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ASIA LEARNING, MONITORING, AND EVALUATION SUPPORT PROJECT

SUSTAINABLE MEKONG PORTFOLIO EVALUATION

February 2017

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ACRONYMS

ABC	Association of Banks of Cambodia
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADPC	Asian Disaster Preparedness Center
AECEN	Asian Environment Compliance and Enforcement Network
AOR	Agreement Officer's Representative
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BRIDGE	Building River Dialogue and Governance
CEAC	China-ASEAN Environmental Cooperation Center
CGIAR	Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research
CIFOR	Participating Agency Program Agreement
COP	Chief of Party
CRM	Climate Resilient Mekong
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DMS	Division of Mineral Resources
DO	Development Objective
DOI	U.S. Department of the Interior
DoS	U.S. State Department
DRG	Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance
DWR	Department of Water Resources of Thailand
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EPA	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
ERI	EarthRights International
ERM	Environmental Resources Management Consulting
ESIA	Environmental and Social Impact Assessment
ESTH	Environment, Science, Technology, and Health
EU	European Union
FAA	Federal Administration Act
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FY	Fiscal Year
GEI	Global Environment Institute
GFOI	SilvaCarbon/Global Forest Observation Initiative
GIA	Gender Impact Assessment
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
GMS	Greater Mekong Sub-Region [China (Yunnan & Guangxi), Cambodia,
GMSCEP	Greater Mekong Sub-Region Core Environment Program
HAI	Hydro and Agro Informatics Institute
IFC	International Finance Corporation
IR	Intermediate Result
ITAP	International Technical Assistance Program
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
IWR	Institute for Water Resources
JAXA	Japanese Aerospace Exploration Agency

JICA	Japanese International Cooperation Agency
KI	Key Informant
KII	Key Informant Interview
LM	Lower Mekong
LMI	Lower Mekong Initiative (United States)
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MCRB	Myanmar Center for Responsible Business
MI	Mekong Institute
MPE	Mekong Partnership for the Environment
MRC	Mekong River Commission
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
NDF	Nordic Development Fund
NDVI	Normalized Difference Vegetation Index
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
NHI	Natural Heritage Institute
OVS	Office of Valuation Services
PAPA	Participating Agency Program Agreement
PEL	U.S.-China Partnership for Environmental Law
RDCS	Regional Development Cooperation Strategy
RDMA	Regional Development Mission for Asia
REO	Regional Environment Office
RTWG	Regional Technical Working Group
S&T	Science and Technology
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SEI	Stockholm Environment Institute
SES	Social and Environmental Safeguards
SI	Social Impact, Inc.
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SIM	Smart Infrastructure for the Mekong
SMP	Sustainable Mekong Portfolio
SOW	Scope of Work
SUMERNET	Sustainable Mekong Research Network
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
USACE	U. S. Army Corps of Engineers
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USD	U.S. Dollars
VCSB	Vietnamese Council for Responsible Business
WREA	Water Resources and Environment Administration of Laos
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Social Impact, Inc. (SI) was contracted to undertake a performance evaluation of the Sustainable Mekong Portfolio (SMP) for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)/Regional Development Mission for Asia (RDMA). This evaluation examines development gaps, challenges, and opportunities related to the conservation of the Lower Mekong Region’s environment and natural resources. USAID/RDMA will use the evaluation’s recommendations in programming existing and future funds for opportunities to advance the conservation of natural resources and the environment of the region. These opportunities may include new interventions, scaling up of current interventions, or other changes from USAID’s current SMP.

A. BACKGROUND OF THE SUSTAINABLE MEKONG PORTFOLIO

SMP includes the four USAID-financed activities that contribute to the achievement of both the goal of the Environment and Water Pillar of the U.S. State Department (DoS) Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) and Intermediate Result (IR) 1.1.3 of USAID/RDMA’s Regional Development Cooperation Strategy (RDMS).

The Environment and Water Pillar aims to “promote dialogue between LMI countries on sound and sustainable environmental management and strengthen capacity within and across LMI partner countries to manage shared water resources, improve water and sanitation access, and develop national and regional capacity to achieve water security and manage increasingly variable water resources.” Meanwhile, IR 1.1.3 works to improve the use of social and environmental safeguards (SES) and sound science for decision-making in regional development projects to contribute to improved regional management of natural capital.

Table 1 summarizes the activities of the SMP. The Scope of Work (SOW; see Appendix A) contains more detailed descriptions of these activities.

TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF THE ACTIVITIES IN THE SUSTAINABLE MEKONG PORTFOLIO

Activity	Countries	Implementing Partner(s)	Years	Estimated Cost	Objective	Notes
Smart Infrastructure for the Mekong (SIM)	Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam	U.S. Department of Interior (DOI)	2013–2018	\$6,032,000	Environmentally sound and socially equitable infrastructure	Part of larger USAID/DOI Participating Agency Program Agreement (PAPA)
Climate Resilient Mekong (CRM)	Cambodia, Laos	Natural Heritage Institute (NHI)	2010–2017	\$3,453,018	Improve siting, design, and operation of hydropower	Part of larger NHI Mekong dam project

Activity	Countries	Implementing Partner(s)	Years	Estimated Cost	Objective	Notes
					dams	
Mekong Partnership for the Environment (MPE)	Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, Burma	PACT & U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	2013–2017	\$12,998,554 (PACT) \$1,123,376 (EPA)	Technically capable & effective civil society networks in the Lower Mekong Region	Nov. 2016 decision to reduce funding by just under \$2M & closure 6 months earlier than planned
SERVIR–Mekong	Cambodia, Laos, Burma, Thailand, Vietnam	Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC)	2014–2019	\$7,494,350	Enhance climate change adaptation and landscape management via application of GIS data.	One of 3 NASA geospatial data “hubs”

Source: USAID 2016

B. EVALUATION PURPOSE AND AUDIENCE

The SMP Portfolio Evaluation will be used to inform USAID/RDMA, USAID/Washington, U.S. Department of State (DoS), USAID bilateral missions and U.S. Embassies in the sub-region, and other U.S. government agencies such as the U.S. Department of Interior (DOI), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on development gaps, challenges and opportunities for existing and future programming. Specifically, the evaluation was designed to answer the following questions:

C. EVALUATION QUESTIONS

1. Effectiveness of Current Portfolio

- i. To what extent is the current Sustainable Mekong Portfolio as a whole, as well as each of the five major Activities, already contributing to the achievement of sub-purpose 1.1.3: “Improved use of social and environmental safeguards and sound science for decision-making in regional development investments” in the Lower Mekong Sub-region?
- ii. What interventions, opportunities, or corrective or adaptive actions should RDMA and the U.S. government consider and implement to accelerate sub-purpose 1.1.3: “Improved use of social and environmental safeguards and sound science for decision-making in regional development investments” in the Lower Mekong Sub-region?

2. Future programming

- i. What other interventions, opportunities, or corrective or adaptive actions should RDMA prioritize in future programming for the Lower Mekong Countries
 - a. considering what other stakeholders, for example bilateral missions, other U.S. government agencies, bilateral donors, multilateral development banks, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), universities, private sector, and others, have been doing;
 - b. to contribute to IR 1.1: “improved regional management of natural capital” through the “improved use of social and environmental safeguards and sound science for decision-making in the Lower Mekong Sub-region”; and
 - c. in response to other USAID and U.S. government policies and priorities related to the environment, for example Climate Change and Development, Biodiversity, or Resilience?
- ii. How should RDMA further strengthen coordination with partners and/or leverage efforts of regional institutions/platforms, such as the Mekong River Commission (MRC), bilateral missions, other U.S. government agencies, bilateral donors, multilateral development banks, NGOs, universities, private sector, and others, to address the future priorities/foci identified in this portfolio evaluation?

D. EVALUATION DESIGN, METHODS, AND LIMITATIONS

This snapshot evaluation design used primarily key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), and document review. Using purposive sampling techniques, the team selected key informants from among implementers, beneficiaries, and other stakeholders of the four SMP activities. Transcripts of each interview as well as FGD summaries were analyzed for trends within and across the four SMP activities. Where useful, data was disaggregated by sex, activity, and country.

Evaluation limitations include a broad scope of inquiry, sampling bias, and response bias. To minimize the effect of these limitations, the evaluation team triangulated the findings from multiple respondents and data sources.

E. FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To avoid duplicate references, the team has structured the report to present on each activity and then SMP as a whole. Similarly, because of the nature of the evaluation questions, and upon agreement with USAID, the team has combined certain evaluation questions (such as A1 and A2) to ensure a logical flow of information and readily identified links between findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

QUESTIONS A1 AND A2

Smart Infrastructure for the Mekong (SIM)

Smart Infrastructure for the Mekong supports natural resource management associated with the sustainable development of large infrastructure and land use projects through capacity development and the use of technology, information, technical expertise, and decision-making tools. The team found mixed results with respect to SIM’s contributions to IR 1.1.3.

SIM’s technical assistance and training has been particularly effective by increasing the quality, timeliness, and quantity of environmental data. Up-to-date, high-quality data enables government regulators to write and enforce more technically sound regulations. Better regulations reduce

investment risk and therefore contribute to attracting more investment in the infrastructure that the Lower Mekong countries require to prosper. Reliable data also strengthens the negotiating position of the Lower Mekong countries vis-à-vis China on issues concerning the use of the Mekong River's water. Notable barriers to efficiency and effectiveness include cumbersome operating procedures, a need for more careful selection of trainees and technical advisors, and a limited scope that does not include valuation of minerals and other natural resources. Similarly, there are needs for socioeconomic technical assistance and training, biological and geophysical technical assistance and training, and technical advice on the siting and design of Mekong River dams. Furthermore, men are demonstrably more heavily represented than women in SIM training events according to program documentation, although this is a reflection of demographics within the target ministries more so than of unequal selection by SIM.

Overall, the evaluation team concludes that SIM is partially contributing to sub-purpose 1.1.3 by improving the use of sound science for decision-making in regional development investments and by improving the use of some environmental safeguards. SIM could do more to achieve the latter half of the sub-purpose by providing socioeconomic assistance and focusing more on hydropower dams with its programming. As the Lower Mekong countries and DOI gain more experience working together, SIM's effectiveness is likely to increase. There are ways, however, to accelerate SIM's effectiveness. We recommend that RDMA and DOI adjust SIM in the following ways:

1. **Simplify the approval process for Concept Notes.** The DOI should assist ministries in preparing Yearly Technical Assistance and Training Plans that include Concept Notes. The country's Foreign Ministry, the U.S. Embassy, and USAID/RDMA should review and approve these plans once a year. DOI should be given the flexibility to implement the plans with the minimum required approvals.
2. **Contract SIM country coordinators.** We recommend that SIM contract country coordinators for Laos, Cambodia, and Burma. They would reduce the workload of SIM on USAID missions, the U.S. Embassies, and DOI and enable SIM to respond more rapidly and flexibly to the specific technical assistance/training needs.
3. **Widen SIM's range of technical assistance/training.** Concept Notes should address the socioeconomic aspects together with their biological and geophysical aspects, giving particular attention to the issues of gender and ethnic minorities.
4. **Emphasize regional technical assistance and training while focusing on Laos, Cambodia, and Burma.** We recommend that SIM emphasize regional technical assistance and training while focusing on the technical assistance and training needs of Laos, Cambodia, and Burma.
5. **Set targets for female participation in training.** SIM should set and reach numerical targets for providing training to women in order to meet its own stated goals and honor USAID's policy. It should consider including women from outside target ministries, such as students or faculty from public universities in the region, to meet these targets.

Mekong Partnership for the Environment (MPE)

The Mekong Partnership for the Environment's goal was originally: "improved use of social and environmental safeguards." MPE chose to focus on one aspect of SES, the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process, and within that, on public participation. Since late 2015, MPE has designed and organized the participative preparation of regional technical guidelines for public participation in EIAs through regional technical working groups (RTWGs). The RTWG process has been effective in four ways:

1. It has raised civil society organization (CSO), government, and business awareness of the usefulness of public participation in EIAs,
2. increased collaboration between some national ministries,
3. increased collaboration between some ministries and CSOs, and
4. has provided an example of how government and CSOs can work together regionally to formulate a feasible regional solution to an environmental procedural and technical need.

All of these are important components to reach IR 1.1.3. The regional guidelines for public participation in EIA establish a regional standard for public participation.

The regional guidelines have not yet been approved. Even if approved, however, their actual use may turn out to be quite limited. Laos, Cambodia, and Burma, countries comparatively new to EIAs, may consult the guidelines when drafting new or modifying existing EIA regulations. Thailand and Vietnam's EIA regulations are comparatively well established, so these countries are less likely to use the guidelines. The regional guidelines indicate five steps in the EIA process where public participation should occur. The region's authoritarian governments are unlikely to adopt Steps 4 and 5, which involve public participation in decision-making about investment projects and in monitoring compliance with EIA mitigation measures. Without Steps 4 and 5, however, the EIA process in the Lower Mekong countries, as in most other countries, will remain mostly a legal formality that only marginally affects investment decisions. MPE, perhaps because of its focus on the RTWGs, has given less attention than was originally proposed to increasing the capacity of civil society for social and environmental safeguards and science for influencing decision-making about infrastructure investments. MPE's focus on the RTWG may also have loosened the ties between research and environmental and social safeguards important in its original design.

Nonetheless, MPE has been extremely effective in several of its other components. Its institutional strengthening component has strengthened over 100 CSOs in the Lower Mekong Region and has fashioned them into a network that seems likely to continue after MPE ends. The Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) has financed research that is providing reliable insights on various aspects of the socioeconomic and environmental effects of large infrastructure projects. MPE's sustainable banking component has persuaded the Association of Banks of Cambodia (ABC) to commit its 40 members to sustainable banking principles and thereby permitted Cambodia's admittance into the International Finance Corporation's Sustainable Banking Network. The environmental journalism component with Internews has reached thousands of readers with its internet site, Mekong News, which has sometimes served to spread news regionally that could not be published nationally about the negative environmental effects of infrastructure projects.

Based on these findings, we conclude that, overall, MPE has been effective in many ways in assisting RDMA to work toward achievement of IR 1.1.3. In particular, MPE contributed to achieving the use of SES for decision-making in regional development investments through the specific avenue of increasing public participation in the EIA process. The RTWG approach employed to accomplish this was highly effective and may serve as a blueprint for improving other aspects of SES to which MPE did not contribute. Based on its experiences, we recommend that MPE take the following measures to increase its effectiveness:

- 1. Complete preparation of the regional guidelines for public participation in EIA.** We recommend that MPE complete the consultation and approval process for the regional guidelines for public participation in the EIA and then provide for their widespread dissemination. PACT should recommend specific steps to disseminate the regional guidelines to

specific government institutions, CSOs, and private enterprises or associations of private enterprises.

- 2. Utilize the MPE regional working group experience in current and future SMP activities.** USAID/RDMA should incorporate MPE’s successful experience with regional working groups into the other current SMP activities. SERVIR-Mekong and SIM can study MPE’s experiences with the regional working groups to identify specific ways to incorporate that experience into their own regional activities. We also recommend that USAID/RDMA incorporate the MPE experience with RTWGs into the design and implementation of future SMP activities.
- 3. Emphasize public participation in EIA as a means to reduce investment risks.** We recommend that USAID/RDMA emphasize the role of public participation in EIA processes in reducing the risks associated with investments in large infrastructure projects. USAID/RDMA should request that MPE, perhaps through the SEI, thoroughly examine the relationship between public participation in EIA and reduced investment risk and determine how its experiences with promoting public participation in EIA can best be conveyed to private sector investors.

Climate Resilient Mekong (CRM)

The goals and objectives of Climate Resilient Mekong are ambitious, aiming to “transform the official development plan for the Mekong River by informing and influencing the . . . siting, design and operation of hydropower throughout the entire Mekong River system” so that they do not destroy the socioeconomic and ecological stability of the Lower Mekong countries.

RDMA has hoped that the Natural Heritage Institute (NHI) could effectively address this pressing issue by coming up with ways to redesign the hydropower dams so that fish can bypass them, going up- and down-river without excessive mortality, and so that sediments can be flushed downstream out of their reservoirs. CRM’s reports indicate that CRM has made dedicated and exhaustive efforts to find technical means to resolve this issue satisfactorily. The reports are inconclusive, however, as to what CRM has in fact accomplished. Although the COP of CRM is confident that the program has achieved results in changing the decision-making process associated with these dams, documentary and other key informant evidence presents an opposing view, wherein the siting and design of these dams in Laos in particular still weighs economic interests more heavily than social and environmental concerns.

We conclude that CRM, as designed, is highly relevant for using SES to inform decision-making in the siting and operation of hydropower dams on the Mekong River and its tributaries. These hydropower dams so threaten the Mekong Basin’s environment, biodiversity, economy, society, and culture that RDMA made the right decision in devoting funds to the CRM activity. However, the degree to which CRM has been effective in this aim is inconclusive, based on the data collected for this study. CRM has made a valiant attempt to solve what may be an intractable issue. We conclude, however, that NHI has taken CRM as far as it can. We therefore recommend that RDMA

- 1. Continue to focus SMP on hydropower dams on the Mekong River & its tributaries.** The threat to the welfare of the Lower Mekong Region from these dams has increased rather than decreased, so we recommend that RDMA explore other ways to reduce the negative impacts of the hydropower dams than by changing their designs. One such measure would be to assist the Lower Mekong countries to identify and develop sources of energy that do not require the construction of hydropower dams on the Mekong. Another measure would be to assist the countries to mitigate the socioeconomic and ecological harm that the dams are already causing and that additional hydropower dams will exacerbate.

- 2. Request NHI provide sufficient, up-to-date, accurate and intelligible data about CRM's results.** NHI should present RDMA with further data regarding what results CRM has actually produced as compared to its anticipated results. It could then determine whether to continue to finance or extend NHI or seek an alternative method of assisting the Lower Mekong countries to address the negative impacts of the proposed and current hydropower dams.

SERVIR-Mekong

SERVIR-Mekong supplies an important regional service to the extent that its production and use of geospatial mapping tools does not duplicate the work of other institutions. SERVIR-Mekong was added to SMP within the last year. Perhaps for that reason, its goals and objectives do not coincide exactly with IR 1.1.3. For example, SERVIR-Mekong is not involved directly in improving the use of SES. Since it provides tools to analyze and use geospatial data, it could contribute to the use of science to make decisions regarding infrastructure investments. SERVIR-Mekong spent its first two years ascertaining the demand for its services and developing tools to respond to that demand. Consequently, it has only recently provided its first three tools, making it unlikely that they have yet influenced any decisions. SERVIR-Mekong has not been able to be fully effective because it has been restricted in its activities in Laos and Burma. SERVIR-Mekong has given substantial attention to gender issues by producing a handbook that includes Guidance Notes that provide guidance to application developers and potential application users on integrating gender concerns in the production of GIS applications for environmental/natural resource management, disaster risk management, and building resilience to climate change. SERVIR-Mekong is institutionally well established because of its home in the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center and its support from the U.S. government through the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in addition to USAID.

On the basis of these findings, we conclude that SERVIR-Mekong, after a gestation period, is beginning to become effective and that it is probable that it will become highly effective as it gains experience in promoting the use of its tools and services and collaborating with regional and national institutions and organizations. Although SERVIR-Mekong is likely to improve regional environmental decision-making, it may not do so in the particular ways that are sought after by sub-purpose 1.1.3. To the extent that geospatial mapping tools represent “sound science,” SERVIR-Mekong is contributing to the inclusion of these into regional environmental decision-making, although it is unclear if this has affected regional development investments. Likewise, SERVIR-Mekong is poised to increase the consideration of gender dynamics (and thus improve the use of SES) in environmental decision-making through its “Gender and GIS” small grants program, but it is not clear how or if this will affect regional development investments either.

The measure we recommend for SERVIR-Mekong will not so much accelerate its contribution to IR 1.1.3 as clarify that contribution:

Define SERVIR-Mekong's expected contribution to IR 1.1.3 and/or LMI. We recommend that SERVIR-Mekong's contribution to IR 1.1.3 and/or LMI be more clearly defined.

Sustainable Mekong Portfolio

SMP's origin as USAID's response to the LMI prevented it from being a coordinated, interrelated set of technical responses. Rather, the four SMP activities were consolidated in a portfolio that would support the LMI but were never fully aligned to incorporate concrete targets to contribute to IR 1.1.3 achievement, making contribution somewhat difficult to measure. The IR 1.1.3 statement uses ambiguous terms that make the links between the SMP activities and the achievement of IR 1.1.3 difficult to understand, including what would constitute sound science; who is a decision-maker; and

which safeguards are being referred. The portfolio's M&E plans seek to produce quantitative evidence for expected outputs and outcomes that might only be measured qualitatively, such as changes in decision-making.

SMP's activities to achieve IR 1.1.3 are important not only for their attention to environmental concerns but also because these environmental concerns can affect the investment climate in the Lower Mekong Region and therefore its chances of achieving equitable prosperity.

Based on these findings, we conclude that, overall, the SMP Portfolio has been moderately successful in achieving the goals and objectives of both IR 1.1.3 and LMI. In addition to the individual activity recommendations above, we recommend that RDMA

1. **Clarify SMP's objectives by re-writing the IR 1.1.3 statement.** We recommend that IR 1.1.3 be rewritten so that it uses unambiguous terms. For example, rather than use the term "social and environmental safeguards" and "sound science" it could state clearly that the purpose of IR 1.1.3 is to assist the Lower Mekong countries to "to measure, understand, avoid, and mitigate negative social and environmental impacts of large infrastructure projects."
2. **Continue model for regional coordination.** We recommend that RDMA design, finance, and implement a new activity that would continue the regional coordination work that MPE started successfully using RTWG and multi-stakeholder consultations.
3. **Make SMP's monitoring and evaluation (M&E) more useful.** We recommend that RDMA revise SMP's M&E plans so that they become more useful and accurate and include qualitative as well as quantitative measures of effectiveness.
4. **Incorporate social, and particularly gender-oriented, issues explicitly in SMP activities.** We recommend that RDMA explicitly incorporate social, and particularly gender-oriented, issues and strategies into the SMP activities. This would include strategies to understand and engage these populations with respect to their role in policy and decision-making, and setting targets for the training of women and ethnic minority groups.

QUESTION B

As evaluation questions B1 and B2 explicitly ask for recommendations, we have included these in the Executive Summary. For more information regarding these recommendations and the evaluation findings and conclusions that support them, please see Sections III.B and III.C in the body of the report. In these sections, we characterize the stakeholders and U.S. government policies that are relevant to the region and subject matter according to the activities they generally engage in and their suitability for inclusion and/or partnership in future RDMA activities.

Question B1

We find that the SMP, as it currently exists, stakes out an important and appropriate role for RDMA in regional environmental programming that is not filled by other stakeholders in the region. It would be feasible for RDMA to continue playing this role. U.S. government policies open the possibility of including future programming that targets biodiversity and climate change adaptation on the basis of contributing to IR 1.1 more broadly. In light of these factors, we believe that RDMA should stay the course in future programming and follow the example of SMP. In doing so, we recommend that RDMA

1. **Build on current SMP activities** in its future programming. SMP has had at least partial success with its programming to date and has built critical relationships through its existing networks. It would be unwise to take on future programming that did not take advantage of this experience or these relationships.

2. **Improve current SMP activities by implementing the recommendations for SIM, SERVIR-Mekong, and SMP overall.** While we believe the other recommendations to be highly useful, they are less relevant with other activities being closed.
3. **Incorporate MPE experiences** into its future programming, including RTWG on urgent regional issues such as gender, information dissemination, post-construction resettlement, and research on the socioeconomic and environmental effects of large infrastructure projects.
4. **Investigate the possibility of funding future programming that targets conservation of biodiversity and management of sustainable landscapes** on the basis that these areas of need in the region fit within RDMA's existing priorities.

Question B2

The main focus this evaluation has established for future RDMA programming is to continue and build on the activities of the SMP. Based on this determination and on the set of other stakeholders in the region with similar objectives, the report recommends that RDMA:

1. **Improve communication with the bilateral missions** about RDMA programming. This could be accomplished by including local staff that are relevant to programming, such as economic growth staff, in email communications or by conducting periodic in-person visits.
2. **Leverage funds from the LMI** by coordinating closely with DoS and responding to its objectives for LMI. This coordination could be improved by clarifying the relationship between RDMA and LMI. Ensuring that future programming can meet diplomatic as well as development objectives may facilitate leveraging LMI funding.
3. **Leverage the technical expertise from other USG partners** including the DOI in particular and the other U.S. government agencies the DOI can tap for technical expertise, such as the USACE.
4. **Consider the Asian Development Bank (ADB) as an institutional mechanism for coordination with other regional EIA institutions** by coordinating and collaborating with the Greater Mekong Sub-Region Core Environmental Program (GMSCEP).
5. **Coordinate closely with the Vermont Law School** with attention to its programs in the Lower Mekong Region, particularly if RDMA is considering investigating the possibility of engaging Chinese decision-makers on issues related to SES.
6. **Explore potential for collaboration with EarthRights International (ERI) and the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI)** as partners for follow-on activities related to MPE programming, such as public participation in EIA.
7. **Coordinate with the MRC** in order to better accomplish the objectives of the LMI and thereby maintain effective coordination and leverage with DoS. This coordination could include regular meetings and sharing of information.

I. BACKGROUND

A. SUSTAINABLE MEKONG PORTFOLIO (SMP) OBJECTIVES

SMP is a \$31.1 million initiative comprising four activities that together span a timeframe from 2010 to 2019 (see Table 1). SMP works to mitigate the negative social and environmental impacts of infrastructure development in the Lower Mekong (LM) sub-region, which includes Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam. This portfolio is intended to contribute to the achievement of Intermediate Result (IR) 1.1.3 of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)/Regional Development Mission for Asia (RDMA) Results Framework and to the Environment and Water Pillar of the U.S. Department of State's (DoS's) Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) (USAID 2016a). Its interventions aim to increase stakeholders' access to reliable information on the anticipated social and environmental costs and benefits of infrastructure projects as well as on realistic measures to reduce the risks of infrastructure investments. In doing so, SMP hopes to increase the application of strong and functional Social and Environmental Safeguards (SES) and sound science in decisionmaking in regional development investments. SMP efforts will "provide reliable energy access, strengthen energy security, improve air quality, reduce health costs, boost economic growth, reduce transnational conflict, and promote food security and biodiversity conservation" (USAID 2016a).

B. SUSTAINABLE MEKONG PORTFOLIO INTERMEDIATE RESULT 1.1.3

IR 1.1.3 is: "Improved use of environmental and social safeguards and sound science for decision-making in regional development projects." IR 1.1.3 contributes to IR1.1: "Improved Regional management of Natural Capital." IR1.1 contributes to Results Framework Development Objective (DO) 1: "Regional Institutions' Ability to Promote Sustainable and Equitable Regional Growth Increased."

Activities under IR 1.1.3 are intended to

- Advance informed decisionmaking that considers sound science and the anticipated social and environmental costs and benefits of regional development projects;
- Facilitate increased coordination among national governments through regional bodies concerned with infrastructure and regional environmental impact assessment (EIA);
- Improve awareness, access, and use of reliable information, including geospatial data, on the anticipated social and environmental costs and benefits of infrastructure investments by all stakeholders; and
- Deliver on-demand technical assistance to Lower Mekong governments to help mitigate potential negative social and environmental impacts of large infrastructure projects (USAID 2016).

Figure 1, below, breaks IR 1.1.3 down further into individual inputs and outputs that are meant to track the progress of its execution.

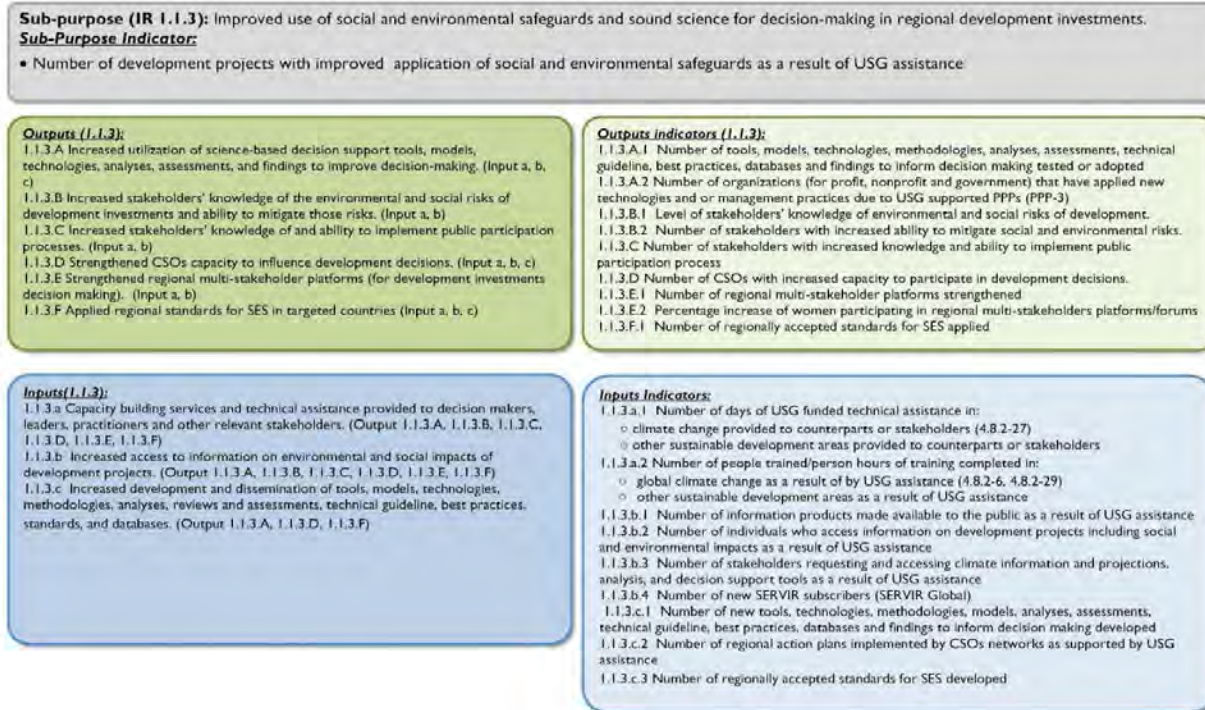


FIGURE 1 IR.1.1.3 INPUTS, OUTPUTS, AND INDICATORS

C. LOWER MEKONG INITIATIVE

The LMI, led by DoS, works to “deliver equitable, sustainable, and inclusive economic growth among the five LMI partner countries by promoting connectivity and collaboratively addressing regional trans-boundary development and policy challenges.” SMP is designed to contribute to the LMI's Environment and Water Pillar in particular. The objective of this pillar is to “promote dialogue between LMI countries on sound and sustainable environmental management and strengthen capacity within and across LMI partner countries to manage shared water resources, improve water and sanitation access, and develop national and regional capacity to achieve water security and manage increasingly variable water resources” (see Appendix C).

D. SUSTAINABLE MEKONG PORTFOLIO ACTIVITIES

Table 1 summarizes the activities of the SMP. The Scope of Work (SOW) contains more detailed descriptions of these activities (See Appendix A).

TABLE 1 SUMMARY OF THE ACTIVITIES IN THE SUSTAINABLE MEKONG PORTFOLIO

Activity	Countries	Implementing Partner(s)	Years	Estimated Cost	Objective	Notes
Smart Infrastructure for the Mekong (SIM)	Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam	U.S. Department of Interior (DOI)	2013–2018	\$6,032,000	Environmentally sound and socially equitable	Part of larger USAID/DOI Participating

Activity	Countries	Implementing Partner(s)	Years	Estimated Cost	Objective	Notes
					infrastructure	Agency Program Agreement (PAPA)
Climate Resilient Mekong (CRM)	Cambodia, Laos	Natural Heritage Institute (NHI)	2010-2017	\$3,453,018	Improve siting, design, and operation of hydropower dams	Part of larger NHI Mekong dam project
Mekong Partnership for the Environment (MPE)	Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, Burma	PACT & U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	2013-2017	\$12,998,554 (PACT) \$1,123,376 (EPA)	Technically capable & effective civil society networks in the Lower Mekong Region	Nov. 2016 decision to reduce funding by just under \$2M & closure 6 months earlier than planned
SERVIR-Mekong	Cambodia, Laos, Burma, Thailand, Vietnam	Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC)	2014-2019	\$7,494,350	Enhance climate change adaptation and landscape management via application of GIS data.	One of 3 NASA geospatial data "hubs"

Source: USAID 2016

E. EVALUATION PURPOSE AND AUDIENCE¹

This evaluation is intended to inform USAID/RDMA about development gaps, challenges, and opportunities related to the conservation of the Lower Mekong Region's environment and natural resources. USAID/RDMA will use the evaluation's recommendations to program existing and future funds for opportunities to advance the conservation of natural resources and the environment of the

¹ As revised in the Work Plan and approved by RDMA.

Lower Mekong Region. These opportunities may include new interventions, scaling up of current interventions, or other changes from USAID’s current SMP.

The evaluation will be used to inform USAID/RDMA, USAID/Washington, DoS, USAID bilateral Missions, and U.S. Embassies in the sub-region as well as other U.S. government agencies such as the U.S. Department of Interior (DOI), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), on development gaps, challenges, and opportunities for existing and future programming.

F. EVALUATION QUESTIONS

This evaluation answers the following evaluation questions:

1. Effectiveness of Current Portfolio

- i. To what extent is the current Sustainable Mekong Portfolio as a whole, as well as each of the five major Activities, already contributing to the achievement of sub-purpose 1.1.3: “Improved use of social and environmental safeguards and sound science for decision-making in regional development investments” in the Lower Mekong Sub-region?
- ii. What interventions, opportunities, or corrective or adaptive actions should RDMA and the U.S. government consider and implement to accelerate sub-purpose 1.1.3: “Improved use of social and environmental safeguards and sound science for decision-making in regional development investments” in the Lower Mekong Sub-region?

