energy transition and gender.

7.2.8. TRADITIONAL AND NEW MEDIA

Women's Voice Radio, based in Kratie province of Cambodia, was an innovative partner in IP1, in providing a platform for emerging women community leaders to share information on their communities and WRM issues with a broad audience through the dedicated Women on Air program. Women's Voice Radio has continued to provide a platform for direct expression of community voices, which may be explicitly critical of local government actions, but has so far remained safe from government reprisal, possibly as it does not take an explicit and direct editorial position itself, possibly also as the voicing of discontent at this level is seen as a necessary safety valve. Several women and other community leaders who have been trained and supported under IP2 have continued to speak out via Women's Voice Radio.

Under IP2, a small grant was provided to the radio for the production of four videos on impacts on Indigenous communities above and below one hydro dam in the area, and these were disseminated online. Mr. Samrith, the founder and director of the radio station, said that in one instance, where an Indigenous community was isolated because of lack of a bridge, he prepared both radio and video material on the situation, which garnered over 85,000 views; and the government department responsible promptly provided the necessary funding and other support for the missing bridge to be built.

Through the Bophana Centre in Phnom Penh, IP2 supported the development of a video, Face of the Mekong in partnership with the Kudu Production Company. This was centred on Sai, one of Cambodia's foremost internet influencers, and tracking him as he journeyed downstream, interacting with Khmer and Indigenous communities, and noting the condition of riparian communities as he went. This aimed to show basic issues about life, livelihoods and resources and potential impacts on them, in a non-confronting way. Over a thousand students participated

in the production, and the first screening, as part of Mekong Discovery Day at the Cambodia International Film Festival, drew a thousand viewers, with Mr. Chea Sopheap, director of Bophana, estimating that up to a third of them were 'policy makers', with prominent representation from the Ministries of Agriculture, Culture, Environment, Women's Affairs, Justice, Foreign Affairs, and the National Election Committee, as well as many Ambassadors, representatives of the Royal Palace, the Office of the Council of Ministers, and numerous NGOs.

There was an encouraging response from one Secretary of State from the Ministry of Culture – speaking of the importance of preserving local culture.

Mr. Sopheap said the Bophana Centre was choosing the path of 'soft advocacy', and that it was important to know 'where the red lines are'. He stressed the importance and effect of social media, noting that the former Prime Minister had instructed all of his Ministers to develop online profiles on Facebook and other platforms – possibly implying that as well as this being a means of communicating the government line, it could be intended to show some openness to feedback.

The other principal media strategy used under IP2 was a course run by the Thailand-based Earth Journalism Network, for a group of eight journalists considered to be potentially sympathetic to the issues faced by riverine communities in the face of hydro dam development and other changes to the Mekong ecosystem. This involved introduction to the issues and exposure to communities, with the goal of enabling them to research and publish stories that the broader public could relate to, and thereby broaden support for community issues, and alternatives to hydroelectric development.

Both staff of EJN and two of the participating journalists were interviewed. Positive results as assessed by staff included:

- Integration of gender perspectives into journalists' stories on hydro dams and other WRM
- issues - before, this had been largely absent
- More coverage of Indigenous communities
- Greater overall consciousness of the issues

on the part of journalists

Limitations observed by the partner were that the kinds of stories that the journalists were pursuing were not the ones that attract the most public attention. There is more interest in spectacular events, 'victim' stories, or stories about the bad behaviour of Chinese engineering companies. To date, stories have been published mainly on Oxfam internet sites and through participating journalists' own social media. EJN also noted that there had been more outmigration from riverine communities by men than women, and as a result, women were more visibly assuming community leadership roles and were more often present on panels. EJN said the approach to date had been to recruit journalists to the program who had a focus on environmental and community issues. In the future, it would be beneficial to recruit those who specialised in women's issues, without necessarily having a prior environmental background.

The one participating journalist who had responded for interview said that he now does more work focused on gender. He had really appreciated the course, and said that in its second phase, the process had been much more

participatory and engaging. He gave an example of the new perspectives he had gained - seeing the empty ceramic jars that had previously been used for pa la (fermented fish) lying around villages or being used for flower planters, which graphically illustrated how the fish catch had diminished: pa la used to be made from the abundant small fish that seasonally migrated

Inclusion Project Phase 2 Closure Workshop in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

up the rivers, but which are now drastically diminished or have disappeared, being the species that are most vulnerable to mainstream dams. The resulting story focused on the ways in which different people had been affected by hydro dams, whereas his previous coverage was more likely to focus on the dam, its construction and electric output, itself.

Both EJN staff and the journalist interviewed said that two years was too short a duration for the program to really be effective, and that a future phase should be longer.

Direct media engagement by IR has been a core strategy to amplify community and civil society voice, promote public debate, where



space allows, and seek to influence policies. This is explicit in the IP2 Theory of Action. IP2 annual reports provide full detail and statistics for this activity: Media briefings on effects of the Lancang dam cascade led to articles in the South China Morning Post, the Bangkok Post, The Diplomat, and several other outlets. In both 2022 and 2023, media briefings on the proposed Salween/Yuam diversion were organised, followed by visits to the affected area and community. Another media trip was organised to the Pak Beng dam site. A media trip to the Sanakham dam site with staff of the Thai National Human Rights Council was also organised in 2023.

IR has maintained systematic media tracking throughout the IP2 implementation period: IR staff have been cited on issues of water resource

Inclusion Project Phase 2 Closure Workshop in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

governance and related community impacts, livelihoods and civil rights, in over 200 articles in multiple media outlets. Social media views as recorded have attracted tens of thousands of views – numbers actually recorded do not pick up the probably much greater exposure through sharing and citation elsewhere.

7.2.9. MOBILISATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE

The initial IP2 design document notes the significance of demographics in the Mekong subregion, with a high proportion of young people, and also the success of previous strategies in the MRWGP for the inclusion of young people in the modes which are relevant to them. A strategy is

not articulated beyond that, but some key points noted through the evaluation data collection process have been:

- Focus of the DRAGON project through Can Tho University, which harnesses the engagement and commitment of young people around environment and climate change impacts in the Mekong Delta, to undertake solution-focused research
- Evidence of inclusion of young women and men and supporting them in community leadership roles in Cambodia, through the FPAR process and other project activities, for example the solar program on Koh Sneh being managed by a team of young women; 3SPN's specific focus on developing young women leaders from Indigenous communities in Ratanakiri
- Mainstreaming of GIA and FPAR tools into the curriculum of the National University of Laos, facilitated by IP2 partner GDA, introducing these concepts and approaches to a whole cohort of emerging water professionals
- Young women leaders supported through IP2 have been particularly prominent in presenting on Women's Voice Radio in Cambodia, enabling them to be heard more widely, and giving the listening public a clear demonstration of young women's ability.
- Use of media strategies which are accessible and meaningful to young people, particularly social media. The production of Face of the Mekong involved up to a thousand mainly young volunteers; and collaborations with journalists to conduct citizen journalism trainings, targeting community youth and women in the Salween and Mekong basins.

7.210. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: OUTCOME 2

- IP2 has effectively provided engagement platforms of civil society actors, academia, community and others in engagement with national and regional WRG policy and practice.
- Clearest and most consistent success has been in supporting platforms for engagement, including networks and other structures which provide access for the voice of previously
- disregarded or marginalised groups, and also allow them to speak with one voice.
- Engagement has not yet resulted in demonstrable influence or change in all instances, although this needs to be viewed with a consideration of realistic timelines for achieving actual policy and practice influence. Platforms supported now have greater capacity to achieve future influence.
- The forms engagement has taken have varied widely across the region, depending on the specific circumstances and constraints in the political environment. IR and Oxfam have been agile and effective in identifying and pursuing the most workable strategies per country context, and issues including particular policy developments, opportunities presenting, project planning issues and other operational matters.
- Riverine communities themselves have had had direct engagement in several nationallevel processes, and direct dialogue with national actors, particularly in Thailand. Elsewhere in the region, communities' engagement with national and regional dialogue and process has

largely been mediated through nationallevel CSOs, which have been increasingly informed by community knowledge and priorities, significantly through IP2supported initiatives.

- Engagement of community representation direct to regional and global fora has been a significant achievement of IP2, and supporting emerging community leaders – including women, Indigenous, young people and others having had little public voice – to engage confidently and consistently.
- IP2's achievement in enabling the voice and leadership of Indigenous women and other marginalised people in WRG at national and international level has been noted and valued by numerous other actors in the sector.

- Several effective approaches in inclusion of young women and men; developing their leadership capacity, knowledge base and voice have been demonstrated through IP2, and could serve as the basis for a specific forward youth focus in future inclusion programming.
- Supporting communities and CSOs to develop an evidence base for advocacy and influence has been a critical and successful strategy, integrating different streams of Community Action Research with collaboration with academics, government and other researchers to present data which is both grounded and technically credible.
- Utilisation of both 'old' and new media has been consistent, agile and effective, and in particular the use of social media channels for influence where other public channels are closely constrained.



Regional workshop on 'Civil Society Leadership in the Mekong: Building Resilience, Advancing Inclusion, and Driving Transformative Change'

7.3. OUTCOME 3:

ARGET GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS AT THE NATIONAL AND REGIONAL LEVELS INCREASINGLY COMMIT TO REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS AND GOOD PRACTICE: AND INCLUDE THE PERSPECTIVES OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN HYDROPOWER AND RE POLICIES AND PLANS.

Three intermediate Outcomes were set out under this:

3.1. INCREASED UNDERSTANDING AND AWARENESS OF ENERGY CONSUMERS, CSOS, POLICY MAKERS AND FINANCIERS OF THE IMPACT AND SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES WITH HYDROPOWER ENERGY PRODUCTION AND THE AVAILABILITY OF ALTERNATIVE, LESS HARMFUL ENERGY OPTIONS

3.2. MORE DIVERSE ACTORS ARE AWARE OF AND PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE RENEWABLE ENERGY OPTIONS

ADVOCATED BY CSOS AND OTHER ORGANISATIONS

3.3. GOVERNMENTS, REGIONAL INSTITUTIONS, DEVELOPERS, AND FINANCIERS INCREASINGLY AWARE OF AND INCLUDE COMMUNITY AND CIVIL SOCIETY PERSPECTIVES IN HYDROPOWER AND RE DEVELOPMENT POLICIES AND PLANS

Results as represented in the Indicator Tracking Table are:

For the overall Outcome, just 3 out of a targeted 18 national and regional actors improving their compliance with international standards (noting that this is based on the Outcome as originally framed); but 14 out of a targeted 24 government and private sector actors including community and civil society perspectives in their policies. Against the first intermediate Outcome, just 18 out of 50 targeted actors are recorded as having shown greater awareness of sustainability issues of hydropower, and availability of RE alternatives.

