

Mekong Regional Water Governance Program: Inclusion Project Phase 2

WHAT IS THE CHALLENGE?

Unequal development in the Mekong and Salween River Basins

With over 72 million people in one of the world's fastest growing economic regions, the Mekong Region is facing unprecedented challenges to ensure sustainable, healthy transboundary rivers and more equitable development.

The unique eco-systems and rich biodiversity of the Mekong and Salween rivers with their wetlands, pools and lakes is the lifeblood for the region providing livelihoods, food security and cultural heritage for millions.

Yet the flow and quality of the waters is being depleted by hydropower to generate energy, sand extraction for growing urban centres, changes in land use, water extraction for irrigation and industrial pollution and waste disposal. The speed of these changes is increasing and is exacerbated by climate change.

In the next few years, **how** competing demands and needs for the river and energy are balanced and negotiated between communities, countries and developers will determine the sustainability and health of the Mekong region for future generations.

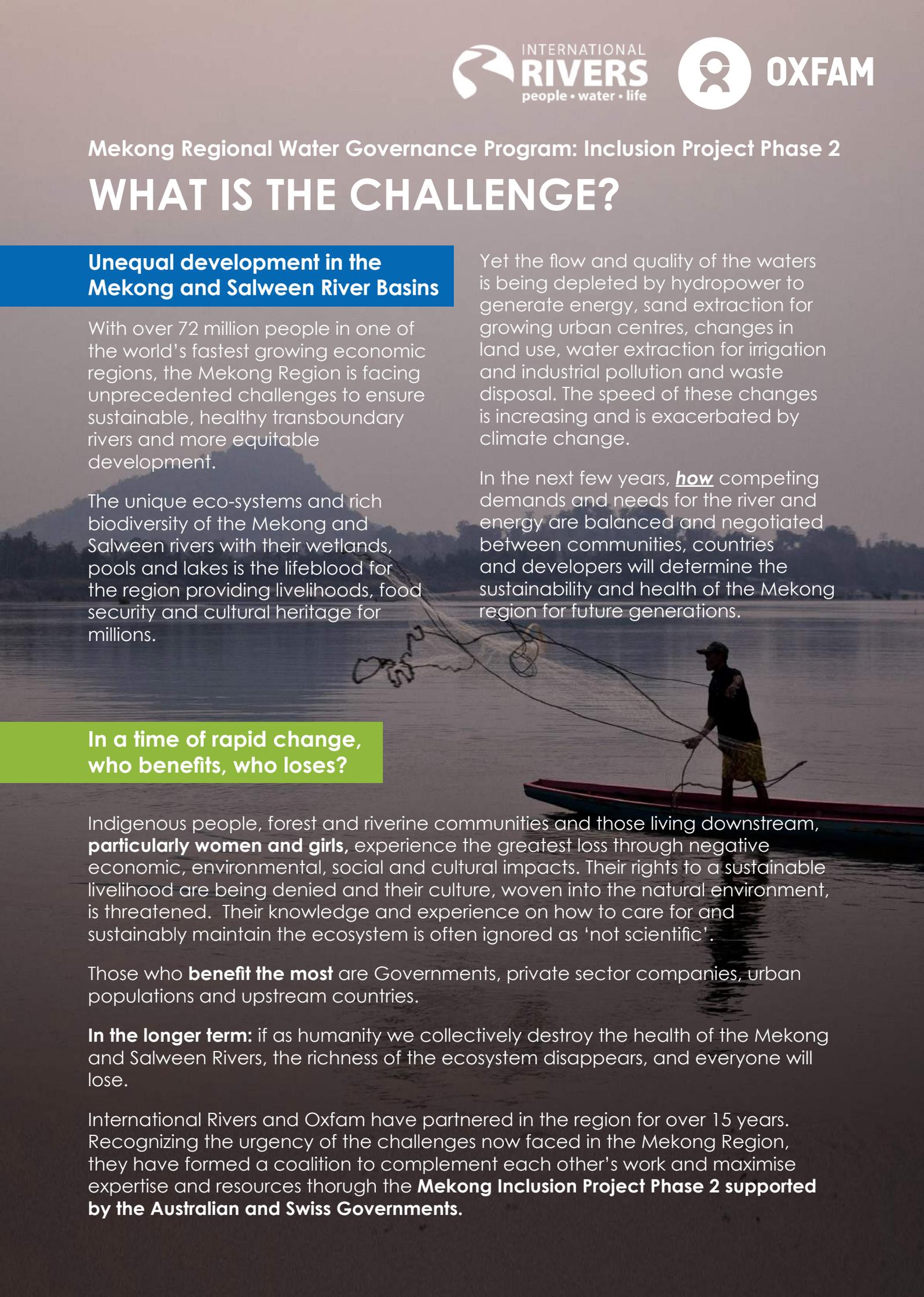
In a time of rapid change, who benefits, who loses?