2. Future programming

- i. What other interventions, opportunities, or corrective or adaptive actions should RDMA prioritize in future programming for the Lower Mekong Countries
 - a. considering what other stakeholders, for example bilateral missions, other U.S. government agencies, bilateral donors, multilateral development banks, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), universities, private sector, and others, have been doing;
 - b. to contribute to IR 1.1: “improved regional management of natural capital” through the “improved use of social and environmental safeguards and sound science for decision-making in the Lower Mekong Sub-region”; and
 - c. in response to other USAID and U.S. government policies and priorities related to the environment, for example Climate Change and Development, Biodiversity, or Resilience?
- ii. How should RDMA further strengthen coordination with partners and/or leverage efforts of regional institutions/platforms, such as the Mekong River Commission (MRC), bilateral missions, other U.S. government agencies, bilateral donors, multilateral development banks, NGOs, universities, private sector, and others, to address the future priorities/foci identified in this portfolio evaluation?

II. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

A. TEAM COMPOSITION AND ROLES

The team leader, a social and environmental safeguards (SES) specialist, and a senior monitoring and evaluation (M&E) specialist were the core members of the evaluation team. They were joined by a local researcher in each country. Technical support for the evaluation from Social Impact, Inc. (SI) staff included a gender specialist, a technical director, and a project manager. SI's administrative support staff consisted of the Chief of Party (COP) of SI in Bangkok, a logistician, and an administrative assistant.

B. DATA COLLECTION

Primary data collection methods included document review, key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs). Program documents and relevant data from other institutions were used to triangulate findings gleaned through primary data collection. Appendix H provides the guides that were prepared for interviews with SMP implementers and beneficiaries.

The sampling frame was created using a purposive approach, identifying relevant actors in each country and for each activity. These actors were then divided into the categories of project implementers, project beneficiaries, and U.S. government staff. The team then scheduled as many interviews as possible with these actors and worked to obtain an equal number of key informants (KIs) from educational institutions, government, civil society organizations (CSOs), and businesses, and an equal number of male and female KIs. More KIs, however, were drawn from the Mekong Partnership for the Environment (MPE) than the other three activities because MPE has been involved with a larger variety of sectors than have the other activities. More men were interviewed than women, as there were a greater number in the sample frame of potential KIs. Table 2 indicates the country, sex, and category of the KIs. The identity of the KIs has been kept confidential to protect the anonymity of respondents.

TABLE 2 NUMBER, SEX, COUNTRY, AND CATEGORY OF KEY INFORMANTS

Activity	T	Sex		Country					Category					
		M	F	B	C	L	T	V	IP	USG	NG	CS	ML	PS
Climate Resilient Mekong	3	2	1	0	1	2	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0
Mekong Partnership for the Environment	29	18	11	6	6	4	7	6	8	0	8	10	1	2
Smart Infrastructure Mekong	8	6	2	0	1	3	2	0	0	2	4	0	0	0
SERVIR-Mekong	4	3	1	0	1	2	1	0	1	1	2	0	0	0

Activity	T	Sex		Country					Category					
		M	F	B	C	L	T	V	IP	USG	NG	CS	ML	PS
General	8	5	3	0	0	0	4	2		0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	52	34	18	6	9	11	14	8	10	4	15	10	1	2

Key: M-male; F-Female; B-Burma; C-Cambodia; L-Laos; T-Thailand; V-Vietnam; IP-Implementing Partner; USG-U.S. government; NG-National Government; CS-Civil Society Organization; ML-Multi-lateral Organization; PS-Private Sector

Interviews were transcribed for analysis following fieldwork.

The team prepared an interview guide for each of the five SMP implementing partners and another for each of their respective beneficiaries. The interview guides were structured around the evaluation questions to collect data that would provide the basis for evidence-based responses to each question in the SOW.

The country researchers organized one FGD each in Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Time limitations prevented an FGD in Burma. The country researchers moderated and recorded the FGDs. They were conducted in Khmer in Cambodia, Lao in Laos, and Thai in Thailand. In Vietnam, the participants chose to speak in English. Men and women attended the FGD together. The topic chosen for discussion at the FGDs was the process MPE had used to prepare regional guidelines for public participation in EIAs. This topic was selected because the preparation of these regional guidelines involved more people than any other aspect of SMP's activities. The participants in the FGD were invited because they had been involved in the preparation of the regional EIA guidelines. The protocol for the FGDs can be found in Appendix D.

C. DATA ANALYSIS

The transcripts of the KIIs and FGDs were grouped by SMP activity. Each transcript was placed in the first column of a table, subdivided as much as possible according to the questions in the interview guides. Each transcript was then analyzed to identify findings. The findings were written out in a column to the right of the first column. These findings for each KII and FGD as well as more overarching findings were formulated based on an initial trend analysis and were given a title and number under each of the four activities.

Triangulation Tables were prepared for each of the four projects. These tables' first columns list the number and title of the findings for the activity, with the second columns listing the KII and FGD data supporting each finding. The third columns provide references to the supporting documentary data. The report cites a few KIIs whose data could not be triangulated with other KIIs or documentary data but whose experience clearly provided a sound basis for trusting his or her opinion. The report identifies these KIIs.

Conclusions for each of the four activities were drawn from the findings, and recommendations were formulated based on the conclusions.

D. METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS

1. Limitations of the Data

The four SMP activities have produced hundreds of documents and worked with many people in five countries. Given the available time and budget, the evaluation team could obtain data from only

selected documents and participants. Aside from essential guiding documents such as contractual instruments and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plans, the team prioritized the remainder of documents for review based on how recently they were published, their relevance to the evaluation questions, and what enriching information they provided to the analysis. The sampling approach described in the previous section was designed to include as diverse a set of respondents as possible and capture a wide variety of viewpoints.

2. Scope of Inquiry

The SOW for the evaluation refers to several different scopes of inquiry. The SOW questions refer to IR 1.1.3 both in the current activities of SMP and in possible future interventions but do not refer to the LMI. Yet, the SOW also says that the evaluation “will determine if USAID/RDMA is focusing its LMI assistance resources effectively and identify potential areas of focus in the future.” Since the evaluation methodology was based on the evaluation questions, KIIs were not selected based on their knowledge of LMI, and exhaustive KII data were not collected about LMI.

3. Sampling Bias

Given the short timeframe available, the team was unable to spend significant amounts of time tracking down respondents who did not respond or agree to be interviewed. As such, it is possible that interviewed KIIs have differing views or experiences than those who did not respond or accept. Similarly, time limitations prevented the evaluation team from traveling outside of Bangkok, Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Phnom Penh, and Yangon, so all KIIs lived in or near these cities. Potential KIIs who live outside these cities may have systematically different viewpoints about SMP activities owing to geographic and sociopolitical contexts, but this was not explored. Finally, the team did not interview many informants who had not been involved with any aspect of SMP, and it is possible that they would also have differing perspectives than those reflected here. Documentary and KII data were sufficiently abundant to reduce the risk that any single source of data would unduly influence the conclusions that were drawn from the findings. However, findings from this evaluation should not be extrapolated to those populations that were not included here.

4. Response Bias

Many of the KIIs have worked on or were still working on some aspect of one or more SMP activity. These KIIs may have emphasized their own successes. Government officials may have tended to respond to the evaluation questions in ways that reflected the official position of their government on issues with which SMP activities have been involved. By sampling across diverse stakeholder groups and conducting an intensive document review to permit the triangulation of evaluation findings, the team has mitigated the risk of response bias influencing evaluation findings.

5. Timing of Data Collection

This evaluation was conducted in late 2016 so that it could reasonably inform considerations of future RDMA/Regional Environment Office (REO) programming. However, many of the SMP activities had components still ongoing or yet to occur at the time of the evaluation. Thus, the evaluation will naturally be unable to capture the full and final outcomes and impacts of the SMP’s activities and characterize their contribution toward sub-IR 1.1.3. The report notes any occasion where evaluation findings and conclusions have changed owing to new evidence uncovered between the data collection period and the submission of the final evaluation report.

III. FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section responds to each of the evaluation questions posed in the evaluation’s SOW. Although the overall questions (A and B) contain their own findings, conclusions, and recommendations, the nature of the sub-questions that comprise each is such that the recommendations for some will flow logically from the findings and conclusions of prior questions.

Specifically, Section III.A of this report responds to both evaluation sub-questions A.1 and A.2. It responds to the former by presenting findings and conclusions that characterize the extent to which each of the components of the SMP, as well as the portfolio overall, is contributing to the achievement of IR 1.1.3. It responds to the latter by presenting recommendations as to how USAID/RDMA can accelerate its achievement of IR 1.1.3 that flow logically from the way SMP is currently achieving (or not achieving) its desired results.

In response to evaluation question B, Section III.B of the report begins with evaluation findings that characterize what other stakeholders in the region are doing as well as what other U.S. government policies are relevant to RDMA’s work. These findings are relevant for all of evaluation question B. The remainder of Section III.B answers evaluation sub-question B.1 by presenting conclusions and recommendations as to how other stakeholders’ activities and other U.S. government policies should affect future RDMA programming. In turn, Section III.C responds to evaluation sub-question B.2 by presenting conclusions and recommendations as to how RDMA should leverage or coordinate with other stakeholders to improve upon the different foci identified in this evaluation based on the activities of other stakeholders as they were presented in Section III.B.

A. QUESTION A: EFFECTIVENESS OF CURRENT SMP PORTFOLIO AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

1. *To what extent is the current Sustainable Mekong Portfolio as a whole, as well as each of the five major activities, already contributing to the achievement of Sub-purpose 1.1.3: “Improved use of social and environmental safeguards and sound science for decision-making in regional development investments” in the Lower Mekong Sub-region?*
2. *What interventions, opportunities, or corrective or adaptive actions should RDMA and the U.S. government consider and implement to accelerate the sub-purpose 1.1.3: “Improved use of social and environmental safeguards and sound science for decision-making in regional development investments” in the Lower Mekong Sub-region?*

1. SMART INFRASTRUCTURE FOR THE MEKONG (SIM)

Background and Design

SIM has both a developmental goal and a foreign policy goal. Its **developmental** goal is to “support natural resource management associated with the sustainable development of large infrastructure and land use projects” (SIM 2016). Objectives associated with this goal are: (1) increase access to and use

of technology, information, technical expertise, and decision-making tools; and (2) increase capacity and expertise of Lower Mekong governments to address adverse environmental and social impacts of development projects through participatory processes (SIM 2016). SIM's **foreign policy** goal is to contribute to the LMI as "part of . . . U.S. government foreign policy and strategic relationships in the region." The objectives stated in the LMI Master Plan are sustainable growth through regional capacity-building activities, establishment of platforms for dialogue, and facilitation of opportunities for exchange of expertise and best practices (State 2016).

SIM was designed to be "demand-driven." Requests for SIM assistance are sent from one or more ministries to a country's Ministry of Foreign Relations, which endorses it and sends it to the U.S. Embassy. There, the Environment, Science, Technology, and Health (ESTH) Officer reviews the request and then forwards it to RDMA/REO for review, approval, and financing. Approval is transmitted back to the ministry along the same channels (DoS 2016b). The activity was conceived as a means to respond to a broad range of requests for technical assistance/training that might be submitted by the Lower Mekong countries. SIM could include technical assistance/training for any sort of infrastructure that reflects their respective governments' priorities, without regard to the priorities of the USG. It lists five broad technical areas for which DOI can provide technical advice and training: infrastructure, water resources, energy, land use, and cross-sectoral. Within these five areas, the Services Menu lists thirty-five different technical areas in which DOI can provide technical assistance and training (USAID 2015).

Several KIs noted that SIM funding is provided annually, so it is uncertain what the funding level will be each year. The Participating Agency Program Agreement (PAPA) is unclear about the amount of funds allocated to SIM out of the overall PAPA funding.

Findings²

Relevance. Numerous KIs from all the countries but Thailand, including KIs from government, the private sector, and CSOs, concurred in the relevance of SIM's technical assistance and training. Thai KIs, by contrast, expressed less need for SIM's technical assistance but did emphasize the usefulness of its regional coordination activities. SIM's own documents, especially its Concept Notes, corroborate in detail how its technical assistance and training will increase government capacity to conserve natural resources (SIM 2014a, SIM 2014b, SIM 2014c, SIM 2015a, SIM 2015b).

Several KIs corroborated documentary data (Shengda 2006, Than 2006, Rajchagool 2006) that China's superior data base strengthens its negotiating position vis-à-vis the Lower Mekong countries. Only one KI noted, with respect to hydrological data, that SIM's assistance would strengthen his country's negotiating position. Several KIs noted that technically sound, clear and consistent, and enforceable regulations decrease risk and thereby encourage investment in infrastructure projects. They also noted that government staff in the Lower Mekong countries often lack capacity to write such regulations. One KI, for example, said: "At the ministry level we need a lot of support in formulation of more regulations. In the developed countries, they have a lot of regulations, so if investors are interested in investing they

² In this and all other "findings" sections, we have not presented findings in the form of aggregated percentages of respondents who hold one general point of view or another, since the small sample size after the disaggregation required for any particular finding would make such a percentage misleading (e.g., 100 percent of female respondents with knowledge of SIM would include two out of two respondents). Instead, we have given a qualitative sense of the prevalence of a view point, including which types of stakeholders expressed similar themes and which documents corroborate a particular view.

have to do prior research on whether they can make the investment or not. But we are not so investor-friendly.” Documents support such observations (SIM. 2015a, SIM. 2015b, SIM. 2015d).

Progress and perspectives on outputs. As of late 2016, SIM had carried out twelve technical assistance/training activities. Documentary and KII data indicate that participants in the Lower Mekong generally, but particularly in Laos and Cambodia, judge SIM technical assistance/training activities to have increased their technical capabilities. Table 3 shows the titles and budgets of the activities SIM had implemented that were related to IR 1.1.3, as of September 30, 2016 (SIM 2016e).

TABLE 3 TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE IMPLEMENTED

Activity	Country	Budget (USD)
Sediment Flushing	Laos	508,036
Dam Safety	Laos	575,446
Fish Research Gap Analysis	Laos	213,329
Fish-friendly Guidelines	Laos	450,000
Hydrology Data Assessment	Laos	TBD
Navigational Dredging Regulation	Cambodia	142,100
Watershed Management	Cambodia	180,000
Sustainable Hydropower Policy Workshops	Thailand	250,000
Environmental Code Assistance	Cambodia	305,048
Reservoir Safety	Vietnam	52,100
Mekong Delta Study	Vietnam	586,000
Sustainable Fisheries Development	Vietnam	243,100

Source: SIM 2016e

SIM’s initial technical assistance/training involved one ministry in one country, whereas its more recent activities have tended to involve more, different ministries, and/or more than one country. For example, the International Fish Passage Conference in Laos (listed above as “Fish-friendly Guidelines”) in June of 2016 included fifteen Regional Experts from Burma. A KI noted that by assisting ministries with resolving the problems that interest them, SIM may develop productive working relationships that will lead to its involvement in more politically and diplomatically sensitive problems.

Indicator data show that SIM has been achieving its anticipated result of reducing the negative environmental impacts of development projects. Table 4 shows the anticipated versus the actual results of SIM.

TABLE 4 SIM: ANTICIPATED VERSUS ACTUAL RESULTS

Indicator Type	Activity Outcome	Indicator No.	Indicator Name	Anticipated	Actual
Outcome	SIM Project Purpose	1	Number of development projects influenced by tools and information provided by the U.S. government under SIM	7	6
		1	Number of institutions with improved capacity to address climate change issues as a result of U.S. government assistance (4.8.2-14)	1	9
Output	Tools & Information	1.1	Number of “new” tools, models, analyses, reviews and assessments, technical guidelines, best practices, and databases developed from technical assistance and provided to Lower Mekong government officials	16	16
		1.2	Number of Lower Mekong government officials that applied the improved technologies and management practices to inform decisionmaking	20	88
	Capacity Building	2.1	Number of Lower Mekong government officials that show an increase in expertise and capacity to address adverse environmental and social impacts of development projects	452	568
Input		3.1	Number of people receiving U.S. government-supported training in natural resources management and/or biodiversity conservation	607	610
		3.2	Number of person hours of training in natural resources management and/or biodiversity conservation supported by U.S. government assistance	12,963	13,423
	Cross-cutting	3.3	Number of technical assistance interventions/services activities funded with U.S. government	49	41

Indicator Type	Activity Outcome	Indicator No.	Indicator Name	Anticipated	Actual
			assistance		
		3.4	Number of days of U.S. government funded technical assistance in natural resources management and/or biodiversity provided to counterparts or stakeholder	2,107	1,158

Source: SIM 2016

Concept Note process. SIM’s operating procedures regarding Concept Notes require approval by one or more technical ministries, a ministry of foreign affairs, the U.S. Embassy, and RDMA. By the time the Concept Notes are submitted for approval, qualified DOI technical staff have already assisted in their preparation, and KIs deemed the subsequent review by USAID and U.S. Embassy staff to only provide marginal increases to their technical quality. The longer the process takes, the less SIM can provide a “rapid response” to country requests, which is an important aspect of its diplomatic objective.

Several KIs agreed that this process requires considerable time and effort by USAID and U.S. Embassy staff. One, for example, said: “Ministry staff have so much work going on that it is hard to follow up on their end, so it does require a lot work on our side . . . in a way it has to be pushed . . . for the ministries to submit the request. The concept note part is difficult.” The detail and technical knowledge of the Concept Notes, and data from several KIs, indicate that DOI technical experts contribute a great deal to their preparation (SIM 2015b, SIM 2015a, SIM 2015d). Several U.S. government KIs also noted that the paperwork required for an SIM technical advisor to visit a country increases the workload of USAID in-country staff. U.S. government KIs noted that one reason SIM has been barred from responding to requests for technical assistance and training from Burma ministries is that it requires so much USAID staff time to process the SIM paperwork.

Demand-driven design. Several KIs noted that national ministers appreciate the SIM program’s “demand-driven” aspect, because it gives them access to useful technical expertise for achieving their own objectives and that SIM has been a diplomatic tool for developing closer relationships with government officials. Documentary data indicates that SIM could provide socioeconomic technical assistance/training.³ Table 4, however, indicates that SIM has provided technical assistance and training only in the biophysical and engineering areas of technical expertise. This demonstrates a potential challenge of the demand-driven design. As one KI noted, “the major challenge for SIM is its

³ “Potential Services and Activity Criteria” lists “socio-economic analysis of infrastructure development, including gender impacts, and effects of infrastructure on livelihoods, transport for poor and disadvantaged (e.g. market women)” as studies that SIM could implement (SIM 2015). SIM’s Monitoring and Evaluation Plan says that “SIM adopts a wide-angle lens involving scientific modeling and analytics from a variety of perspectives (such as engineering, social, fish and wildlife, gender) in attempting to fashion sustainable, low-impact, and socially conscious solutions to modern infrastructure challenges.”

demand-driven design, because ministries are not interested in getting advice on their most political issues; SIM does not get beyond the non-controversial issues to the hot issues such as designing a non-impact mainstream dam.”

Effectiveness of SIM training and technical assistance. Documentary and KI data indicate that SIM training has often effectively increased the technical knowledge of trainees, though there was evidence of some mixed reactions. For example, one KI said SIM had provided his staff with basic but thorough training on how to calculate sediment loads in rivers and, “we were satisfied with the workshops, because it reflected our needs.” Others, however, noted that the training was too short to build their application capacity and that some of the technical advisors lacked experience applicable to the Lower Mekong Region conditions. Two noted that they did not believe they would be able to apply what they learned because of constraints in their operating environment. Several KIs recommended that SIM choose its trainees according to pre-determined criteria, since training is often considered simply a perk, sometimes related to seniority rather than to relevance or influence.

Regional collaboration. KIs from different sectors and countries all agreed that SIM could serve to increase communication between homologous ministries in the different Lower Mekong countries, given the regional nature of many environmental problems. One, for example, said his department has had no contact with other countries about river bank erosion and that “we would be happy to exchange ideas if we were able to meet together.” Table 3 indicates that although only two of the twelve projects SIM has implemented so far have involved more than one country, these two have been recent. KI’s in Thailand and Vietnam expressed particular interest in regional collaboration.

Design of hydropower dams. The SIM-USAID PAPA does not list the design of hydropower dams as one of DOI’s areas of technical expertise, but numerous KIs corroborated documentary data that indicate that hydropower dams planned or under construction on the Mekong River and its tributaries constitute the principal current threat to the ecological and socioeconomic well-being of the Lower Mekong countries (Diokno, 2013, Leinenkugel 2014, *Economist* 2012, DoS 2015). Further, several reliable studies, including the above, indicate that hydropower dams on the Mekong River in Laos and Cambodia, as currently sited and designed, will hugely threaten the future prosperity of the Lower Mekong countries, particularly their poor and disadvantaged populations.

SIM has provided technical assistance on subjects related to hydropower dams, such as fish passages and “fish-friendly” turbines. It has not, however, provided technical assistance or training directly related to the design of hydropower dams. KIs mentioned several possible reasons for SIM’s non-involvement in the “hot” issue of Mekong River hydropower dams. First, Section 118 (f) of the Federal Administration Act (FAA)⁴ may prohibit such assistance on relatively un-degraded forest lands. Second, DOI has little expertise that is applicable to the Mekong, since they have not built large hydropower dams recently and have little experience in tropical regions. Third, concern over potential political repercussions keeps USAID/RDMA from asking DOI to provide technical assistance identifying alternatives to the current dam plans. Fourth, the dams’ locations and designs were fixed long ago, so they are now difficult to change (Binh, Nguyen Phuong 1996). Fifth, SIM has little contact and no influence over the decisions of

⁴ U.S. government foreign assistance funds may not be used for the “construction of dams or other water control structures that flood relatively un-degraded forestlands” (State 2005).

the Chinese, Thai, and Vietnamese investors who are financing the planned hydropower dams in Cambodia and Laos.

SIM and gender issues. USAID gender policy posits that attention to gender issues in all its projects will contribute substantially to their effectiveness (USAID 2013). Findings on how SIM has addressed gender issues are therefore relevant to its effectiveness. The PAPA agreement discusses gender issues,⁵ but the SIM Quarterly Reports do not indicate that SIM has “implemented formal gender analysis” or “targeted traditionally under-represented groups.” Section 3.1 of the Quarterly Report for July to September 2016 states that “SIM has encouraged ministries to involve as many women as possible in all training events,” but the SIM Quarterly Reports do not provide cumulative totals for the number of women trainees out of the total number of trainees (SIM 2016e). A KI with knowledge of the situation indicated that SIM generally targets and accepts all women in target ministries who request to attend their trainings, and that any inequities in people who receive training based on gender is the result of underlying demographics in the ministries themselves.

Conclusions

Overall, the evaluation team concludes that SIM is partially contributing to sub-purpose 1.1.3 by improving the use of sound science for decision-making in regional development investments, but not by improving the use of social and environmental safeguards.⁶ SIM could do more to achieve the latter half of the sub-purpose by providing socioeconomic assistance and focusing more on hydropower dams with its programming. More specific conclusions in support of this overall theme are listed below.

SIM’s overall design permits it to address highly relevant technical issues. We conclude that SIM supports the achievement of the “science-based decisionmaking” part of IR 1.1.3 but does not specifically support the “increased use of social and environmental safeguards” part of IR 1.1.3 and that, in general terms, it also supports LMI’s goal. SIM’s areas of technical assistance/training are highly relevant to avoiding or mitigating the negative environmental effects of the large infrastructure projects that have and will continue to be built in the region. The Concept Note process avoids any imposition of U.S. priorities on the national governments of the Lower Mekong Region. The findings indicate that SIM’s technical assistance/training has been particularly effective when it has assisted Laos and Cambodia to collect more and higher quality data related to environmental issues. The data suggest that Burma would also benefit from SIM’s technical assistance/training. Such data create a

⁵ “During the regional and country assessments . . . and when work plans are under development, the issue of targeting traditionally ‘under-represented’ groups (women and youth, for example) as beneficiaries of DOI-ITAP interventions will be prioritized. . . . As needed, DOI-ITAP will perform formal gender analyses. It’s feasible that gender considerations will be more relevant in some proposed activities than others. Progress reporting and monitoring and evaluation exercises will include disaggregating gender participation data. During pre-deployment planning, DOI-ITAP technical assistance teams will be briefed by project managers on any gender issues that might be particularly relevant to their upcoming in-country assignment. Such teams will also be instructed to secure gender related data during the in-country mission.”

⁶ Following the conclusion of data collection, SI learned of impacts that SIM had achieved in various training and workshop contents achieving the power of regulation or decree in Cambodia, in particular (Keller, 2017). If these impacts are sustained, SIM can also be considered to address environmental safeguards in addition to sound-science in decision making.

stronger basis for these countries to write effective environmental regulations, thereby creating more attractive conditions for investment by reducing risk, and to negotiate with China on issues related to the use of the water of the Mekong.

SIM is providing much of its technical assistance and training effectively. SIM's design and implementation procedures have enabled it to work effectively toward both its developmental and diplomatic goals through effective technical assistance and training responses. By placing responsibility on the government institutions themselves for requesting specific technical assistance/training, SIM helps to develop ministerial self-reliance and technical capacity and fosters improved relations between the Lower Mekong countries and the United States. By responding to the ministries' requests, DOI has gained the confidence of some ministries in the Lower Mekong countries. It is therefore better placed to promote the use of technical information and analyses in making decisions that will affect the natural environment. Over the relatively short period of two years, SIM has effectively responded to diverse requests for technical assistance and training in Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam. SIM's regional activities are increasing the level of regional coordination between Lower Mekong countries on technical issues. Both these results are likely to strengthen the negotiating position of the Lower Mekong countries vis-à-vis China.

SIM operating procedures reduce its effectiveness. The Concept Note approval process is burdensome and resource heavy, which can cause delays and inefficiencies. SIM's exclusion from providing the technical advice and training required by Burma because of the heavy workload on USAID staff obviously has reduced its effectiveness.

Providing socioeconomic assistance would increase SIM's effectiveness. Although SIM is demand-driven, and in part because of it, DOI technical advisors and requesting governments contribute to the technical bent of many of the ultimate requests, which may or may not address the most pressing issues. The lack of socioeconomic as well as engineering and biophysical technical assistance and training is clear, and is a detriment to SIM's contribution to the broader SMP goals.

Reliable, current, and accessible data is key to SIM's effectiveness. Sufficient, up-to-date, and reliable socioeconomic, biological, and physical data provide the ministries of the Lower Mekong countries with more power to negotiate with neighboring countries, resolve socioeconomic disputes, and apply technical solutions to environmental problems. Table 4, however, gives relatively little attention to these data needs; they are mentioned only as part of the description of Indicator 1.1 in the form of "databases." The findings suggest that SIM could become more effective if it were to concentrate much more on assisting the Lower Mekong countries to improve the capabilities for collecting, processing, distributing, analyzing, and using reliable geophysical, biological, and sociological data.

Selection of trainees and technical advisors is key to training effectiveness. SIM's effectiveness largely depends on how well it chooses the people it trains and its provision of highly qualified technical advisors. If trainees have little or no possibility of using the training or if the technical advisors are not experienced in the specific technical area for which the ministry requested technical assistance, then SIM cannot be effective. Further attention to this area, both in policy and adherence to criteria, will be crucial to promote application of skills and knowledge.

SIM's effectiveness requires more attention to hydropower dams. Though viewed as an obstacle to implementation, FAA 118 (f) does not actually prohibit SIM from providing technical advice for identifying alternatives to countries' current plans for hydropower dams on the Mekong River and its tributaries, particularly since such assistance would be for design, not "construction." Thus, if SIM could be a vehicle for providing Laos and Cambodia with technical assistance for improving the siting and design of hydropower dams or finding ways other than hydropower to meet the energy needs that these

dams are intended to supply, it would be assisting them to address the greatest single threat to the economic, social, and environmental well-being of the Lower Mekong countries.

SIM could ensure equal access to and usefulness of training by women more effectively. Thus far, SIM's potential to respond to gender issues has not been realized. Insufficient data are in the SIM Quarterly Reports to permit the evaluation team to determine how many women have been trained in comparison to the total number of trainees since SIM started, but the lack of a formal strategy and targeting to engage female participants has clearly affected the activity's ability to attract and involve women. Even supposing that the women who do attend represent the entire population of women in the target ministries, there are still women who may benefit from the training in local universities or other public institutions.

Recommendations

1. Simplify approval process for Concept Notes.

We recommend three ways for USAID and DOI to simplify SIM's operating procedures for approving the Concept Notes:

- Eliminate the requirement that every Concept Note be reviewed and approved by the Foreign Ministry, the U.S. Embassy, and USAID/RDMA.
- Require DOI and each ministry that requests SIM assistance to prepare an overall Yearly Technical Assistance and Training Plan that has indicative levels of technical assistance and training, an indicative budget, and an indicative schedule.
- Permit DOI to operate flexibly on the basis of these plans, using its own administrative and technical judgement to provide technical assistance and training under the plans' parameters and budget limits.

We recommend that USAID and DOI revise the PAPA immediately so that SIM can operate under these new procedures during most of 2017.

2. Contract SIM country coordinators.

DOI should immediately search for and contract technically qualified country coordinators for Laos and Cambodia. Country coordinators in these countries would relieve USAID country offices from becoming overly involved in the administrative aspects of SIM training and technical assistance, reduce the number and length of DOI administrative trips, assist Ministries to prepare Yearly Technical Assistance and Training plans, and coordinate technical assistance and training with other ministries and countries. Country coordinators could operate under the supervision of the current SIM Regional Coordinator.

3. Widen SIM's range of technical assistance.

SIM should widen its provision of technical assistance and training to include more socioeconomic expertise, thereby making it more relevant to assisting the LM countries to resolve intertwined environmental, social, and economic problems. In particular, SIM should provide expertise in all aspects of hydropower dams, including cost-benefit analyses that fully account for the costs that are currently being borne by women, ethnic minorities, and other disadvantaged groups.

4. Emphasize regional assistance.

We recommend that SIM maintain and expand its current trend toward providing technical assistance and training through regional events that involve more than one country. However, we recommend that

SIM orient the regional events toward the technical assistance and training needs of Laos, Cambodia, and Burma more than those of Thailand and Vietnam.

5. Set Targets for female training participants

USAID/RDMA should instruct DOI to set strategies and targets to attract, involve, and engage women. This might start through the establishment of targets for female training participants. If there are not enough women in the ministries to be trained, then SIM should meet targets for training women by training women from other public institutions, including public universities. We recommend that SIM adjust its training programs to respond to the training needs of women.

2. MEKONG PARTNERSHIP FOR THE ENVIRONMENT (MPE)

Background and Design

According to its Cooperative Agreement, MPE's goal is "improved application of social and environmental safeguards in regional development projects" (USAID 2013a). The MPE Quarterly Report dated September 30, 2016, however, states that MPE's goal is "to advance informed multi-stakeholder dialogues on the social and environmental costs and benefits of regional development projects" (MPE 2016a). Both documents indicate the same objectives for MPE: (1) to increase capacity of civil society to influence development decisions that have significant anticipated social and environmental impacts, (2) to strengthen regional platforms for multi-stakeholder participation in development decision-making, and (3) to increase public access to quality, timely information on environmental and social costs and benefits of development projects.

MPE has been implemented through a four-year, \$13 million cooperative agreement awarded by USAID to PACT, Inc., a Washington, D.C.-based NGO. PACT has given sub-awards to the East-West Management Institute, Internews, Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI), Wildlife Conservation Society, and local partners. The project originally had an end date of October 15, 2017.

USAID also made a PAPA agreement with the EPA for \$350,000 "to provide technical and policy assistance and build capacity for improved environmental governance in Asia." The PAPA has "one component focused on providing technical assistance to governments and regional institutions on EIA processes and enforcement, including related permitting and an emphasis on public participation." This activity can be considered a sub-component of MPE.⁷

MPE's original proposal to USAID was to train CSOs in SES, obtain ASEAN support for enforcing SES, and give a central role to SEI's Sustainable Mekong Research Network (SUMERNET). SEI was to continue MPE activities when PACT's cooperative agreement with USAID ended. In late 2015, however, on the basis of a study by Wells-Dang (2015), PACT decided to "support the structural changes needed to transform the process of decision making and policy rather than focusing on influence over a limited number of development project sites" (Wells-Dang 2015, Owen 2016) by using public participation in EIAs as an entry point for achieving the goal of "strengthening safeguards and

⁷ Despite persistent efforts, the evaluation team was not able to collect a significant amount of primary data on the EPA activity. Nonetheless, Table 10 in Appendix B provides the most recent summary available of the activity's progress against its targets. Of the 17 tasks, eight have been completed and nine are in progress.

enhancing multi-stakeholder dialogue and changing the power relations that have enabled entrenched powerful groups to use the EIA to protect and advance their own financial interests.” MPE commissioned a regional comparison of national EIA systems that found that all the Lower Mekong countries lacked substantive legal provisions for public participation in the EIA process (Baird & Frankel 2015). MPE established technical working groups in each country, composed of three members of government agencies and two members from CSOs. Since early 2016, the regional working groups have met five times to discuss and prepare regional guidelines for public participation in EIA. The last meeting was to have occurred in Burma in January 2017.

Table 8 in Appendix B indicates that MPE has collaborated with and supported twenty civil society organizations in the Lower Mekong countries. Three are in Cambodia, two in Laos, six in Thailand, three in Burma, and six in Vietnam. Ten of these CSOs are also members of the RTWG. Fifteen of the CSOs are also recipients of MPE grants. Figure 2 in Appendix B shows the network of civil society organizations that MPE has assisted and helped to establish. The network illustrated above is composed of both national networks that predate SMP/MPE, some of which are MPE partners, for example VFI and Pan Nature (see Table 5), and some that might be best described as new ‘proto-networks’ whose continuity is doubtful.