For the second, against the target of 1148 cases or evidence of diverse actors (Govt, PS, CSOs, community) aware of and/or promoting sustainable renewable energy, 1958 were recorded as achieved, though this indicator covers a very broad range of possible activities and actual impacts

For the third the target of 28 instances or evidence of targeted actors (government, regional institution, developer, financier) aware

approached or exceeded. This is mainly in the form of dissemination of information, through media communications and public events. Carrythrough from this to enduring awareness of those targeted cannot necessarily be deduced.

7.3.1. OVERVIEW

From both project documentation and data gathered during the Evaluation process, there is relatively sparse concrete evidence of improved compliance by government and private sector actors with better standards and practice. The change of wording for Outcome 3 in the NCE design, to 'commit to' rather than simply 'comply with' reflects implementation experience in the first years of IP2, reinforced by the refreshed PEA. It is stated frankly in the first annual IP2 report that achieving compliance with international standards is 'a long-term goal' noting that the original Outcome was envisaged within an 8-year timeframe, though this can still read as ambitious. The second annual report notes that no instances of improved compliance had been noted. It is also underlined in project



Screening of 'Face of the Mekong' film at the Blue Chair Film Festival in Laos

of and/or including CSO and community recommendations in their policies and plans, a total of 23 are recorded as having been achieved.

For the third intermediate outcome, evidence cited in the target tracker shows most targets

documentation that policy change, when it does occur, does not always flow to practice change. As has been closely documented in the refreshed PEA and elsewhere, civil society and advocacy space has become further constrained in all

countries of the region throughout the implementation period, and there have been serious legal sanctions in some instances where civil society actors made overt criticism of government policy.

Regarding Renewable Energy policy and roll-out, IP2 has consistently engaged with policy from

2021, although relatively little direct activity and outputs are recorded through project documentation. This is due principally to (1) the bulk of direct and documented RE activity being undertaken within the Influencing Just Energy Transition (IJET) project, funded through the

Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) and Oxfam's own unrestricted funding, and (2) failure to gain Vietnamese government approval for two partner-led RE activities planned under the original IP2 design.

The IP2 PMU engaged closely with national and regional policy work on RE from 2021 and directed Oxfam unrestricted funding to the scoping study for the Community Renewable Energy (CORE) model conducted by AMPERES in three countries, which served as the basis for IJET, funded by the Australian NGO Cooperation Program, now implemented across five countries. Individual community-level RE initiatives have been supported by IP2, including the Koh Sneh solar power project in Stung Treng province of Cambodia, that serves as part of the evidence base as a ground-up initiative to support policy influencing re energy transition in the region. The PMU in collaboration with the Heinrich Boll Stiftung also initiated the regional multistakeholder dialogue on RE held in Siem Reap in October 2022 and has consistently engaged in subsequent regional RE convenings. On balance, IP2 outputs under RE could be considered as greater than those immediately recorded against the Outcome 3 indicators, given continuing PMU inputs to the larger 'ecosystem' of Oxfam project work in this sector in the region.

It does also seem reasonable to state that, in the face of the multitude of constraining factors, important steps have been taken

and some initial achievements can be flagged. There has been demonstrable change at least in public position by several key actors. These include:

- Official statement from the Cambodian Minister for Mines and Energy of a moratorium on construction of hydro dams on the Mekong mainstream until at least 2040, and commitment as part of the country's Power Development Plan to ambitious Renewable Energy targets for the country. This was also formally announced at COP28 in December 2023
- Decision by the Thai government not to proceed with blasting of a navigation passage in the Mekong mainstream – for which community concern was cited as a major reason
- The 2nd Thai National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights, which includes priority actions on Thai outbound investment
- Kasikorn Bank (Thailand)'s announcement of a responsible credit policy

Clearly, all of the above are the result of multiple factors, but the continued activity and engagement of IR, Oxfam and partners both during and long prior to IP2 cannot be discounted.

In moving towards the intended Outcome, it appears demonstrable that IR, Oxfam and their partners have made very creative and effective use of such space as is available to bring into public awareness and into dialogue with officialdom the issues of hydropower and climate change impacts on riverine communities, and feasible alternative strategies, noting also the Outcome wording re inclusion of civil society perspectives in policies and plans. .

There has been considerable observable progress in the raising of awareness – and triggering public statements – among key actors; with a small number of official policy statements, and fewer still clear changes in practice. There has been a demonstrable increase in the

accessibility of government bodies and the possibility of engaging in dialogue around WRG and RE issues.

Against this, it needs to be acknowledged that those branches and levels of government which have proven accessible and open are generally not those where key decision-making power lies in relation to large-scale water resource development.

It also needs to be reiterated that the changes observed cannot be attributed solely to IR and Oxfam activity under IP2; nor has either sought to give this impression. The principle of **‘Contribution, not attribution’**

clearly applies. As more than one Oxfam staff interviewed stated, **‘There is light in the darkness.’**

One point which is made across the periodic IP2 reports is the effectiveness of GEDSI as an entry point to dialogue with government. This is seen as relatively non-threatening; national governments and their agencies are increasingly committing, at least officially, to greater gender equity, and in some cases, to broader inclusion. The gender narrative has a strong overlap with the official missions of the national Women’s Unions of Vietnam and Laos – though these also have a strong focus on women’s domestic roles as well as in public space. An example was the ready uptake by the Lao Women’s Union of the Gender Impact Assessment tool during IP1 and by MoNRE on mainstreaming gender in the Integrated Water Resources Management Strategy under Department of Water Resources) – at least partly because its profile had the potential to give the LWU a seat at the table in planning for major projects. As GEDSI is seen as particularly closely associated with the IP2 and Oxfam brand, with longstanding partnerships and government engagement, this has been a relatively readily accessible channel.

In engaging with the finance sector, an important entry point has been to frame issues around risks to banks – financial, reputational and other – in hydropower development, drawing on public

commitments made by the banks. This has been core to the approach used by IR within Fair Finance Thailand and gives space to highlight gaps between public commitments and stated policies, and actual practice on the ground. This has the potential to move private sector actors from commitment (official, and on paper) to actual compliance in practice, particularly given that commercial risk is the single most powerful driver of private banks’ decisions.

7.3.2. DIFFERENTIATION IN INFLUENCING STRATEGIES ACROSS THE REGION

Channels of access and influence differ widely across the countries of the region – there is no single approach, or combination of approaches, which is applicable to the whole region, so observations here are categorised by country and sector, with separate mention of region-wide bodies.

Thailand has shown the largest number of significant changes; which can be attributed in part to the continuing relatively open civil society space and freer media; but also to the duration and depth of engagement by IR and its partners, among the groups that have advocated around hydro dam construction especially. Apparent changes have included apparent modification to the Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) for the proposed Pak Beng and Pak Lay dams in Laos (based on letters from the Thai energy ministry to civil society networks, and presentations by developers of the Pak Beng dam at the MRC RSF in June 2024); the intervention of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on the proposed diversion of the Yuam River; also a formal letter from the Parliamentary Committee on Land, Natural Resources and the Environment to the Prime Minister stating that the Yuam diversion should be stopped; and the 2nd National Action Plan (NAP) on Business and Human Rights, reiterating the Thai government's commitments to comply with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, including for Thai outbound investment, among others The NAP does outline several actions

that incorporate civil society recommendations, and commitments to strengthen alignment with regional and international standards and guidelines related to Thai outbound investments.

These include researching and implementing guidelines requiring businesses to conduct human rights due diligence, the possibility of developing EIA guidelines across borders, and exploration of a possible working system to address grievances.

Thailand has also been the locus of the deepest engagement with the private sector, particularly through the national network Fair Finance Thailand, advocating that Thai banks not finance dams on the Mekong. This was one factor in a commitment by the Kasikorn Bank not to finance the proposed Luang Prabang dam. Banks have also announced improved policies, referencing the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights; although it remains to be seen how far this stated commitment will be carried through in practice. While difficult to attribute to the project, Siam Commercial Bank, which has been a key financier of large-scale hydropower projects in neighbouring countries became the first Thai Bank to sign onto the Equator principles in January 2022.

Civil society space in Laos has remained tightly constrained under a one-party government, despite several false dawns since the 1990s, with CSOs broadly obliged to operate only in direct partnership with government entities. Given this, the ways in which Oxfam and partners have used available space has contributed to



Press conference of 'Face of the Mekong' at the Oxfam Cambodia office

some significant changes. IP2 partner Green Community Alliance (GCA) established an MoU with the Lao Academy of Social and Economic Sciences (LASES) to strengthen the evidence base of advice provided to the Lao government for planning decisions. The establishment of the National Dialogues mentioned above, now expanded from government researchers to include a larger number of CSOs and National Assembly members, has also been notable. Although no frank policy or practice changes have emerged from these to date, it was noted by partners that after the second National Dialogue, it had become possible for several previously sensitive issues around the environment, social and energy supply to be discussed openly on social media without fear of repercussion.

In early 2024 the Lao Prime Minister called for further development of both mines and energy to be carried out in closer alignment with principles of environmental friendliness and sustainability – although subsequently, no obvious policy or practice changes have been observed.

One direct win achieved by an IP2 CSO partner was the negotiation conducted by CLICK with the company operating the Don Sahong dam, obtaining an agreement to provide electricity at a 50% discount rate to affected communities, for a set period. This was carried out with the knowledge of the relevant provincial government authorities. While it was a local and temporary measure, it has been noted that in the particular government culture of Laos, where individual provinces retain a high level of autonomy, and can engage in robust (though not public) contestation with national authorities, changes initiated at local level can feed up through government and party channels to influence national government direction. (It does also need to be noted that Champassak province, where the Don Sahong dam is located, is the home of Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone's family, and links and influence with national government are particularly strong partly for this reason.)