Indigenous people, forest and riverine communities and those living downstream, **particularly women and girls**, experience the greatest loss through negative economic, environmental, social and cultural impacts. Their rights to a sustainable livelihood are being denied and their culture, woven into the natural environment, is threatened. Their knowledge and experience on how to care for and sustainably maintain the ecosystem is often ignored as 'not scientific'.

Those who **benefit the most** are Governments, private sector companies, urban populations and upstream countries.

In the longer term: if as humanity we collectively destroy the health of the Mekong and Salween Rivers, the richness of the ecosystem disappears, and everyone will lose.

International Rivers and Oxfam have partnered in the region for over 15 years. Recognizing the urgency of the challenges now faced in the Mekong Region, they have formed a coalition to complement each other's work and maximise expertise and resources through the **Mekong Inclusion Project Phase 2 supported by the Australian and Swiss Governments.**



We want to see in the Mekong region:



Increased capacity and inclusion of communities.



This will help strengthen civil society and researchers to:

- Challenge the lack of accountability;
- Influence decision making and
- Propose renewable energy alternatives to reduce reliance on hydropower development.

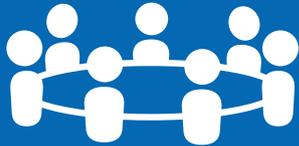


Women, people with disabilities, youth and community leaders have increased capacity and opportunities to explain to the public how rivers provide their food, livelihoods and cultural heritage and this is as important as the economic value of the river and should be factored into decision making.



How will we achieve this?

Building on our experience we will:



Identify new ways to convene different stakeholder groups to listen to and respect each other's views and knowledge of sustainable Water Resource Governance and Renewable Energy.



Ensure that the goals for development in the Mekong and Salween basins are increasingly built on shared values and international standards.



Ensure decisions made by government and developers at the national and regional levels increasingly include the views and knowledge of communities affected by Hydropower and Renewable Energy projects.

The Program will focus on:

SOCIAL INCLUSION, GENDER EQUALITY, AND WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

Focus:

With our support, young and indigenous women will have their voices and interests heard at public events and decision-making processes at local, national and regional level.



Community groups, the private sector and policy makers will analyse and pay increased attention to the social and gender impact of decisions on water resource governance and renewable energy.



CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT AND NETWORKING

Focus:

Communities and their representatives are more knowledgeable and more effectively networked to influence national and regional policy and planning processes, institutions, government bodies and the private sector on water resource governance and renewable energy.



Community organisations that we work with are more inclusive of women, people living with disabilities, youth and indigenous people, and represent their interests and issues in water resource governance and renewable energy development.



GOVERNMENT AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Focus:

The general public, energy consumers, civil society, policy makers and financiers increasingly understand the impact and sustainability concerns with hydropower energy production and the availability of alternative, less harmful energy options.



Stakeholders will be increasingly aware of and actively promote sustainable renewable energy options being proposed by civil society.



Governments, regional institutions, developers and financiers will increasingly include community and civil society views in hydropower and Renewable Energy development policies and plans.



Photos: Patrick Brown, Dustin Barter, Kimlong Meng X2.



This project is part of Oxfam's Mekong Regional Water Governance Program and International Rivers South East Asia Program. The Inclusion Project Phase 2 is supported by the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.



cambodia.oxfam.org

Contact: info.mrwgp@oxfam.org

internationalrivers.org