Findings

Relevance. Scholarly papers support the need for achieving the goals and objectives stated for MPE (Lebel et al. 2014, Be et al. 2007, Bourdier 2009). The Asian Development Bank (ADB) Program on Economic Cooperation in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS), the Agreement on the Cooperation for the Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)-Mekong Basin Development Cooperation, as well as the establishment of the Mekong River Committee in 1957 and the subsequent MRC in 1995, all emphasize the importance governments in the Lower Mekong countries attach to regional collaboration. KIs in all the countries expressed their opinion that regional collaboration is required to resolve regional and transboundary environmental issues.

Anticipated versus actual results.

Table 5 shows MPE’s anticipated results in comparison to its actual results.

TABLE 5 MPE ANTICIPATED VERSUS ACTUAL RESULTS

Goal/Objective	Target	Achieved	Note
0.1 Number of development decisions influenced by multi-stakeholder dialogues and/or civil society input as a result of U.S. government assistance	3	1	Achievement due to influence on a mine in Ratanakire, Cambodia
Objective 1: Increased capacity of civil society to influence development decisions that have significant anticipated social and environmental impacts			
1.1 Number of regional civil society network action plans implemented as a result of U.S. government assistance	1	0	12 of 20 activities in regional CS action completed; Regional CSO EIA Network includes 20

Goal/Objective	Target	Achieved	Note
			CSOs and reaches over 100 organizations
1.2 Number of CSOs with increased capacity to participate in decisionmaking as a result of U.S. government assistance	10	5	DPA, NGOFC (Cambodia), PanNature, CECR (Vietnam), SEM (Thailand) assessed.
1.3 Person hours of training completed as a result of U.S. government assistance	5,592	12,837	Target exceeded due to additional training by MPE & its partners
1.4 Number of people trained in technical and organizational capacity areas as a result of U.S. government assistance	524	966	Target exceeded due to additional training by MPE & its partners
Objective 2: Strengthened regional platforms for multi-stakeholder participation in development decision-making			
2.1 Number of regional platforms created or strengthened as a result of U.S. government assistance	1	0	Refers to regional technical working group (RTWG) on EIA. Draft guidelines completed July 2016 & uploaded to web
Objective 3: Increased public access to quality, timely information on environmental and social costs and benefits			
Objective 3: Increased public access to quality, timely information on environmental and social costs and benefits	57	200	Mekong Matters Journalist Network enabled target to be exceeded
3.2 Number of individuals that have greater access to information on the environmental and social costs and benefits of development projects as a result of U.S. government assistance	450,000	80,558	Target not met due to delay in launch of ODM
Cross-Cutting			
4.1 Number of CSOs eligible to receive direct USAID funding as a result of U.S. government	2	1	STTA assistance enabled DPA to pass a Non-US Pre-Award Survey (NUPAS)

Goal/Objective	Target	Achieved	Note
assistance			

Source: MPE 2016

Regional guidelines and increased communication. Wells-Dang et al. (2016) noted that inter-institutional communications in all the Lower Mekong countries tended to be infrequent. KII and documentary evidence concur that MPE has been able to increase communication between government agencies and CSOs and that, by participating in the regional working groups, public officials have generally come to value public participation in EIAs. For example, respondents in Vietnam said that public participation in government decisions in general had “been about zero” and that the national working group on public participation in EIAs was “possibly first time Government of Vietnam has worked with NGOs.” Similarly, another KI noted that, as a result of MPE, “there is more acceptance of public participation as part of EIA and that acceptance by government and industry that public participation at an early stage leads to better outcomes; this is a significant achievement.”

Use of draft regional guidelines. KII data indicate that it is unlikely that the regional guidelines will be adopted in full or in their present form by the national governments of the Lower Mekong Region because, as one KI stated, “each country has different needs and EIA regulations.” This thought was echoed by respondents in several countries. The findings of Wells-Dang et al. (2016) confirm that each of the Lower Mekong countries has established quite different EIA regulations. The KIIs all agreed with the thrust of the statement of one KI that “the country level is primary because nothing will happen at the regional level if the country level is not prepared.” All the KIIs also thought, however, that national governments would probably consult the regional guidelines when preparing their own country-specific guidelines for public participation in the EIA process. One KI noted that Burma and Cambodia have already used the regional guidelines to develop national EIA guidelines, including public participation.

KIIs in Cambodia and Laos noted that, in general, the government is reducing the scope of action possible for CSOs. One respondent in Cambodia cited the existence of “new regulations limiting CSO activity” with threats of legal action that require international NGOs to register with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and national NGOs with Ministry of Interior. They did say, however, that the Cambodian government is suppressing human rights organizations more than environmental organizations. One KI said, “Thailand seems the least positive in the direction it is moving with the government trying to water down existing EIA policies so they can do more big projects.”

Character and role of EIAs. While MPE’s original design intended it to improve the use of SES in direct support of achieving IR 1.1.3, in 2015 it narrowed its scope of action to public participation in EIA.⁸ Several KIIs agreed with the thrust of the comment of one that “EIA is an important part but highly

⁸ The World Bank publication on Environmental and Social Safeguards ten chapters concern: (1) environmental assessment; (2) labor and working conditions; (3) resource efficiency and pollution prevention and management; (4) community health and safety; (5) land acquisition; (6) restrictions on land use and involuntary resettlement; (7) biodiversity conservation and sustainable management; (8) indigenous peoples and cultural heritage; (9) financial intermediaries; and (10) stakeholder engagement and information disclosure. Only the first of these chapters concerns environmental impact assessment (WWF 2016).

legalistic and formal approach” to identifying and mitigating the negative environmental and social impacts of investment projects. The regional guidelines for public participation state that public participation in EIA is a five-step process⁹ “that occurs throughout the entire project cycle, from consideration of project feasibility to closure of the project and rehabilitation of the environment” (MPE 2016d). All the KIs agreed, however, that public participation in EIA in the Lower Mekong countries would not come to include the steps of review and decision-making. Many of them agreed with documentary evidence that EIAs, not only in the Lower Mekong Region, but in most places, are used to identify measures to avoid or mitigate negative environmental impacts rather than to make decisions. Many KIs confirmed that EIAs are prepared after rather than before private investors and government officials have made investment decisions.

As noted, MPE has concentrated on public participation in EIAs for specific proposals for infrastructure projects. It has not given attention to other types of environmental assessments, such as programmatic and strategic environmental assessments. No KI mentioned a need in the Lower Mekong countries for programmatic environmental assessments. One respondent in Thailand, however, suggested that Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEAs) are needed in the Lower Mekong countries. S/he stated that SEAs would “respond to the need to handle environmental problems early on and upstream” rather than after the fact, as currently happens through the EIA processes in the Lower Mekong countries. Planning people in Thailand, according to this KI, are drafting “plans without knowing environmental consequences, or knowing how to incorporate them into their plans. . . . Sectorial ministries need help in incorporating environment into their plans.”

Private sector participation in RTWG. Documentary and KII data indicate that, although private sector representatives did not participate in the RTWG, MPE ensured that they were kept informed of the process and that their views were considered. Between February and April 2016, MPE consulted with over 55 private sector companies (project proponents and EIA consulting firms) who have been involved in the EIA processes in Mekong countries (MPE 2016). In collaboration with the Myanmar Center for Responsible Business (MCRB), ERM (Environmental Resources Management) Consulting, and the Vietnamese Council for Sustainable Business Development (VCSBD), meetings were held with the private sector in Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, and Cambodia.¹⁰ Table 9 in Appendix B lists the companies MPE consulted about EIA and public participation.

⁹ The five steps are: (1) screening; (2) scoping; (3) investigation and reporting; (4) review; (5) decision-making (MPE 2016d).

¹⁰ At these meetings, the participants formulated the following lessons learned concerning public participation in the EIA process: Investing in public participation can lead to long-term value; Regional cooperation is valued, but national sovereignty should be respected; There is no one-size-fits-all approach for public participation practices; Meaningful and effective public participation is built on principles of trust and respect; Public participation should start early and continue throughout project development; Effective public participation is firmly grounded in the local context where it is practiced; Not every public consultation will result in high-quality feedback; Guidelines for public participation in EIA should be clear and simple; Effective public participation requires engaging a wide range of stakeholders.

Several KIs expressed the opinion that the working groups should have included representatives from the private sector. For example, one noted: “Private sector is a weak area. We did recommend more involvement of project proponents and EIA consulting firms. There has been some, but I think MPE made a decision to not try to do everything at once and work separately with business side first and then bring them together. It is an area where more could be done.” Another said: “If starting again, we would include the business sector in the technical working group although it may be difficult to identify who would participate.” According to other KIs, however, PACT decided that including the private sector would make the working group discussions too complicated and time-consuming. For example, one KI commented, “businessmen see public participation in EIA as another set of conditions and regulations and would be put off rather than participate,” and another noted, “private sector has never discussed public participation before and had nothing to contribute to the regional technical working group.” Another KI commented that it was just as well that businesses did not participate, since “business is sometimes the target in such consultations, and businesses cannot be bothered and have better things to do.”

Documents and KIs indicated that the private sector often opposes attempts to implement environmental protection measures, such as effective EIA processes (Be et al. 2007, Lebel et al. 2014). Data from private businesses was limited, but one KI’s observation was: “The regional guidelines ask businesses to do things that are not to the point, such as consulting with the communities and getting their consent to have the project there. But if a business has won a contract from the government, it is the governments that should be putting the time frame for the project. Businesses are on time frame limits. There has to be an end point to the discussion.” Several KIs from government and the private sector expressed a similar idea to the KI that said, “do not impose a lot of restrictions without informing the private sector; otherwise you lose investments.”

Several KIs noted that their desire to reduce financial risk does motivate some private for-profit people to take interest in, or even promote, public participation in EIAs. A Thai government official, for example, explained private sector interest in effective EIA public participation processes by pointing out that “in Thailand, there are many protesters who fight development projects nearly every day” and emphasized the importance of public participation at the beginning of the EIA process, during the screening and scoping, since otherwise, people are only involved when the EIA is nearly finished, and it is very difficult to go back and develop trust at the end of the EIA process. Several other KIs similarly noted that the environmental reputation of companies has begun to affect their image and therefore their potential profitability.

Social and environmentally responsible banking. MPE initiated work on responsible banking early in the project (MPE 2013), but training activities only commenced in 2015 (MPE 2015). MPE supported, in coordination with the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the FMO, the Cambodian Sustainable Finance Initiative (CSFI), through which the Association of Banks of Cambodia (ABC) has adopted voluntary sustainable finance principles. MPE considers this a major achievement (MPE 2016). The KIs interviewed about MPE’s responsible banking actions made three points, all pertaining to the utilization of voluntary standards: (1) voluntary rather than regulatory standards avoid corruption and increase competition in the banking sector; (2) the Burmese banking sector may adopt voluntary standards more easily than the Cambodian banking sector did, because Burma has no foreign bank that would oppose them; and (3) adherence to voluntary standards reduces banks’ liability.

Environmental journalism. Many KIs agreed with the statement of one that MPE’s environmental journalism component “seems very useful and effective.” MPE’s support for the Mekong Matters Journalist Network has enabled almost 300 journalists across the region “to access resources, training, and each other to develop more accurate and comprehensive reporting” and publish over 160

environmental stories about sustainable development in the Mekong region” (MPE 2016a, MPE 2016b). MPE has facilitated the sharing of environmental stories across national boundaries. Due in part to MPE, journalists have shared information between countries, thereby being able to publish what they cannot publish at home because of government restrictions. One particularly knowledgeable KI commented that the journalism component of MPE does not fit well with its other components because “MPE sits in the middle of important civil society, business, and government organizations, and has to stake out a neutral territory and uncover difficult truths that do not make people happy.” Only one KI, in Vietnam, directly mentioned that as peoples’ incomes increase, they tend to become more concerned about environmental issues, but documentary data about public opposition to building more hydroelectric dams in Thailand supports this observation.

MPE administration. Many informants noted that MPE has been effective in large part because it has been able to facilitate a complex process across five countries without dominating the process itself. MPE receives external support from consultants, but the main decisions are all made by national people. For example, one KI said that what MPE has managed to achieve in a year and a half “is extraordinary, considering the number of countries and agreeing on a regional framework,” and several other KIs expressed similar opinions. One KI said, however, that PACT’s “hub and spoke” operation of MPE has almost eliminated cooperation between SEI and the other consortium members and has weakened the link between research and the RTWG. Several KIs commented that USAID’s contracting and administrative procedures have influenced MPE’s effectiveness. USAID competitive procedures, one KI noted, may have favored institutions that are already practiced in responding well to USAID selection criteria, so they may have excluded some of the institutions that MPE could have strengthened, both in the selection of the consortium and for research grants. Also, some KIs thought that USAID had become too involved in the details of administering MPE. One of them asked, “If USAID went through a competitive process to select PACT and then gave it \$10 million, why would it micromanage MPE?” As noted elsewhere, the U.S. Ambassadors have influenced MPE’s effectiveness by prohibiting some of its activities in Laos. In Burma, the USAID mission itself has restricted MPE activity.

Gender, human rights, and indigenous issues. Several KIs mentioned that increased public participation in EIA is tied closely to the issue of human rights obligations, and KIs consistently emphasized that women’s and ethnic minorities’ involvement in all aspects of the EIA process is important.¹¹ The draft regional guidelines include a section on gender in EIAs. Several respondents emphasized the need for women to be more involved in both the EIA process and public participation. Further, KIs mentioned that many CSO activists and academics are women. For example, a KI said: “In the RTWG there are probably more women than men. In northeast Thailand, most women are active and women are the leaders in protests.” Another KI commented:

¹¹ A study MPE financed of women and EIA recommended that EIAs: include a gender and social inclusion expert; hold prior-to-EIA meeting activities with local women and indigenous groups; use local languages; hold meetings where and when women can attend; establish and adhere to quotas for women’s participation in EIA meetings; include women; increase awareness and build capacity for women participation in EIAs; and utilize the Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) tool.

Public participation may give more voice at the local level to women. People tend to listen more to women at the working-class level, although the new decree in Vietnam says nothing specific about women. Since the regional guidelines mention of gender, so we may include the gender considerations in our adoption of the guidelines.

Recent documentation clearly indicates that large infrastructure projects can cause severe negative effects on indigenous peoples (Manoroma et al. 2017). A KI in Burma, a country with at least 134 indigenous groups, described how so many of the conflicts in that country involve clashes with projects to exploit natural resources at the cost of the livelihoods and rights of indigenous peoples.

MPE has a research component that SEI operates through its research network SUMERNET. MPE financed SEI to implement an Action Research program, and it made two calls for proposals, one about gender and EIA, and the other about economic land concessions and EIA. A KI commented that the research component of MPE became disconnected from the rest of MPE when PACT chose to focus on the RTWGs for public participation in EIAs. Research results, therefore, in his/her opinion, have contributed little to the regional technical guidelines for public participation in EIAs.

Conclusions

The evaluation team concludes that, as an activity, MPE contributed to achieving the use of SES for decision-making in regional development investments through the specific avenue of increasing public participation in the EIA process. The RTWG approach employed to accomplish this was highly effective and may serve as a blueprint for improving other aspects of SES to which MPE did not contribute. More specific detail on MPE's contribution to IR 1.1.3 follows below.

MPE has improved one aspect of SES—public participation. MPE has succeeded in making a limited improvement in the current use of SES in the Lower Mekong countries. The discussions and public consultations during the preparation of the draft regional technical guidelines for public participation in EIA raised the level of awareness of members of CSOs, government, and private sector organizations about the role of public participation in EIAs. These guidelines provide a standard against which each country can develop its own public participation procedures, which some are using in preparing their EIA regulations. If the Lower Mekong countries were to adopt, fully or even partially, and effectively enforce the regional guidelines for public participation, then it would be possible to conclude that MPE had made a substantial contribution to the achievement of IR 1.1.3. In fact, it is unlikely that the Lower Mekong countries will adopt or enforce the guidelines. Moreover, none of the findings indicate the guidelines have been put into practice anywhere in the Lower Mekong countries for any specific infrastructure project, as of the writing this report.

Multi-stakeholder regional working groups can be effective. MPE was very successful with respect to increasing awareness and enhancing levels of cooperation among a variety of stakeholders. The experience of the RTWGs on public participation in EIA provide a viable example of how complex environmental issues can be fruitfully discussed across institutional, economic, and political boundaries, one that could be applied to other procedural and technical environmental problems.

MPE addressed the issue of investment risks. Regional economic growth in the Lower Mekong countries requires massive private investment in large infrastructure projects, which will be made only when investors perceive that their risks are low. Public opposition to large infrastructure projects and excessive regulations both increase investment risks. That the Association of Banks of Cambodia has adopted the IFC sustainable finance principles indicates that Cambodian banks are aware of the link between environmental issues and investment risk. That Thailand banks are uninterested in the sustainable finance principles, by contrast, may indicate that they do not recognize this risk, or at least

believe it threatens their profitability less than competition from Chinese banks. Businesses are similarly split between those that perceive environmental regulations, such as those requiring effective public participation in EIAs, as increasing risk, and those that perceive them as reducing risk. Data were insufficient to formulate clearer findings on how banks and other businesses in the Lower Mekong countries are evaluating the risk from opposition to investment projects based on social and/or environmental grounds. We can conclude, however, that perceptions and realities of risks are central to the support or opposition by private sector enterprises in the Lower Mekong countries to environmental regulations, such as those governing public participation in EIAs. We can also conclude that, through the multi-stakeholder RTWG process, MPE addressed head-on the issue of investment risks from public opposition to large infrastructure projects.

MPE's focus on public participation limits its ability to contribute to IR 1.1.3. Public participation in EIA, although perhaps an excellent “entry point” for increased collaboration, may be quite limited as a way to achieve IR 1.1.3. By narrowing its activities, MPE was less able to address important social and environmental concerns about large infrastructure projects that do not involve public participation and less able to respond to other regional opportunities for achieving IR 1.1.3. None of the findings indicate that MPE addressed issues closely linked to large infrastructure projects, such as their effects on women, indigenous peoples and human rights, or the role of strategic environmental assessments and regional planning in reducing the negative impacts of large infrastructure projects. Similarly, MPE's focus on public participation may have weakened its ability to stimulate research on the scientific social, geophysical, and biological effects of large infrastructure projects. The use of the regional guidelines may turn out to be quite limited, as no country is likely to simply adopt, monitor, and enforce the guidelines. Further, no government is likely to write regulations that include Steps 4 and 5 of the guidelines, which are those that pass some decision-making power to the public and contribute to 1.1.3.

Recommendations

1. Complete preparation of the regional guidelines for public participation in EIA.

MPE should make its first priority the completion, approval, and dissemination of the regional guidelines for public participation in EIA. USAID/RDMA, through MPE, has invested so much time, effort, and funding in these guidelines that it should ensure that they are used to the greatest extent possible. PACT, in its final report, should recommend specific steps to disseminate the regional guidelines to specific government institutions, CSOs, and private enterprises or associations of private enterprises.

2. Utilize the MPE regional working group experience in current and future SMP activities.

USAID/RDMA should incorporate MPE's successful experience with regional working groups into the other current SMP activities: SIM, SERVIR-Mekong, and CRM. Although both SIM and SERVIR-Mekong are “demand-driven” and so must respond to the requests of country institutions, they also both are already providing technical assistance/training at a regional level, involving more than one of the Lower Mekong countries. SERVIR-Mekong and SIM should study MPE's experiences with the regional working groups in order to identify specific ways to incorporate that experience into their own regional activities. We also recommend that USAID/RDMA incorporate the MPE experience with regional working groups into the design and implementation of future SMP activities. However, the MPE experience should also serve as a cautionary tale that warns against designing future SMP activities that over-emphasize one type of activity (like public participation in EIA) to the exclusion of other opportunities.

3. Emphasize public participation in EIA as a means to reduce investment risks.

USAID/RDMA should emphasize the role of public participation in EIA processes in reducing the risks associated with investments in large infrastructure projects. MPE, perhaps through SEI, should thoroughly examine the relationship between public participation in EIA and reduced investment risk and determine how its experiences with promoting public participation in EIA can be best be conveyed to private sector investors.

3. CLIMATE RESILIENT MEKONG (CRM)

Background and Design

CRM aims to “inform and influence the choices that will be made by the national governments, investors, and hydropower customers, with regard to the siting, design, and operation of hydropower dams throughout the entire Mekong River system to maintain the flows of water, sediments, nutrients, and migratory fish to sustain its exceptional biological productivity” (USAID 2010). In practice, CRM aspires to accomplish “a transformation of the official dam development plans . . . to alternatives that will maintain these flows that are essential to sustain the extraordinary productivity of this river system” (Thomas 2014). Recent Quarterly Reports indicate that most CRM activity is taking place in Laos and Cambodia, where “most current dam development is occurring, since China, Thailand and Vietnam have completed their dams.”

CRM was designed to create a partnership among national and international governmental, non-governmental, and inter-governmental technical research institutions to improve and use analytical tools to simulate hydrologic, geomorphic, biologic, and economic processes in order to improve the siting, design, and operation of existing and future dams both individually and synergistically as a basis for future decision-making on basin infrastructure” (USAID 2010, CRM 2016).

CRM originally was to have focused its technical assistance on three dams: Lower Sesan 2 and Sambor (Mekong mainstream) in Cambodia and Sekong in Laos. These dams were chosen as “the most appropriate for learning and acting as demonstrations for both government and developers. The aim has been to improve the dam designs, by developing computer models to deal better with managing sediment/nutrients and fisheries.”¹²

Findings

Relevance. Since mid-2006, the Governments of Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand have granted approval to Thai, Malaysian, Vietnamese, Russian, and Chinese companies to investigate eleven mainstream hydropower dams (ICEM 2010). Numerous reliable research papers have concluded that all dams on the Mekong River are a threat to the viability of fish populations, particularly those of large species. Even one dam, for instance Don Sahong, could undermine population viability, especially for large (>50 cm) species, and the combined effects of dams already built on tributaries and the loss of floodplains to agriculture is expected to reduce fish catch by 150,000 to 480,000 tons between 2000 and 2015 from the current consumption of fish and other aquatic animals in the Lower Mekong Basin of about 2.6

¹² The Se Kong is located in Laos about ten miles from its border with Cambodia on a major tributary to the Mekong River. The Lower Sesan 2 is in Cambodia, also on a major tributary to the Mekong River. The Sambor dam is in Cambodia on the Mekong River itself.

million tons (ICEM 2010, Hortle 2007, Halls and Kshatriya 2009). In 2010, MRC's Strategic Environmental Assessment report recommended that because of the environmental and socioeconomic risks the hydropower dams could cause, decisions on whether to proceed with the mainstream dams be deferred for a period of ten years until further studies can be conducted (International Rivers 2016).

A KI said that CRM had shifted from its original strategy (targeting design changes to three specific dams) to opposing any dams on the Mekong River and took MEM by surprise, because it gave it no report to MEM on why the initial plan would not work. Likewise, although the CRM Quarterly Reports indicate that in 2012 CRM started to prepare a Sustainable Hydropower Master Plan for the Se Kong Basin, they do not explain the reason for the shift in CRM's focus. So far, the Quarterly Reports do not indicate that CRM has been able to identify feasible design alternatives for the Se Kong cascade dams. CRM continues to work on design alternatives for the Lower Sesan 2 and Sambor dams. The reports say that Natural Heritage Institute (NHI) is redesigning these dams with financing from sources other than USAID (Thomas 2012).

Anticipated versus actual results. Table 6, from CRM's most recent quarterly report, depicts the targeted and actual status of the activity's performance indicators and demonstrates that CRM has greatly exceeded its targets for two of its indicators, achieved exactly its target for one indicator, and fallen far short of its target for one indicator.

TABLE 6 CRM: ANTICIPATED VERSUS ACTUAL RESULTS

Indicator No	Indicator description	Target No	Actual No	Percent
1.1	Number of stakeholders with increased capacity to ascertain and implement sustainable hydropower options as a result of U.S. government assistance	75	314	418
1.2	Number of official hydropower development plans modified to embrace the more benign alternatives	3	3	100
2.1	Number of model runs, reports, and assessment on the environmental performance of the alternatives provided to the decision-makers and made available to the public and press	9	130	1,444
3.1	Number of people with access to Hydropower Development Alternatives for the Mekong River Basin Activity's information sharing platform	290	106	36

Source: CRM 2016; email Greg Thomas/Jessica Nagtalon to Bruce Kernan, Jan.4, 2017

According to its twenty first last Quarterly Report (the most recent available), CRM's measure of success "is the extent to which the best alternatives, to ameliorate the potential adverse effects of hydropower dams that emerge from the Activity's technical assessments, are actually implemented by the national governments" (CRM 2016). One informant noted that 13 radial sediment gates and an insufficiently large fish bypass have been installed on the Lower Sesan 2 dam as a result of CRM's advice and against the strong initial resistance by the hydropower company, though data were unavailable to verify this. Data from both documents and KIs indicate that technical knowledge about how to design, construct, and operate hydropower dams on the Mekong and its tributaries so they will

not substantially reduce the up and downstream migration of fish and maintain sedimentation downstream remain insufficient (CRM 2016, Cowx 2016, ICEM 2010).

One CRM implementer strongly believes that “in terms of dam design there have been major changes, and officials are aware there are more options.” Other documentary and KI evidence indicates that CRM has not yet succeeded in convincing some Laos officials that hydropower dams would cause major impacts on the environment. On the contrary, according to this evidence, these officials still believe the dams would have more positive than negative socioeconomic impacts. Documentary data also indicates that Laos and Cambodian policies are to encourage the construction of hydropower dams on the Mekong River, even if the technology and funds are unavailable to avoid or mitigate their negative effects on sedimentation and fish.

The Cooperative Agreement indicates that CRM was to collaborate with various research entities and institutions of the Mekong Basin nations,¹³ but documentary data indicate that such collaboration with most of these institutions has not occurred.

CRM and gender issues. Many documents indicate that most women in the Lower Mekong countries do not have the same opportunities as men to be educated in the technical fields that are required to design hydropower dams. The Cooperative Agreement between USAID and NHI makes no mention of gender issues. CRM’s second, third, and fourth quarterly reports do not mention gender issues. CRM’s 12th Quarterly Report (October to December 2013) states some measures CRM intended to take to address gender issues,¹⁴ though subsequent quarterly reports do not indicate the extent to which CRM complied with these measures. Until mid-2014, CRM had responded to the gender and female empowerment section of Quarterly Reports as “not applicable.” It is possible that NHI considered these sections to be not applicable since its work is of a highly technical nature, on issues such as fish passage and sediment distribution that do not, in and of themselves, have implications for local gender issues aside from preserving the environment from which many women build a livelihood in the region. Quarterly Report 23 disaggregates training by sex and indicates that CRM has trained 249 men and 146 women. One key informant noted that CRM has not addressed gender issues specifically, other than encouraging women team members because, as a foreign NGO, it was unable to affect gender equity or equality.

¹³ USAID 2010 mentions the following institutions: Chinese Institute of Water Resources and Hydropower Research (IWHR), Yunnan University; Ecosystem Study Commission for International Rivers, and the Lancang Huageng Hydropower Company were to be full partners from China; Department of Water Resources (DWR) of Thailand and the Water Resources and Environment Administration (WREA) of Laos; WWF’s Greater Mekong Program; Nature Conservancy’s Global Freshwater Initiative; Conservation International; Mekong River Commission.

¹⁴ This states that CRM intends to “promote the full and effective participation and contribution of women in decision-making and leadership on issues of sediment transportation and community resilience to climate change and disasters by: Increasing number of female participants at briefing, workshop, training model sessions to improve understanding of linkages between gender and hydropower development plan and the importance of gender-sensitive climate protection measures; ensure women participants have equal access to the technical expertise, training opportunities and information available through the program; ensure there is a gender balance in training workshops and courses; ensure information material developed includes a gender aspect.”

Conclusions

The evaluation team concludes that CRM, as designed, is highly relevant for using SES to inform decisionmaking in the siting and operation of hydropower dams on the Mekong River and its tributaries. However, the degree to which it is effective in this aim is inconclusive, given the data collected for this study.

CRM is relevant to Lower Mekong ecological and socioeconomic stability. CRM goals and objectives directly address what is probably the most urgent current threat to the socioeconomic and ecological stability of the Lower Mekong countries: the construction of hydropower dams on the Mekong River and its tributaries.

Data is insufficient to determine CRM results. Insufficient data is available to determine the extent to which CRM has accomplished its stated goals and objectives. Aside from anecdotal accounts, the data does not indicate what design changes have been made in the Lower Sesan 2, Sambor, and Sekong hydropower dams in order to mitigate negative social or environmental consequences. Likewise, it does not indicate the extent to which the work of CRM on the design of these three dams has demonstrably changed the point of view of relevant national government and developer stakeholders toward design options that mitigate negative social and environmental consequences of the dams. With that stated, documentary evidence does indicate that CRM will be unlikely to convince the Government of Laos to abandon its plan to build the Se Kong cascade of dams and shift its attention to the Sustainable Hydropower Master Plan for the Se Kong Basin that CRM is preparing.

CRM's design limits its ability to address gender issues. CRM's goal, objectives, design, and mode of implementation offer it little scope to address gender issues other than to include as many women when possible in its training courses. As far as the inclusion of women in trainings is concerned, 37 percent of CRM's trainees have been women, which does not appear to be a low percentage given the finding that women tend to be underrepresented in the professional fields related to hydropower dam design.

Recommendations

1. Continue to focus SMP on hydropower dams on the Mekong River and its tributaries.

The need to avoid or mitigate the enormous negative socioeconomic and ecological effects of the current and proposed hydropower dams on the Mekong River and its tributaries continues to be an important one. The threat to the welfare of the Lower Mekong Region from these dams has increased rather than decreased, so we recommend that RDMA continue to support efforts to reduce the negative impacts of the hydropower dams.

2. Request NHI to provide sufficient, up-to-date, accurate, and intelligible data about CRM's results.

NHI should provide RDMA with data that are sufficient to determine accurately what results CRM has actually produced as compared to its anticipated results. Without these data, it has proven difficult for the evaluation team to understand what results CRM has actually produced. Without such understanding, it is not possible for the evaluation team to recommend that RDMA continue to finance NHI or that it finance some alternative method of assisting the Lower Mekong countries to address the negative impacts of the proposed and current hydropower dams.

4. SERVIR-MEKONG

Background and Design

SERVIR-Mekong's goal is to “enhance climate change adaptation and landscape management in the Lower Mekong Region through the increased application of geospatial analysis to critical, urgent, or common policy and planning needs, especially in the context of disaster risk reduction and response, Mekong basin development, water security, food security, and landscape management to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.” According to the USAID-SERVIR Cooperative Agreement, as modified, the objectives of SERVIR-Mekong are (1) to build and institutionalize the technical capacity of government decisionmakers and key civil society groups to integrate geospatial information into their decision-making, planning, and communication; (2) to improve the sharing of user-tailored geospatial data, products, and services; (3) to develop new high quality user-tailored data, tools, applications, and models to address on-the-ground priorities; and (4) SERVIR-Mekong hub strengthened as a regional provider of geospatial data, analyses, and capacity building services.

SERVIR-Mekong started operations on September 30, 2014, based on a Cooperative Agreement USAID awarded to the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC) in Bangkok, Thailand. It was added to SMP during the 12 months after October 2015. Through this Cooperative Agreement, ADPC has become associated with one of four international National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) SERVIR “hubs” for geospatial data analysis. The SERVIR Coordination Office based at the NASA Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama, provides scientific backstopping to SERVIR-Mekong and facilitates relationships with other SERVIR hubs. Chemonics International, Inc., provides technical assistance to all the hubs. ADPC has made sub-awards to Deltares, SEI, and Spatial Informatics Group.

SERVIR-Mekong is a “demand driven” activity, basing geospatial tool development on a needs assessment. Intending to be a permanent, self-financing institution within the institutional structure of ADPC, it has established links with the National University of Laos, the Royal University of Phnom Penh, Naresuan University (Thailand), Mandalay Technological University, and the Vietnam National University. SERVIR-Mekong does not directly support improved SES but does provide data that can be used in their preparation. It also provides scientific data that can be used for decisionmaking.

Findings¹⁵

Relevance. The Cooperative Agreement explains SERVIR-Mekong's relevance for giving policy-makers, scientists, land management professionals, infrastructure developers, disaster managers, and academics geospatial tools they can use to respond effectively to the negative environmental impacts that investment in development projects is causing to the landscapes, natural resources, and environment of the Lower Mekong countries (USAID 2014). Numerous publications also have documented how infrastructure projects in the Lower Mekong countries have degraded their landscape, natural resources, and environment. Many KIs concurred with these documentary data. Documents emphasize, and many KIs concurred, that development projects often cross national boundaries. Both documentary and KI data indicate that regional environmental data are required to formulate effective responses to such degradation. Leinenkugel (2014), for example, says environmental “problems facing

¹⁵ Due to the relative youth of SERVIR-Mekong as an SMP activity, these findings are a product of documentary data and four key informant interviews.

the Mekong region are common or transboundary issues that only can be addressed by transboundary approaches based on consistent and regional comparable information on the state of the environment at basin scale.”

Anticipated versus actual results. Table 7 displays SERVIR-Mekong’s progress against its targeted performance indicators, according to its most recent quarterly report.