CSO actors have also noted the shift in government discourse on hydroelectric development during the IP2 implementation period as the fiscal damage of Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) with Thailand have become obvious as part of a broader national economic crisis and deep government indebtedness driven by large-scale infrastructure investments; and also with the 2018 collapse of the Xe Pian Xe Namnoy dam in Attapeu province. There are fewer references to Laos becoming 'the battery of Asia', although there has officially been no revision of government plans for hydropower expansion as a mainstay of the country's economy. The economic crisis is partly attributable to the financing models of both hydro and other large infrastructure projects. This is touched on in the refreshed PEA, noting the absence of Lao government equity in more recent dam projects, now 100% owned by developers, and very likely linked to Lao government credit ratings and level of debt to the Chinese government.

These developments in Laos are sometimes cited as probable influences on shifts in Cambodian government planning and public policy. The most notable of these has been the formal commitment not to construct any hydro dams on the Mekong mainstream until at least 2040, as is mentioned above. This covers the dams previously projected for Sambor, on the first rapids of the Mekong in Kratie province, and Stung Treng, a short distance south of the Lao border. The viability of the Sambor dam had been the subject of sustained questioning already. The provincial government of Stung Treng had sent a formal letter to the Ministry of Mines and Energy (MME) questioning the likely impacts of the proposed dam on riverine communities and the environment. It does need to be noted that Cambodia's apparent caution in following up largescale hydro development has not affected projections in the Cambodian Power Development Plan to increase electricity imports from Laos.

It is not possible to identify with any certainty the factors which led to the change in national government position, which has also been presented as part of the broader strategy of

greatly increased RE targets set out in the national Power Development Plan. The mainstream dams were of very questionable engineering and commercial viability. Stung Treng riverine communities and CSOs have also raised the question of what will happen after 2040.

Civil society access to government in Cambodia has changed noticeably through the implementation period of IP2. The most significant instance is in dialogue with the Secretariat of the National Mekong Committee (CNMC), which brings together representatives from ministries and authorities across national government – see below regarding the overall shift of the Mekong River Commission and its advice to the National Committees to engage directly with civil society.

Both IP2 partners and Oxfam itself have been in direct and frank dialogue with the Secretariat since 2021, raising issues of concern to communities and relevant to international standards in policy and practice. This began with a consultation meeting on the report of the pilot of Joint Environmental Monitoring (JEM) of the Don Sahong and Xayaburi hydropower development projects and led to ongoing engagement with Oxfam and RCC members in regard the Procedures for Notifications and Prior Consultation and Agreement (PNPCA) of relevant projects in the Mekong. Through this, recommendations from CSOs and Communities were submitted to the CNMC and the MRC on the proposed expansion of the Don Sahong hydropower project. This has been of relatively limited direct impact to date, as the CNMC is necessarily seen as intergovernmental agency that plays the central role in coordination and consolidating technical and political aspects that correspond directly to MRC agreements which could potentially be influential in decisions regarding hydro dam construction or other water resource management areas, while the decision-making power remains with the relevant line ministry. Dialogue with the CNMC does represent a significant precedent in access to government. There is likewise ready

and cordial access to the Ministry of the Environment; but this is similarly perceived as carrying relatively little weight in major infrastructure decisions. The Ministry of Mines and Energy is considered to carry the most heft in matters around energy policy and infrastructure and has been perceived as relatively closed to CSO engagement and concerns. With DFAT support, Oxfam in Cambodia has been able to engage with the MME since mid-2022, when one Oxfam staff member was engaged by DFAT through the Australia Mekong Partnership to join a Mining Regulator Governance initiative where Oxfam and two other NGOs together with MME colleagues joined an exchange program and short course in Brisbane, looking at Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) in the mining industry. During Clean Energy Week in 2023, The OiC Country Director was invited by the Australian Embassy to a courtesy gathering where the Minister of MME was invited to talk about energy transition in Cambodia. OiC has reported very open dialogue – though as yet no demonstrable shift in policy and practice that could be ascribed to this. The Cambodian parliament has also announced plans to build six clean energy plants though with little more specific detail to date; also increasing solar electricity supply to two gigawatts, as part of the Power Development Plan mentioned above. Noting, however, that hydropower is still considered ‘clean’.

There had already been some shift in Cambodian government responsiveness to some level of community concerns compared with previous years. In most fishing communities interviewed, they said that when illegal fishers were observed, the local police came when called and would confiscate and destroy electric shock equipment and other illegal tools. This is a contrast to earlier stages in the development of community fisheries organisation, where police would often be unresponsive; fisheries officials had no fuel for their own boats, and in one recorded case, police arrested the community fisheries people who had confiscated electric shock equipment and charged them with theft. In one community in Kratie, members said one reason for an apparent improvement in fish catch

in the last couple of years was the government intervening to stop wide netting across the mainstream to catch the seasonal upstream migration of fish.

The commune councils were frequently referred to as first point of contact with officialdom, and generally being responsive.

7.3.3. INFLUENCE AND CHANGE WITH REGIONAL AND GLOBAL BODIES

There have been two substantial engagements with staff of the Asian Development Bank, to apparently high level. IR staff joined multiple meetings with ADB management and board members around the Bank's energy policy. Purpose of the meetings was reported as awareness raising around WRM issues, though with no substantive change noted in the Bank's updated 2021 energy policy in relation to hydropower or subsequent guidance on hydroelectricity development. Oxfam also made a submission re the ADB New Energy Policy via the Fair Finance Coalition statement in 2021.

The major change in access, dialogue and apparent policy during IP2 implementation has been with the Mekong River Commission (MRC) Secretariat. In the final evaluation of IP1, both MRC staff and Oxfam personnel who had sought to engage with the commission were interviewed, and there did not seem to be a significant degree of real openness to CSO and community concerns.

Major shift has occurred, with consistent engagement and apparent responsiveness. The major starting point was the Regional Stakeholder Forum in 2021, following recommendations from civil society participants, the MRC produced a Gender Action Plan. During the low-flow event of the Mekong in 2022, the Rivers Coalition of Cambodia (RCC) advocated to the MRC to commission a study of the phenomenon; its causes, particularly relating to hydro dams and climate change, and impacts on fisheries and other livelihoods. This was not the first report on low flows undertaken by the MRC, but this could be taken as one indication of increasing congruence between MRC and civil society agendas. There

has been substantial change around the process of MRC engagement with CSOs, with the establishment of an annual MRCS – CSO informal dialogue, and an MRC roundtable. These give more opportunities for open and frank discussions than is possible through the Regional Stakeholder Forum and other large events.

One small but significant detail is the provision of translation during the Regional Stakeholder Forum and CSO dialogues, since December 2023.

This is a practical measure ensuring a more realistic basis for community engagement.

This has been a highly significant change; also one for which a significant contribution can reasonably be ascribed to persistent constructive engagement by Oxfam and IR both during IP2 implementation, and previously, under IP1 and other initiatives. At the same time, as the PEA details, the influence of the MRC and its recommendations on the national governments of the participating nations has not strengthened, and is not a major driver of policy or practice change in itself.

MRC staff interviewed spoke very favourably about the ways in which IR and Oxfam had engaged, noting specifically that IR had brought a lot of knowledge about banks and other lenders, which had led to some change in approach; and that Oxfam came with a very deep knowledge base.

They also said that IR could sometimes be 'too critical', but they had also been amenable to engaging on the same issues through less confrontational approaches. DFAT staff interviewed spoke particularly positively around IR's mode of engagement with the MRC and its enabling of other CSOs in doing so.

Among the National Mekong Committees, Cambodia's has been particularly responsive to the MRC's recommendation to engage with civil society. Due to political sensitivities, other Mekong countries have faced challenges in creating realistic opportunities for CSO engagement with their respective NMCs.

The situation which most plainly demonstrates the limitations of the MRC as a mechanism to ensure compliance with standards, and possibly the disconnect between stated government policy and actual planning decisions is the proposed Funan Techo Canal in Cambodia, which would link the major rivers directly to Cambodia's coast, rather than through Vietnam, and thus provide direct port access. Likely environmental impacts on Vietnam particularly through massive hydrological change would be great. MRC protocols designate notifying countries (which initiate projects) and notified countries (which would be affected). Any project must be under the terms and conditions of the law, but notified countries do not have any right of veto.

~~This is not the case for the proposed Funan Techo Canal project. The Vietnamese government initially expressed deep concern about the probable impacts of the project, but the Cambodian government is still proposing to proceed. In August 2024, the official Vietnamese government line changed to express support for the project; further shifts are not out of the question.~~ The possibility of the MRC conducting or overseeing a Transboundary EIA has been raised.

There has been no opportunity for civil society, through the standard PNPCA mechanism, or possibly even the CNMC, to engage with the necessary levels of government about this.

Theoretically, a major project cannot proceed without consultation; but there has not been an opportunity to raise issues of concern.

This does illustrate the gap between government stated policy and actual practice – although both diplomatic and fiscal considerations could still affect the Cambodian government's final decision to proceed. Several stakeholders interviewed, from both government and civil society, said that even when sound technical evidence against a project is presented, government will often proceed in a different direction. 'Edifice complex' – the inclination of governments to project power through major visible developments – remains a significant factor

even when both environmental and economic disbenefits are clear.

Presence at CoP26 in 2021: IR engaged with the UN Special Rapporteurs on Human Rights to ensure inclusion of information on the impacts on human rights of people affected by hydro dams at the 26th COP Conference on Climate Change.

7.3.4. PROMOTION OF RENEWABLE OR CLEAN ENERGY

Promotion of Renewable Energy (RE) was integrated into IP2 design from the outset, and partnership with EnergyLab Cambodia began from 2020. There was also annual engagement with Cambodia Energy Week, and IP2 staff convened the Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue on Renewable Energy Pathways in 2022, which generated a policy document intended for submission to ASEAN energy ministers (but was not finalised until much later). Integration of community level activity, particularly piloting of small-scale RE systems, commenced only in 2023. Measurable impacts in terms of government policy and practice are so far not clear. In Cambodia, IP2 provided a grant to Energy Lab, a social enterprise and 'renewable energy think tank', which has pursued various channels of building RE ecosystems in Cambodia. IP2 support was in the form of CSOs and youth capacity building, production of a video for internet dissemination, and the awareness raising including Clean Energy Roadshow in 2023, targeting both the public and sub-national officials.