TABLE 7 SERVIR-MEKONG ANTICIPATED VERSUS ACTUAL RESULTS

Indicator No.	Indicator Name	Anticipated	Actual
0.1	Number of stakeholders with increased capacity to adapt to the impacts of climate changes as a result of U.S. government assistance	0	NA
1.1	Number of institutions with improved capacity to address climate change issues as a result of U.S. government assistance	0	NA
1.1.1	Number of people receiving training in global climate change as a result of U.S. government assistance	150	183
1.1.2	Number of days of U.S. government technical assistance in climate change provided to counterparts or stakeholders	100	41
1.2.1	Number of scientists or decision-makers participating in exchanges between SERVIR hubs or partner institutions	30	139
2.1	Number of stakeholders with increased awareness of geospatial data, knowledge products, tools and or services created or made available via U.S. government assistance	100	21
2.1.1	Number of data agreements developed or created with U.S. government assistance	0	NA
2.1.2	Number of formal partnerships between women’s organizations and technical geospatial agencies	0	NA
2.2.1	Number of visitors to SERVIR–Mekong website	2000	98.389
	Number of data downloads from SERVIR–Mekong website	200	1,161
3.1	Number of climate change mitigation and/or adaptation tools, technologies, and methodologies developed, tested, and/or adopted as a result of U.S. government assistance	3	3
3.1.1	Number of SERVIR data layers standardized and made available in data portals	3	3
3.2.1	Number of institutions co-developing and/or adaptation tools, technologies and methodologies	3	3
4.1	ADPC Capacity assessment	NA	NA

Indicator No.	Indicator Name	Anticipated	Actual
4.1	ADPC Capacity Assessment Score	NA	NA
4.2.1	Amount of investment mobilized in USD for climate change as supported by U.S. government assistance	50,000	260,000

Source: SERVIR 2016

SERVIR-Mekong had released three tools through its web site as of the end of Fiscal Year (FY) 2016: The Surface Water Mapping tool, Eco-Dash, and Dam Inundation. The Virtual River and Virtual Rain Gauge Data Service, MapCha, Regional Land Cover Monitoring System, Regional Seasonal Weather Information Service, Regional Drought and Crop Yield Information System, Web-WSP Accounting Support Platform, and Regional Severe Thunderstorm Tracking System tools are still under various stages of development (SERVIR 2016b). SERVIR-Mekong’s open data portal provides open geospatial data and has the following databases: normalized difference vegetation index (NDVI) for the Lower Mekong Region; Estimated Dry and Wet Season Surface Water Distribution; and Estimated Changes in Environmental Suitability of Agriculture Production Given Predicted Changes in Climate.

SERVIR-Mekong’s Annual Reports for FY 2015 and 2016 indicate that its staff has attended and organized many meetings, conferences, and training sessions related to the use of geospatial information for conservation purposes (SERVIR-Mekong 2015a, SERVIR-Mekong 2016b).

SERVIR-Mekong presence in Laos and Burma. Section A.12.10 of the Cooperative Agreement establishes special provisions for SERVIR-Mekong assistance to Burma based on restrictions in U.S. law that prohibit assistance to the Government of Burma without prior written approval by the USAID/Burma Agreement Officer’s Representative (AOR). It similarly requires that any SERVIR-Mekong assistance to Thailand first be approved in writing by the USAID Agreement Officer. Several KIs noted that SERVIR-Mekong activity in Laos has been restricted pending U.S. Embassy approval in that country. Other U.S. government KIs noted that the Laos government might be sensitive to the U.S. offering geospatial data. U.S. government KIs in Laos, however, indicated that SERVIR-Mekong would be visiting Laos soon to explore possibilities for offering its services there. These KIs said that they had heard from several Laos ministries of their interest in capacity building in the use of geospatial data through SERVIR-Mekong. According to a KI with knowledge of the situation, USAID has limited SERVIR-Mekong activity in Burma until it is clear that it will not duplicate the function of OneMap. In order to address such concerns, SERVIR-Mekong has been actively engaged with OneMap Myanmar and its implementing partner, the University of Bern’s Centre for Development and Environment.

Coordination with existing regional Geographic Information System (GIS) capacity. One respondent noted that SERVIR-Mekong is developing new geospatial tools and is adding “new information that cannot be found on other portals.” KIs in Thailand, by contrast, said that SERVIR-Mekong may be duplicating existing geospatial tools and regional capacity, noting that Japan, China, Disaster Charter, and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) all have projects regarding geospatial data and that “SERVIR has not brought anything new or added anything new . . . The tools they are using are like the tools we already have.” A KI noted that SERVIR-Mekong has had to avoid duplicating the work of the University of Bern’s OneMap activity in Burma, although other sources indicate that SERVIR-Mekong has actively worked with the University of Bern precisely to avoid such duplication. Several KIs concurred that Thailand and Vietnam have more capacity for GIS than Burma, Cambodia, and Laos. Documentary data indicate that SERVIR-Mekong has adjusted its approach to these varying capacities.

SERVIR-Mekong's quarterly reports indicate that SERVIR staff have coordinated and collaborated with many other institutions in the region that have GIS capabilities (universities, government institutions, OneMap, SilvaCarbon/Global Forest Observation Initiative (GFOI), the Hydro and Agro Informatics Institute (HAI), and Japanese Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA)) (SERVIR 2015a, SERVIR 2016a).

SERVIR-Mekong's attention to gender issues. The SERVIR-Mekong Cooperative Agreement notes that "men and women may have different levels of access to training in and use of geospatial technologies" and that SERVIR-Mekong will "evaluate gender equality in regard to information access, technical capacities, and leadership roles, and develop appropriate targets and an action plan for engaging and benefiting both women and men in the program." According to one KI, the project is trying to "bridge the gap between women's organization and GIS . . . pushing the envelope in social inclusiveness" by asking such questions as "How can tools be built in such a way so as not to exacerbate dominant paradigms between male and female?" SERVIR-Mekong just launched a small grants program called Gender and GIS. This grants program resulted in a handbook that included Guidance Notes that provide guidance to application developers and potential application users on integrating gender concerns in the production of GIS applications for environmental/natural resource management, disaster risk management, and building resilience to climate change. In September 2016, SERVIR-Mekong also partially financed an event called "Power, Vulnerability and Agency in Disaster Risk Reduction: A Knowledge Exchange for Sustainable Development in Asia," which created "better linkages and synergies between disaster risk reduction and gender initiatives" and linked women's groups and GIS agencies in the Lower Mekong Region (SERVIR 2016b). The Gender and GIS Infographic shows how to integrate GIS gender issues (SERVIR 2016b).

Conclusions

SERVIR-Mekong provides an important regional service that is likely to improve regional environmental decision-making, but not in the specific ways that are sought after by sub-purpose 1.1.3. To the extent that geospatial mapping tools represent "sound science," SERVIR-Mekong is contributing to the inclusion of these into regional environmental decision-making, although it is unclear if this has affected regional development investments. Likewise, SERVIR-Mekong is poised to increase the consideration of gender dynamics (and thus improve the use of SES) in environmental decision-making through its "Gender and GIS" small grants program, but it is not clear how or if this will affect regional development investments either. More detail on these dynamics can be found in the specific conclusions below.

SERVIR-Mekong was not designed to contribute to IR 1.1.3. SERVIR-Mekong's written objective statement, its association with the Asia Center for Disaster Preparedness, and its recent association with the RDMA's climate change IR, indicate that SERVIR-Mekong was designed more to address disaster preparedness and climate change adaptation objectives than IR 1.1.3.

SERVIR-Mekong supplies an important regional service. To the extent that the production and use of geospatial mapping tools constitutes USAID's definition of sound science, SERVIR-Mekong contributes to the sound science part of IR 1.1.3. The KIs and documentation, however, do not indicate that SERVIR-Mekong has been involved in promoting the use of geospatial data specifically for making decisions about "regional development investments" or for the "improved use of social and environmental safeguards," at least not at the time of this evaluation.

SERVIR-Mekong has effectively considered gender issues within the scope of its geospatial work. SERVIR-Mekong has given adequate and effective attention to gender issues within the scope of its geospatial work. Its efforts to incorporate social media in its outreach are promising in terms of the

potential for Lower Mekong Region stakeholders to consider gender dynamics as they incorporate GIS into their own objectives.

Recommendation

Define SERVIR-Mekong’s expected contribution to IR 1.1.3 and/or LMI.

We recommend that SERVIR-Mekong’s contribution to IR 1.1.3 and/or LMI be more clearly defined in terms that will permit that contribution to be easily and accurately measured and reported.

5. OVERALL SUSTAINABLE MEKONG PORTFOLIO

Findings

SMP’s goals and objectives. Several KIs concurred that SMP was conceived as USAID support for the Water and Environment Pillar of the LMI and that it has been managed to achieve LMI objectives rather than IR 1.1.3. Documentary data corroborates this finding, since they indicate that the four SMP activities have involved different countries and have different, not universally complementary, objectives. While SMP’s components treat parts of IR 1.1.3 individually, the sum of their objectives does not comprehensively address the overall portfolio objective. SMP does support achieving the goal and objectives stated in the LMI Master Plan of Action 2016–2020. Its actions correspond more to the LMI’s Connectivity than to its Environment and Water Pillar’s objectives (see Appendix C).

Meaning of key terms in IR 1.1.3. The IR 1.1.3 statement uses rather ambiguous terms. “Improved use,” for example, is difficult to define and measure. While “social and environmental safeguards” generally refer to the ADB and the World Bank social and environmental standards and “sound science” generally refers to a replicable research methodology, not to a specific research result, these are not immediately clear and well (or consistently) understood by all KIs.

Decision-making targets of SMP activities. IR 1.1.3 aims to improve “decision-making.” KIs emphasized that, in the Lower Mekong countries, high-level government officials and project investors make decisions about large infrastructure projects. Documentary and KII data, however, indicate that only the CRM activity has specifically targeted these decision-makers. SERVIR-Mekong and MPE, by contrast, interacted almost exclusively with mid-level government officials, not high-level “decision-makers,” with the exception, perhaps, of high-level “decision-makers” in the Cambodian banking system. SIM and SERVIR-Mekong’s technical assistance/training for mid-level government officials who do analyses of data may eventually influence the decisions of the high-level decision-makers, although SIM has interacted with some of the same high-level decision-makers that CRM targets, according to a KI with knowledge of the situation.

As of November 2016, when the evaluation was conducted, KII and documentary data did not indicate that SMP activities had yet influenced the decisions of high-level government officials. Documentation uncovered after the study period indicates that SIM has achieved such an impact with environmental code and recommendations for navigational dredging, achieving the status of formal regulations and sub-decree, respectively, in Cambodia as of January 2017.¹⁶ At the time of this report, similar impacts

¹⁶ See Keller 2017 in the Bibliography.

were imminent in Laos regarding sediment and dam safety guidelines, although the evaluation team did not receive documentation to support this claim.

Use of EIA for decision-making. Within IR 1.1.3's reference to SES, MPE chose to concentrate on the public participation aspect of the EIAs. The EIA is meant to be one basis for making decisions, but Wells-Dang (2016) and many KIs agreed that in the Lower Mekong countries, "impact assessment frequently has become a bureaucratic and technical exercise emphasizing the writing and approval of a scientific document rather than part of a holistic planning process to inform decision making."¹⁷

SMP and Lower Mekong country cooperation. Many KIs and documents note that hydropower dams on the Mekong River and its tributaries are the key issue for regional cooperation because they so significantly affect the areas downstream. Binh (2006) attributes ineffective or non-existent cooperation between the Lower Mekong countries to the weaknesses of the MRC, whose members are only in the lower basin and which has no conflict resolution capability. SMP has attempted to foster regional cooperation through numerous activities, such as the 2016 conferences organized by SIM and CRM on fish, SERVIR's regional workshops on GIS, and CRM's conferences on fish passages and dam designs. In particular, MPE, through the RTWGs on public participation in EIA, has developed and tested a methodology for regional cooperation on establishing guidelines for resolving environmental issues.

Regional versus country USAID programs. KIs involved with SMP thought it should concentrate on assisting the Lower Mekong countries to resolve regional environmental problems, whereas KIs who work on national activities tended to think SMP should "fill in gaps" in national programs. Several KIs, however, expressed the subtler viewpoint that SMP should work to resolve regional problems that negatively affect achievement of country objectives. One noted, for example, that "RDMA has responsibilities that affect the work we are doing in this country in agriculture. If we don't get the hydropower issue straight, what agriculture will we have here? Most RDMA programs complement what we do . . . but RDMA does not look at our experiences. We are local and understand what the government wants since we meet with it all the time. RDMA needs to study our program."

Coordination of SMP activities. Documentary and KII data indicate that there is still room for improvement with respect to effective coordination of SMP activities. For example, the SERVIR FY 2016 Annual Report says, "SERVIR-Mekong frequently encounters existing efforts either implemented by or supported by USAID and other U.S. government agencies that relate to its work in some way," and suggests that RDMA map U.S. government efforts in the region so that SERVIR can support them effectively. Similarly, KIs in USAID/Vietnam and USAID/Cambodia noted that although SMP activities are important to achieving their country objectives, they have often lacked information about what these activities are doing. One respondent noted the difficulties of coordinating the RDMA with the mission's

¹⁷ Well-Dang 2015: "EIA implementation is limited by numerous political economy constraints, some general across the Mekong region, others specific to one or more country contexts. Certain of these constraints can be addressed through a regional cooperative approach, while others will require longer term changes in social and political dynamics to encourage uptake and impact and avoid possible blockage from entrenched interest groups." Baird 2015: "In general, the implementation of EIA processes in Lower Mekong countries often commences too late, when the major project decisions (including site, design, and construction preparation) already have been made, thereby rendering the EIA process a formality"

programming: “SIM and SERVIR are very important to us, but . . . we struggle to get information and know how things are progressing. I think the two missions need to think about how we can help each other. It is always difficult because regional missions have mandates that we don’t have.”

Social media and environmental issues. Several KIs emphasized the importance of social media in influencing decision-makers in the Lower Mekong countries. One, for example, noted that there is a strong role for GIS in social media, since Facebook is a fundamental part of people’s lives in in the Lower Mekong Region, and new knowledge products are frequently posted on social media. Visits to SERVIR-Mekong’s website increased from 2,000 people per month to 100,000 people per month after a website relaunch with a social media presence. One Vietnamese KI said, “Nowadays people do not watch a lot of things on TV, but they go online and on Facebook. It is the easy way to do propaganda is through the online newspaper.” Several noted that dramatic environmental disasters stir up public interest in environmental issues. The owner of an online newspaper, for example, said its readership increased by forty percent when it published information about a chemical spill from a factory that caused a millions of fish to die. Many agreed that such public interest and even anger sometimes stir even authoritarian governments to take action to protect the environment. Use of social media, however, is more common in the more prosperous countries, like Thailand and Vietnam (67 percent and 48 percent social media penetration, respectively) than in poorer countries such as Laos and Burma (each with 26 percent social media penetration) (Kemp, 2017).

SMP and investment in infrastructure in the Lower Mekong. The Lower Mekong countries require enormous investments in infrastructure if they are to achieve rates of equitable economic growth that will lift them into middle income status. Unambiguous, technically sound environmental regulations have become an important aspect of attracting investment funds. SMP’s efforts to assist the Lower Mekong countries to use SES and sound science are, therefore, important to it attracting investment funds. There are opportunities for “win-win” investments in infrastructure that also raise incomes and living standards and conserve ecosystem processes and biodiversity. For example, a KI commented:

It would be beneficial if there were guidelines in place for to educate business and CSOs on the supply chain. How do you create win-win between business and communities through a stakeholder plan that addresses poverty through job creation? In the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA), the consultant gives plans for livelihood restoration, and this would be a good regional activity. Thailand and Vietnam have more experience than Myanmar. Social aspects are important in EIA, but there is little in the ESIA on how to follow up on social impacts. Businesses need to learn to address long-term needs through win-win activities that benefit both businesses and communities.

Conclusions

SMP’s origin reduces its effectiveness. The origin and objectives of SMP prevented it from being a coordinated, inter-related set of technical responses whose results can be accurately measured for the progress they are making toward achieving IR 1.1.3. Rather, the four SMP activities were consolidated in a portfolio that would support the LMI. SMP fits the activities and aims of the LMI “Connectivity Pillar” more closely than its “Water and Environment Pillar.” The ambiguous meanings of many of the terms used of the IR 1.1.3 statement make the links between the SMP activities and the achievement of IR 1.1.3 difficult to understand. That only CRM clearly aims to influence “decision-makers” for large infrastructure projects contributes to the difficulty of measuring SMPs results in terms of the IR 1.1.3 statement. So does the use of the term “social and environmental safeguards,” since this term is so associated with the loans made by the World Bank and ADB, and since MPE chose to concentrate its attention on participation in the EIA process, which is only one part of SES.

Sharper regional versus country USAID roles would increase SMP’s effectiveness. The relationship between RDMA SMP regional activities and USAID country activities is not completely clear. Should SMP “fill in the gaps” in the environmental aspects of a USAID country program when the mission lacks sufficient funds to finance them itself or gives them low priority? Or should SMP operate based on RDMA’s own strategy for assisting the Lower Mekong countries to address the negative environmental impacts of large infrastructure projects by achieving IR 1.1.3? SMP could both support USAID country mission programs and implement an RDMA regional environmental strategy based on assisting the Lower Mekong countries to cooperate more fully on environmental issues. Developing this dual strategy for SMP, however, will require frequent, detailed, productive discussions with USAID mission staff.

SMP has provided a model for regional coordination. Regional cooperation for resolving environmental problems that large infrastructure projects invariably cause remains incredibly important. While the four SMP activities have promoted regional coordination, the MPE model of developing regional guidelines through national and RTWG provides the most promising and feasible model for addressing other environmental problems on a regional rather than national basis.

According to their M&E systems and KIs, SMP activities are attaining their objectives. In general, the four SMP activities are gradually attaining their stated objectives. This is occurring despite the constraints they face, including them not having been designed to contribute specifically to achieving IR 1.1.3. Each SMP activity is in a different stage of implementation, and each one works with a different and diverse range of actual and potential beneficiaries. These differences make it difficult to compare the progress of the activities against each other or to judge their relative contribution to IR 1.1.3. The data indicate, however, that SMP is strongest when its activities are linked to permanent, technically strong institutions. SERVIR-Mekong, for example, derives strength from being linked to NASA and ADPC, and SIM derives its strength from being linked to the DOI. CRM, by contrast, being implemented by a small NGO, and MPE, being a temporary project, do not have equivalent institutional bases.

SMP’s M&E systems do not adequately measure its results. As noted above, it is difficult to accurately measure the results of the four SMP activities. The monitoring data presented in the tables entitled “Anticipated versus Actual Results” for each of the four activities clearly fail to capture the most important results of the SMP activities. That this evaluation had to seek qualitative data from key informants and focus groups indicates that the data from the activities’ M&E Plans are inadequate for evaluating the progress of the activities.

We conclude that some of the potentially most important results from the SMP are the most difficult to measure. Such results require qualitative narratives to describe the processes, the interactions, the achievements, and the problems encountered. SMP activities’ M&E plans are based almost entirely on numbers that cannot capture these results. This evaluation’s findings indicate clearly that SMP activities are not construction projects that can proceed with great regularity and certainty in a step-by-step process along a predetermined timeline. Rather, they are slowly maturing activities that can only assist the Lower Mekong countries gradually to develop their capacities for avoiding and mitigating the negative environmental effects of large infrastructure projects. Thus, the type of progress that might be expected of SMP is inconsistent with the way its progress is being measured.

SMP provides occasional, although inadequate, attention to social issues, and gender dynamics in particular. In general, judging by the attention that social issues, and gender dynamics in particular have been given in each of the SMP activities according to previous sections of this report, these have not been assigned the importance that the USAID Gender Policy would require. None of the SMP activities, for example, has established a minimum for women’s participation in training events, although quotas are frequently required to achieve the objective of gender equality and equity (Ly et al.

2015). MPE has financed some excellent research on gender and EIA (Ly et al. 2015), but its documentation otherwise indicates relatively little attention to gender issues. Quarterly Reports from SIM and CRM indicate rather perfunctory attention to gender issues in their technical assistance and training activities, although this may be expected from a heavily technical program like CRM.

SMP cannot be effective or comply with USAID policy if it does not devise ways to involve women and disadvantaged groups, particularly ethnic groups, in its activities. Nonetheless, it has not explicitly and sufficiently incorporated gender and social issues, involving women and ethnic minority peoples, into the design and implementation of most of its activities.

Recommendations

1. Clarify SMP's objectives by rewriting the IR 1.1.3 statement.

RDMA should define more clearly SMP's objectives and terminology by rewriting the statement for IR 1.1.3 using unambiguous terms. For example, rather than using the terms "social and environmental safeguards" and "sound science," it could state clearly that the purpose of IR 1.1.3 is to assist the Lower Mekong countries to "to measure, understand, avoid, and mitigate negative social and environmental impacts of large infrastructure projects."

2. Continue model for regional coordination.

Based on MPE's positive experience, we recommend that RDMA design, finance, and implement a new activity that would continue the regional coordination work that MPE started successfully, using RTWG and multi-stakeholder consultations for other regional issues relevant to RDMA.

3. Make SMP's M&E more useful.

We recommend that RDMA revise SMP's M&E plans so that they become more useful and accurate. We understand that for internal reporting purposes to USAID, RDMA is required to provide numerical data. For RDMA's purposes of scaling up SMP activities, however, we recommend that it implement an M&E system that is based on qualitative rather than quantitative data.

4. Incorporate social, and in particular gender-oriented, issues explicitly in SMP activities.

We recommend that RDMA explicitly incorporate social, and particularly gender-oriented, issues into the SMP activities by establishing quotas for training of women and ethnic minority groups. This would improve their compliance with USAID's Gender Policy and increase program effectiveness by including female government officials' or technical professionals' perspectives.

B. QUESTION B1: FUTURE PROGRAMMING

What other interventions, opportunities, corrective, or adaptive actions should RDMA prioritize in the future programming for the Lower Mekong Countries: (a) considering what other stakeholders, for example, bilateral Missions, other U.S. government agencies, bilateral donors, multilateral development banks, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), universities, private sector entities, and others have been doing; (b) to contribute to the IR 1.1 "improved regional management of natural capital" through the "improved use of social and environmental safeguards and sound science for decision-making in the Lower Mekong Sub-region"; and (c) in response to other USAID and U.S. government policies and priorities related to environment, i.e., Climate Change and Development, Biodiversity, or Resilience?

FINDINGS

Actions of Other Stakeholders

Other U.S. Government Agencies

DoS currently finances part of SMP as part of the LMI and may continue to do so in the future. KIs emphasized that when DoS finances an SMP activity, that activity must respond to its objectives as much as or more than it responds to RDMA's objectives. The KIs said that DoS's objectives for LMI are oriented more toward diplomacy than development.

DOI has been RDMA's next most important U.S. government agency partner in the implementation of the SIM activities of SMP. Its International Technical Assistance Program (DOI-ITAP) draws from diverse expertise of DOI employees to build capacities in other countries through on-site technical assistance, U.S.-based training, one-on-one mentoring, and train-the-trainer workshops. DOI typically contributes the salaries and benefits of its technical experts, while external funds cover other expenses, such as travel costs. DOI-ITAP has worked with USAID and DoS in more than sixty countries.

According to one KI, DOI-ITAP has a well-staffed, experienced team able to handle international work efficiently and effectively. The expertise of DOI-ITAP includes such areas as indigenous peoples' issues, mitigation and management of natural disasters, energy, mining, and water management (DOI 2016). The DOI's **Division of Mineral Resources** (DME), a branch of the **Office of Valuation Services** (OVS), provides mineral evaluations for the United States Federal government. (DOI 2016)

The SIM activity under SMP has been implemented through a PAPA between USAID/RDMA and DOI-ITAP. The PAPA is not only for SIM, however, and the SIM budget is not separated from the other activities under the PAPA. Section III.A evaluates the SIM activity and concludes that it has responded well to the objectives of LMI and IR 1.1.3.

The **USACE** is the third U.S. government agency for RDMA to consider when planning future programming. The most important contribution this U.S. government agency has made to the LMI was through the Mississippi-Mekong Sister River Partnership, wherein it took delegations from the Mekong River countries to its Great Rivers Education and Research Center. The USACE has expertise in water management and infrastructure projects. The evaluation team was unable to evaluate USACE's expertise in the design, construction, and operation of hydropower dams of the type that are being built or proposed for the Mekong River and its tributaries. In August 2016, representatives from the MRC visited the USACE's **Institute for Water Resources** (IWR) to discuss opportunities for collaboration between various water management agencies in the Mekong River region and the IWR's **International Center for Integrated Water Resources Management** on issues such as flood risk management, transboundary water management issues, water supply, hydropower, sediment management, and collaborative planning techniques. One IWR staff member noted: "IWR's engagement with the MRC has a long and productive history. Providing effective, efficient, and safe water resources is a common goal . . . and USACE and IWR look forward to continuing these dialogues and technical exchanges" (USACE 2016).

Finally, the **EPA** is currently participating in SMP programming with its "Strengthening Environmental Impact Assessment in the Lower Mekong Region" program in support of MPE. The evaluation team was unable to find sufficient documentary or primary evidence to characterize the success or relevance of this sub-activity. Aside from this activity, most EPA activity in the region is bilateral, with existing programming in Thailand and Vietnam only that aligns with existing objectives, such as pollution reduction (EPA 2017).

Other Bilateral Programs

The **Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA)** finances Japanese construction companies to build major infrastructure projects such as roads, ports, bridges, and airports in the Lower Mekong countries (see Appendix G). Other JICA programs include health projects to help the most vulnerable groups of people, training courses to produce new groups of local experts and administrators, programs to mitigate and adapt to climate change and environmental degradation, and urban planning. JICA infrastructure projects have had tremendous impact in the Lower Mekong Region. For example, JICA planned and financed the 1,450-kilometer East-West economic corridor linking the port of Mawlamyaing in Burma with Danang in Viet Nam via Thailand and Laos and the 1,600-meter-long Second Mekong International Bridge over the Mekong River, which have transformed the economy of the region. Japanese finance and expertise have also helped to rebuild airports and ports throughout the Lower Mekong Region, including designing and financing Cambodia's largest port, Sihanoukville. JICA projects in Myanmar, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia are using satellite imaging to establish baseline maps of forest cover and land use. JICA encourages the Lower Mekong countries to cooperate and integrate their natural resources and environmental programs. Since the early 2000s, JICA, usually together with the MRC, has been closely involved in Mekong Delta studies such as the Key International Monitoring Stations in the Mekong Delta study and the Climate Change Adaptation for Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development in Coastal Mekong Delta Vietnam study. JICA also provides grants for technical studies that model Mekong River hydrology, climate changes, and agriculture. Since 2000, JICA has also provided grants for studies of the energy sector, including power generation; non-renewable; electrical transmission/distribution; coal-fired power plants; energy policy, administration, and management; and hydroelectric power plants.

Finally, Finland, the **Nordic Development Fund (NDF)** and the **Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)** finance the **Core Environment Program of the GMS (GMSCEP)** (GMSCEP 2016).

Multilateral Development Banks

The **Asian Development Bank** has three strategic agendas: inclusive economic growth, environmentally sustainable growth, and regional integration. It also has five “drivers of change”: (1) private sector development and private sector operations, (2) good governance and capacity development, (3) gender equity, (4) knowledge solutions, and (5) partnerships. Eighty percent of the ADB’s lending is in five core operational areas: infrastructure, education, environment, regional cooperation, and integration and finance.

The ADB Water Strategy states that “multiple public agencies, at different levels, share responsibility for water allocation and its use. Harmonization of sectoral and spatial planning in river basins is required, and the interdependence of water, food, and energy requires greater attention.” It supports embedded integrated water resources management as an “adaptive management process in river basins.” Further, the Water Policy recognizes that “dwindling freshwater endowments . . . require better trans-boundary water management, both within and among countries,” but states that “ADB will only work in this area if requested by all [relevant] riparian countries.” The Energy Policy has three pillars: promoting energy efficiency and renewable energy, maximizing access to energy for all, and promoting energy sector reform, capacity building, and governance. It notes that the “ADB will also selectively support large hydroelectric power plants requiring seasonal storage reservoirs with multipurpose benefits. However, such financing will be based on the economic benefits and the projects will comply with ADB’s social and environmental safeguards requirements. Such projects may be for domestic or regional benefits” (ADB 2009).

ADB's programming includes **GMSCEP** and the **GMS Program**. The GMS countries are Cambodia, the People's Republic of China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam, which entered into a program of sub-regional economic cooperation, designed to enhance their economic relations. The GMS Program helps the implementation of sub-regional projects in transport, energy, telecommunications, environment, human resource development, tourism, trade, private sector investment, and agriculture. Substantial progress has been achieved in terms of implementing GMS projects since 1992. Priority infrastructure projects worth around \$11 billion have either been completed or are being implemented. Among these are the upgrading of the Phnom Penh (Cambodia)-Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam) highway and the East-West Economic Corridor, which will eventually extend from the Andaman Sea to Da Nang (ADB 2016b). GMSCEP has programs in strategic planning, safeguards, environmental monitoring, biodiversity landscapes and livelihoods, climate change, and capacity building (GMSCEP 2016).

In 2006, the World Bank and ADB jointly published a Mekong Water Resources Assistance Strategy that "emphasizes positive opportunities and the potential to balance the risk- and investment-averse attitudes of the past decade, and to stress the benefits of cooperation." The Strategy argues that "(a) much has been achieved in the region that is essential and positive, (b) that these achievements are, however, far from sufficient to address the upcoming challenges and capture the opportunities, and (c) that, unless serious attention is given by the development partners to the present institutional dynamics in the Mekong River management, there is a high likelihood that the progress made in building cooperation among the riparian states will dissipate" (World Bank and ADB 2006).

Currently, the **World Bank** is financing the \$12 million Mekong Integrated Water Resources Management project with Laos and the MRC. Its objective is to establish integrated water resource management practices in the Lower Mekong Basin at the regional, national, and sub-national levels, thus contributing to more sustainable river basin development in the Lower Mekong (World Bank 2016).

NGOs

EarthRights International (ERI) is a non-governmental, non-profit organization that documents human rights and environmental abuses in countries where few other organizations can safely operate. It operates the **EarthRights School Mekong**, at Chiang Mai University in Thailand. The school has provided seven months of training on the negative socioeconomic and environmental impacts of large infrastructure projects to over 300 civil society advocates of human rights and environmental protection from the Mekong Region. The school's alumni program promotes networking, collaboration, information exchange, training, and technical assistance among the alumni (Earth Rights 2016).

SEI-Asia aims to make science influence policy in order to advance sustainable development of the Mekong Region. Its multi-national staff has expertise in the social and physical sciences. The staff operates through the **Sustainable Mekong Research Network** (SUMERNET) and the **Regional Asia Environment Conference Support Programme**. The former integrates research and the use of scientific evidence in policy-making. The latter promotes dialogue and knowledge sharing to shape public policy to advance sustainable development.

The **Global Environmental Institute** (GEI), established in Beijing in 2004, designs and implements market-based models to solve environmental problems and realize sustainable development in China and other countries. Its Investment, Trade, and Environment program supports and encourages the Chinese government to formulate foreign investment and trade-related environmental policies that regulate and guide the environmental conduct of Chinese enterprises that are investing outside of China; increase the environmental governance capacity of other countries, including the development of appropriate environmental policies that regulate environmental conduct of investors; and improve the capability of Chinese enterprises to comply with environmental policies and regulations, better manage

investment risks, and fulfill their environmental and social responsibilities. GEI participated in the development of “A Guide on Sustainable Overseas Forest Management and Utilization by Chinese Enterprises and Guidelines for Environmental Protection in Foreign Investment and Cooperation” (GEI 2016).

The **China ASEAN Environmental Cooperation Center** is a thinktank under the Ministry of Environmental Protection in China. It is a focal point for environmental cooperation between China and ASEAN and provides support to the government agencies both in China and ASEAN member states for developing an environmental cooperation strategy/plan. It facilitates dialogues on environment and development policies, conducts joint policy studies on selected key issues in the region, and provides policy recommendations to policymakers. It develops partnerships with all interested countries and international organizations and creates networks to support the programs and activities jointly developed by China and ASEAN.

According to its website, the **World Wildlife Fund** (WWF) “is the only environmental organization working across the entire Mekong River basin—from its headwaters in China to the Mekong Delta in Vietnam.” It is supporting a 10-year deferral on making a decision for hydropower projects on the Mekong main stream to allow for a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis of their construction and operation and is advocating for Mekong countries to establish an environmental master plan for the Mekong River, based on a solid baseline of data on water, sediment, and nutrient flows and connectivity. WWF is “advising on the design and operation of hydropower dams in order to provide the best development opportunities at the least cost to the local environment, people and economies” based on “sound science, smart financing, alternative hydropower dams on tributary rivers and development standards” (WWF 2016).

The **International Union for the Conservation of Nature** (IUCN) is implementing the **Building River Dialogue and Governance** (BRIDGE) project. BRIDGE operates in the Se Kong, Sesan, and Sre Pok River basins located in the border region of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam; these are the only trans-boundary tributaries of the Mekong. The “3S Rivers,” as they are collectively called, are important in the hydrology of the Lower Mekong, contributing up to 18 percent of its annual total discharge. IUCN and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) jointly finance BRIDGE (IUCN 2016).

In 2005, environmental agency leaders from thirteen Asian countries established the **Asian Environmental Compliance and Enforcement Network** (AECEN) to promote improved compliance with environmental legal requirements in Asia. AECEN accomplishes this task through the exchange of innovative policies and practices among member enforcement agencies. The mission of AECEN is to promote improved compliance with environmental legal requirements in Asia through regional exchange of innovative policies and practices. Members are national and sub-national agencies from Asian countries committed to improving compliance and enforcement through regional cooperation and information exchange. Members presently include environmental agencies from: Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, People’s Republic of China, Laos, Malaysia, the Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam. The AECEN has been commissioned to maintain an EIA clearinghouse to facilitate knowledge capture and dissemination of information on international and regional best practices in EIA implementation (AECEN 2016).

The **Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research** (CGIAR) is an international consortium of fifteen independent organizations that do research on reducing poverty, enhancing food and nutrition security, and improving natural resources and ecosystem services. The CGIAR centers collaborate with and support hundreds of partners, including national and regional research institutes,

civil society organizations, academia, development organizations, and private sector organizations. The principal CGIAR members doing research in the Lower Mekong Region are the International Rice Research Institute, World Agroforestry Centre, World Fish, International Water Management Institute, International Center for Tropical Agriculture, and Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR).

Universities

There are several regional universities whose staff do research on issues related to the goals and objectives of SMP (see Appendix E). The **Vermont Law School** has been involved in various ways in the Lower Mekong countries through the **U.S.-China Partnership for Environmental Law (PEL)**, which was financed by a Cooperative Agreement with USAID/RDMA. PEL designed and implemented a project to research China's foreign investment activities in the GMS and policies or other mechanisms that could be used to mitigate the environmental and social impacts of these investments, working with the **Global Environmental Institute (GEI)**. PEL also worked with the **China-ASEAN Environmental Cooperation Center (CAEC)** to organize and host an innovative regional workshop in Beijing that brought together government representatives, NGO leaders, academics, and environmental lawyers from both China and the GMS countries to begin a dialogue on these issues and strengthen cross-border communication and cooperation to address them. Numerous KIs indicated that the School has been effective in its work in both China and the Lower Mekong countries and has excellent working relationships with Chinese and Lower Mekong institutions that influence social and environmental safeguards in the region. These KIs also indicate that the School is maintaining a close relationship with Chinese educational institutions. According to a KI in Myanmar, the Vermont Law School is continuing to work there on environmental issues with financial support from the **Henrich Boll Foundation**.

China

Gill et al. (2016) interprets how future U.S. engagement in Southeast Asia should fit into the three-sided dynamic of China, the United States, and the Southeast Asia countries. Various articles in Diokno and Chinh (2006) review how China has become extremely influential in the Lower Mekong countries. They emphasize that China sees the Lower Mekong countries as sources of raw materials and energy, as well as trade, to develop Yunnan Province in western China. Since 2009, the Chinese government and Chinese enterprises have become the principal stakeholders in planning, financing, and constructing much of the infrastructure in the Lower Mekong Region. Currently, for example, the major dams in Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar, except for one (Xayaboury), are Chinese projects. Data from numerous KIIs confirmed this documentary evidence of China's economic and political influence in the Lower Mekong countries.

Documents and KIs agreed that Chinese enterprises have not addressed the environmental issues well. For example, one KI said, "Chinese thinktanks and universities recognize that criticism of Chinese companies for their generally poor environmental records has financial implications," and mentioned that the Chinese Chamber of Commerce has communicated with thinktanks and universities about the environmental issues raised by Chinese investments in the Lower Mekong countries. Numerous KIs recommended that USAID regional activities should not only involve China but draw from its experiences with environmental problems. One KI, for example, said that the Chinese examples of public environmental litigation and training courts to deal with environmentally based disputes could be useful in the Lower Mekong countries. Several KIs agreed with the comment of the KI who said, "If China wants to be an important country, then they have to inform and participate in environmental activities."

Mekong River Commission

The MRC, established by the 1995 Mekong Agreement, is an intergovernmental organization that works directly with the governments of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam to jointly manage the shared water resources and the sustainable development of the Mekong River. The MRC is a platform for water diplomacy and regional cooperation in which member states share the benefits of common water resources despite different national interests. It also acts as a regional knowledge hub on water resources management that helps to inform the decisionmaking process based on scientific evidence.

The MRC is funded through contributions from its four member countries and through technical and financial collaborations with the following countries/organizations through their bilateral and multilateral development and financial institutions: Australia, Belgium, Denmark, European Union (EU), Finland, France, Germany, Japan, Luxembourg, Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands, the World Bank, and the United States. Other partner organizations include ADB, ASEAN, UNDP, and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

The Basin Development Plans and Programs, funded by the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) and other donors, prepared the Basin Development Plan and Strategy for 2011 to 2015 and published a second strategy for 2016–2020. These plans are based on a basin-wide assessment of ecology, social, and economic aspects and identified opportunities and risks for decisionmakers to consider. This plan does not include China. The EU is financing the Climate Change and Adaptation Initiative, which is preparing an Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan that has not yet been finished.

A KI with considerable experience working within MRC commented that the MRC is a good mechanism for getting the four countries to talk together and reaching the “real decisionmakers” in a way that independent organizations cannot do; the “decisionmakers are part of the MRC process” so the MRC “provides access to the decisionmakers.” This KI pointed out that “the challenge is . . . that some topics are very sensitive. MRC uses consensus based approach in which all four countries have to agree, so it takes a lot of time for consultations and policy dialogue to make them feel comfortable to make a decision.” This KI and several others mentioned that a new Commissioner (from Vietnam) was recently appointed and is implementing structural changes in MRC so that its actions are less donor driven and respond more to the priorities of member countries. It has also recently established a “basket fund” financing mechanism to which the donors contribute to support the basin-wide master plan, rather than each donor financing and implementing its own projects with MRC. The intent is to avoid duplication of programs. Donors, however, can choose which part of the master plan’s ten core functions to finance. The National Action Plans estimate how much funding will be needed.

Another KI said that transboundary issues are a priority and that MRC has previously tried to resolve transboundary issues without success; the World Bank is currently financing a consultant to prepare transboundary environmental guidelines.

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

ASEAN has ten members: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei Darussalam, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Burma. The only one of ASEAN’s many aims and purposes that touches on environmental issues is: “promote collaboration and mutual assistance on matters of common interest in the economic, social, cultural, technical, scientific, and administrative fields.” ASEAN includes environmental issues under its cultural pillar, which perhaps indicates the little importance it gives to environmental issues. KIs almost uniformly commented that it is extremely difficult to gain access to or partner with ASEAN and that it is distant from the environmental and socioeconomic problems caused by large infrastructure in the Lower Mekong. A typical comment from

one KI is: “MPE could not find a way to work with ASEAN. It is difficult to work with and has no teeth.” Another KI said that “although ASEAN is the only regional body that works, it has nobody that tackles natural resources, and it goes out of its way to not deal with sensitive issues such as water.”

Mekong Institute

The Mekong Institute (MI) is an intergovernmental organization founded by members of the GMS. It implements educational programs and development projects related to regional cooperation and integration. It is managed by GMS national and international staff and is supported by international academics, subject-matter experts, and consultants. MI works with and through various local government authorities, development partners, and local organizations to deliver and implement standardized and customized learning programs, workshops, seminars, policy consultation, and research and development projects. Its orientation is mostly toward business education. MI has no environmental programs (MI 2006).

Other USAID and U.S. Government Policies and Priorities

U.S. Policies toward China

U.S. government KIs indicated that U.S. policy for collaboration with China on environmental issues in the Lower Mekong countries remains unclear.

LMI

The SMP is intended to contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the LMI (USAID 2016a, U.S. government KI). The LMI is a DoS program that is intended to

- “Promote sustainable growth through regional capacity-building activities, establishment of platforms for dialogue, and facilitation of opportunities for exchange of expertise and best practices;
- Strengthen regional connectivity by building connections between institutions, the public and private sectors, and people within the Mekong Region and with the United States; and
- Identify solutions for key regional challenges, including water, energy, and food security nexus and gender equality and women’s empowerment challenges” (DoS 2016a).

LMI has six “pillars”: agriculture, connectivity, education, energy security, environment and water, and health (DoS 2016b). The SMP is intended to support the Environment and Water Pillar. This pillar is intended to “develop a regional approach to sustainable environmental management and strengthen capacity to manage shared water resources” by understanding and mitigating the risks associated with water-related extreme events, reducing water-related risks, increasing access to safe drinking water and sanitation, improving the productivity of water for food and energy, and maintaining the integrity of ecosystem services and sustainable economic growth (DoS 2016a).

According to a U.S. government KI, DoS provides the funds for the SIM, SERVIR-Mekong, and CRM activities, so these activities must satisfy DoS’s objectives and meet its priorities. No LMI document that the evaluation team reviewed made any reference to China.

USAID Gender Policy

Gender equality and female empowerment are core development objectives, fundamental for the realization of human rights and key to effective and sustainable development outcomes. In the Lower Mekong countries, USAID’s gender policy is particularly pertinent to their numerous, generally poorer, and disadvantaged ethnic minorities. These ethnic groups generally inhabit more remote areas of the

Lower Mekong countries. They are being severely affected by “land grabbing” for the exploitation of natural resources, including forests, water, and minerals (Bourdier 2009).

USAID Biodiversity Policy

USAID’s Biodiversity Policy “promotes the selective, focused, and strategic use of biodiversity resources through identifying priority countries/regions for biodiversity programming. USAID will focus on high-biodiversity-priority geographies where the Agency has a comparative advantage for making positive change and can support host-country conservation and development priorities” (USAID 2015b). According to the WWF, the Lower Mekong region is just such a geography, given that “the Greater Mekong region holds irreplaceable riches—ranging from rare wildlife in spectacular natural landscapes to communities with distinct cultural heritages. The vast region spans six countries: China, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. Its 200 million acres contain some of the most biologically diverse habitats in the world” (WWF 2016).

According to this policy, then, the stewardship of biodiversity is one way in which future RDMA programming could promote the management of natural capital in the region (and thus IR 1.1). The evaluation team could not locate a regional USAID FAA 118 & 119 report on tropical forests and biodiversity for the Lower Mekong Region.

USAID Climate Change and Resilience Policy

USAID’s climate strategy has three overarching objectives: adaptation, integration, and mitigation. It also has three priority types of activity: adaptation, clean energy, and sustainable landscapes. Adaptation means helping countries and communities prepare for and adapt to climate change. Integration means factoring climate change knowledge and practice into all USAID programs. Mitigation means helping countries slow or curb carbon emissions while spurring growth and development through clean energy (renewable energy sources and energy efficiency). Sustainable landscapes means improving the land management of forests and natural landscapes (USAID 2012b).

This last priority activity under the Policy could serve as a justification to include activities targeting sustainable landscapes in future RDMA programming, since these would serve IR 1.1 by improving the management of natural capital.

USAID’s Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance Strategy

USAID’s Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG) Strategy provides a framework to support the establishment and consolidation of inclusive and accountable democracies to advance freedom, dignity, and development. The strategy affirms DRG as integral to USAID’s overall development agenda; builds the DRG foundation needed to eradicate extreme poverty; outlines an approach for supporting and defending civil society; promotes democracy, human rights, and governance through the innovative use of technology; adopts a cohesive, goal-oriented framework; elevates human rights as a key USAID development objective; encourages integration of DRG principles and practices into other development sectors; and defines a country-based strategic approach to applying this strategy (USAID 2013).

Although this strategy is less immediately relevant to RDMA’s environmental programming than the previous two, its support for civil society and human rights is consistent with RDMA’s existing approach of increasing the use of social and environmental safeguards in decisionmaking for regional development investments.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings in the previous section, we have three broad conclusions regarding RDMA's future programming based on the three sub-questions of evaluation question B.1. First, we conclude that the SMP, as it currently exists, stakes out an important and appropriate role for RDMA in regional environmental programming that is not filled by other stakeholders. Second, we conclude that following the example of SMP in future programming is feasible given the activities of other stakeholders, the need to contribute to IR 1.1, and the content of other relevant U.S. government policies. Finally, we conclude that the USAID Policies on Biodiversity and Climate Change, in particular, justify the consideration of future programming in these subject matters on the basis of contributing to improving the management of the region's natural capital (IR 1.1) in other ways than those contemplated under IR 1.1.3. More specific conclusions supporting these broad conclusions can be found below.

Conclusions Regarding the Actions of Other Stakeholders

LMI's priorities are likely to have equal standing to those of RDMA in future programming. RDMA must consider the diplomatic priorities of LMI when it plans its future programming for SMP. While it was beyond the scope of this evaluation to report on DoS's priorities for the future, it appears its priorities will be more diplomatic than developmental. RDMA therefore needs to continue to design and implement SMP in a way that satisfies DoS's diplomatic objectives while also contributing to developmental objectives. SIM has demonstrated that this combination is not only possible but can be effective.

USAID-DOI-IATP PAPA continues to be a suitable vehicle for TA and training during future programming. USAID-DOI-IATP PAPA would continue to be an excellent vehicle for providing technical assistance and training to ministries of the Lower Mekong countries that are concerned with large infrastructure. A section of DOI-ITAP expertise that could provide useful technical assistance and training to some Lower Mekong ministries would be its Division of Mineral Resources (DME), a branch of the Office of Valuation Services (OVS). DME provides mineral evaluations for the United States Federal government. Through the USAID-DOI PAPA, DME could help to train ministries in the Lower Mekong countries to conduct mineral evaluations as a means to use science to mitigate conflicts over mineral resources.

USACE has the technical capability to be involved in future programming involving hydropower. USACE could provide excellent technical advice and training to some ministries of the Lower Mekong countries, especially in the design and operation of water-related infrastructure. The evaluation team did not uncover any documentary or key informant evidence that spoke to USACE's expertise in tropical hydropower dams specifically, although it is possible that they do possess such expertise.

EPA is not involved in the same activities that SMP implements. The EPA is not currently interested in regional environmental activities of the type that SMP implements. Its existing activities in the region are aligned with its own objectives, such as pollution reduction, and are mostly bilateral in nature.

Other bilateral programming does not cover the same issues as SMP. AFD, SIDA, and NDF currently are not financing activities related to avoiding or mitigating the negative environmental effects of large infrastructure projects.

Multilateral development banks have a large funding role in regional infrastructure projects. The World Bank and ADB still are important sources of finance for large infrastructure projects in the Lower Mekong countries. RDMA, therefore, must consider their policies and activities when considering its future programming. In particular, RDMA must consider the activity of the SES training center that they are establishing.

NGOs are significantly involved in relevant regional programming. There are at least six important NGOs, including two Chinese ones, that have programs that deal with environmental issues in the Mekong Region (more information in Appendix E). It was beyond the scope of this report to analyze exactly how RDMA could or could not collaborate with one or more of them when it plans its future programming. It must, of course, follow the policy of DoS regarding contacts and collaboration with Chinese NGOs.

China is a key player in the success of environmental initiatives in the Lower Mekong Region. RDMA's activities to reduce the negative environmental effects of large infrastructure projects by influencing decisionmakers, as IR 1.1.3 proposes, may not succeed unless Chinese universities, thinktanks, and enterprises are involved.

Conclusions Regarding Other USAID and U.S. Government Policies and Priorities

U.S. Policy toward China is not conducive to collaboration with Chinese institutions. The US policy toward China is too uncertain to permit USAID/RDMA to include collaboration with Chinese institutions in its future programming for achieving IR 1.1.3.

USAID Gender Policy is complementary to IR 1.1.3. The gender equity and equality objectives of the USAID Gender Policy are complementary to the objectives of IR 1.1.3. As such, future programming would benefit from the more explicit and holistic inclusion of objectives oriented toward gender and social issues.

USAID Biodiversity Policy is consistent with the goals of IR 1.1.3, as well as of IR 1.1 broadly. RDMA could argue that it is eligible to receive biodiversity funding based on this consistency. If such funding were to be achieved, future programming could include conservation of biodiversity.

USAID Climate Change and Resilience Policy is not consistent with the goals of IR 1.1.3 but could be considered consistent with the goals of IR 1.1. In its future programming for IR 1.1.3, RDMA cannot rely on obtaining funds with the justification of addressing climate change. If RDMA broadened its focus to include improved management of sustainable landscapes as contributing to the improved management of natural capital, it may be able to obtain funds under this justification.

USAID's DRG Strategy overlaps with potential future programming objectives of RDMA. RDMA can make a strong case that actions to achieve IR 1.1.3 are closely linked to USAID human rights policies, particularly in the context of the many underprivileged ethnic minorities that are affected by the decisionmaking RDMA is looking to affect.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the conclusions in the previous section, we believe that RDMA should stay the course in future programming and follow the example of SMP. In doing so, we recommend that RDMA

1. Build on knowledge generated from current SMP activities,

For USAID/RDMA to effectively assist the Lower Mekong countries, it requires experience with the specific situations in each of the five countries and good working relations with private enterprises, government institutions, and civil society organizations. Such experience and relationships take time and money to accumulate. We recommend, therefore, that USAID/RDMA base its future programming on current activities under SMP.

2. Improve current SMP activities,

Section III makes five recommendations for making SIM more effective and one recommendation for orienting SERVIR-Mekong toward IR 1.1.3. We recommend that RDMA implement these recommendations in its future programming for achieving IR 1.1.3 under SMP.

3. Incorporate MPE experiences into future RDMA programming, and

We recommend that RDMA incorporate MPE's successful actions into the design of activities in its future programming. We recommend that such programming include RTWG on gender issues, information dissemination, post-construction resettlement, and research on the socioeconomic and environmental effects of large infrastructure projects.

4. Investigate the possibility of funding future programming that targets conservation of biodiversity and management of sustainable landscapes.

If RDMA was interested in targeting these themes, they would have a justification for doing so in order to both address IR 1.1 more broadly and comply with USAID's policies on this subject. Although international NGOs such as WWF do have existing programming in these areas, both could be considered areas of need in the Lower Mekong Sub-Region that fit within RDMA's existing priorities.

C. QUESTION B2: COORDINATION AND LEVERAGE

How should RDMA further strengthen coordination with partners and/or leverage efforts of regional institutions/platforms (such as MRC), bilateral Missions, other U.S. government agencies, bilateral donors, multilateral development banks, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), universities, private sector, and others to address the future priorities/foci identified in this Portfolio Evaluation?

FINDINGS

The findings about the regional institutions and platforms that support the conclusions below are the same as those at the beginning of Section III.B (Actions of Other Stakeholders), above.

CONCLUSIONS

Coordination with the DoS and DOI is essential for the achievement of IR 1.1.3 in future programming. RDMA coordination with DoS regarding the LMI is important for leveraging its resources for the LMI, which can also contribute to the achievement of IR 1.1.3. The PAPA with DOI provides an excellent form of coordination and leverage with U.S. government agencies that have technical expertise that can be used to achieve IR 1.1.3. Leverage of DOI technical resources could be expanded to include the technical expertise of more DOI agencies, such as the Office of Valuation Services (OVS), and other U.S. government agencies, especially the USACE's capabilities in water management infrastructure.

ADB-GMS offers a good organizational base for SIM follow-on activities. The ADB-GMS Core Environment Program offers a good organizational base for RDMA SIM follow-on activities. Due to its link with the ADB and funding from a wide range of bilateral institutions, including from China, it might open opportunities for greater collaboration between RDMA/REO and China on resolving environmental problems in the Mekong River Basin, including the construction of hydropower dams. Its large, well-defined program of investments coincides closely with the objectives of IR 1.1.3. We conclude that RDMA could best achieve such leverage and coordination through participation in and

financial contribution to the GMSCEP. RDMA participation in GMSCEP would provide it with a means to coordinate and leverage with Chinese private sector investors, thinktanks, universities, and government institutions.

Some but not all NGOs will be useful partners in accomplishing IR 1.1.3. There are limited possibilities for RDMA to leverage the activities of NGOs to accomplish IR 1.1.3; NGOs are generally seeking rather than disbursing funds. The Chinese NGOs may have interests that coincide with IR 1.1.3, but as Chinese organizations, it may be difficult for RDMA to collaborate with them. Several international NGOs are focused on the impacts of large infrastructure projects, public participation in EIAs, capability development, research, public policy, environmental journalism, and stakeholder engagement and have interests that coincide with IR 1.1.3. On the other hand, the large international environmental NGOs' programs are more concerned with conservation of biodiversity and climate change than with the negative effects of large infrastructure projects.

USAID is already funding the Asian Environmental Compliance and Enforcement Network (AECEN). RDMA could probably not leverage funds from AECEN, but it could certainly investigate if there are better ways to coordinate between SMP and AECEN.

The Vermont Law School could be a source of coordination but not leverage. While RDMA could not leverage funds from the Vermont Law School, it is important for RDMA to coordinate with it, particularly if RDMA decides to try to open a dialogue with China. As is outlined in previous sections, China has proven to be a principal decisionmaker regarding investments in large infrastructure in the Lower Mekong Region. The School was an effective partner in the USAID/RDMA-funded PEL, which advanced objectives related to SES in China, and it appears to maintain positive working relationships in that country with government and university institutions alike.

RDMA cannot leverage funds through the MRC. RDMA could not leverage funds through the MRC because of its focus on internal priorities and relative ineffectiveness. However, the MRC's area of interest is perhaps the most related to USAID/RDMA's, of all the regional institutions. Thus, it is very important for RDMA to coordinate with the MRC, especially in relation to the LMI aspects of the SMP.

ERI and SEI-Asia would both be effective partners for future programming. ERI would be an effective partner for EIA public participation, environmental journalism/media, networking, and socially and environmentally responsible banking, while SEI-Asia would be a particularly effective partner for environmental public policy action research, capability development, environmental journalism/media, stakeholder engagement, and networking.

ASEAN and MI are not suitable partners for leverage or coordination on future SMP programming. Although ASEAN is a critical regional partner for RDMA on programming outside the environmental arena, it is not a suitable partner for future programming that follows on the objectives of SMP. ASEAN is primarily oriented toward dealing with regional governments, with few if any provisions for supporting civil society organizations. It does not have a strong, useful focus on environmental issues or encouraging public participation in their resolution. Unless this situation changes, ASEAN is a more suitable partner for non-environmental future RDMA programming. MI offers little opportunity for leverage or collaboration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Improve communication with the bilateral missions about RDMA programming.

Although they are not external stakeholders, findings and conclusions about the overall SMP in Section III.A suggest that the bilateral USAID missions in the region feel that coordination with RDMA could be improved upon in current programming. In future programming, RDMA should consider including relevant bilateral mission staff on email communications or conducting periodic in-person visits to maximize the effectiveness of regional programming with local support.

2. RDMA should leverage funds from the LMI.

RDMA should leverage funds from DoS's LMI for its future programming for achieving IR 1.1.3. To leverage these funds, we recommend that RDMA coordinate closely with the DoS officials who are responsible for LMI. Part of this coordination ought to include clarifying the relationship between LMI and RDMA: although stakeholders on either side of this relationship seem to believe it is important, neither side seems to understand how this relationship functions or ought to function. Outside of understanding the relationship itself, RDMA should ensure that future programming can suit both development and diplomatic objectives so that it remains relevant for LMI funding.

3. RDMA should leverage technical expertise from other U.S. government partners.

Similarly, RDMA should leverage the technical resources available through DOI and the other U.S. government agencies that the DOI can tap for technical expertise, such as the USACE.

4. RDMA should consider the ADB GMSCEP as one institutional mechanism for coordination with other regional EIA institutions.

RDMA should coordinate and collaborate with the GMSCEP as one institutional mechanism to coordinate with other regional EIA institutions and organizations, to leverage Chinese environmental thinktanks, universities, and government institutions, and to leverage funds of Chinese private enterprises that finance or build large infrastructure in the Lower Mekong countries.

5. RDMA should coordinate closely with the Vermont Law School.

We recommend that RDMA coordinate closely with the Vermont Law School. U.S. government policy toward cooperation with China is not conducive to collaboration with Chinese institutions, yet China nonetheless is a key decisionmaker in the arena that RDMA aims to affect through SMP. The School could function as a partner in advancing objectives related to the use of SES in decisionmaking by Chinese institutions.

6. RDMA should explore potential for collaboration with ERI and SEI.

We recommend that RDMA consider partnering with ERI and/or SEI-A to follow-on the range of activities initiated by MPE, especially those related to public participation in EIA, environmental journalism, stakeholder engagement, public policy on large infrastructure, and socially and environmentally responsible banking.

7. RDMA should meet regularly and share information with the MRC

RDMA should coordinate closely with MRC through regular meetings and sharing of information. This recommendation is particularly important in order to accomplish the diplomatic objectives of the LMI and thereby maintain effective coordination and leverage with DoS.

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APPENDIX A: SCOPE OF WORK

SECTION C – DESCRIPTION / SPECIFICATIONS / STATEMENT OF WORK

C.1 TITLE OF ACTIVITY

USAID/RDMA Sustainable Mekong Portfolio Evaluation

C.2 BACKGROUND

The Lower Mekong Sub-region—an area comprised of five Southeast Asian countries, namely; Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam—covers 1.9 million square kilometers and has a combined population of about 235 million. Rapid economic growth in the Lower Mekong countries has reduced the poverty rates but increased the pace of natural resources extraction and infrastructure development. Much of the economic growth has been fueled by demand within the region for food, energy and commodities. Current economic policies, such as the 2015 ASEAN Economic Community, promote greater regional economic harmonization and a reduction in trade barriers. Foreign direct investments (FDI) are now flowing into the sub-region at unprecedented rates, providing crucial sources of development finance.

However, new investments—especially in large-scale infrastructure and agriculture—can have significant social, environmental, and economic impacts over the short and long term. There are serious concerns that planned infrastructure development—such as hydropower dams—could, without sound Social and Environmental Safeguards (SES) systems, disrupt the river’s major fisheries and the food security, livelihoods, water availability, and transportation options for approximately 60 million people in the Lower Mekong Sub-region. Similarly, the conversion of natural forests into oil palm, rubber, timber and other commercial agricultural commodities, and for development of roads, dams, mines and pipelines are major threats to biodiversity in the Lower Mekong countries.

Increasingly, these high impact development projects have regional dimensions. Both the source of financing as well as the demand for energy and resources behind the projects is increasingly originating from within Asia. Similarly, many of the social and environmental impacts of the projects, especially in the case of hydropower, are felt regionally.

Development decisions always involve trade-offs. However, many development decisions in the Lower Mekong countries with significant social and environmental impacts are made without the input and/or agreement of many of the most affected stakeholders, such as local communities.

As a result, decisions are often unduly influenced by vested interests, do not adequately take into account and mitigate the environmental and social risks, and ultimately fail to promote sustainable development in the sub-region. However, many of these impacts could be mitigated with the application of a strong and functional SES and sound science in decision making in regional development investments.

In response to the above issues, USAID/RDMA’s Regional Environment Office (REO) designed its Sustainable Mekong portfolio, which correlates to sub-intermediate result (sub-IR) 1.1.3 of RDMA’s Regional Development Cooperation Strategy (RDCCS). This sub-IR seeks to improve the use of SES and sound science for decision-making in regional development investment. This sub-IR contributes to the intermediate result (IR 1.1), “Improved Regional Management of Natural Capital,” which aims to tackle common transboundary challenges, including regional and trans-regional issues such as illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, illegal wildlife trafficking, climate change and infrastructure development with regional impacts (e.g., Greater Mekong Sub-region hydropower projects). At a regional level, poor transboundary regimes for natural capital management and regional trade in natural capital assets further undermine sustainable and equitable economic growth. A strong focus on regional natural capital management is, therefore, an important aspect of eradicating extreme poverty across Asia. At a higher level, IR 1.1 directly supports the RDCCS’s Development Objective (DO) 1 of increasing the ability of regional institutions to promote sustainable and inclusive regional growth. The linkages between sub-IR 1.1.3, IR 1.1 and DO 1 are presented in the below results framework.

DO 1: Regional Institutions' Ability to Promote Sustainable and Equitable Regional Growth Increased

Indicator: Number of regional institutions with increased ability to promote sustainable and equitable regional growth

IR1.1 Project Purpose: Improved Regional Management of Natural Capital

Illustrative Indicators:

- Greenhouse gas emissions estimated in metric tons of CO2 equivalent, reduced, sequestered, and/or as a result of USG assistance (4.8-7)
- Projected GHG emissions reduced or avoided through 2030 from adopted laws, policies, regulations, or technologies related to:
 - clean energy as supported by USG assistance (4.8.2-34)
 - sustainable landscapes as supported by USG assistance (4.8.2-35)
- Number of hectares of biological significance and/or natural resources under improved natural resource management as a result of USG assistance (4.8.1-26)

Sub-purpose (IR 1.1.1): Increased adoption of low emission development and green growth policies, practices, and investments through regional platforms

Sub-Purpose Indicators:

- Number of low emission development and green growth laws, policies, strategies, plans, agreements, regulations, standards, practices, or investments officially adopted or implemented as a result of USG assistance
- Clean energy generation capacity installed or rehabilitated as a result of USG assistance (4.8.2-32)

Sub-purpose (IR 1.1.2): Regional cooperation for biodiversity conservation through sustainable ecosystems management and trade of natural resources in Asia strengthened.

Sub-Purpose Indicators:

- Number of regional agreements for biodiversity conservation through sustainable ecosystems management and trade of natural resources adopted and/or implemented

Sub-purpose (IR 1.1.3): Improved use of social and environmental safeguards and sound science for decision-making in regional development investments.

Sub-Purpose Indicators:

- Number of development projects with improved application of social and environmental safeguards as a result of USG assistance

C.2.1 THE SUSTAINABLE MEKONG PORTFOLIO (SUB IR 1.1.3)

The Sustainable Mekong portfolio was designed to increase the access of government officials, decision-makers, and other stakeholders in all five Lower Mekong Countries to reliable information on the anticipated social and environmental costs as well as benefits of infrastructure projects, and improve their understanding of realistic measures to reduce the environmental and social risks of infrastructure investments. Activities implemented under this portfolio support the development of environmentally- and socially-sound infrastructure in the energy, transport, water, and agriculture sectors of Lower Mekong countries. Sustainable Mekong Activities are to advance decision-making that is informed by sound science and considers the anticipated social and environmental costs as well as benefits of regional development projects; increase coordination of national governments through regional bodies on infrastructure; and improve access to reliable information on the anticipated social and environmental costs and benefits of infrastructure investments. By helping the region mitigate negative social and environmental impacts of infrastructure development, activities under the Sustainable Mekong portfolio can help address extreme poverty in the Lower Mekong Sub-region. These efforts thereby provide reliable energy access, strengthen energy security, improve air quality, reduce health costs, boost economic growth, reduce transnational conflict, and promote food security and biodiversity conservation.

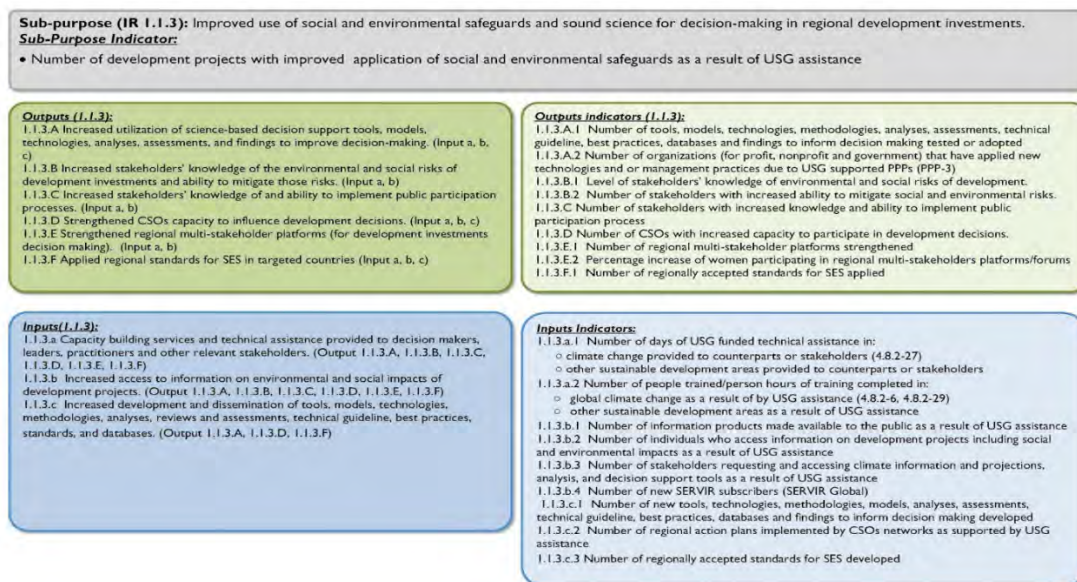
This portfolio comprises of several Activities including: Smart Infrastructure for the Mekong (SIM); Mekong Partnership for the Environment (MPE); Climate Resilient Mekong (CRM); and SERVIR Mekong. Descriptions of each activity are included in C.1.3.

The Sustainable Mekong portfolio directly supports the Water and Environment Pillar of the Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI). Launched in 2009, LMI is a multinational partnership among Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, and the United States of America to create integrated sub-regional cooperation among the five Lower Mekong countries (Myanmar, the latest member, officially joined the LMI in July 2012). LMI serves as a platform to address complex, transnational development and policy challenges in the Lower Mekong sub-region. In supporting LMI, the Activities under Sustainable Mekong provide Lower Mekong partner governments with technical assistance, such as consultations, analyses, tools, and training to mitigate potential negative social

and environmental consequences from large infrastructure projects and increase climate resilience. RDMA also regularly coordinates with and provides technical assistance to advance the priorities of USAID bilateral missions in the aforementioned Lower Mekong countries as well as to identify regional resources and/or partnerships that support their objectives. Outcomes from these Activities include increased informed multi-stakeholder dialogues on anticipated social and environmental impacts of regional development projects; increased social and environmental soundness of regional development projects in the Lower Mekong Sub-region; and more sustainable energy, transport, water, and agriculture systems as a result of improved design and land use planning.

C.2.2 RESULT FRAMEWORK FOR SUB-IR 1.1.3

To address the issues and achieve the expected outcome of “improved use of social and environmental safeguards and sound science for decision-making in regional development investments,” REO developed a results framework with illustrative indicators for this sub-IR as presented in the following diagram.



C.2.3 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES BEING IMPLEMENTED UNDER SUSTAINABLE MEKONG PORTFOLIO (SUB-IR 1.1.3)

As of July 2016, there are four major Activities being implemented by five implementing partners under the Sustainable Mekong portfolio. A brief description of each activity is as summarized below.