Energy Lab were able to engage directly with the Ministry of Mines and Energy and other stakeholder on the policy influencing and had so far encountered a level of openness and cooperation. There was concern regarding the actual level of knowledge of MME personnel engaged; for example, while the national government has set a target of 70% Electrical Vehicles by 2050, it became clear in meetings with MME staff that many did not understand what an EV

was. This may be indicative in assessing the national government's stated aim of establishing six RE generating facilities by 2050. However, the

formal government commitment to carbon neutrality by 2050 in the framework of the Power Development Plan announced by the Minister, and the other commitments made at COP28 make a useful basis for continued engagement with and potential influencing of government RE policy.

The Cambodian government has however supported the establishment of small-scale solar energy stations or mini-grids to rural communities previously without reliable energy access.

Communities have to put up 50% of the costs. Problems have arisen when the installation work has been contracted to local private sector providers, with poor quality equipment installed and lack of proper user training on maintenance and repair, leaving several systems non-functional after a short time, and communities in debt. An IP2 grant to Live and Learn has supported both repair and sustainable maintenance training to communities. Funding for a small-scale solar plant, and training of a team of local technical team, especially young women in maintenance was also provided directly to Oxfam's community-led RE initiative Koh Sneh, a Mekong island community in Stung Treng province. Due to difficulty of access across the river, the community could not rely on commercial contractors for maintenance.

Oxfam has also engaged with SOGE, a private sector company which has specialised in setting up solar-driven irrigation systems, and directly supports community systems enabled by Oxfam, giving ten-year warranty for functioning. SOGE's direct engagement in IP2 has been through workshops and dialogue but has been a direct provider in related Oxfam projects. Ms. Thida, coowner

of the company explained that many farmers and farming communities were initially hesitant to take on solar-driven irrigation schemes, as they had been previously burned by unsatisfactory private solar providers. SOGE's operation guarantees 48-hour response to maintenance needs and has enabled

replacement of diesel driven pumps on areas of up to 1300 hectares per system. All participating farmers need to register their land for the agreement; Ms Thida said that on average, 60% of registering farmers were women. The solar systems also have the advantage that heavy diesel pumps do not need to be carried from one location to another, which gives women far greater control.

This could be considered as an influencing strategy, through supporting a demonstrably viable RE system.

7.3.5. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: OUTCOME 3

A heightened level of informed engagement with government, private sector and intergovernment bodies by civil society organisations around WRM and RE issues has been enabled through IP2 where space has been available. This has been most notably in Cambodia and Thailand; and in engagement with the Mekong River Commission. In Lao PDR, there has been innovative use of available channels despite continuing formal constraints on direct civil society influencing.

Levels of achievement against the original Outcome – greater compliance with international standards in WRM by government and private sector bodies – have been limited, and the modification to 'commitment to comply' has proven to be appropriate and realistic in the operating context. Several instances where statements of policy and practice reflect such commitment have been recorded; also of government and private sector actors incorporating CSO and community views into policy. In several such instances, it seems to be reasonable to claim that actions under IP2 have been a contributing factor.

- There have been notable examples of success of community and civil society in influencing the positions and practice of Thai government and private sector actors where it appears demonstrable that IP2-supported activities have contributed significantly.

- There has been a lesser amount of engagement or apparent influence to date around RE, with some significant exceptions including the Cambodian Government's Power Development Plan. However, some important initiatives have been undertaken in the relatively short period that RE has

been integrated into the project structure and goals.

- The approaches taken by Oxfam and International Rivers, both their own and enabling partner organisations, have been explicitly appreciated by different actors, including some officials of national government and of inter-government bodies, notably the Mekong River Commission.
- The agencies of government which are more accessible and open to dialogue on community issues around WRM are not usually those which carry the greatest weight in related decision-making. However, Oxfam and IR have achieved some noticeable success in engaging with previously unresponsive government bodies.

- Within single-party or authoritarian states, there can be persisting technocratic streams within government agencies, which are more susceptible to evidence-based arguments for changes in strategy. IR and Oxfam have increased engagement with these in several different country contexts.
- Some instances of access and possible influence have been achieved in contexts which previously seemed less amenable to civil society influence, notably via the National Dialogues in Laos.
- Achieving influence on government and private sector through generating public opinion impact, particularly demand for RE and ecosystem services, via traditional and social media has shown some signs of promise in countries where this is possible, notably Thailand and Cambodia. Observable impacts are so far limited, but it does seem that continued and expanded use of social media in particular is a strategy that should be further pursued.
- No single formula for successful influence on government policy and practice has become evident through the



Screening of 'Face of the Mekong' film, followed by the panel discussion at the Cambodia International Film Festival.

implementation of IP2. However, it does appear that the multi-pronged strategy of opening communication channels to sympathetic branches of government; building a strong evidence base via community action and academic collaboration; and raising broad community awareness and support through social and other media is an achievable strategy which can work to build a critical mass of opinion, knowledge and pressure ready for when more open and technically informed government processes evolve, and/or to take the opportunity when particular events and developments, such as the Mekong low-flow event, offer a window for introduction of CSO and community views.

progress achieved in building partner and community capacity, and women's leadership has been substantial in the timeframe of IP2, but it is unlikely the momentum could be sustained without further external resourcing. Some of the most positive factors towards sustainability within the program are (1) the building of networks, ensuring that peer support can be provided and joint action undertaken with relatively low financial and management inputs from Oxfam/IR management, (2) the emphasis on partner autonomy in moving the broad strategy forward, which could lead to a diminution of external resources required for ongoing work, and (3) the continued building of communities' own capacity, aligned with the stated aim above.

These three approaches will not ensure postIP2 sustainability in and of themselves, but should

ASSESSMENT AGAINST THE OECD-DAC CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION

8.1. IMPACT

Impact is not assessed separately here, as it is essentially covered under the three Outcomes above.

8.2. SUSTAINABILITY

In the periodic reports, the approaches to achieve sustainability emphasise strengthening of local partners and of communities themselves; and building wider networks of partners and communities that will be able to sustain their own momentum. This approach has demonstrably been followed by Oxfam and IR and is complemented by project staffing from within the countries of the region, ensuring retention of expertise.

This is necessary but not sufficient to ensure continuing benefits from the project. The

lead to tapering requirement for external resourcing.

The linking up of communities, partners, and academic and other researchers as is evident in Vietnam, Laos and Thailand particularly also works towards a more sustained impetus towards local and national direction and autonomy, as a greater level of intellectual and analytic resource comes from within the region, and existing state budgets.

One instance which emerged repeatedly in Cambodia data collection was the future of community fisheries management. Several groups indicated a need for continued or refreshed resourcing, to cover items such as maintenance of boats and motors, or replacement of life vests. Of the active community fisheries groups across the country,

a high proportion had their origin with external donor funding. A few examples were cited of community initiatives to raise their own funds to cover these costs – donations made via the local pagoda; agreement with participating families to pay a small levy; and in one instance, a community setting up a small seasonal tourism business. For broader sustainability, securing government resourcing seems to be essential. This should be feasible in the medium term given the rhetorical value at least that national and provincial governments place on community management of fisheries. One suggestion was that there should be advocacy to the Ministry

of the Interior (with which local organisations are registered) to in turn direct that the local commune councils should prioritise support to community fisheries through their own budgets, which it was claimed are often underspent. As is noted above, an EU grant for the support of community fisheries groups is administered through commune councils, but access to date appears to have been uneven.

8.3. EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS

8.3.1. VALUE FOR MONEY AND ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE

Periodic reports particularly cite value for money, with standard processes of seeking comparative bids; also noting collaboration with other agencies in the hosting of events or use of existing premises and other resources; all of which seem to be clear. On a fundamental level, Oxfam and IR's long-established practice of working through local partner organisations and prioritising in-region competence in staffing optimises retention and growth of capacity and continuity in relationships, which have a direct cost-benefit relationship in addition to their basis in development philosophy.

In discussion with PMU staff, the routine practice throughout implementation has been the frontending of payment tranches to partners. This has mitigated the frequent delays caused by slow and complex government processes for

project approval: continuation of project deliveries is not delayed while interim reports and acquittals are processed. It was also acknowledged by PMU that this does have the counterbalancing result that no funds are returned by partners to PMU for possible reallocation but are rather expended on activities and costs that partners have identified are consonant with their existing agreement with IP2.

On balance, the front-ending practice is probably a greater asset to efficiency rather than the reverse, given the multiple delaying factors inherent in budgeting, remitting and tracking across multiple partners and countries and a high level of government intervention.

It is noted that the delays in expenditure through the project's lifetime had the net result of a significant underspend, which it was negotiated could be allocated to the No-Cost Extension which now runs to April 2025. Delays were driven largely by external factors beyond Oxfam and IR's control, particularly the Covid-19 pandemic and long delays in project approvals in some countries.

Complexity and slow speed of approval processes were cited by both staff and partners, across all countries, though with more severe manifestations in some countries than others. In all cases, this has worked against program efficiency and also against balance of resourcing and activity between the countries of the region. V In one country, often mentioned as a challenging case, approval times for individual projects under IP2 extended for up to twelve months. As was cited by one partner, the general government directive is to avoid sensitive areas, but there is no clear guidance as to what constitutes sensitivity: 'we don't know where the red lines are'.

Impacts of Oxfam internal structure: Bureaucratic delays have been compounded by features of Oxfam's architecture, with Laos being the most acute example. The PMU has a regional project responsibility, but without a matching level of regional authority. Country-level implementation is under the charge of the Oxfam body in that country, which has its main reporting and

accountability line through another channel. For most countries of the region, a quite efficient collaborative arrangement has been established. This is plainly easiest in Cambodia, where the country entity co-locates with PMU, and a highly professional, outcome-focused team matrix appears to be in place. Oxfam country teams operating in volatile contexts appear to have found the working relationship smooth and unproblematic and was particularly appreciative of donor flexibility in allowing funding to be reallocated to essential livelihoods and other activities to ensure partner resilience during conflict periods when project implementation

to plan was not feasible. In Laos, the effects of disjunction in structure appear to have been compounded by high staff turnover and related difficulties of remote working relationships with staff unfamiliar with Oxfam ways of working. The failure to secure an MoU with the government of Laos for IP2 implementation has been an obvious constraint; but it has been argued that a greater degree of leeway for operations should have been possible with more functional intra-Oxfam processes.