1) **Smart Infrastructure Mekong (SIM)**

Type of Mechanism: Participating Agency Program Agreement (PAPA)

Implementer: U.S. Department of Interior (DOI)

Implementation Period: 08/15/2013-08/14/2018

Total Estimated Cost: USDOl Agreement consists of different activities, including, Marine and Fisheries program, Counter Wildlife Trafficking and forest management, etc. SIM is one of the activities managed by Sustainable Mekong Portfolio. The total estimated cost of this agreement is \$20,000,000 but there is no estimated total cost identified specifically for SIM.

Obligated Funding To Date: \$6,032,000

Brief Description: Announced by Secretary Kerry in July 2013, SIM is a U.S. Government inter-agency Activity that provides the LMI partner countries with rapid, demand-driven technical and scientific assistance to support

climate-smart, environmentally sound and socially equitable infrastructure, clean energy development, and land and/or water resources use.

However, it does not include direct monetary transfer. LMI partner governments will receive technical assistance and capacity development services. LMI partner countries can request SIM support for a range of services, including:

- engineering support to incorporate environmental impact mitigation measures into road, dam, land-use, or construction projects;
- technical support for hydrological modeling, climate change vulnerability modeling, geospatial land-use analysis, clean energy planning and other technical assessments;
- training for decision-makers on environmental and social impact assessments and public participation processes; and
- financial analyses of economic scenarios and innovative finance and design alternatives for smart infrastructure, clean energy, and land and/or water resources use decision-making.

Through SIM, the U.S. Government works hand-in-hand with LMI partner governments to promote green growth, and ensure that it is sustainable and benefits all citizens of the sub-region.

2) Mekong Partnership for the Environment (MPE)

Type of Mechanism: Cooperative Agreement

Implementer: Pact, Inc.

Implementation Period: 09/25/2013 - 10/14/2017

Total Estimated Cost: \$12,998,554 (Obligated \$10,500,000)

Brief Description: To address the structural concerns of poor environmental governance in the Lower Mekong countries over the long-term, MPE works to increase the technical capacity and effectiveness of civil society networks in the lower Mekong region. This will support three discrete results: 1) increased capacity of civil society to influence development decisions that have significant anticipated social and environmental impacts; 2) strengthened regional platforms for multi-stakeholder participation in development decision-making; and 3) increased public access to quality, timely information on environmental and social risks. MPE aims to advance informed multi-stakeholder dialogue on the social and environmental costs and benefits of large-scale development projects in the Lower Mekong. To achieve the expected results, MPE works with governments, private sector, and civil society to advance inclusive decision-making, strengthen regional SES, and increase access to quality information to inform decision-making with three specific approaches:

- address key barriers to achieving environmentally and socially responsible development—lack of capacity, engagement opportunities and information—by improving effective stakeholder engagement and increasing the quality and quantity of information on development projects;
- engage with selected trans-boundary development projects to put learning into practice, promote inclusive decision-making processes and share best practices across the region; and
- strengthen regional networks between governments, the private sector, and civil society, to increase social and environmental benefits and ensure more sustainable and equitable development outcomes in the Lower Mekong Sub-region.

3) Supporting Environmental Leadership in the Lower Mekong Region

Type of Mechanism: Participating Agency Program Agreement (PAPA) **Implementer:** U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) **Implementation Period:** 09/30/2014 - 09/29/2018

Total Estimated Cost: \$1,123,376 (Obligated \$350,000)

Brief Description: The inter-agency agreement with EPA is part of the Mekong Partnership for Environment (MPE) deliverable that Secretary Clinton announced under the Lower Mekong Initiative. EPA provides technical and policy assistance and builds capacity to MPE beneficiaries for improved environmental governance in Asia, focusing on Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) and public participation.

4) Climate Resilient Mekong (CRM)

Type of Mechanism: Cooperative Agreement **Implementer:** Natural Heritage Institute (NHI)
Implementation Period: 11/24/2010 – 03/21/2017 **Total Estimated Cost:** \$3,453,018 (fully obligated)

Brief Description: The objective of the CRM is to inform the choices made by national governments, investors and hydropower customers with regard to the siting, design and operation of hydropower dams throughout the Lower Mekong River system to maintain the flows of water, sediments, nutrients, and migratory fish to sustain its exceptional biological productivity. In so doing, NHI has employed expert technical consultants to perform field data collection and has engaged the University of California at Berkeley to conduct computer modeling of the impacts that planned dam construction will have on sediment flow and fish biodiversity in the Mekong basin.

5) SERVIR Mekong

Type of Mechanism: Cooperative Agreement **Implementer:** Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC)
Implementation Period: 09/30/2014 - 09/29/2019

Total Estimated Cost: \$7,494,350 (Obligated \$4,220,000)

Brief Description: SERVIR is a global partnership between USAID and NASA which aims to establish long-term regional “Hubs” focused on the provision of geospatial information and related analytics and capacity building to improve environment management and policy. The overall objective of SERVIR-Mekong is to enhance climate change adaptation and landscape management in the Lower Mekong Sub-region through the increased application of geospatial data and analysis to critical, urgent, or common policy and planning needs.

SERVIR-Mekong is a demand-driven mechanism focused on priorities as defined by decision-makers and key stakeholders in the Lower Mekong Sub-region. Additionally, an open, web-based “Request for Technical Assistance” mechanism allows SERVIR-Mekong to respond directly to the needs and priorities. Initial thematic priorities include land use/land cover change, water resources management (floods/droughts), and valuation of ecosystem services.

C.3 STATEMENT OF WORK

C.3.1 Purpose of the Sustainable Mekong Portfolio Evaluation

The purpose of the Portfolio Evaluation is to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of current implementation and will also examine the priorities of LMI itself, other donor programs related to those objectives, and whether or not the U.S. is focusing its LMI assistance resources effectively. The evaluation will also provide an objective, up-to-date, and comprehensive Lower Mekong regional analysis as well as insights into ongoing and future RDMA’s regional environment programs to maximize development outcomes in the Lower Mekong region.

C.3.2 Audience and Intended Use

The Portfolio Evaluation for the Sustainable Mekong portfolio will be used to inform USAID/RDMA, USAID/Washington, U.S. Department of States (DoS), USAID bilateral Missions and U.S. Embassies in the sub-region as well as other USG agencies such as U.S. Department of Interior (USDOI), U.S. Army Corp of Engineer (USACE), and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) on development gaps, challenges and opportunities for existing and future programming.

C.3.3 Key Questions

Based on a thorough review of the key environmental issues and stakeholders in the Lower Mekong sub-region and U.S. Government priorities, the contractor must provide findings, conclusions and recommendations in response to the following key questions.

A. Effectiveness of current portfolio:

- 1) To what extent is the current Sustainable Mekong Portfolio as a whole, as well as each of the five major Activities already contributing to the achievement of the sub-purpose

1.1.3 “improved use of social and environmental safeguards and sound science for decision-making in regional development investments” in the Lower Mekong Sub- region?

2) What interventions, opportunities, corrective or adaptive actions should RDMA and USG consider and implement to accelerate the sub-purpose 1.1.3 “improved use of social and environmental safeguards and sound science for decision-making in regional development investments” in the Lower Mekong Sub-region?

B. Future programming:

- 1) What other interventions, opportunities, corrective or adaptive actions should RDMA prioritize in the future programming for the Lower Mekong Countries:
 - considering what other stakeholders, for example, bilateral Missions, other USG agencies, bilateral donors, multilateral development banks, non- governmental organizations (NGOs), universities, private sector, and others have been doing;
 - to contribute to the IRI “improved regional management of natural capital” through the “improved use of social and environmental safeguards and sound science for decision-making in the Lower Mekong Sub-region”; and
 - in response to other USAID and USG policies and priorities related to environment, i.e. Climate Change and Development, Biodiversity, or Resilience?
- 2) How should RDMA further strengthen coordination with partners and/or leverage efforts of regional institutions/platforms (such as Mekong River Commission - MRC), bilateral Missions, other USG agencies, bilateral donors, multilateral development banks, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), universities, private sector, and others to address the future priorities/foci identified in this Portfolio Evaluation?

C.3.4 Design and Structure

The Portfolio Evaluation must be undertaken in a manner that ensures credibility, lack of bias, transparency, and the generation of high quality information and knowledge. The contractor must use sound social science methods and include the following basic features:

- Establishment of a team with the appropriate methodological and subject matter expertise to conduct a high quality Portfolio Evaluation (as described in section F.4).
- Written design, including key and sub-question(s), detailed methods, main features of data collection instruments, and data analysis plans. Except in unusual circumstances, the design will be shared with country level stakeholders as well as with the implementing partners for comment before being finalized.
- Incorporate relevant gender equality issues in the design and report of the Portfolio Evaluation, as appropriate.
- Use of data collection and analytic methods that ensure, to the maximum extent possible, that if different, well qualified personnel were to undertake the same Portfolio Evaluation, he or she would arrive at the same or similar findings and conclusions.
- Application and use to the maximum extent possible of internationally-recognized social science methods and tools that reduce the need for assessors’ specific judgments.
- Given the nature of the evaluation questions set forth in this SOW, as well as the complexity of the Activities and the portfolio, it is anticipated that a combination of mixed methods will be applied for this task. In addition to multiple levels and types of respondents/informants, a combination of sound quantitative and qualitative research methods (e.g. surveys, case studies, interview and focused group discussion with appropriate statistical and qualitative data analysis methods for each type of data collected) shall also be developed for each question as deemed appropriate. Selected non-conventional methods such as the most significant changes and outcome harvesting may also be considered for this evaluation. However, different questions may be combined in one tool for specific targeted groups as appropriate. Attempts shall be made to collect data from different sources by different methods for each research questions and findings be triangulated to draw valid and reliable conclusions. Data shall be disaggregated by sex where possible and appropriate.

- It is anticipated that samples of informant/respondent groups will be required for each research question.
- Standardized recording and maintenance of records from the Portfolio Evaluation (e.g., focus group and key informants' detailed interview notes).
- Collection of data on variables corresponding to inputs, outputs and outcomes.
- Collection of data from relevant sources other than Sustainable Mekong implementing partners and beneficiaries to obtain comprehensive information to support findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The other relevant sources may include but not be limited to government and non-government organizations working on similar interventions in the same geographic areas, academia specialized on the issues of concern, and relevant literature.
- The recommendations could be built upon successes and lessons learned from Activities under the Sustainable Mekong Portfolio and/or other similar programs or projects implemented by other organizations funded by USAID and/or other donors, as well as derived from the Portfolio Evaluation Team's own evidence-based solutions.
- The Portfolio Evaluation focuses on reviewing current situation while USAID requires forward-looking recommendations on the trends for future needs for similar future programming.

C.4 LIST OF AVAILABLE DOCUMENTS/DATA SOURCES

A variety of project-related documents, including but not limited to the following, will be available and provided upon award:

- Project Appraisal Document (PAD) IR 1.1 Improved Management of Natural Capital (RDMA/DOI/IR 1.1), March 2015. (Procurement sensitive: specific sections to be shared in hard copy and returned to RDMA.)
- PAD: M&E Plan, Logframe and Result Framework with illustrative indicators
- Cooperative Agreements and modifications (MPE, SERVIR, CRM, SIM)
- Program Description, Work Plans and M&E plans for all Activities.
- Quarterly and Annual reports (MPE, USEPA, CRM, SIM, SERVIR).
- Approved Concept Notes (for SERVIR and SIM)
- Fact Sheets
- Research report from CRM
- LMI Evaluation Report, if available (from State Department)
- Report on Impact of Outward Foreign Direct Investment through Great Mekong Sub- region by Vermont Law School
- MPE tools and technical reports (many available at: <http://www.pactworld.org/>)
- <https://www.usaid.gov/results-and-data/planning/policy>

C.5 OTHER REQUIREMENTS

- a. It is expected that the contractor will travel to all Lower Mekong countries. The contractor may be requested to have in-brief and/or out-brief with USAID bilateral mission or U.S. Embassy in each country. The Contractor must follow RDMA's protocol for coordinating with USAID bilateral missions. In some countries, the contractor may be required to receive an approval from U.S. Embassy or USAID Bilateral Mission prior to meetings with government officials or will be accompanied by Embassy/USAID staff to the meetings.

The contractor will be responsible for all logistical support to the Portfolio Evaluation Team such as making all visa, travel, transportation and lodging arrangements, and should not expect any substantial involvement from USAID in planning or implementation of the Portfolio Evaluation. However, USAID will prepare an introductory letter that can be used to facilitate meetings, if necessary.

APPENDIX B: ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND DATA ON MEKONG PARTNERSHIP FOR THE ENVIRONMENT ACTIVITY (MPE)

Figure 2 is a diagram of the network of CSOs that MPE has helped to create in the Lower Mekong countries.¹⁸

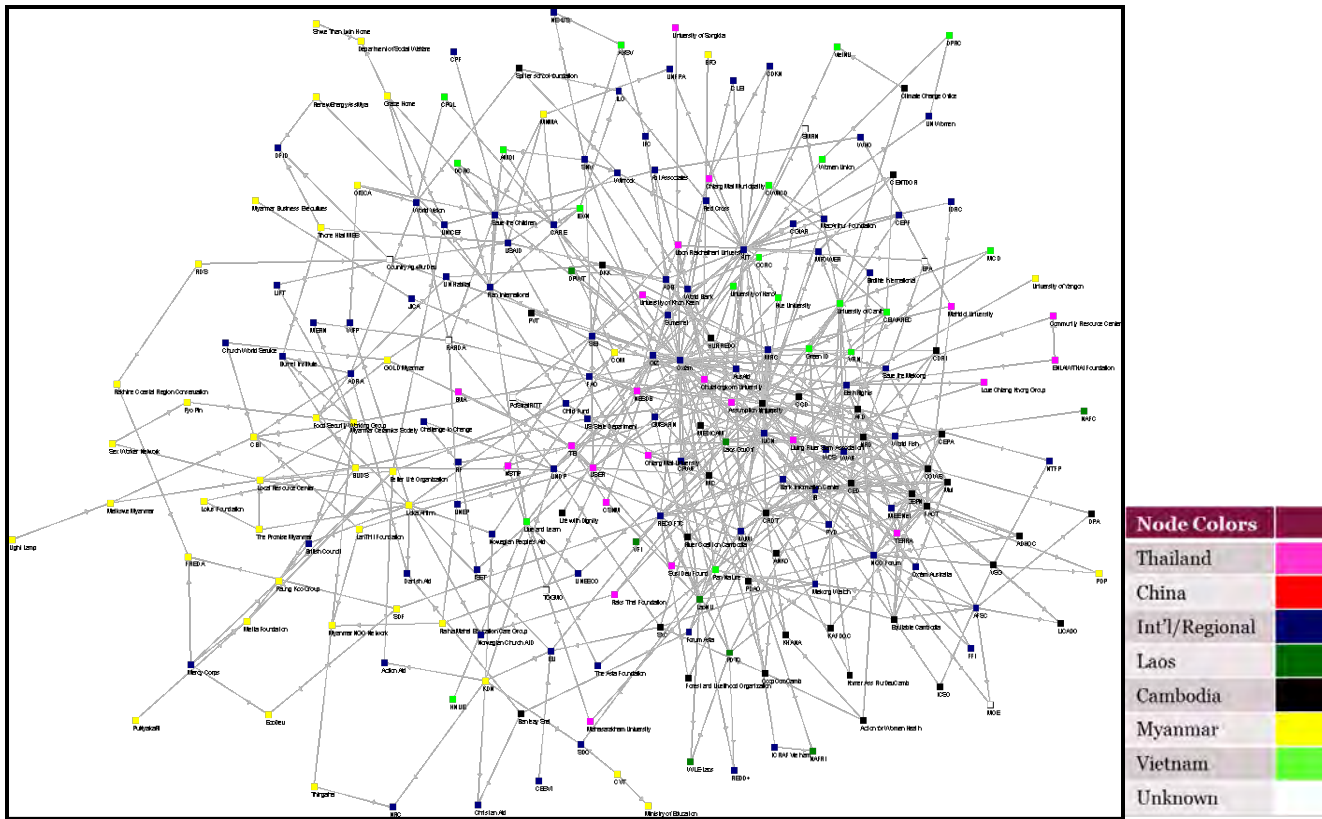


Figure 2 Network of environmental CSOs assisted by MPE in the Lower Mekong countries

Table 8 Civil society organizations collaborating with MPE

	Organization Name	Country	RTWG member	MPE grantee
1	Development and Partnership in Action (DPA)	Cambodia	X	X
2	NGO Forum on Cambodia	Cambodia	X	X
3	Village Focus International (VFI)	Laos	X	
4	Law and Development Partnership (LDP)	Laos	X	
5	Promotion of Indigenous and Nature Together (POINT)	Myanmar	X	
6	Forest Resource Environment Development and Conservation	Myanmar	X	X

¹⁸ The ET can provide a larger copy of this figure upon request that makes each of the individual CSOs identifiable. The figure in this report is simply meant to display the regional breadth and interconnectedness of this network.

	Organization Name	Country	RTWG member	MPE grantee
	Association (FREDA)			
7	Healthy Public Policy Foundation (HPPF)	Thailand	X	
8	Rangsit University	Thailand	X	
9	Center for Environment and Community Research (CECR)	Vietnam	X	X
10	People and Nature Reconciliation (PanNature)	Vietnam	X	X
11	Spirit in Education Movement (SEM)	Thailand		X
12	Community Resource Center (CRC)	Thailand		X
13	EarthRights International (ERI)	Thailand		X
14	Local Act	Thailand		X
15	Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI)	Cambodia		X
16	Spectrum	Myanmar		X
17	Vietnam Environment & Sustainable Development Institute (VESDI)	Vietnam		X
18	Center for Environment and Community Assets Development (CECAD)	Vietnam		X
19	Can Tho University	Vietnam		X
20	Green Innovation and Development Centre (GreenID)	Vietnam		X

Source: MPE 2016

Table 9 Companies MPE consulted about public participation in EIAs

<p>Cambodia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rui Feng (Cambodia) International Company Limited • ANGKOR Gold Group • China Huadian Lower Stung Russei Chrum Hydro-Electric Project (Cambodia) Co., Ltd(CHDPC) • Electronic Telecommunication Solutions (ETS) • Country Group Development Public Company Limited • Phnom Penh Special Economic Zone • Heng Rui (Cambodia) International Company Limited • E&A • RCBCC • KCC • GEG • Sustinat Green • CES • GIGB • Prey Kdouch Development • SAWAC • PPIc Co.,Ltd • Chip Mong 	<p>Vietnam</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indo China Construction Consultants, Co.,Ltd • Investment and Consultant in environment and climate change joint stock company • Power consultant and construction joint stock company I • Vietnam environment consultant and treatment joint stock company • Environment Technology Joint Stock Co. • Environment Information and Technology Co. • Viet-Sing Commercial and Technical Joint Stock Company • AES Mong Duong Power Company Limited • ERM • Luong Thai Environment Joint Stock Company • Petrol Vietnam • Commercial construction and environmental technology company AIX
<p>Thailand</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • POYRY Energy • Chevron • GE • DOW Chemical • TTCL • Glow Energy • United Analyst and Engineering Consultant Co.,Ltd • TEAM • EGCO • Soleq • EGATi • Italian-Thail Development Plc. • CEC Services (Thailand) Limited • ERM 	<p>Myanmar</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ERM • Wilmar Myanmar • Coffey Myanmar • Ramboll Environ Inc. • Myanmar Koei International (Nippon Koei) • PETRONAS • Kaung Kyaw Say Engineering co. ltd • Pacific Hunt Energy • TOTAL • Eguard • AIRBMP • SMEC • Optic Energy • Shell • Chevron/Unocal • NEPS Co. • MPRL E&P Pte Ltd

Source: email from Christy Owen to Bruce Kernan dated December 2016

Table 10 Status of Tasks under the USAID-EPA PAPA Agreement (SEL)

Sub-Tasks	Milestones	Status (as of September 30, 2016)
Support Institutional Capacity for EIA Training in the Lower Mekong Region		
(A) Provide a written evaluation report of the first PEIAR course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EPA team provides a final course evaluation and summary to AIT-VN and World Bank 	Complete
(B) Provide comments on AIT-VN's Business Plan and Training Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EPA team provides comments on AIT-VN's Business Plan and Curriculum 	Complete
(C) Support preparation for AIT-VN's delivery of a course on Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) Review in October 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AIT-VN provides course outline and presentation materials EPA provides feedback on course materials provided by AIT-VN 	AIT-VN has provided the course outline. EPA provided comments on the course outline on 10-18-16. EPA expects to receive and comment on additional course materials in FY17Q1.
(D) Deliver 2 nd PEIAR Course in partnership with AIT-VN.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Timing, agenda, and location for course are determined in partnership with AIT-VN. Course is delivered. 	During an August 2016 call (see Attachment 3 for meeting notes), EPA and AIT agreed to deliver a joint "Principles of EIA Review" training in December 2016 in HCMC, Vietnam. Planning is underway. In FY17Q1, EPA will connect with the Lowering Emissions in Asia's Forest (LEAF) training program to exchange lessons learned in advance of the PEIAR training. In FY17Q1, on the margins of the PEIAR training, EPA will identify training module support needs for 2017.
Regional Technical Working Group (TWG)		
(C) Participate remotely in the second RTWG meeting in December 2015 in Hanoi.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate with MPE and other relevant partners on agendas for RTWG meetings Provide appropriate materials for RTWG meetings in advance Participate remotely in RTWG meeting 	Complete
(D) Participate in the third RTWG meeting in April 27-29 in Siem Reap, Cambodia.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate with MPE and other relevant partners on agendas for RTWG meetings Provide appropriate materials for RTWG meetings in advance Participate in RTWG meeting Provide technical assistance to RTWG by reviewing and providing feedback on content of proposed guidelines 	Complete
(E) As needed, provide assistance for fourth RTWG meeting in July 2016 in Chiang Mai, Thailand.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As needed, Provide appropriate materials for RTWG meetings in advance As needed, Provide technical assistance to RTWG by reviewing and providing feedback on content of proposed guidelines 	Complete (Assistance was not requested)

Sub-Tasks	Milestones	Status (as of September 30, 2016)
(F) Prepare for participation in the fifth RTWG meeting in Myanmar (tentatively scheduled for January 2016).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate with MPE and other relevant partners on agendas for RTWG meetings • Provide appropriate materials for RTWG meetings in advance 	EPA continues to provide remote support to the RTWG and plans to attend the 5th RTWG meeting (currently scheduled for January 2017 in Myanmar). EPA developed and co-delivered an MPE-sponsored webinar entitled “Public Participation in EIA on Tools and Techniques” on September 29, 2016 for the RTWG and related partners. During the webinar, which had 18 attendees, EPA provided information on tools to successfully engage the public and stakeholders in the EIA process.
Task 3: Support Cambodia EIA Reforms		
(A) Coordinate regularly with Vishnu Law Group and the STWGs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EPA holds 15 planning calls with Vishnu Law Group • EPA participates remotely in 5 meetings of the STWGs • EPA and Vishnu agree on a plan for support for STWG 2 and 7 • EPA provides support to Cambodia in final stages of Code development (November 2016) 	EPA has held 20 planning calls with Vishnu Law Group to date, and has participated remotely in 8 meetings of the STWGs. EPA and Vishnu agreed on a plan for support to STWG 2 and 7 on September 2, 2016. In FY17Q1, EPA expects to provide on-the-ground support to Cambodia in the final stages of Code development.
(B) Coordinate regularly with DOI to develop joint SOW and exchange relevant information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EPA holds regular meetings with DOI to exchange relevant information on environmental code • EPA and DOI develop joint SOW 	Since March 2016, EPA and U.S. Department of Interior (DOI) have met regularly to coordinate efforts on the environmental code. RDMA approved the joint DOI-EPA Statement of Work, as well as supporting documentation, in June 2016. We finalized our joint travel primer on August 3 rd , and both EPA and DOI attended a meeting with the Cambodian environment minister in Washington DC in mid-September 2016 to highlight our joint technical assistance.
(C) Provide assistance on water pollutant discharge control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EPA provides concept paper in advance of in-person meeting (completed August 2016) • EPA holds series of conference calls with relevant STWG-2 members (August-September 2016) • EPA provides in-person technical assistance to STWGs (September 2016) • EPA provides draft code text (October 2016) 	Complete.
(D) Provide assistance on public disclosure of pollutant discharge information, such as Pollutant Release and Transfer Register (PRTR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EPA provides concept paper in advance of phone and in-person meetings (August 2016) • EPA holds conference call with relevant STWG-2 members (August 2016) • EPA provides in-person technical assistance to STWGs (September 2016) • EPA reviews draft Code text provided by Vishnu Law Group (October 2016) 	EPA has provided the concept paper, held conference calls, and provided in-person assistance in this area. EPA plans to comment on draft text in FY16Q1.
(E) Provide assistance on management of hazardous and solid waste	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EPA provides overview of legal tools for solid waste management, hazardous waste management, and hazardous waste remediation in advance of in-person meeting (August 2016) • EPA provides in-person technical 	EPA has provided the overview, held conference calls, and provided in-person assistance in this area. EPA plans to comment on draft text and provide follow up on-the-ground assistance in FY16Q1.

Sub-Tasks	Milestones	Status (as of September 30, 2016)
	assistance to STWGs (September 2016) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EPA reviews draft Code text provided by Vishnu Law Group (October 2016) • EPA provides on the ground follow-up assistance to Cambodia (November 2016) 	
(F) Provide assistance on lead paint	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EPA provides overview on lead paint in advance of in-person meeting (August 2016) • EPA provides in-person technical assistance to STWGs (September 2016) • EPA reviews draft Code text provided by Vishnu Law Group (October 2016) 	EPA has provided the overview and in-person technical assistance in this area. EPA plans to comment on draft text in FY16Q1.
(G) Provide assistance on enforcement of environmental laws	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EPA reviews draft Code text provided by Vishnu Law Group (August-October 2016) 	EPA enforcement experts reviewed the STWG's draft inspection code and provided comments and suggestions for strengthening the enforceability. EPA EIA experts reviewed the STWG's draft guideline on public participation in the EIA process and has consolidated comments for the STWG's consideration. In FY17Q1, EPA expects to provide additional in-person technical assistance on public participation and remedies and enforcement of permits in draft Code.
(H) Provide assistance on resolution of environmental disputes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EPA develops and provides concept note on administrative law and dispute resolution (August-October 2016) • EPA provides in-person technical assistance to STWGs to assist with development of Code provisions for administrative tribunals (October 2016) 	EPA has provided a concept note on administrative law and dispute resolution (September 2016) and held multiple conference calls with Vishnu Law Group experts. EPA administrative law judges and dispute resolution specialists will provide in-person technical assistance to Vishnu and STWG 7 to assist with development of code provisions for administrative tribunals and dispute resolution October 31-November 9, 2016.
Task 4: Support to SERVIR-Mekong: Mangrove Remote Sensing Technical Assistance		
(A) Compile a desk research review report prior to the workshop, including facilitating review by workshop facilitators and advisors	Draft review report prepared and reviewed by workshop facilitators and advisors prior to the workshop	Complete
(B) Present the main findings of the review at the workshop	Workshop presentation of key report findings	Complete
(C) Finalize the report after the workshop to reflect relevant insights and regional perspectives generated during the workshop	Final review report	EPA is finalizing the report for the workshop.

APPENDIX C: COMPARISON OF THE LMI CONNECTIVITY AND ENVIRONMENT AND WATER PILLARS

LMI Connectivity Pillar	LMI Environment and Water Pillar
<p>Summary <i>The Connectivity Pillar represents the intersection of economic development, human capital, information and communication technologies, infrastructure, environmental stewardship, and the cross-border movement of goods. Designed to reflect the ASEAN Master Plan on Connectivity and to support ASEAN economic integration, the Connectivity Pillar is developing strategies and the necessary tools to connect all LMI member states.</i></p> <p>Pillar Priorities</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Build infrastructure, institutional, and people-to-people connectivity; 2. Promote equitable and sustainable regional economic growth; and 3. Enhance cross-border collaboration. <p>Specific Objectives</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Promote socially and environmentally sustainable infrastructure development <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Support social and environmental impact assessments (EIAs) and capacity building in the use of best practices in infrastructure and development planning. b. Provide regular opportunities for LMI governments, across all relevant ministries, to engage on collaborative infrastructure planning that affects the entire region. Support regional platforms that increase cooperation and multi-stakeholder deliberation. Provide U.S. expertise where appropriate. c. Bring together LMI member states at the highest levels of leadership to promote sustainable development of the Mekong sub-basin. d. Assist infrastructure planners to build-in environmentally and socially sound safeguards that address climate change, natural disaster relief management, potential displacement of persons, and the needs of persons affected by climate change or disasters. 2. Create an enabling business environment <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Develop legislation and assist with implementation of existing regulations that are 	<p>Summary <i>Promote dialogue between LMI countries on sound and sustainable environmental management and strengthen capacity within and across LMI partner countries to manage shared water resources, improve water and sanitation access, and develop national and regional capacity to achieve water security and manage increasingly variable water resources while preparing to meet future demands, and link activities, where appropriate, to global and LMI countries' climate change policy.</i></p> <p>Pillar Priorities</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improve Water Security 2. Promote Disaster Risk Reduction 3. Increase Natural Resources Conservation and Management, to protect the Environment and Biodiversity <p>Specific Objectives</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Promote sound and sustainable natural resource management and climate change policies and improve institutional and human resource capacity to address transnational issues related to natural resources, with particular emphasis on forests, renewable energy, wetlands, and biodiversity. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Share best practices in social and natural sciences related to impacts of natural resource management (with emphasis on forests, renewable energy, biodiversity, food security, etc.), perhaps on the margins of other regional dialogues; b. Improve dialogue between scientists and policy makers to both better inform policy makers, and help scientists identify knowledge gaps that should be addressed through research and sharing of best practices; and <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Build technical capacity and political awareness to address adaptation and vulnerability to the impacts of climate change on livelihoods, landscapes and ecosystems, including land management, wetlands, wildlife conservation, wildlife trafficking, and sustainable forestry management programs. b. Promote sustainable land use and water management for agriculture and aquaculture. c. Strengthen cooperation, dialogue and exchange of information in the region for effective and sustainable utilization, protection and

LMI Connectivity Pillar	LMI Environment and Water Pillar
<p>transparent and publicly recognized to create investor and business confidence.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> b. Leverage private sector expertise and resources to build regional capacity, including through activities under the U.S.-Singapore Third Country Training Program. Appropriately confront current business roadblocks and implement practical solutions. c. Work towards a business environment inclusive of women and minorities. d. Promote investment in green technology to prepare member economies to adapt to a changing climate. e. Enhance the reach of technology throughout LMI partner countries to foster small- and medium-sized business development, further rural development, and encourage entrepreneurial innovation. f. Connect regional governments and businesses to U.S. corporate supply chains. <p>3. Increase cross-border cooperation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Leverage existing tools to pinpoint and assess infrastructure gaps that affect the movement of goods and services across borders. b. Address gaps in border management via technical assistance and capacity building programs by providing expertise from appropriate U.S. government and private sector institutions. c. Engage the private sector both internationally and domestically as a tool in developing efficient and practical solutions to logistical and supply-chain bottlenecks. d. Implement and develop information and communications technology (ICT), including support for the ASEAN Single Window, at the border and at critical logistical chokeholds to assist in smoothing the facilitation of trade and movement of goods across borders. <p>4. People-to-People Connectivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Connect post-secondary institutions to local businesses to develop a pipeline of skilled labor; 	<p>management of water resources in the Mekong River basin.</p> <p>2. Strengthen existing regional institutions, cooperation among national institutions, natural resource related research, and ongoing partnerships between LMI countries:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Enhance capacity for wildlife management and biodiversity management by sharing and utilizing best practices; b. Where applicable, build LMI-centric sessions into regional workshops and seminars related to climate change, including impacts of sea-level rise, conservation efforts, wildlife trafficking, forestry practices, clean and renewable energy, and land management. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Encourage participation of related institutions in LMI capacity building programs and activities. <p>3. Encourage incorporation of good governance tools for sustainable management of natural resources into the basin development strategy and green growth initiatives into broader national development strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Promote political and community support for impact assessments on social, economic, and ecological systems; b. Promote integration of forests and biodiversity management considerations into broader development strategies supported by MDBs; c. Promote capacity building through cooperation, and technical assistance within and among LMI nations' relevant agencies and existing regional institutions; d. Promote community-based eco-tourism. <p>4. Improve capacity in Disaster Risk Management (DRM) practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Strengthen techniques and procedures along internationally accepted standards and conforming to the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER); b. Build capacity to enhance DRM efforts, including promoting regular training and exercises; c. Build upon currently bilateral activities to expand into all LMI countries;

LMI Connectivity Pillar	LMI Environment and Water Pillar
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> b. Promote the exchange of best practices in targeted professions, which includes integrating social and environmental considerations between leading Lower Mekong universities and vocational colleges; c. Identify internships, fellowships and applied learning opportunities for Lower Mekong youth; and d. Promote exchanges between U.S. and Lower Mekong universities on trans-boundary challenges and opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> d. Enhance monitoring and early warning systems and preparedness in disaster management and share best practices; and e. Share environmentally friendly disaster management technologies. <p>5. Develop better natural weather and climate related natural disaster forecasting tools.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Develop and deploy weather forecasting tools, climate change predictive tools, and other climate services that allow identification, production, and timely interpretation of data and information related to weather and climate; b. Work with local and national governments to develop climate change adaptation strategies as a part of climate resilient development; and c. Build capacity to respond to potential disasters through training courses, workshops, seminars, etc. on disaster risk reduction and management. <p>6. Work together to improve sustainable access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene in underserved areas to support economic development and poverty alleviation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Provide joint technical support to assist LMI countries seeking to strengthen their water and sanitation sectors and to enhance capacity to achieve MDG and sustainable development goals. b. Involve high-level and inter-ministerial coordination around building the institutions, platforms, target-setting and reforms to accelerate water and sanitation coverage. c. Develop innovative strategies for expanding and sustaining access to services, particularly to the urban poor, through partnerships with water and sanitation companies and operators. <p>1. Strengthen LMI Partner Country capacity to meet integrated water resource management goals, while building climate resilience.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Continue to develop the Forecast Mekong tool and other planning tools to support water management and meet regional watershed management goals. b. Build capacity to support decision making regarding water

LMI Connectivity Pillar	LMI Environment and Water Pillar
	<p>resources management and infrastructure development, furthering a sustainable balance at the nexus of water, food, and energy.</p> <p>c. Continue to strengthen climate resilience planning, particularly in infrastructure design, planning, and operations.</p> <p>8. Facilitate the introduction of new water technologies, best practices and knowledge to more effectively manage current water resources needs and meet future demands.</p> <p>a. Continue to advance regional workshops, conferences and technical exchanges on water resources management, technologies and best practices.</p> <p>b. Build public-private partnerships on water designed to accelerate the introduction of new technologies and facilitate shared knowledge.</p> <p>9. Support national and regional capacity to manage shared water resources and build transparent, science-based common institutions for the shared development of common water resources.</p> <p>a. Enhance capacity to implement regional frameworks on water resources utilization, basin development strategy, and to improve studies on the impact of water resources development.</p> <p>b. Strengthen the ability of the Mekong River Commission (MRC) through national Mekong committees to gather and communicate data to LMI policy makers, including findings within the Lower Mekong countries and lessons learned from Mississippi-Mekong River Commission (MRC-MRC) exchange program.</p>

APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION PROTOCOL

Introduction: (Introducing evaluators and their role, SI, purpose of evaluation, and purpose of the FGD)

Informed Consent: (how information will be used, level of anonymity, etc...)

(Note for facilitators: One person should lead, while the other takes notes and documents. Remember that the focus group discussion is meant to generate discussion between participants themselves, and your role is not to ask too many questions but to encourage the participation of respondents to delve into these questions in a deeper and more nuanced way. Encourage them to agree, disagree, and provide rationale. It may take a while for participants to feel comfortable, so you can revisit items that don't receive much input later if you feel it would garner additional information.)

Intro: Before we get started, I'd like first set a few ground rules. While this is in a group setting, we recognize many of you are associated with ministries or organizations; and that personal experiences and organizational experiences sometimes differ. As such, we ask that nobody share any information or discussions that happen here outside of this room, and that we don't associate any view with someone's organization or department. Is that okay with everyone? Great! We will also try to make sure everyone gets a chance to speak, but please do feel free to jump in and agree/disagree in a respectful way without interrupting. All right- to understand where everyone is coming from before we get into some specific questions; I'd like you to please introduce yourselves and describe your affiliation or experience with MPE.

1. To get started, I'd like you to think back before MPE began. What did the decision-making process look like for regional development investments? *(Facilitator should list steps, inputs, and processes on pieces of paper as participants talk about them. Put them on the wall or ground. As others jump in, ask questions regarding which steps or inputs/outputs go where, who makes the decisions, and arrange/re-arrange the pieces of paper as necessary to reflect the process. Let participants move the papers themselves if desired. If people disagree on the process, ask probing questions and make sure to document the disagreements and why. Once done, verify by reading it out loud and making sure people agree that the diagram is an accurate depiction of the process. Ensure there is a picture or that the note-taker otherwise captures the resulting process map).*

2. Great – thanks! Let's do a similar exercise for the process that currently exists. What, if anything, has changed? *(Same notes as previous)*

- a. What changes have occurred? What were the causes of those changes?
- b. What has not changed? What is the reason for the lack of change?

3. What would this process look like in an ideal world?

- a. What do you see as missing to make this ideal version become reality?
- b. Where do you see the roles of different actors in making this happen?

4. What do you see as the most important next steps (interventions, opportunities, or changes) to improve the use of safeguards and science in decision-making in regional development investments in the Lower Mekong Sub-region?

APPENDIX E: OTHER RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS IN THE LOWER MEKONG REGION

Potential Funding or Implementing Partners

- ACCF - ASEAN China Cooperation Fund
- ADB - Asian Development Bank
- The Government of P.R. China /Yunnan Provincial Government
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (UNFAO)
- GIZ - Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
- The Government of Japan
- MASHAV -Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation
- MRC - Mekong River Commission
- NEDA - Neighbouring Countries Economic Development Cooperation Agency
- NZAP - New Zealand Aid Programme
- OECD Development Finance Network (OECD DeFiNe)
- ROK - Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea
- SDC - Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
- TICA - Thailand International Cooperation Agency
- Asia-Pacific Research and Training Network (ARTNeT)
- Betagro Group
- China Southern Power Grid Co., Ltd. (CSG)/ Yunnan Power Grid Co., Ltd. (YNPG)
- Department of Commerce of Yunnan Province
- Department of Transport of Yunnan Province
- Economic Research Institute for Trade, Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Laos
- GIZ Programs in Cambodia and Laos
- GMS Business Forum
- Indian Institute of Foreign Trade (IIFT)
- International Institute for Trade and Development (ITD)
- Mekong Migration Network
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France
- National and Provincial Chambers of Commerce and Industries of GMS Countries
- Nikkei Business Publications, Inc.
- Provincial People's Committee of Quang Tri
- International College of National Institute of Development Administration (ICO NIDA)
- The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
- Trade Training and Research Institute (TTRI), Ministry of Commerce of Cambodia
- Union of Myanmar Federation of Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Vietnam Tourism Research Institute

Potential University Partners

- Institute of Technology of Cambodia
- Royal University of Phnom Penh
- Kunming University of Science and Technology
- Yunnan University
- Guangxi University
- National University of Laos
- Yangon Technological University
- Asian Institute of Technology

- Khon Kaen University
- Thammasat University
- Hanoi University of Science and Technology
- Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology
- Souphanouvong University (SU)
- Sripatum University (SPU)
- Nakhon Phanom University, Thailand
- College of Arts, Media and Technology (CAMT) of Chiang Mai University (CMU)
- Transportation Institute, Chulalongkorn University
- Sasin Graduate Institute of Business Administration of Chulalongkorn University
- Hue Tourism College, Vietnam
- International Business School, University of Finance and Economics, Yunnan
- Keio University Graduate School of Media and Governance
- Khon Kaen University

APPENDIX F: RELEVANT CURRENT ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMMING IN LOWER MEKONG REGION

Stakeholder	Project Type & Period	Summary of Program/Project
ADB	TA-Grant for environment (2013-2016)	Core Environment Program and Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative in the GMS, Phase 2 (Supplementary)
		Core Environment Program and Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative in the GMS, Phase 2
Agence Francaise de Développement (AFD)	TA-Grant for environment (2015-2018)	Mekong River Commission - Support to Data Management
	TA-Grant for environment (2015-2018)	Sustainable Management of Protected Areas
EU	TA-Grant for environment (2015-2020)	Biodiversity Conservation and Protected Area Management in Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)
	TA-Grant for environment (2015-2020)	Sustainable Use of Peatland and Haze Mitigation in ASEAN
	TA-Grant for environment (2013-2017)	From Local Models to National Frameworks – Developing Innovative Models of Sustainable Financing for Protected Areas in the Three Emerging Countries of the Indo-Burma Biodiversity Hotspot – Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar.
	TA-Grant for environment (2013-2018)	Common Access to Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) Process in Laos and Vietnam
Government of Finland	TA-Grant for environment (2016)	Core Environment Programme
Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)	TA-Grant for environment (2012-2016)	Mekong River Commission (Basin Development Programme, Climate Change Adaptation Initiative, Environment Programme, Institutional Support Programme, Flood Management and Mitigation Programme, Fisheries Programme)
	TA-Grant for environment (2012-2016)	Core Environment Program and Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative in the Greater Mekong Subregion, Phase 2 (Supplementary)
UNDP	TA-Grant for environment (2013-2017)	Joint UNDP-UNEP Poverty Environment Initiative 2013-2017 (Laos, Thailand, Myanmar)
UNEP	TA-Grant for environment (2013-2017)	Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMA) Development for Building Sector (Thailand and Viet Nam)
UNFAO	TA-Grant for environment (2007-2018)	Pesticide Risk Reduction in the Southeast Asia
	TA-Grant for environment (2013-2018)	Phase II - Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Component
	TA-Grant for environment (2013-2018)	Phase II Pesticide Risk Reduction in South East Asia - Policy Component

Stakeholder	Project Type & Period	Summary of Program/Project
US-LMI	TA-Grant for environment (2013-2016)	Environment and Water Pillar
USAID- RDMA	TA-Grant for environment (2013-2016)	A Climate Resilient Mekong (CRM): Maintaining the Flows that Nourish Life
	TA-Grant for environment (2011-2016)	Asia's Regional Response to Endangered Species Trafficking (ARREST)
	TA-Grant for environment (2013-2018)	SERVIR-Mekong Program
		EPA and USAID/RDMA Environmental Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region
		Mekong Partnership for the Environment Program (MPE)
		National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Mission Support (NMS) Participating Agency Partnership Agreement
		Private Financing Advisory Network-Asia Program (PFANAsia)
		Department of the Interior Mission Support (DMS) Participating Agency Partnership Agreement to Provide Technical Assistance for Biodiversity and Smart Infrastructure for the Mekong (SIM) Projects.

APPENDIX G: JAPAN (JICA, OECF, MOFA, JBIC) FUNDED ACTIVITIES IN THE MEKONG REGION

Conclusions

- Energy and Hydropower: Given the potentially large, negative social and environmental impacts of hydropower dams, investments by China and Japan are the logical focus for efforts aimed at improving planning, decision making and application of SES.
- Transport (road, rail, air and water) have potentially large negative social and environmental impacts, investments by Japan up to 2013 dominate ODA, and are the logical focus for efforts aimed at improving planning, decision making and applications of SES.

Findings	Conclusions
<p>General The data for ODA to Mekong region countries is for the 2000-13 period only. It does not include any data for ODA from China. This lack results in the apparent over representation of Japanese ODA for energy-related and hydropower investments. Despite this, it is clear that Japan has been the dominant investor since 2000 (and before).</p>	<p>Comment.</p>
<p>General. Major infrastructure projects such as roads, ports, bridges and airports, planned and partially financed by JICA, sustain economic growth and closer regional cooperation. Other JICA programs range from health projects to help the most vulnerable groups of people, training courses to produce new groups of local experts and administrators, programs to tackle climate change and environmental degradation to a new urban master plan for the Vietnamese capital of Hanoi. In addition to helping build a land-based transportation network Japanese finance and expertise have also helped to rebuild a series of terminal points – airports and ports throughout the Mekong through which all the region's exports, imports and passengers move. One example is Cambodia's largest port, Sihanoukville, which handles virtually all of the country's container and cargo traffic. (https://www.jica.go.jp/english/news/focus_on/mekong/ accessed 27Jan17)</p>	<p>Japan, via loans and grants, is active in almost all sectors of the regional economy. Japan is particularly active in trade-related transport and energy infrastructure, and increasingly urban infrastructure projects.</p>
<p>Natural Resources. JICA projects in Myanmar, Viet Nam, Laos and Cambodia emphasize several targets. The latest technology such as satellite imaging is being employed to develop forest baselines, the potential use of land and ecological potential. Wherever possible, the Mekong countries are encouraged to cooperate and integrate programs on a regional basis and coordinate their information. Laos, for instance, is establishing a forest resource information centre through Japanese grant aid which should provide valuable information on such subjects as capacity development and forest baselines. (op cit)</p>	<p>Japanese ODA is focused on NRM research and pilot projects. In addition, Japan provides numerous scholarship for graduate study in Japan.</p>
<p>Mekong Hydrology. Since the early 2000s JICA, commonly in conjunction with the MRC, has been closely involved in Mekong Delta studies (e.g. Key International Monitoring Stations in the Mekong Delta - http://open_jicareport.jica.go.jp/pdf/11755576_03.pdf) More recently (2013) JICA was involved in the Mekong Delta Study (e.g. Climate Change Adaptation for Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development in Coastal Mekong Delta Vietnam, see: http://open_jicareport.jica.go.jp/pdf/12114617_01.pdf).</p>	<p>Since the 1990s Japan has supported Mekong hydrological studies. The focus has been on data collection and analysis. In the Mekong Delta the focus has been the effects of climate change, and changes in Mekong streamflow, sediments and nutrients on rice cultivation and agriculture.</p>

Energy Related ODA – Japan and Total (2000-13)

Japanese ODA: The number of Japanese-funded hydropower and energy-related projects - loans and grants - in the region is significant and too many to list here. A historical listing 2000-13 for the five Mekong region countries can be found in an annex. The totals are summarised below, and compared to total energy-related ODA for each country.

<p>Laos Japan - JICA, OECF, MOFA Energy Grants & Loans USD 88,486,807 (Japan 39%) Total ODA - Energy Grants & Loans USD 224,338,036</p>	<p>Data for ODA for energy-related investments in the five Mekong countries make it apparent Japan has been important and in some cases (Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand) the dominant investor.</p> <p>The data does not include energy-related Chinese investments, which have increased significantly since about 2005.</p> <p>From the perspective of SMP, now and in the future, it is clear that Japanese and Chinese energy-related investments will be dominant. This suggests achieving design and SES improvements will need to focus on infrastructure funded by these two donors.</p>
<p>Cambodia Japan - MOFA and JICA, Energy Grants & Loans USD 106,690,881 (Japan 48%) Total ODA - Energy Grants & Loans USD 224,306,497</p>	
<p>Myanmar Japan - MOFA and JICA, Energy Grants & Loans USD 27,826,237 (Japan 84%) Total ODA - Energy Grants & Loans USD 33,168,692</p>	
<p>Vietnam Japan - JICA, JBIC, MOFA, OECF Energy Grants & Loans USD 2,591,815,837 (Japan 43%); Total ODA - Energy Grants & Loans USD 5,968,233,489</p>	
<p>Thailand Japan - JICA, JBIC, MOFA, OECF Energy Grants & Loans USD 266,595,568 (Japan 84%) Total ODA - Energy Grants & Loans USD 316,273,824</p>	

Hydropower Related ODA – Total and Japanese

<p>Laos Total ODA - Hydropower Grants & Loans USD 210,919,224 Total Japan - Hydropower Grants & Loans USD 88,486,807 (42%)</p>	<p>The pattern of investments for hydropower investments is similar to that for general energy-related investments, with Japan very dominant in Myanmar and Thailand.</p> <p>The increase in hydropower investments by China in the last decade will have reduced Japan's dominance; no data is available on Chinese ODA.</p>
<p>Cambodia</p>	

<p>Total ODA - Hydropower Grants & Loans USD 217,819,233 Total Japan - Hydropower Grants & Loans USD 106,690,881 (Japan 49%)</p>	
<p>Myanmar Total ODA - Hydropower Grants & Loans USD 33,168,693 Total Japan - Hydropower Grants & Loans USD 27,826,237 (Japan 84%)</p>	
<p>Vietnam Total ODA - Hydropower Grants & Loans USD 5,001,422,371 Total Japan - Hydropower Grants & Loans USD 2,591,815,837 (Japan 52%)</p>	
<p>Thailand Total ODA - Hydropower Grants & Loans USD 308,658,474 Total Japan - Hydropower Grants & Loans USD 266,595,568 (Japan 86%)</p>	
<p>Transport Related ODA – Total and Japanese</p>	
<p>General Comment: Transport-related investments include road, rail, air and water transport. In several of the five countries rail and air transport investments make up a substantial proportion of the total amount.</p>	
<p>Laos Total ODA - Transport Grants & Loans USD 493,270,014 Japan - JICA, OECF, MOFA Transport Grants & Loans USD 234,684,889 (Japan 48%)</p>	<p>In Laos road transport investments dominate over other forms; in Cambodia road and rail investments are the most important; in Myanmar investments in road and water transport are the most important; in Vietnam investments in roads predominate, with lesser investments in air and water (ports); and in Thailand there are substantial investments in rail and air in addition to road transport.</p> <p>In all five Mekong countries Japan is the dominant ODA investor, in Myanmar, Vietnam and Thailand providing almost all ODA investments in transport.</p>
<p>Cambodia Total ODA - Transport Grants & Loans USD 618,765,016 Japan - JICA, OECF, MOFA Transport Grants & Loans USD 312,853,007 (Japan 51%)</p>	<p>No data is available of Chinese ODA for the transport sector.</p>
<p>Myanmar Total ODA - Transport Grants & Loans USD 49,998,109 Japan - JICA, OECF, MOFA Transport Grants & Loans USD 48,117,820 (Japan 96%)</p>	

<p>Vietnam Total ODA - Transport Grants & Loans USD 4,497,063,381 Japan - JICA, OECF, MOFA Transport Grants & Loans USD 5,222,596,526 (Japan 116% ?)</p>	
<p>Thailand Total ODA - Transport Grants & Loans USD 3,834,299,077 Japan - JICA, OECF, MOFA Transport Grants & Loans USD 3,798,774,911 (Japan 99%)</p>	

APPENDIX H: INTERVIEW GUIDES

Smart Infrastructure for the Mekong (SIM) Implementer Interview Guide

Project Smart Infrastructure for the Mekong (SIM)
Informant Category
Name of Key Informant
Date
Interviewer(s)
Consent Script
Respondents Background
Can you begin by telling us a little bit about yourself and your knowledge of (or role in) the SIM project? <i>(based on responses, may skip certain questions if not pertinent)</i>
Question A I
IR 1: Increased access to and use of technology, information, technical expertise and decision-making tools among LMG officials
1. Prior to beginning implementation of SIM, how <i>much access to and use</i> was made by governments of technology, information, etc., for decision making.? Feel free to divide this up by country.
1.1. How, if at all, how has access and use in each country changed since the implementation of SEL?
1.2. What influences and activities played a role in changing access and use in each country?
1.3. If this access and use has remained the same in some of the five countries, what have been obstacles to change occurring?
2. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is no change in access and use, 3 is some increase, and 5 is much more, how would you characterize the access and use by decision-makers in each country with now, as compared to five years ago
Laos
Cambodia
Vietnam
Thailand
Myanmar
2.1. if a change has occurred, what do you think has caused this change in each country?
2.2. If no change has occurred, what do you see as the obstacles blocking that change?
IR 2: Increased capacity and expertise of government officials to address adverse environmental and social impacts of development projects
3. Prior to beginning implementation of SIM, what was the capacity and expertise of government officials to address adverse environmental and social impacts of development projects? Feel free to divide them up by country
3.1. How, if at all, how has knowledge of these risks in each country changed since the implementation of SIM?
3.2. What influences and activities played a role in changing these processes in each country??
3.3. If these processes have remained the same in some of the five countries, what have been obstacles to such a change occurring?
4. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is no change, 3 is some change, and 5 is much more change, how would you characterize stakeholders of the environmental and social risks of development investments and <i>ability to mitigate</i> those risks, as compared to five years ago?
Laos
Cambodia
Vietnam
Thailand
Myanmar
4.1. If no change has occurred, what do you see as the obstacles blocking that change?
4.2. If a change has occurred, what do you think has caused this change in each country?

Laos
Cambodia
Vietnam
Thailand
Myanmar
Gender Relations
5. How has the design and/or implementation of SIM handled the potential different levels of results and/or intended impact on beneficiaries from different gender groups and assessed gender relations, equality and male/female empowerment
Question A.2
6. What remaining challenges do you see as necessary to overcome in order to improve regional management of natural capital?
7. If it were possible, in what ways would you change the design and implementation of SIM or a follow-on intervention
8. Are there ways that SIM has influenced “improved use of social and environmental safeguards and sound science for decision-making ...” that you believe are not captured in the way they are currently measured?
9. What do you think have been your biggest successes and challenges?
9.1. Successes
9.2. Challenges
10. Do you think the design and/or implementation of SEL should be modified in some way so that its results for beneficiaries from different gender groups are assessed more accurately and contribute to improved gender relations, equality and male/female empowerment?
10.1. Successes?
10.2. Failures?
Question B.1 Future Opportunities
11. What remaining challenges do you see as necessary to overcome in order to improve the regional management of natural capital?
12. What other interventions, opportunities, corrective or adaptive actions would you like to see <i>prioritized</i> in the future programming for the Lower Mekong Countries?
Question B.2 Regional Coordination
13. What <i>other actors or programs</i> , if any, are you aware of that are attempting to improve national and regional decision-making regarding hydropower development in the Lower Mekong Region? (<i>Probe for MRC, ADB, NGOs, private sector, universities</i>)
14. Which national, regional, or international partners do you consider it most important for RDMA to collaborate with more closely?
14.1. Is their programming complementary with RDMA programming, or inconsistent with RDMA programming?
15. For the future, what practical options do you see to <i>strengthen coordination</i> or build new linkages with other donors and regional institutions working on improving decision making on these issues?
16. Are there any ASEAN <i>peninsular members</i> (Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore Brunei) you think offer good potential for collaborative working relationships on these issues?
17. Are there any <i>major gaps</i> obvious in programming among other national, regional, and international partners on these issues that you think USAID/RDMA programming could fill?

SERVIR-Mekong Implementer Interview Guide

Informant Name
Informant email
Informant Skype name:
Informant Telephone
Project SERVIR
Informant Category
Date
Interviewer(s)
Consent Script
Respondents Background
Can you begin by telling us a little bit about yourself and your knowledge of (or role in) the SIM project? <i>(based on responses, may skip certain questions if not pertinent)</i>
Question A I
IR 1: Improved capacity of institutions to use earth observation information and geospatial information technologies
1. How, if at all, has institutional capacity in each country changed since the implementation of SERVIR?
1.1. What influences and activities have played a role in changing institutional capacity?
1.2. If institutional capacity has remained the same, what have been obstacles to change occurring?
2. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is no change, 3 is some increase, and 5 is much more, how would you characterize change in <i>institutional capacity</i> regarding earth observation information and geospatial information technologies, as compared to two years ago?
2.1. Laos
2.2. Cambodia
2.3. Vietnam
2.4. Thailand
2.5. Myanmar
2.6. If a change has occurred, what do you think has caused these changes in each country?
2.7. If no change has occurred, what do you see as the obstacles blocking that change?
IR 2: Increased awareness of stakeholders of geospatial data, tools, knowledge products, and services.
3. How, if at all, has <i>stakeholder awareness</i> in each country changed since the implementation of SERVIR?
3.1. What influences and activities played a role in changing stakeholder awareness in each country?
3.2. If stakeholder awareness has remained the same in some of the five countries, what have been obstacles to change occurring?
4. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is no change, 3 is some increase, and 5 is much more, how would you characterize changes in <i>stakeholder awareness</i> in each country, as compared to two years ago?
Laos
Cambodia
Vietnam
Thailand
Myanmar
4.1. If a change has occurred, what do you think has caused these changes in each country?
4.2. If no change has occurred, what do you see as the obstacles blocking that change?
IR 3: Increased provision of user-tailored geospatial data, products, and tools to inform decision making
5. How, if at all, has SERIEVR's provision of <i>user-tailored geospatial data</i> changed since the implementation of SERVIR?
5.1. What influences and activities played a role in changing provision of user-tailored geospatial data?
5.2. If the level of provision has remained the same, what have been obstacles to such a change occurring?
6. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is no change, 3 is some increase, and 5 is much more, how would you characterize change in provision of user-tailored geospatial data, as compared to two years ago?
Laos
Cambodia
Vietnam
Thailand
Myanmar

6.1. If a change has occurred, what do you think has caused these changes in each country?
6.2. If no change has occurred, what do you see as the obstacles blocking that change?
IR 4: ADPC strengthened as a regional provider of geospatial data analyses, and capacity building services.
7. How, if at all, has ADPC's capacity as regional provider changed since the implementation of SERVIR?
7.1. What influences and activities played a role in changing ADPC's capacity as a regional provider?
7.2. If ADPC's capacity as a provider has remained the same, what have been obstacles to such a change occurring?
8. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is no change, 3 is some change, and 5 is much more, how would you characterize changes in ADPC's capacity as a regional provider, as compared to two years ago?
Laos
Cambodia
Vietnam
Thailand
Myanmar
8.1. If a change has occurred, what do you think has caused these changes in each country?
8.2. If no change has occurred, what do you see as the obstacles blocking that change?
Gender Relations
9. How has the design and/or implementation of SERVIR handled the potential different levels of results and/or intended impact on beneficiaries from different gender groups and assessed gender relations, equality and male/female empowerment?
Question A.2
10. If it were possible, in what ways would you change the design and implementation of SERVIR?
11. What remaining challenges do you see as necessary to overcome in order to improve regional management of natural capital?
12. Are there ways that SERVIR has influenced "improved use of social and environmental safeguards and sound science for decision-making ..." that you believe are not captured in the way they are currently measured?
13. What do you think have been your biggest successes and challenges?
13.1. Successes
13.2. Challenges
14. Do you think the design and/or implementation of SERVIR should be modified in some way so that its results for beneficiaries from different gender groups are assessed more accurately and contribute to improved gender relations, equality and male/female empowerment?
Question B.1 Future Opportunities
15. What remaining challenges do you see as necessary to overcome in order to improve the regional management of natural capital?
16. What other interventions, opportunities, corrective or adaptive actions would you like to see <i>prioritized</i> in the future programming for the Lower Mekong Countries?
Question B.2 Regional Coordination
17. What <i>other actors or programs</i> , if any, are you aware of that are attempting to improve national and regional decision-making regarding hydropower development in the Lower Mekong Region? (<i>Probe for MRC, ADB, NGOs, private sector, universities</i>)
18. Which national, regional, or international partners do you consider it most important for RDMA to collaborate with more closely?
18.1. Is their programming complementary with RDMA programming, or inconsistent with RDMA programming?
19. For the future, what practical options do you see to <i>strengthen coordination</i> or build new linkages with other donors and regional institutions working on improving decision making on these issues?
20. Are there any ASEAN <i>peninsular members</i> (Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore Brunei) you think offer good potential for collaborative working relationships on these issues?
21. Are there any <i>major gaps</i> obvious in programming among other national, regional, and international partners on these issues that you think USAID/RDMA programming could fill?

Climate Resilient Mekong (MRE) Implementer Interview Guide

Project Climate Resilient Mekong (MRE)
Informant Category
Date
Interviewer(s)
Consent Script
Respondents Background
Can you begin by telling us a little bit about yourself and your knowledge of (or role in) the SIM project? <i>(based on responses, may skip certain questions if not pertinent)</i>
Question A 1
IR 1: Improved understanding of decision-makers of the environmental consequences of hydropower development decisions.
1. Prior to beginning implementation of CRM what was the level of understanding by governments regarding the <i>environmental consequences</i> of large hydropower projects? Feel free to divide them up by country.
1.1. How, if at all, has awareness and understanding in each country changed since the implementation of CRM?
1.2. If this has remained the same in some of the five countries, what have been obstacles to a change occurring?
2. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is no change, 3 is some change, and 5 is much more change, how would you characterize changes in decision-makers understanding in each country regarding environmental and social risks of hydropower development investments now, as <i>compared to five years ago</i> ?
2.1. Laos
2.2. Cambodia
3. Do you believe there has been any change over the past 5-6 years with respect to practical knowledge about <i>alternatives for dam designs and operating plans</i> (e.g. location, design) regarding environmental and social consequences of hydropower dams outside the government or private dam developers?
3.1. If a change has occurred, what is the nature and extent of change?
3.2. What do you think has caused these changes?
3.3. If decision maker's awareness and understanding has remained the same, what have been obstacles to change occurring?
IR 2: Increased access to information on the technically feasible and efficacious alternatives for dam designs and operating plans.
4. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is little change, 3 some change, and 5 is much more change, how would you characterize changes in the access by decision-makers in each country to information and efficacious alternatives now, as compared to five years ago?
4.1. Laos
4.2. Cambodia
4.3. If a change has occurred, what do you think has caused these changes in each country?
4.4. If no change has occurred, what do you see as the obstacles blocking that change?
5. Since CRM started in each country have hydropower development plans/designs been altered to take give greater consideration to the environmental effects of specific dams?
5.1. If a change has occurred, what is the nature and extent of changes?
5.2. What do you think has caused these changes?
5.3. If no changes have occurred, what have been obstacles to change occurring?
5.4. If decision maker's awareness and understanding has remained the same, what have been obstacles to change occurring?
IR 3: Generated learning on sustainable hydropower development options that can be widely applied throughout the world?
6. What opportunities have there been for CRM to generate knowledge about practical options for hydropower design and operations?
6.1. What is nature of this knowledge and how has it been made available to other hydropower developers or operators?
6.2. How has this knowledge been made available to governments and organizations in the Mekong region and globally?
Gender Relations
7. How has the design and/or implementation of CRM handled the potential different levels of results and/or intended impact on beneficiaries from different gender groups and assessed gender relations, equality and male/female empowerment?
Question A.2
8. If it were possible, in what ways would you change the design and implementation of CRM?
9. What remaining challenges do you see as necessary to overcome in order to improve the design and operation of hydropower investments to minimize environmental impacts?

10. Regarding “ <i>improved use of social and environmental safeguards and sound science for decision-making ...</i> ” [for hydropower] - are there ways that CRM has influenced this that you believe have not been captured by the way they are currently measured?
11. What do you think have been your biggest successes and challenges?
11.1. Successes
11.2. Challenges
12. Do you think the design and/or implementation of CRM should be modified in some way so that its results for beneficiaries from different gender groups are assessed more accurately and contribute to improved gender relations, equality and male/female empowerment?
Question B.1 Future Opportunities
13. What other interventions, opportunities, corrective or adaptive actions would you like to see <i>prioritized</i> in the future programming for the Lower Mekong Countries?
Question B.2 Regional Coordination
14. What remaining challenges do you see as necessary to overcome to improve the regional <i>cooperation</i> on management hydropower design and operation?
15. What <i>other actors or programs</i> , if any, are you aware of that are attempting to improve national and regional decision-making regarding hydropower development in the Lower Mekong Region? (<i>Probe for MRC, ADB, NGOs, private sector, universities</i>)
16. Which national, regional, or international partners do you consider it most important for RDMA to collaborate with more closely?
16.1. Is their programming complementary with RDMA programming, or inconsistent with RDMA programming?
17. For the future, what practical options do you see to <i>strengthen coordination</i> or build new linkages with other donors and regional institutions working on improving decision making on these issues?
18. Are there any ASEAN <i>peninsular members</i> (Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore Brunei) you think offer good potential for collaborative working relationships on these issues?
19. Are there any <i>major gaps</i> obvious in programming among other national, regional, and international partners on these issues that you think USAID/RDMA programming could fill?