More than one partner in being interviewed by the consultant evaluator expressed very specific discontent with Oxfam in Laos' ways of working, and the poor quality of the working relationship.

8.3.2. RESPONSE TO PANDEMIC CONDITIONS

With inception of IP2 occurring almost simultaneously with the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, Oxfam, IR and partners were faced with the same constraints on movement, communication and action as other development agencies, government or non-government, but rapidly took up and adapted different modes of online and other distance communication and operation. This also penetrated to the implementing partners. Pandemic restrictions on movement and face-to-face interaction were on the one hand a factor in accelerating the development and functioning of virtually run networks from local to regional level, as grassroots people, often with limited formal literacy, realised the potential of connecting with

peers and others via internet. However, this was more than outweighed by the impact of radical reduction of face-to-face meetings, conferences and other interactions which are critical to the building of understanding and trust, and conversations which do not occur in prescheduled and structured online meetings.

Direct impacts of the pandemic were the illnesses of many partner staff and community members, with resulting reduction in previously planned activities, and/or reduced quality of processes requiring inputs from multiple parties. Indirectly, as was noted in the refreshed PEA, the pandemic has had enduring effect on civil society space, as government restrictions on associations and gatherings introduced on public health grounds interacted with regulations and scrutiny introduced to address corruption (~~most notably in Vietnam~~) and led to the longer term weakening of civil society networks.

Taken together, these pandemic-related issues can be seen as a significant factor in delays or shortfalls in reaching targets under all three Outcomes.

8.3.4. INTERNAL ASSETS CONTRIBUTING TO EFFICIENCY

Major assets for Oxfam and IR in efficient operation and delivery have included (1) the relatively long service of several staff in both PMU and the Oxfam country teams, meaning a considerable depth of knowledge of both content and operational issues, and (2) the number and duration of partnerships: there has been a critical mass of long-standing partnerships predating IP2, and in some cases, IP1, which has allowed for efficiencies in operations and accountability procedures, given familiarity with systems, and also an apparently high degree of mutual trust and respect.

Of those partners outside of Laos questioned on their experience of working with Oxfam in IP2 implementation, nearly all expressed satisfaction. The main concern raised was with regard to delays in project approval and funding flow, although in most cases, this was accompanied by recognition that the

processes of approval and funding remittance were not in Oxfam's sole control and were most frequently driven by national government regulation and related factors.

8.3.5. ASSETS IN PARTNERSHIP AND PORTFOLIO

Long-term partnerships with competent local, national and regional CSOs were complemented by the strategic provision of small grants to small and relatively inexperienced and informally structured emerging organisations with specialist focus. Two examples with which the evaluation engaged were MHSS and WLAD, both in Cambodia, with focus inclusion respectively of people with diverse SOGIE and People with Disability. Both organisations were very pleased with the extent of activity and change that they had been able to achieve with relatively small funding amounts, and the Oxfam-IR consortium was able to release grants of that level with relatively simple standards of organisational assessment and accountability.

IP2's status as one of a trio of projects in the larger Oxfam Mekong Regional Water Governance Program also had benefits, as the three component projects functioned in overlapping areas, with some complementary activities which reinforced each other at critical points, while allowing IP2-specific funding to continue to be targeted to activities as per design. IP2 is also a component of the IR South-East Asia program, and links closely to other IR programs, for example in China and cross-regional thematic programs. As with Oxfam programs, this enabled sharing of knowledge, insights and strategies.

8.3.6. FUNCTION OF THE OXFAM-IR CONSORTIUM

The consortium structure of International Rivers and Oxfam allowed combination of the two organisations' complementary areas of focus, expertise and relationships. There was also an advantage in mutual familiarity, as two IR staff with direct responsibility for IP2 had previously worked on Mekong issues as Oxfam staff over a substantial period. Each carries a high degree of credibility with particular partners and

interlocutors from local to global level, and the two organisations enjoyed a longstanding cordial and respectful relationship, albeit with significant differences of policy and approach. Ideally, the consortium structure would have allowed a whole which was greater than the sum of its parts.

This turned out not to be the case, particularly for IR with its much smaller and lighter structure and staffing complement. IR is structured essentially as a network, rather than an institution, and found that a disproportionate amount of time was taken up by focus on accountability and compliance requirements to an extent which detracted from their core business. Both parties attempted to find solutions that would allow the consortium structure to continue, but in the end, it was agreed that the best way forward was to dissolve the consortium, effective 2024, to continue through the NCE period as a regional partner of Oxfam.

8.3.7. OPTIMISING OF PMU RESOURCES

Oxfam PMU staff at management level also mentioned the high proportion of their time spent in accountability; processing and approving of grants; negotiation with Oxfam country teams, and similar, which they felt had detracted from their availability to engage with substantive and strategic issues of program content and direction. This issue would need to be addressed in a future project phase, whether through streamlining of procedures and /or further staff resourcing within PMU. This is critical given the imperative for greater focus on linking work and outputs at local and sub-national level to the national and regional levels, and further strengthening program coherence. Others have commented very positively on the high competency and leadership qualities of the PMU managers, and the credibility of their highquality interventions in multiple regional and global forums, including the 2023 MRC Leaders Summit; the First National and Women Leaders Elevation and World Water Week, and Mekong Environmental Resilience Week at national and regional levels, particularly. The example and

profile of the PMU leadership, as women of the Mekong region, has also been cited as one factor in supporting and developing the capacity and confidence of other women leaders. It seems essential for several reasons to further enhance this.

8.3.8. THE DUAL DONOR STRUCTURE

The issue of PMU resourcing links in part to the dual donor arrangement, and consequent increase in accountability and communication requirements. It has been critically important to secure the higher levels of funding and institutional support available as SDC joined as a donor; and there is major advantage in combining the two agencies' funding priorities, expertise and strategic portfolios in development cooperation in the region. These have a large degree of overlap, but also a significant amount of difference which broadens the project's scope as well as deepening the funding pool. SDC's long-term engagement in regional land governance potentially provides an important complementarity to the project.

To date, there has been some transactional cost engendered by incomplete alignment between the two agencies' accountability requirements: notably SDC's standard requirement for semiannual as well as annual reporting. Oxfam staff at different levels reported that there was initially some difficulty in explaining issues of access to projects and partners in the field. SDC also indicated some initial difficulties in reaching understanding on roles and requirements, including access to projects and partners in the field but felt there had since been progress towards smoother collaboration and effective partnership. It seems essential that conscious effort is applied to frankly addressing any remaining points of misunderstanding in order to optimise both donors' engagement with and contribution to the project, and also to harmonise donor accountability requirements as far as possible.

Direct donor backing was cited as a significant factor in program effectiveness. Oxfam in Cambodia staff said that DFAT had 'opened doors

to us which had never been open before', citing, in particular, the Cambodian Ministry of Mines and Energy (who in turn fed back to Oxfam staff that 'you have a good donor'). Donor recognition of the need to support resilience building of IP2's partners in the 2021 post-COVID-19 scenario and difficulty in some countries in project approval meant that partners could continue to provide support and services to communities, and also pursue future funding until more regular implementation could be resumed.

Reallocation of IP2 funding to essential livelihoods needs was approved for the NCE period, in recognition of the challenges of unstable contexts in some countries.

8.4. RELEVANCE

Evidence from the evaluation indicates that the project in its structure and mode of implementation has had close relevance first to the riverine communities, and marginal groups within them, and secondly, to the larger population of the Mekong sub-region. The initial design was based on IR and Oxfam's long experience and engagement with stakeholders at all levels across all countries of the region, updated with close independent analysis through the PEA. On the evidence of project documentation and of direct evaluation data collection, it seems clear that the activities undertaken within each country remained in alignment with the design as expressed in both the Theory of Action and the Theory of Change, despite the differences in approach driven by individual country contexts.

In engaging with communities, the evaluation team consistently found responses to the effect that the activities and targets of the project spoke to some of their uppermost priorities and concerns, in terms of maintaining livelihoods and retaining their natural resource base in the face of multiple changes. Examination of national government policies and statements across the region, and evaluators' engagement with government stakeholders through the course of the evaluation show official aims which at least in

the way they are formally stated, are consonant with some of the project goals, including greater gender equity, support to women's leadership, recognition of community priorities, and commitment to clean energy. That actual government practice in most of the country is less in accord with the aim of a strengthened and more vocal civil society actually underlines the relevance of the project design.

Responses from women and men community members directly interviewed in data collection demonstrated a sometimes-vehement confirmation of the project activities' relevance to their lives and circumstances, and of the importance of the changes so far achieved.

The ultimate achievability of Outcome 3 is appears more realistic in the revised framing adopted for the NCE period, and when taken in the perspective of an eight-year implementation period as was originally envisaged, The original target looks extremely ambitious when considering the relative strength of Oxfam, IR, partners and allies when compared to the combined momentum of governments and the private sector in the region, and the relatively small degree of apparent progress that has been made since major hydropower development began in the 1990s.

However, progress under Outcome 3 during IP2 implementation, including concrete examples of official government and private sector policy commitment, and some shifts in the larger economic and political context, would indicate that a much larger degree of change could be possible, and the relatively small level of investment in working towards this is amply justified.

Further, investment in women's leadership and greater inclusion of people with disability, Indigenous communities and other marginalised groups, as well as strengthening of community and civil society cohesion and voice has an absolute value, particularly when viewed in the broader context beyond the project plan and timelines. Riverine communities, and wider populations of the region, will unquestionably be subject to very major social, environmental, political and climate changes in the foreseeable

future, of which hydropower development and climate-induced changes to river flow and ecology are just one element. Women's and community agency in voicing their needs and advocating for their rights will become only more essential.

There were some indications arising through the evaluation process that a wider range of issues beyond the health of the river system and control of its resources are bearing on communities' viability, not least population increase, outmigration, and increasing dependence on nonfishing, non-agricultural sources of income. If a further phase of the Inclusion Project is undertaken, it would seem essential to include these wider issues in both analysis and strategy.

8.5. COHERENCE

The Theory of Change and the Logic Model of IP2 set out a clearly coherent analysis and approach. Questions have been raised about how far coherence is discernible in implementation. One suggestion arising during the Mid-Term Review was that separate Theories of Change were needed for each country of the region, given the wide differences in politics, society, civil society space and more.

This differentiation is approached frankly in both the original and revised versions of the PEA, which nonetheless indicate that a united strategy is possible. One clear impression emerging from the evaluation is that Oxfam and IR have proceeded from a base of nuanced understanding of political and economic dynamics and available influencing space in each country, and have moulded strategy, accordingly, also showing agility in adapting as the situation evolves. This is directly demonstrated by the preparation of the refreshed PEA, and in the design of the NCE.

It seems evident that there has not been a consistent or symmetrical flow of concerns raised at community level flowing through sub-national to national and regional levels. A literal reading of the Theory of Change diagram would anticipate this. However, this is to be expected first, given communities' necessary preoccupation with immediate survival issues,

secondly, given the lack of open civil society space, media access and other factors which are highlighted in the project design as issues to be addressed. Finally, it needs to be recognised that for a project working across multiple locations and actors in a highly dynamic political, social and environmental context, a ToC structure needs to be distinguished from a linear logframe model, recognising that positive change may occur or blockages spring up suddenly, and the essential strategy is to build enduring capacity and relationships in order to be prepared to act when events and circumstances allow.

The relative dearth of transboundary action has been commented on elsewhere. This is not surprising given the strong pattern of national governments working very much to national agendas, without a really ingrained mechanism of consultation with neighbours – the limitation in the MRC’s function is noted above. There are however examples of IP2 enabling transboundary community engagement where impacts across national borders were immediately obvious, such as Cambodian organisations’ and communities’ engagement around the Don Sahong dam.

Brian Eyler of the Stimson Centre specifically highlighted what he had seen as IP2’s frequent enabling of cross-border linkages around research and evidence presentation, in contrast to much more siloed information flow in other regional programs he had worked with.

Work towards linkage from community to national level and beyond is evident in the project’s focus on networks – both continuing support and enabling of existing umbrella bodies, including FACT and the NGO Forum on Cambodia, and the creation of the Women’s Leadership Network on Fisheries, which do specifically work to create direct linkage from local to national level and beyond.

Also, experiences reported from regional gatherings show the immediate sense of coherence, shared identity and purpose which is felt by community and civil society representatives from highly diverse backgrounds, language groups and more when they are enabled to meet and engage. This would seem to be an emphatic validation of the

importance of pursuing a regional strategy which includes elements from community to regional levels.

8.6. FINDINGS AGAINST THE OECD EVALUATION CRITERIA

- IP2 has incorporated several key measures to optimise sustainability of partners’ and communities’ activities and progress beyond the project’s lifetime, but these will not be sufficient to ensure full continuation toward the three Outcomes and ultimate Impact identified without significant continuing external resourcing.
- The complex and diverse structure of the project, and its dispersal across multiple locations and levels has made efficiency particularly challenging. Countering this, Oxfam and IR have implemented several management measures to maximise efficiency, including collaboration in resource use; reliance on remote communications, and focus on in-region expertise and knowledge.
- Oxfam’s complex internal architecture and lines of reporting have in some instances worked against both efficiency and effectiveness, compounding delays and uncertainty caused by national regulatory and approval requirements.
- Duration of key staff tenure and depth of expertise, as well as long-established and trusting partnerships have been a major source of project effectiveness. The strategic use of small grants for emerging organisations with low administrative capacity has also delivered disproportionate benefits.
- There is clear and strong coherence in the project’s design, patterns of implementation, and progress towards projected Outcomes, and in alignment with the Theory of Action despite the wide variety of activities implemented in very dispersed locations.
- The project’s relevance to direct participants and intended beneficiaries is

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

strongly borne out by the available evidence.

The following recommendations have been formulated with the assumption that substantial institutional donor funding will be available for a continuation either of the Inclusion Project, or a coherent regional program of closely related work.

The recommendations are based on the substantial strengths identified in IP2's implementation which should inform future practice, as well as areas identified for learning and improvement.

Not all current aspects of IP2 practice are covered in this formulation, but the list should be read with the assumption that the successful practice identified under all three Outcome areas and the six OECD-DAC criteria should continue to form the basis of a further implementation phase.

For Future Program Design:

1. The model to promote and support women's leadership as developed through IP2 should be specifically documented and shared more widely for possible adaptation and use beyond the countries where it has been most visibly used, and possibly in other program contexts. This should also be integral to any future phase of the Inclusion Project.
2. Future work on women's leadership should incorporate monitoring of individual women's stories of change across gender normative practices, and the pathways to transformative change they indicate.
3. The further development of women's leadership from community to national and regional levels should be a core focus of a future project phase, consolidating and expanding from successful practice and learning under IP2.
4. A clearer and more coherent strategy for the inclusion of people with disability, people of diverse SOGIE, and other marginalised groups, drawing on the diverse examples of successful practice in IP2 should be developed for any future phase of the Inclusion Project. OPDs and organisations of people with diverse SOGIE should be directly engaged in this design.
5. The enabling of Indigenous women's leadership which has been successfully undertaken through IP2 should be further consolidated; extended where possible across the Mekong region, and further supported in developing linkages with Indigenous women's activism globally.
6. Lessons learned from focus on young people's engagement across all components of IP2 should inform the articulation of a specific youth strategy for continued programming.
7. Avenues to ensure the continued resourcing of community fishery groups and other grassroots structures and networks, independent of institutional donors, need to be explored as a priority, particularly advocacy for in-country government funding.
8. Attention should be given to possible evolution of the partnership model in implementation, noting the increasing strength of community organisation, and ways in which community groups may come to rely less on the intermediation of CSO partners.
9. The significant differences in political and economic context and in available civil society space in each country need to be specifically articulated in developing a Theory of Change for any future phase of the Inclusion Project, and also clearly

reflected in the design of the Theory of Action.

10. Design of a future phase of the Inclusion Project should include clear articulation as to how the successful enabling of local-level leadership, engagement and influence can more consistently fully linked up to engagement and influence at national and regional levels; also respecting the differing national circumstances and constraints as per Recommendation 4 above.

11. A more detailed strategy for the promotion and support of Renewable Energy initiatives from local to regional level should be developed as part of any future program, particularly looking to possible engagement with other DFAT-supported initiatives in the region.

12. Lessons learned from engagement with social and 'old' media across the region within the IP2 implementation period should be documented and analysed to develop a component strategy for future intervention. Future media work could include sharing success stories and data that highlight the importance of community and gender considerations in policy.

13. Lessons learned from collaboration with academia, as both a direct channel of influence, and a partner in empowering community development of evidence for influence, should likewise be documented for future strategy development. Specific actions which should be undertaken in this regard include:

- Strengthening of Research Collaboration: Fostering partnerships between local universities and international research institutions to generate relevant data and
- evidence-based studies that address community and gender issues.
- Capacity Building for Local Academics: Provision of training and resources to
- local researchers with whom relationships have been established on

- methodologies related to gender studies, community development, and policy
- analysis to enhance their ability to contribute effectively to discussions.
- Publication and Dissemination: Promotion of the publication of research findings
- in both academic journals and popular media to increase visibility and
- accessibility, ensuring that findings reach a broader audience, including
- policymakers.
- Policy Briefs and Recommendations: Support collaboration to development of
- concise, evidence-based policy briefs that clearly outline actionable
- recommendations based on research findings, targeting specific policymakers or
- government departments which have demonstrated openness to dialogue.
- Engagement in Policy Dialogue: Where official control of space permits, organise
- forums, workshops, and roundtable discussions that bring together academics,
- policymakers, and community representatives to discuss research findings and
- their implications for policy.

14. Oxfam and International Rivers should jointly review both successes and constraints in engaging with the private sector under both IP phases to date, with a view to articulating a clear forward strategy that weighs the relative influence and accessibility of hydro-electric companies; private financial institutions; and private sector actors in RE, and which are likely to be the targets of successful influence, whether directly; via CSO partners; media; and/or academia and other researchers.

Operational and Structural Issues:

15. Priority should be given to addressing any remaining points of misunderstanding regarding donor engagement, communication and accountability requirements in order to optimise both donors' engagement with and contribution to the project, and also to

harmonise donor accountability requirements as far as possible.

16. The disjuncture between Oxfam regional project management structure and the autonomy of individual Oxfam country teams must be addressed in any future regional program.
17. Oxfam should discuss internally and with donors ways in which current operational management and accountability workload could be streamlined and possibly redistributed to allow greater engagement of management level staff in matters of program strategy and quality.
18. The benefits of IP2's interaction and cross-fertilisation with other IR and Oxfam projects in the area of WRG, RE and Natural Resource Management should be recognised and continued in any further program phase, and also expanded to include more systematic interaction with other projects funded by SDC and DFAT.