Supporting Environmental Leadership (SEL) Implementer Interview Guide

Project Supporting Environmental Leadership in the Lower Mekong (SEL)
Informant Category
Name of Key Informant
Date
Interviewer(s)
Consent Script
Respondents Background
Can you begin by telling us a little bit about yourself and your knowledge of (or role in) the SIM project? <i>(based on responses, may skip certain questions if not pertinent)</i>
Question A 1
IR 1: Increased access to and use of technology, information, technical expertise and decision-making tools among LMG officials
1. Prior to beginning implementation of SEL, how <i>much access to and use</i> was made by governments of technology, information, etc., for decision making.? Feel free to divide this up by country.
1.1. How, if at all, how has access and use in each country changed since the implementation of SEL?
1.2. What influences and activities played a role in changing access and use in each country?
1.3. If this process has remained the same in some of the five countries, what have been obstacles to change occurring?
2. Prior to beginning implementation of SEL, how much access to and use was made by governments of technology, information, etc. for <i>decision making</i> .? Feel free to divide this up by country
2.1. How, if at all, has access and use in each country changed since the implementation of SEL?
2.2. What influences and activities played a role in changing this process in each country?
2.3. If this process has remained the same in some of the five countries, what have been obstacles to such a change occurring?
IR 1B: Increased stakeholders' knowledge of the environmental and social risks of development investments and ability to mitigate those risks
3. Prior to beginning implementation of SEL, what was <i>stakeholders' knowledge</i> of the environmental and social risks of development investments and ability to mitigate those risks? Feel free to divide them up by country
3.1. How, if at all, how has knowledge of these risks in each country changed since the implementation of SEL?
3.2. What influences and activities played a role in changing these processes in each country??
3.3. If these processes have remained the same in some of the five countries, what have been obstacles to such a change occurring?
4. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is no change, 3 is some change, and 5 is much more change, how would you characterize stakeholders of the environmental and social risks of development investments and <i>ability to mitigate</i> those risks, as compared to five years ago?
Laos
Cambodia
Vietnam
Thailand
Myanmar
4.1. If no change has occurred, what do you see as the obstacles blocking that change?
4.2. If a change has occurred, what do you think has caused these changes in each country
IR 1C: Increased stakeholders' knowledge of and ability to implement public participation processes
5. Prior to beginning implementation of SEL, what was stakeholders' knowledge of and ability to implement public participation processes? Feel free to divide this up by country?
5.1. How, if at all, how has their knowledge and ability changed in each country changed since the implementation of SEL?
5.2. What influences and activities played a role in changes in their knowledge and ability in each country?
5.3. If their knowledge and ability has remained the same in some of the five countries, what have been obstacles to such a change occurring
6. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is no change, 3 is some change, and 5 is much more change, how would you characterize stakeholders' knowledge and ability to implement public participation processes, as compared to five years ago
Laos
Cambodia
Vietnam

Thailand
Myanmar
Gender Relations
6.1. If a change has occurred, what do you think has caused these changes in each country?
6.1.1. If no change has occurred, what do you see as the obstacles blocking that change
IR 1D Strengthened CSOs capacity to influence development decisions
7. Prior to beginning implementation of SEL, CSOs <i>capacity to influence</i> development decisions? Feel free to divide this up by country
7.1. How, if at all, how has CSO's capacity influence decisions changed in each country changed since the implementation of SE
7.2. What influences and activities played a role in changes in CSO's capacity to influence decisions in each country
7.3. If CSO's influence decisions has remained the same in some of the five countries, what have been obstacles to such a change occurring
8. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is no change, 3 is some change, and 5 is much more change, how would you characterize CSO's capacity to influence decisions, as compared to five years ago
Laos
Cambodia
Vietnam
Thailand
Myanmar
8.1. If a change has occurred, what do you think has caused these changes in each country
8.2. If no change has occurred, what do you see as the obstacles blocking that change
IR 1E: Strengthened regional multi-stakeholder platforms (for development investments decision making)
9. Prior to beginning implementation of SEL, were regional multi-stakeholder platforms for decision making available? Feel free to divide this up by country
9.1. How, if at all, how have regional standards for SES decision-making in each country changed since the implementation of SEL
9.2. What influences and activities played a role in regional standards for SES changing decision making in each country?
9.3. If regional standards for SES have not changed decision making in some of the five countries, what have been obstacles to such a change occurring?
10. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is no change, 3 is some change, and 5 is much more change, how would you characterize changes in regional multi-stakeholder platforms capacity to influence decision making, as compared to five years ago
Laos
Cambodia
Vietnam
Thailand
Myanmar
10.1. If a change has occurred, what do you think has caused these changes in each country
10.2. If no change has occurred, what do you see as the obstacles blocking that change
R 1F: Applied regional standards for SES in targeted countries.
11. Prior to beginning implementation of SEL, were regional standards for SES for decision making available? Feel free to divide this up by country
11.1. How, if at all, have regional standards for SES changed decision making in each country changed since the implementation of SEL
11.2. How, if at all, have regional standards for SES changed decision making in each country changed since the implementation of SEL?
11.3. If regional standards for SES have not influenced decision making in some of the five countries, what have been obstacles to such a change occurring?
12. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is no change, 3 is some change, and 5 is much more change, how would you characterize changes in regional SES standards influence on decision making, as compared to five years ago
Laos
Cambodia
Vietnam

Thailand
Myanmar
12.1. If a change has occurred, what do you think has caused these changes in each country
12.2. If no change has occurred, what do you see as the obstacles blocking that change
Gender Relations
13. How has the design and/or implementation of SEL handled the potential different levels of results and/or intended impact on beneficiaries from different gender groups and assessed gender relations, equality and male/female empowerment
Question A.2
14. What remaining challenges do you see as necessary to overcome in order to improve regional management of natural capital?
15. If it were possible, in what ways would you change the design and implementation of SEL or a follow-on intervention
16. Are there ways that SEL has influenced “improved use of social and environmental safeguards and sound science for decision-making ...” that you believe are not captured in the way they are currently measured?
17. What do you think have been your biggest successes and challenges?
17.1. Successes
17.2. Challenges
18. Do you think the design and/or implementation of SEL should be modified in some way so that its results for beneficiaries from different gender groups are assessed more accurately and contribute to improved gender relations, equality and male/female empowerment?
18.1. Successes?
18.2. Failures?
Question B.1 Future Opportunities
19. What remaining challenges do you see as necessary to overcome in order to improve the regional management of natural capital?
20. What other interventions, opportunities, corrective or adaptive actions would you like to see <i>prioritized</i> in the future programming for the Lower Mekong Countries?
Question B.2 Regional Coordination
21. What <i>other actors or programs</i> , if any, are you aware of that are attempting to improve national and regional decision-making regarding hydropower development in the Lower Mekong Region? (<i>Probe for MRC, ADB, NGOs, private sector, universities</i>)
22. Which national, regional, or international partners do you consider it most important for RDMA to collaborate with more closely?
22.1. Is their programming complementary with RDMA programming, or inconsistent with RDMA programming?
23. For the future, what practical options do you see to <i>strengthen coordination</i> or build new linkages with other donors and regional institutions working on improving decision making on these issues?
24. Are there any ASEAN <i>peninsular members</i> (Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore Brunei) you think offer good potential for collaborative working relationships on these issues?
25. Are there any <i>major gaps</i> obvious in programming among other national, regional, and international partners on these issues that you think USAID/RDMA programming could fill?

Mekong Partnership for the Environment (MPE) Implementer Interview Guide

Project Mekong Partnership for the Environment (MPE)
Informant Category
Name of Key Informant
Date
Interviewer(s)
Consent Script
Respondents Background
Can you begin by telling us a little bit about yourself and your knowledge of (or role in) the SIM project? <i>(based on responses, may skip certain questions if not pertinent)</i>
Question A 1
IR 1: Improved smart infrastructure decision making by Lower Mekong Governments
1. Prior to beginning implementation of MPE, how were investment decisions made by governments regarding large infrastructure projects? Feel free to divide them up by country.
1.1. What influences and activities have played a role in changing this process in each country?
1.2. If this process has remained the same in some of the five countries, what have been obstacles to change occurring?
2. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is no change, 3 is some increase, and 5 is much more, how would you characterize changes in the knowledge of decision-makers in each country regarding environmental and social risks of development investments now, as compared to five years ago?
2.1. If a change has occurred, what do you think has caused these changes in each country?
2.2. If no change has occurred, what do you see as the obstacles blocking that change?
IR 2: Advanced informed multi-stakeholder dialogues on the anticipated social and environmental impacts of development projects:
3. Prior to beginning implementation of MPE, were <i>multi-stakeholder dialogues</i> on anticipated social and environmental impacts conducted for large infrastructure projects? Feel free to divide them up by country
3.1. How, if at all, have these processes in each country or the region changed since the implementation of MPE?
3.2. What influences and activities played a role in changing these processes in each country or the region??
3.3. If these processes have remained the same in some of the five countries, what have been obstacles to such a change occurring?
1. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is no change, 3 is some change, and 5 is much more change, how would you characterize the changes in multi-stakeholder dialogues in each country or the region regarding anticipated social and environmental and social of (large) development project now, as compared to <i>five years ago</i>
Laos
Cambodia
Vietnam
Thailand
Myanmar
If no change has occurred, what do you see as the obstacles blocking that change?
4. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is no change, 3 is some increase, and 5 is much more, how would you characterize changes in multi-stakeholder dialogues in each country or the region regarding anticipated social and environmental and social impacts of large development projects now, as compared to five years ago?
Laos
Cambodia
Vietnam
Thailand
Myanmar
4.1. If a change has occurred, what do you think has caused these changes in each country?
4.2. If no change has occurred, what do you see as the obstacles blocking that change?
IR 3: Increased provision of user-tailored geospatial data, products, and tools to inform decision making
Gender Relations
5. How has the design and/or implementation of SERVIR handled the potential different levels of results and/or intended impact on beneficiaries from different gender groups and assessed gender relations, equality and male/female empowerment?

Question A.2
6. What remaining challenges do you see as necessary to overcome in order to improve regional management of natural capital?
7. Are there ways that MPE has influenced “improved use of social and environmental safeguards and sound science for decision-making ...” that you believe are not captured in the way they are currently measured?
8. What do you think have been your biggest successes and challenges?
8.1. Successes
8.2. Challenges
9. Do you think the design and/or implementation of SERVIR should be modified in some way so that its results for beneficiaries from different gender groups are assessed more accurately and contribute to improved gender relations, equality and male/female empowerment?
Question B.1 Future Opportunities
10. What remaining challenges do you see as necessary to overcome in order to improve the regional management of natural capital?
11. What other interventions, opportunities, corrective or adaptive actions would you like to see <i>prioritized</i> in the future programming for the Lower Mekong Countries?
Question B.2 Regional Coordination
12. What <i>other actors or programs</i> , if any, are you aware of that are attempting to improve national and regional decision-making regarding hydropower development in the Lower Mekong Region? (<i>Probe for MRC, ADB, NGOs, private sector, universities</i>)
13. Which national, regional, or international partners do you consider it most important for RDMA to collaborate with more closely?
13.1. Is their programming complementary with RDMA programming, or inconsistent with RDMA programming?
14. For the future, what practical options do you see to <i>strengthen coordination</i> or build new linkages with other donors and regional institutions working on improving decision making on these issues?
15. Are there any <i>major gaps</i> obvious in programming among other national, regional, and international partners on these issues that you think USAID/RDMA programming could fill?

Supporting Environmental Leadership (SEL) Beneficiary Interview Guide

Project Supporting Environmental Leadership in the Lower Mekong (SEL)
Informant Category
Name of Key Informant
Date
Interviewer(s)
Consent Script
Respondents Background
Can you begin by telling us a little bit about yourself and your knowledge of (or role in) the SIM project? <i>(based on responses, may skip certain questions if not pertinent)</i>
Question A 1
IR 1: Increased access to and use of technology, information, technical expertise and decision-making tools among LMG officials
1. Prior to beginning implementation of SEL, how <i>much access to and use</i> was made by governments of technology, information, etc., for decision making.?
1.1. How, if at all, how has access and use in each country changed since the implementation of SEL?
1.2. What influences and activities played a role in changing access and use in each country?
1.3. If this process has remained the same in some of the five countries, what have been obstacles to change occurring?
2. Prior to beginning implementation of SEL, how much access to and use was made by governments of technology, information, etc. for <i>decision making</i> .? Feel free to divide this up by country
2.1. How, if at all, has access and use in each country changed since the implementation of SEL?
2.2. What influences and activities played a role in changing this process in each country?
2.3. If this process has remained the same in some of the five countries, what have been obstacles to such a change occurring?
IR 1B: Increased stakeholders' knowledge of the environmental and social risks of development investments and ability to mitigate those risks
3. Prior to beginning implementation of SEL, what was <i>stakeholders' knowledge</i> of the environmental and social risks of development projects?
4. How, if at all, how has knowledge of these risks in each country changed since the implementation of SEL?
4.1. What influences and activities played a role in changing stakeholder's knowledge of these risks?
4.2. If these processes have remained the same what have been obstacles to such a change occurring?
5. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is no change, 3 is some change, and 5 is much more change, how would you characterize stakeholders' knowledge of infrastructure investments now as compared to five years ago?
5.1. If no change has occurred, what do you see as the obstacles blocking that change?
5.2. If a change has occurred, what do you think has caused these changes in each country?
IR 1C: Increased stakeholders' knowledge of and ability to implement public participation processes
6. Prior to beginning implementation of SEL, what was stakeholders' knowledge of and ability to implement public participation processes?
7. How, if at all, how has their knowledge and ability changed in each country changed since the implementation of SEL?
7.1. What influences and activities played a role in changing stakeholders' knowledge of and ability to implement public participation processes?
7.2. If stakeholders' knowledge and ability has remained the same, what have been obstacles to such a change occurring?
8. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is no change, 3 is some change, and 5 is much more change, how would you characterize stakeholders' knowledge of and ability to implement public participation processes, as compared to five years ago?
8.1. If a change has occurred, what do you think has caused these changes in each country?
8.2. If no change has occurred, what do you see as the obstacles blocking that change?
IR 1D Strengthened CSOs capacity to influence development decisions
9. Prior to beginning implementation of SEL, CSOs <i>capacity to influence</i> development decisions?
9.1. What influences and activities played a role in changing CSO's capacity to influence development decisions?
9.2. If CSO's influence decisions has remained the same, what have been obstacles to such a change occurring?
10. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is no change, 3 is some change, and 5 is much more change, how would you characterize CSO's capacity to influence decisions, as compared to five years ago?
10.1. If a change has occurred, what do you think has caused these changes in each country?
10.2. If no change has occurred, what do you see as the obstacles blocking that change?

IR 1E: Strengthened regional multi-stakeholder platforms (for development investments decision making)
11. Prior to beginning implementation of SEL, were regional multi-stakeholder platforms for decision-making available?
12. How, if at all, has decision-making changed since the implementation of SEL?
12.1. What influences and activities played a role in making (regional) multi-stakeholder platforms for decision-making?
12.2. If (regional) multi-stakeholder platforms for decision making are not available, what have been obstacles to such a change occurring?
13. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is no change, 3 is some change, and 5 is much more change, how would you characterize changes in regional multi-stakeholder platforms capacity to influence decision making, as compared to five years ago?
13.1. If a change has occurred, what do you think has caused these changes?
13.2. If no change has occurred, what do you see as the obstacles blocking that change?
R 1F: Applied regional standards for SES in targeted countries.
14. Prior to beginning implementation of SEL, were regional standards for SES available?
14.1. What influences and activities played a role in making regional standards for SES available?
14.2. If (regional) standards for SES are not available, what have been obstacles to such a change occurring?
15. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is no change, 3 is some change, and 5 is much more change, how would you characterize changes in regional SES standards influence on decision making, as compared to five years ago?
15.1. If a change has occurred, what do you think has caused these changes?
15.2. If no change has occurred, what do you see as the obstacles blocking that change?
Gender Relations
16. Have you observed or felt any different results from the activities of SEL with respect to impacts on different gender groups or gender relations, equality and male/female empowerment?
Question A.2
17. Are there ways that SEL has influenced... <i>improved use of social and environmental safeguards and sound science for decision-making</i> ... that you believe are not captured in the way they are currently measured?
18. If it were possible, in what ways would you change the design and implementation of SEL or a follow-on intervention?
19. What opportunities do you see for SEL in what remains of its current implementation period?
20. What do you think have been SEL's biggest successes and challenges?
20.1. Successes
20.2. Challenges
21. Do you think the design and/or implementation of SEL should be modified in some way so that its results for beneficiaries from different gender groups are assessed more accurately and contribute to improved gender relations, equality and male/female empowerment?
Question B.1 Future Opportunities
22. What remaining challenges do you see as necessary to overcome in order to improve the regional management of natural capital?
23. What other interventions, opportunities, corrective or adaptive actions would you like to see prioritized in the future programming for the Lower Mekong Countries?
Question B.2 Regional Coordination
24. Which national, regional, or international partners do you consider it most important for RDMA to collaborate with more closely?
25. What other actors or projects, if any, are you aware of that are attempting to improve national and regional decision-making regarding infrastructure development in the Lower Mekong Region? (probe for MRC, ADB, NGOs, private sector, universities)
26. What other interventions, opportunities, corrective or adaptive actions would you like to see <i>prioritized</i> in the future programming for the Lower Mekong Countries?
27. For the future, what practical options do you see to strengthen coordination or build new linkages with actors working on improving management of natural capital, SES and public participation?
28. Are there any ASEAN <i>peninsular members</i> (Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore Brunei) you think offer good potential for collaborative working relationships on these issues?
29. Are there any major gaps obvious in programming among other national, regional, and international partners on these issues that you think USAID/RDMA programming could fill?

Climate Resilient Mekong (CRM) Beneficiary Interview Guide

Project Climate Resilient Mekong (MRE)
Informant Category
Date
Interviewer(s)
Consent Script
Respondents Background
Can you begin by telling us a little bit about yourself and your knowledge of (or role in) the SIM project? <i>(based on responses, may skip certain questions if not pertinent)</i>
Question A 1
IR 1: Improved understanding of decision-makers of the environmental consequences of hydropower development decisions.
24. Prior to beginning implementation of CRM, how were decisions made regarding large infrastructure projects? <i>(probe for who decision-makers are, influencing factors, specifics on hydropower development decisions, influence of external stakeholders, etc.)</i>
24.1. How, if at all, has the process changed since the implementation of CRM? <i>(can probe on same factors as above)</i>
24.2. If this process has remained the same, what have been obstacles to such a change occurring?
25. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is no change, 3 is some change, and 5 is much more change, how would you now characterize changes in the knowledge of decision-makers regarding environmental and social risks of development investments now, as compared to five years ago?
25.1. If a change has occurred, what is the nature and extent of changes?
25.2. What do you think has caused these changes?
25.3. If decision maker's knowledge of and ability to manage risks has remained the same, what have been obstacles to change occurring?
IR 2: Increased access to information on the technically feasible and efficacious alternatives for dam designs and operating plans.
27. How do decision-makers within and outside government gain access to relevant design information for large hydropower dams?
28. Do you believe there has been any change over the past five years with respect to access to information on alternatives for dam designs and operating plans (e.g. location, design) outside the government or dam developers?
29. Which, if any, specific large hydropower dam designs have been modified since CRM started?
29.1. What were the main factors in causing these modifications? <i>(probe for consideration of social & environmental effects)</i>
29.2. If none, what were the obstacles to modifications?
IR 3: Generated learning on sustainable hydropower development options that can be widely applied throughout the world?
31. On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being not successful at all, 3 having some success, and 5 being very successful, to what extent do you think CRM has been successful in generating learning on sustainable hydropower development options? Please explain your answer
32. In what areas and/or topics has CRM generated and shared (new) learning, if any, on design options for more socially and environmentally benign hydropower development?
Gender Relations
34. Have you observed or felt any different results from the activities of CRM with respect to impacts on different gender groups or gender relations, equality and male/female empowerment?
Question A.2
36. Are there ways that CRM has influenced "improved use of social and environmental safeguards and sound science for decision-making ..." that you believe are not captured in the way they are currently measured?
37. If it were possible, in what ways would you change the design and implementation of CRM or a follow-on intervention?
38. What opportunities do you see for CRM in what remains of its current implementation period?
39. What do you think have been CRM's biggest successes and challenges?
39.1. Successes
39.2. Challenges
40. Do you think the design and/or implementation of CRM should be modified in some way so that its results for beneficiaries from different gender groups are assessed more accurately and contribute to improved gender relations, equality and male/female empowerment?

Question B.1 Future Opportunities
42. What remaining challenges do you see as necessary to overcome in order to improve the regional management of natural capital?
43. What other interventions, opportunities, corrective or adaptive actions would you like to see <i>prioritized</i> in the future programming for the Lower Mekong Countries?
Question B.2 Regional Coordination
45. What other actors or projects, if any, are you aware of that are attempting to improve national and regional decision-making regarding infrastructure development in the Lower Mekong Region? (probe for MRC, ADB, NGOs, private sector, universities)
46. What remaining challenges do you see as necessary to overcome in order to improve the regional management of natural capital?
47. What other interventions, opportunities, corrective or adaptive actions would you like to see <i>prioritized</i> in the future programming for the Lower Mekong Countries?
48. For the future, what practical options do you see to strengthen coordination or build new linkages with actors working on improving management of natural capital, SES and public participation?

Mekong Partnership for the Environment (MPE) Beneficiary Interview Guide

Project Mekong Partnership for the Environment (MPE)
Informant Category
Name of Key Informant
Date
Interviewer(s)
Consent Script
Respondents Background
Can you begin by telling us a little bit about yourself and your knowledge of (or role in) the SIM project? <i>(based on responses, may skip certain questions if not pertinent)</i>
Question A 1
IR 1: Improved smart infrastructure decision making by Lower Mekong Governments
1. Prior to beginning implementation of MPE, how were investment decisions made by governments regarding large infrastructure projects? <i>(probe for who decision-makers are, influencing factors, specifics on hydropower development decisions, influence of external stakeholders, etc.)</i>
1.1. How, if at all, has the process changed since the implementation of MPE? <i>(can probe on same factors as above)</i>
1.2. If this process has remained the same in some of the five countries, what have been obstacles to change occurring?
2. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is no change, 3 is some increase, and 5 is much more, how would you characterize changes in the knowledge of decision-makers in each country regarding environmental and social risks of development investments now, as compared to five years ago? ?
2.1. If this process has remained the same, what have been obstacles to such a change occurring?
2.2. What do you think has caused these changes?
2.3. If decision maker's knowledge of and ability to manage risks has remained the same, what have been obstacles to change occurring?
IR 2: Advanced informed multi-stakeholder dialogues on the anticipated social and environmental impacts of development projects:
3. Prior to beginning implementation of MPE, were <i>multi-stakeholder dialogues</i> on anticipated social and environmental impacts conducted for large infrastructure projects? <i>(influencing factors, specifics on hydropower development decisions, influence of external stakeholders, etc.)</i>
3.1. How, if at all, have multi-stakeholder dialogues changed discussions and decisions on anticipated social and environmental impacts since the implementation of CRM? <i>(can probe on same factors as above)?</i>
3.2. If this discussion and decision process for of anticipated impacts has remained the same, what have been obstacles to such a change occurring?
4. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is no change, 3 is some change, and 5 is much more change, how would you characterize changes in dialogues with decision-makers regarding environmental and social risks of infrastructure investments now, as compared to five years ago?
4.1. If a change has occurred, what is the nature and extent of changes?
4.2. If no change has occurred, what have been the obstacles to change occurring?
Gender Relations
5. Have you observed or felt any different results from the activities of MPE with respect to impacts on different gender groups or gender relations, equality and male/female empowerment?
Question A.2
6. Which elements of MPE (probe: RTWG, public participation, media outreach) have been useful to you as a decision maker or as an 'influencer' (e.g. CSO), and which have not?
7. Are there any factors that have amplified or reduced your ability to use contributions from MPE? If so, please describe them.
8. What do you think have been MPE's biggest successes and challenges?
8.1. Successes
8.2. Challenges
9. Do you think the design and/or implementation of MPE should be modified in some way so that its results for beneficiaries from different gender groups are assessed more accurately and contribute to improved gender relations, equality and male/female empowerment?
Question B.I Future Opportunities
10. What other interventions, opportunities, corrective or adaptive actions would you like to see prioritized in future programming

for the Lower Mekong Countries?
11. What other actors or projects, if any, are you aware of that are attempting to improve national and regional decision-making regarding infrastructure development in the Lower Mekong Region? (probe for MRC, ADB, NGOs, private sector, universities)
Question B.2 Regional Coordination
12. What other actors or projects, if any, are you aware of that are attempting to improve national and regional decision-making regarding infrastructure development in the Lower Mekong Region? (probe for MRC, ADB, NGOs, private sector, universities)
13. What remaining challenges do you see as necessary to overcome in order to improve the regional management of natural capital?
14. What other interventions, opportunities, corrective or adaptive actions would you like to see <i>prioritized</i> in the future programming for the Lower Mekong Countries?
15. For the future, what practical options do you see to <i>strengthen coordination</i> or build new linkages with other donors and regional institutions working on improving decision making on these issues?
16. Are there any ASEAN <i>peninsular members</i> (Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore Brunei) you think offer good potential for collaborative working relationships on these issues?
17. Are there any <i>major gaps</i> obvious in programming among other national, regional, and international partners on these issues that you think USAID/RDMA programming could fill?

Smart Infrastructure for the Mekong (SIM) Beneficiary Interview Guide

Project Smart Infrastructure for the Mekong (SIM)
Informant Category
Name of Key Informant
Date
Interviewer(s)
Consent Script
Respondents Background
Can you begin by telling us a little bit about yourself and your knowledge of (or role in) the SIM project? <i>(based on responses, may skip certain questions if not pertinent)</i>
Question A I
IR 1: Increased access to and use of technology, information, technical expertise and decision-making tools among LMG officials
2. Prior to beginning implementation of SIM, did government officials have access to and use technology, information, tools, etc. for decision making about large infrastructure projects? <i>(probe for who decision-makers are, influencing factors, specifics on hydropower development decisions, influence of external stakeholders, etc.)</i>
2.1. How, if at all, how has access and use in each country changed since the implementation of SEL? <i>(can probe on same factors as above)</i>
2.2. If access and use has remained the same, what have been obstacles to such a change occurring?
3. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is no change, 3 is some change, and 5 is much more change, how would you characterize the change in access to and use of technology, information, tools, etc. regarding decision making now, as compared to five years ago?
3.1. If a change has occurred, what is the nature and extent of changes?
3.2. What do you think has caused these changes?
3.3. If decision maker's access to and use technology, information, tools, etc. for decision making has remained the same, what have been obstacles to change occurring?
IR 2: Increased capacity and expertise of government officials to address adverse environmental and social impacts of development projects
4. Prior to beginning implementation of SIM, what was the capacity and expertise of government officials to address adverse environmental and social impacts of development projects?
4.1. How, if at all, has capacity and expertise changed since the implementation of SIM?
4.2. What influences and activities played a role in changing their capacity and expertise?
4.3. If capacity and expertise has remained the same, what have been obstacles to such a change occurring?
5. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is no change, 3 is some change, and 5 is much more change, how would you characterize government capacity and expertise regarding addressing adverse environmental and social risks of infrastructure investments now, as compared to five years ago?
5.1. If a change has occurred, what do you think has caused this change in each country?
5.2. If no change has occurred, what do you see as the obstacles blocking that change?
Gender Relations
6. Have you observed or felt any different results from the activities of SIM with respect to impacts on different gender groups or gender relations, equality and male/female empowerment?
Question A.2
7. Are there ways that SIM has influenced "improved use of social and environmental safeguards and sound science for decision-making ..." that you believe are not captured in the way they are currently measured?
8. If it were possible, in what ways would you change the design and implementation of SIM or a follow-on intervention?
9. What opportunities do you see for SIM in what remains of its current implementation period?
10. What do you think have been your biggest successes and challenges?
10.1. Successes
10.2. Challenges
11. Do you think the design and/or implementation of SIM should be modified in some way so that its results for beneficiaries from different gender groups are assessed more accurately and contribute to improved gender relations, equality and male/female empowerment?
Question B.I Future Opportunities
12. What remaining challenges do you see as necessary to overcome in order to improve the regional management of natural

capital?
13. What other interventions, opportunities, corrective or adaptive actions would you like to see prioritized in the future programming for the Lower Mekong Countries?
Question B.2 Regional Coordination
14. Which national, regional, or international partners do you consider it most important for RDMA to collaborate with more closely?
15. What other actors or projects, if any, are you aware of that are attempting to improve national and regional decision-making regarding infrastructure development in the Lower Mekong Region? (probe for MRC, ADB, NGOs, private sector, universities)
16. What other interventions, opportunities, corrective or adaptive actions would you like to see <i>prioritized</i> in the future programming for the Lower Mekong Countries?
17. For the future, what practical options do you see to strengthen coordination or build new linkages with other donors and regional institutions working on improving decision making on these issues?
18. Are there any ASEAN <i>peninsular members</i> (Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei) you think offer good potential for collaborative working relationships on these issues?
19. Are there any major gaps in programming among other national, regional, and international partners on these issues that you think USAID/RDMA programming could fill?

SERVIR Beneficiary Interview Guide

Project SERVIR
Informant Category
Date
Interviewer(s)
Consent Script
Respondents Background
Can you begin by telling us a little bit about yourself and your knowledge of (or role in) the SIM project? <i>(based on responses, may skip certain questions if not pertinent)</i>
Question A I
IR 1: Improved capacity of institutions to use earth observation information and geospatial information technologies
1. Prior to beginning implementation of SERVIR what was the capacity of institutions to use earth observation information and geospatial information technologies? (probe for influencing factors, specifics on development decisions, influence of external stakeholders, etc.)
1.1. How, if at all, has the capacity of institutions to use this information and technologies changed since the implementation of SERVIR? <i>(can probe on same factors as above)</i>
1.2. If institution's capacity has remained the same, what have been obstacles to such a change occurring?
2. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is no change, 3 is some change, and 5 is much more change, how would you characterize the change in the capacity of institutions now, as compared to five years ago?
2.1. If a change in institutions capacity to use of this information and technologies has occurred what is the nature and extent of changes?
2.2. What do you think has caused these changes?
2.3. If institution's capacity to use of this information has remained the same, what have been obstacles to change occurring?
IR 2: Increased awareness of stakeholders of geospatial data, tools, knowledge products, and services.
3. Prior to beginning implementation of SERVIR what was the awareness of stakeholders of geospatial data, tools, etc.? (probe for influencing factors, specifics on development decisions, influence of external stakeholders, etc.)
3.1. How, if at all, has stakeholder's awareness of geospatial data, tools, etc. changed since the implementation of SERVIR? <i>(can probe on same factors as above)</i>
3.2. If stakeholder's awareness has remained the same, what have been obstacles to such a change occurring?
4. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is no change, 3 is some increase, and 5 is much more, how would you characterize changes in <i>stakeholder awareness</i> in each country, as compared to two years ago?
4.1. If a change in stakeholder's awareness of geospatial data, tools, etc. has occurred what is the nature and extent of changes?
4.2. What do you think has caused these changes?
IR 3: Increased provision of user-tailored geospatial data, products, and tools to inform decision making
5. Prior to beginning implementation of SERVIR what was the level of provision of user-tailored geospatial data, products, and tools to inform decision making? <i>(probe for influencing factors, specifics on development decisions, influence of external stakeholders, etc.)</i>
5.1. How, if at all, has provision of user-tailored geospatial data, products, etc. changed since the implementation of SERVIR? <i>(can probe on same factors as above)</i>
5.2. If the level of provision has remained the same, what have been obstacles to such a change occurring?
6. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is no change, 3 is some increase, and 5 is much more, how would you characterize change in provision of user-tailored geospatial data, as compared to five years ago?
6.1. If a change user-tailored geospatial data, products, etc. has occurred, what is the nature and extent of changes?
6.2. What do you think has caused these changes?
6.3. If institution's capacity to use of this information has remained the same, what have been obstacles to change occurring?
IR 4: ADPC strengthened as a regional provider of geospatial data analyses, and capacity building services.
7. How, if at all, has ADPC's capacity as regional provider changed since the implementation of SERVIR?
7.1. What influences and activities played a role in changing ADPC's capacity as a regional provider?
7.2. If ADPC's capacity as a provider has remained the same, what have been obstacles to such a change occurring?
8. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is no change, 3 is some change, and 5 is much more, how would you characterize changes in ADPC's capacity as a regional provider, as compared to two years ago?

8.1. If a change has occurred, what do you think has caused these changes in each country?
8.2. If a change has occurred, what do you think has caused these changes?
8.3. If no change has occurred, what do you see as the obstacles blocking that change?
Gender Relations
9. Have you observed or felt any different results from the activities of SERVIR with respect to impacts on different gender groups or gender relations, equality and male/female empowerment?
Question A.2
10. Have you observed or felt any different results from the activities of SERVIR with respect to impacts on different gender groups or gender relations, equality and male/female empowerment?
11. If it were possible, in what ways would you change the design and implementation of SERVIR or a follow-on intervention?
12. What opportunities do you see for SERVIR in what remains of its current implementation period?
13. What do you think have been SERVIR's biggest successes and challenges?
13.1. Successes
13.2. Challenges
14. Do you think the design and/or implementation of SERVIR should be modified in some way so that its results for beneficiaries from different gender groups are assessed more accurately and contribute to improved gender relations, equality and male/female empowerment?
Question B.1 Future Opportunities
15. What remaining challenges do you see as necessary to overcome in order to improve the regional management of natural capital?
16. What other interventions, opportunities, corrective or adaptive actions would you like to see <i>prioritized</i> in the future programming for the Lower Mekong Countries?
Question B.2 Regional Coordination
17. What other actors or projects, if any, are you aware of that are attempting to improve national and regional decision-making regarding infrastructure development in the Lower Mekong Region? (probe for MRC, ADB, NGOs, private sector, universities)
18. What other actors or projects, if any, are you aware of that are attempting to improve national and regional decision-making regarding infrastructure development in the Lower Mekong Region? (probe for MRC, ADB, NGOs, private sector, universities)
19. For the future, what practical options do you see to strengthen coordination or build new linkages with actors working on improving management of natural capital, SES and public participation?
20. Are there any ASEAN <i>peninsular members</i> (Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore Brunei) you think offer good potential for collaborative working relationships on these issues?
21. Are there any <i>major gaps</i> obvious in programming among other national, regional, and international partners on these issues that you think USAID/RDMA programming could fill?

US Government Interview Guide

Project
Informant Category
Name of Key Informant
Date
Interviewer(s)
Consent Script
Respondents Background
Can you begin by telling us a little bit about yourself and your knowledge of (or role in) the SMP? <i>(based on responses, may skip certain questions if not pertinent)</i>
Question A 1 Effectiveness of Current Portfolio
89. To what extent do you think the current SMP as a whole and each of the five activities are contributing to the achievement of Sub Purpose 1.1.3?
89.1. SMP Overall
89.2. SIM
89.3. MPE
89.4. CRM
89.5. SEL
89.6. SERVIR
Question A.2 Improvements to Current Portfolio
90. What interventions, opportunities, corrective or adaptive actions should RDMA and USG consider and implement to accelerate achieving Sup-Purpose 1.1.3?
90.1. SMP Overall
90.2. SIM
90.3. MPE
90.4. CRM
90.5. SEL
90.6. SERVIR
Gender Relations
91. How has the design and/or implementation of SERVIR handled the potential different levels of results and/or intended impact on beneficiaries from different gender groups and assessed gender relations, equality and male/female empowerment?
Question B.1 Future Opportunities
92. What remaining challenges do you see as necessary to overcome in order to improve regional management of natural capital?
93. If it were possible, in what ways would you change the design and implementation of SMP or a follow-on intervention?
94. What do you think have been your biggest successes and challenges?
94.1. Successes
94.2. Challenges
Question B.2 Regional Coordination
95. What <i>other actors or programs</i> , if any, are you aware of that are attempting to improve national and regional decision-making regarding hydropower development in the Lower Mekong Region? <i>(Probe for MRC, ADB, NGOs, private sector, universities)</i>
96. Which national, regional, or international partners do you consider it most important for RDMA to collaborate with more closely?
97. For the future, what practical options do you see to <i>strengthen coordination</i> or build new linkages with other donors and regional institutions working on improving decision making on these issues?
98. Are there any ASEAN <i>peninsular members</i> (Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore Brunei) you think offer good potential for collaborative working relationships on these issues?
99. Are there any <i>major gaps</i> obvious in programming among other national, regional, and international partners on these issues that you think USAID/RDMA programming could fill?

APPENDIX I: DISCLOSURE OF ANY CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The evaluation team members disclosed that they had no potential conflicts of interest to conduct this evaluation. Their Conflict of Interest forms are available upon request.

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