GLOSSARY

Acronym	Full name
3SPN	3S Rivers Protection Network (Sesan, Sekong, Sreh Pok)
AIPP	Asia Indigenous People's Pact
CAR	Community Action Research
CEPA	Culture and Environment Preservation Association
CEWAREC	Centre for Sustainable Development of Water Resources and Adaptation to Climate Change
CNMC	Cambodia National Mekong Committee
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSRD	Centre for Social Research and Development
Centre for Social Research and Development DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)
DWR	Department of Water Resource (Laos)
Department of Water Resource (Laos) EIA	EIA Environmental Impact Assessment
FACT	Fisheries Action Coalition Team
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FIA	Fisheries Administration (Cambodia)
FPAR	Feminist Participatory Action Research
GCA	Green Community Alliance
GDA	Gender Development Association (Laos)

Acronym	Full name
IP2	Mekong Inclusion Project Phase 2
HREA	Human Rights and Environment Association
I-JET	Influencing Just Energy Transition IR
IWRAP	International Women's Rights Action Watch
KII	Key Informant Interview
LASES	Lao Academy of Social and Economic Sciences
LDPA	Lao Disabled People's Association
LMC	Lancang-Mekong Cooperation
LRSA	Living Rivers Association
LWU	Lao Women's Union
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MEM	Ministry of Energy and Mines (Laos)
MHSS	Men's Health Social Services
MME	Ministry of Mines and Energy (Cambodia)
MoNRE	Ministry of Natural Resources and Energy (Vietnam)
MRC	Mekong River Commission
MVi	My Village
NCE	No-Cost Extension

Acronym	Full name
OiL	Oxfam in Laos
NHRC	National Human Rights Council (Thailand)
NRD	Northeast Rural Development
NUoL	National University of Laos
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Development and Cooperation – Development Assistance Committee
OiC	Oxfam in Cambodia
OiV	Oxfam in Vietnam
OPD	Organisation of People with Disability
PCA	Partner Capacity Assessment
PEA	Political and Economic Analysis
PMU	Project Management Unit
PNPCA	Procedures for Prior Notification, Prior Consultation and Agreement
PWWW	People We Work With
RE	Renewable Energy
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation
SOGIE	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression*
SSI	Semi-structured Interview
ToA	Theory of Action

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ToC	Theory of Change
VWU	Vietnam Women's Union
WLN	Women's Leadership Network in Fisheries
WRG	Water Resource Governance
WRM	Water Resource Management
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

- The acronym 'SOGIESC' is also in use – Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression and Sex Characteristics. There has been criticism from some intersex people that they are not necessarily included in practice in advocacy around this area of diversity. The 'SC' is omitted as there is no clear evidence in this case that efforts to inclusion have included intersex people.

FOR PROJECT STAFF

Introduction:

1. Introduction of the consultant (Mark and Tam)
2. Introduction of the aims of the evaluation
 - To evaluate the impacts of the Inclusion Project Phase 2 per the revised Theory of Change and Theory of Action, ascertaining the factors both contributing to success, and in reducing any final achievement and impact
 - To evaluate the extent to which project approaches and strategies contributed to the project's final outcomes and impacts
 - To identify lessons learned from the project for Oxfam, International Rivers and their partners, to develop recommendations for continuing program work in inclusion, civil society strengthening, and policy work in water governance and renewable energy development
3. Introduction of principles of independent evaluation4. Afs for permission of recording and principle of interviewing

Questions:

Main questions**1. OUTCOME 1: SOCIAL INCLUSION, GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN LEADERSHIP****Main questions**

- 1.1. What is your role or position in the project/s of IP2 support by Oxfam?

Main questions

- 1.2. How has the strengthened capacity helped civil society organisations (CSOs) engage more effectively in policy dialogue on water governance at national, regional levels?

What are the evidences to support this?

Additional questions

- What can be continued or replicated?
- What can be seen as innovative?
- What could have been done differently?

Clarifying questions

Which activities (or part of the activities) can be seen as:

- Most relevant?
- Most effective?
- Most impact?
- Most sustainable?

Main questions

- 1.3. As a result of improved capacity of CSOs in policy influencing and increased participation of women leadership in WRG and RE civil society groups, who and/or what have changed? How have changes happened? How has the IP supported partners to make these changes sustainable? What have been significance of these changes to women, people with disability and CSOs?

Additional questions

- What can be continued or replicated?
- What can be seen as innovative?
- What could have been done differently?

Main questions

- 1.4. To what extent has the IP2 strengthened individual and collective capacity of civil society at social inclusion, Gender equality and women leadership?

Additional questions

How were these interventions contributing for outcome 1 (Social inclusion, Gender equality and Women leadership?

Clarifying questions

Please provide detailed information about members of other marginalized groups (who are they?)

Main questions

- 1.5. To what extent has the project/s conducted by your organization supported women and members of other marginalized groups realizing leadership roles?

Additional questions

- What activities they have participated in and what were their role?

Main questions

- 1.6. To what extent has the project/s conducted by your organization supported women and members of other marginalised groups to participate in and/or take lead role on water governance and influence policies that have an impact on their lives?

Additional questions

- Any story of change about these members?
- What policies related to WRG/RE that these groups have advocated influenced? Which level?
- How did the project/s communicate about the story of change (if any)?

Main questions

- 1.7. Please specifics of instances in which women and members of other marginalised groups have demonstrated leadership?

Additional questions

- Any story of change about these members?
- What policies related to WRG/RE that these groups have advocated influenced? Which level?
- How did the project/communicate about the story of change (if any)?

Main questions

- 1.8. What strategies and approaches have been most and less effective in enabling women and members of other marginalised groups to assume leadership roles?

Main questions

- 1.9. To what extent has your organization approach been inclusive of specific marginalised groups in the project activities (people with disability; indigenous people; young people; and people of diverse SOGI)?

Additional questions

- Any specific approach for each group?

Main questions

- 1.10. What have been the key factors limiting success with these groups?

Additional questions

- How did your organization identify these limitations?

Main questions

- 1.11. Has leadership function been focused solely on areas of WRG and RE, or has this led to broader leadership and advocacy function for the people concerned?

Additional questions

- What are the evidences for these influences?

Main questions

- 1.12. What would be required to ensure that women and representatives of other marginalised groups/people with multiple identities are able to continue in these roles after cessation of external donor support; and more people from those groups enabled to assume leadership (after project end)?

Additional questions

- Why do you think that these requirements will contribute to the sustainability of the project/s?

Main questions

- 1.13. How did your organization engage in gender and social analysis activities?

Additional questions

- What can be continued or replicated?
- What can be seen as innovative?
- What could have been done differently?

Main questions

- 1.14. How did your organization collaborate with other CSOs, private sector and policy makers in WRG and RE development?

Additional questions

- Which CSO?
- Which private sector?
- Which authority? Which level?

Main questions**2. OUTCOME 2: CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT AND NETWORKING****Main questions**

- 2.1. As a result of “communities and CSOs are more informed, and their networks strengthened to influence national and regional WRG and RE policy and planning processes” What and how did your org be informed about WRG/RE policies?
 What and how did your organization inform the communities in the project areas?
 Who and/or what have changed? What and how did your org engage in planning process of WRG or RE activities? What and how did your organization engage communities in planning process of WRG/ RE?

Additional questions

- What can be continued or replicated?
- What can be seen as innovative?
- What could have been done differently?

Main questions

- 2.2. How have changes happened (related to WRG/RE)?

Main questions

- 2.3. What have been significance of these changes to women’s leadership, social inclusion, gender equality thanks to these engagement and networking?

Additional questions

- What are evident for this?

Main questions

- 2.4. How do you evaluate the contribution of GESDI Lense/method to women’s leadership?
 Do you think the engagement of women influencing institutions, government bodies and the private sector on national and regional WRG and RE policies and plans?

Additional questions

- What can be continued/replicated?
- What can be seen as innovative?
- What could have been done differently?

Main questions

- 2.5. Do you think that the engagement and networking produced by the projects will be continue to maintain after the project end? Why/what evident for this?

Clarifying questions

- Which activities (or part of the activities) can be seen as:
- Most relevant?
- Most effective?
- Most impact?
- Most sustainable?

Main questions**3. OUTCOME 3: GOVERNMENT AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR**

- 3.1. What activities have been implemented by the project/s to increase understanding and raise awareness of the general public, energy consumers, CSOs, policy makers and financiers of the impact and sustainability issues with hydropower energy production and the availability of alternative, less harmful energy options?

Additional questions

- What activity can be continued or replicated?
- What activity can be seen as innovative?
- What were challenges faced during implementation?
- How did you overcome?
- What activity could have been done differently?

Main questions

- 3.2. What were the changes? (related to awareness of and promoting sustainable renewable energy options advocated by CSOs and other organisations)

Additional questions

- Any evidence for these changes?
- Who has changed?

Main questions

- 3.3. What were the changes? (related to awareness of and social perspectives in hydropower and RE development policies and plans)

Main questions

- 3.4. What strategy or approach has been applied for awareness raising activities

Additional questions

- What activity can be continued or replicated?
- What activity can be seen as innovative?
- What were challenges faced during implementation?
- How did you overcome?
- What activity could have been done differently?

Main questions

- 3.5. What were the interventions have been done with women and men who most reliant on rivers for their lives and livelihoods and directly impacted by specific development projects? How have changes happened to their lives and livelihood?

Additional questions

- What activity can be continued or replicated?
- What activity can be seen as innovative?
- What were challenges faced during implementation?
- How did you overcome?
- What activity could have been done differently?

Main questions

- 3.6. Do you think that the support on livelihood to men and women produced by the projects will be continued to maintain after the project end?

Additional questions

- Why/what evident for this?

4. **4. IMPACTS EVALUATION (POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE, PRIMARY AND SECONDARY LONG-TERM EFFECTS) PRODUCED BY THE PROJECT**

HOW DID OXFAM AND PARTNERS RESPOND TO UNINTENDED EFFECTS IN THE CHANGING CONTEXT AT COUNTRIES AND REGIONAL LEVEL?

Main questions

- 4.1. When implementing this project, what are the difficulties and obstacles (both technical and logistical, financial, etc.) that you encountered?
- 4.2. How do you use the internal tracking system to implement the project effectively?
- 4.3. Does DRAGON, CEWAREC, or CSRD have plans and resources to maintain the achievements of the project?
- 4.4. If you design again this project, what activities or approaches will you maintain, what activities will you modify or remove because it is not reasonable in the context of Vietnam?
- 4.5. If you implementing this project again, what you want to redo as you did (areas of success) and what you will do differently (the areas of improvement) to achieve project aim and objectives as proposed? You can give three or more specific examples or activities and explain why you did it as you stated it.
- 4.6. What would be your recommendations to Oxfam?
 - Approach
 - Design and implementation
 - Inter-institutional relations
 - Cross cutting issues

Main questions

- 4.7. What is your overall judgment (relevance, appropriateness, effectiveness, sustainability) of this activity?
 - Approach
 - Design and implementation
 - Inter-institutional relations

Additional questions

- What should be continued?
- What can be seen as innovative?
- What could have been done differently?

Additional questions

Which activities (or part of the activities) can be seen as;

- Most relevant?
- Most effective?
- Most impact?
- Most sustainable?

5. **TOPIC 5: OVERALL EVALUATION**

- 5.1. How do you evaluate the implementation of the project/s? (satisfaction)

Additional questions

- What do you like best?

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- What should be continued?
- What can be seen as innovative?
- What could have been done differently?

5.2. Do you have any recommendations or suggestions for the evaluation team?

5.3. Do you think there are missing things you have not mentioned during this conversation and want to add for now?

FOR WU/YOUTH UNION/ (PARTNERS/BENEFICIARIES OF DRAGON/CEWAREC/CSRD AT LOCAL LEVEL)

= Introduction:

1. Introduction of the consultant
2. Introduction of the aims of the evaluation
3. Seek for participants' consent for interview and recording and clarify questions of confidentiality.

Questions:

Main questions

1. GENERAL STARTING

1.1. What do you know about this project? (objectives, activities, etc.)

Main questions

1.2. How have you/your institution been involved in this project? In which activities?

Additional questions

- Are you aware of the Water Management or Irrigation
- Management Guidelines for provincial level? If yes, please list?

Main questions

1.3. What was your roles and tasks in these activities?

1.4. What support did you receive from the project to be able to perform the above roles and tasks well?

2.1. What have you learnt from this project?

2.2. What have you changed (knowledge, skills, attitude) thanks to participating in the project activities (focus on WRG, RE, or Climate change)?

2.3. What have your livelihood changed in thanks to participating in the project activities (focus on WRG, RE, or Climate change)?

2.4. What changes you see in your community in terms of WRG, /RE, or Climate change?

2.5. Do you think your family and community are better aware of WRG or RE?

Additional questions

- Why?

Main questions

2.6. What do you think about the roles of women (who participated in the project activities) in the family and communities? (compare with the time before the project has intervention)

2.7. How do you evaluate the participation of People with Disability, youth, ethnic communities in the project activities?

2.8. Do you think the project's interventions are appropriate to the needs of yourself, your institution and local communities?

- Approach
- Design and implementation
- Inter-institutional relations

Additional questions

- What can be continued/replicated?
- What can be seen as innovative?
- What could have been done differently?

Main questions**3. GENERAL EVALUATION**

3.1. How does the project fit in the province or institution's plan, strategy, or institutional structure for WRG, RE, or Climate change adaptation?

- Approach
- Design and implementation
- Inter-institutional relations

3.2. What changes occurred during and after the project implementation in WRG/RE planning at province and community level?

3.3. What will be continued after the project's closure? What will be challenging to continue?

Additional questions

- Will the city DRM planning guidelines be used for other districts in the province?
- Is there possibility that the DRM
- Guidelines be used in other provinces?

Main questions

4. TOPIC 3: IMPACTS (POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE, PRIMARY AND SECONDARY LONG-TERM EFFECTS) PRODUCED BY THE PROJECT

4.1. When implementing this project, what are the difficulties and obstacles (both technical and logistical, financial, etc.) that you encounter?

4.2. How do you use the changes into WRG or RE problems might rise in the coming time in your communities?

4.3. What do you like about this project?

- Approach and Activities
- Design and implementation

4.4. What challenges have you experienced with this project?

- Approach and Activities
- Design and implementation

Main questions

5. TOPIC 5: OVERALL EVALUATION

5.1. What would be your recommendations (to CEWWAREC/CSRD/Dragon...)?

- Approach
- Design and implementation
- Inter-institutional relations

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

FOR STAKEHOLDERS (8-10 BENEFICIARIES/GROUP)

Introduction:

- 1.5. Introduction of the consultant
- 1.6. Introduction of the aims of the evaluation
- 1.7. Seek for participants' consent for FGD and recording and clarify questions of confidentiality.
- 1.8. Break into 2 groups

Questions:

- 1) State the project's objectives and list activities implemented at your community?
- 2) Why were you selected to join the project?
- 3) Describe your role and responsibilities as a beneficiary of the project?
- 4) What were difficulties when your group implementing these tasks? What are the solutions for this?
- 5) What knowledge and skills you have acquired during participating project activities?
- 6) Did you face any gender prejudice during participating WRG/RE from your family and communities? How did you deal with this?

Method for facilitating:

Option 1: Use Mindmap for the above questions

Option 2: River flow

The group will draw a river on an A0 piece of paper. On that river there are timelines, and symbols representing activities, roles and responsibility, results, difficulties, and obstacles. The group will then send a representative to present details.

7) SWOT analysis: beneficiaries' group

Topics	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats	Recommendations / Lessons learnt
Human resource					
Time					
Budget					
Legal framework					

- 8) Describe the changes (knowledge/ skills/ attitude in WRG/RE) through the timeline tool

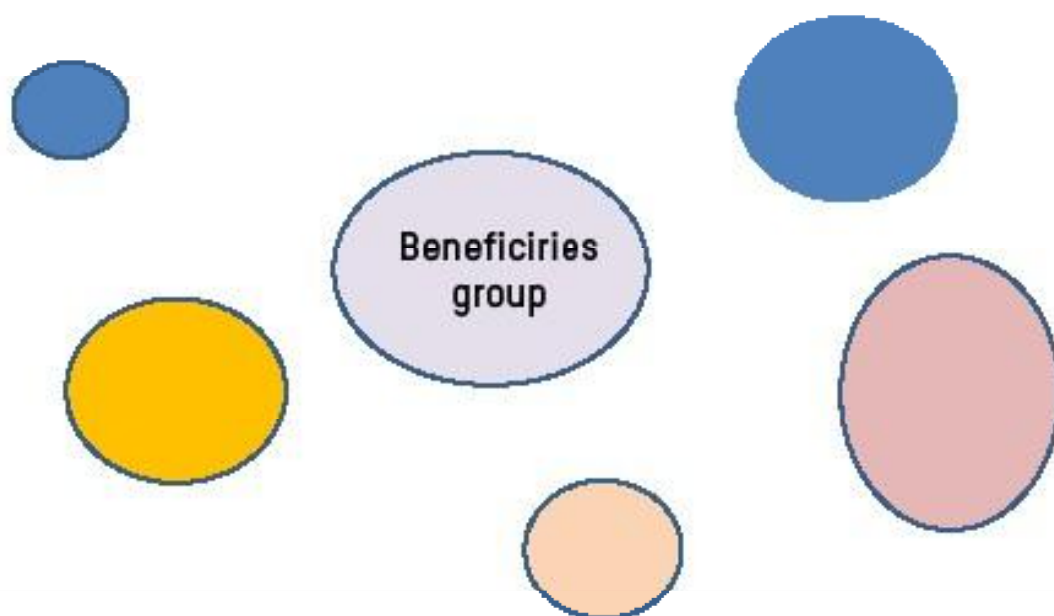
Option 1: using timeline

Before participating project activities	During participating activities	After participating activities
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Option 2: using story telling _river of the time (Prepare a thread and some pictures, shells, paper, and leaves. Each participant chooses symbolic materials and tells a change related to the change in chronological order. Then stick it to the thread to form as a river)

9) Describe the relation of beneficiary groups with relevant sectors/CSOs/government agencies in water governance via Venn diagram tool



10) Will the group maintain their operation after the project end? If yes, why and how to maintain? Are there any challenges to maintain the groups?

If no, what are the reason for this?

11) After the project ends, in order to maintain the taskforce group to operate smoothly, what good experiences will you apply during the past time (provide evident)? Anything will you change/improve to be better? Why?

12) List project activities that they have involved and score those activities 1-5 from the most relevance/meaningful to them.

Note: This question only applied for the group who have been involved in the project activities.

Scores	1	2	3	4	5
Activity 1					
Activity 2					

...

General evaluation

Scores	1	2	3	4	5
Appropriateness					
Consistency					
Impact					
Sustainability					

Note for each tool:

1. Get informed consent from our interviewees
 2. Ask whether they wish to remain anonymous
- Semi-structured interview with Storytelling:

Title	Note
Purpose:	Understand the changes in the context that the IP2 operates and aims to contribute
Tool Note:	This tool uses storytelling alongside semi-structured interview questions.
Who:	Private sectors and stakeholders who have interacted with IP2 partners
How:	one on one face to face or zoom call
Potential questions:	a. what changes have you observed in planning, designing, decision making meetings, stakeholders forums/events? Notice any different voices? b. Of those changes, which is the most significant and why?

Scale questions: from 1-5 (5 actively engage and presented) - communities, minority groups voices; questions relating to effectiveness...etc., **Focus Group:**

Title	Note
Purpose:	Gather information about the opinions, beliefs, practices and attitudes of a group of people towards a specific topic of interest. Guided questions in this Focus Group Discussion (FGD) relate to the impacts, effectiveness... of the program
Tool Notes:	This tool should be used during small group discussions. The group should be made of people from similar backgrounds or experiences and should not include more than 10-12 participants. The groups should also be separated by sex and age. The FGD will be led by our in-country facilitator who introduces the topics of discussion and helps to ensure that all members participate evenly in the discussions.
How:	3/4 separate groups, before bringing them together and then separate again

Who:	1. IP2 partners leadership level 2. IP2 partners operation/staff level 3. Donors (TBC) 4. Communities (TBC)
Potential questions:	- Looking back at your first day with IP2, can you walk me through your feelings and thoughts? - How would you describe your feelings and thoughts now? - What is the one key thing you kept saying many times to the IP2 team and you don't feel the message was heard and well understood? - What have they listened to and acted on that you believe led to a positive change?

Scale question about impact, effectiveness....

DIRECT OBSERVATION: to be used if we go to the field or at workshops or events where we can observe partners and different stakeholders' interaction. Careful observation is an important tool that can be used with other data sources to triangulate information. For the purposes of assessing sex and age data, take a mental note of what individuals are in what spaces. Undertaking a transect walk (if in the field) and think about who is missing: young, old, people with disabilities...etc.,

SAMPLING: Use both convenience and purposive sampling approaches. The use of convenience sampling recognises different people's ability to participate in the context IP2 operates, while the use of purposive sampling ensured sufficient sampling across different intersectional groups, and those that IP2 has not heard from yet.



 Oxfam in Cambodia

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