

INCLUSIVE WATER GOVERNANCE PROJECT IN THE MEKONG REGION (IWGP; "INCLUSION PROJECT")



Women crossing a river in Ratanakiri province.
Photo © Oxfam in Cambodia

Through the Inclusion project, Switzerland supports civil society organisations, women and vulnerable communities in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam to engage in decision making on the water resources they rely on for their livelihood and wellbeing. In particular, the project focuses on empowering women to lead, and on policy dialogue that is more inclusive of local people and civil society in the Mekong region.

BACKGROUND

With over 72 million people in one of the world's fastest growing economic regions, the Mekong region is facing unprecedented challenges to ensure sustainable, healthy transboundary rivers and more equitable development. The unique ecosystem and rich biodiversity of the Mekong and Salween basins is the lifeblood for the region providing livelihoods, food security and cultural heritage for millions.

Yet the flow and quality of the water is being altered by infrastructure development and changes in water and land uses. The speed of these changes is increasing and is exacerbated by climate change.

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

OUTCOME

The overall goal is to support water resource governance processes at the national and regional levels in the Greater Mekong Sub-region to be more inclusive of civil society, women and marginalised social groups.

This shall ultimately lead to more sustainable livelihoods of riparian communities through access to river resources and the environmental services they provide.

The project includes three outcomes:

1. Inclusion and gender equality: to strengthen women leaders' and representatives of marginalised groups capacity and promote gender analysis in policies and practices.
2. Civil society engagement and networking: to connect civil society organisations, help them become more inclusive of women and minorities and strengthen their capacity to engage with national and regional actors.
3. Government and private sector engagement: to foster opportunities for engagement with civil society on issues related to hydropower and renewable energy.

PROJECT AT A GLANCE:

Project Title:

Inclusive Water Governance Project in the Mekong Region (Inclusion Project)

Partners:

Oxfam and International Rivers (IRs)

The SDC Budget:

(10/2020-06/2024)
CHF 3,353,000

Project Funding:

Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and Switzerland (SDC).

Project Locations:

Mekong region (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam).

Contact:

Oxfam Australia

Email: info.mrwgp@oxfam.org

Website: <https://www.oxfam.org.au/infrastructure-people-and-environment/save-the-mekong/mekonginclusion>

International Rivers
Website: <https://www.internationalrivers.org>

APPROACH

Building on previous experience and achievements of the Inclusion project, this phase will work through:

- Identifying new ways to convene different stakeholder groups to share and respect each other's views and knowledge of sustainable water resource governance and renewable energy
- Ensure that the goals for development in the Mekong and Salween basins are increasingly build on shared values and international standards
- Ensure decision made by government and developers at the national and regional levels increasingly include the view and knowledge of communities affected by hydropower and renewable energy projects.

The project's demand-driven implementation approach in strengthening the capacity of riverine communities, CSOs and their networks ensure that their capacities and relationships developed with government and private sector actors at all levels will be sustained after project completion.

STRATEGY

With the project's ambition of addressing water governance issues, promoting more inclusive policy dialogue and supporting the effort to promote alternative renewable energy sources, the project contributes to the objectives of the Swiss Cooperation Programme in the Mekong Region 2022-2025, where citizen engagement, sustainable natural resources management and inclusive economic growth are key priorities.

The project increases opportunities and strengthens capacities of civil society, researchers, community leaders, and vulnerable population groups including women, people with disabilities and youth, to participate and provide their voices in decision-making processes.

RESULTS

The previous phase of the Inclusion Project, implemented by Oxfam with DFAT support from 2014-2019, has effectively influenced strategic processes and policies on water resource governance and renewable energy through inclusive consultation, policy dialogue and more engagement among different stakeholders at sub-national, national and regional levels.

Community members, including women and young people, government representatives, hydropower project companies and civil society organization's staffs (50,365 people, including 22,151 women) have improved their capacities, knowledge and networks to be able to effectively influence water resource governance and renewable energy planning and decision-making processes.

EXPECTATIONS

SDC expects that by 2024, the water resource governance processes at national and regional levels in the Mekong region are more inclusive of civil society, women and marginalised social groups. This should ultimately contribute to more sustainable livelihoods of riparian communities through access to river resources and the environmental service they provide. The activities supported by SDC will allow to deepen existing partnerships and include several new partners at the community and regional levels, and scale up the interventions areas that further achievement of the project's outcomes.

By 2024, the project expects to reach directly 25,103 people (12,877 women) including community members and leaders, civil society organisation staffs and members of networks, academics and researchers, staff from government agencies and private sector actors. In total, an estimated 477,440 people (241,394 women) will be reached by the project's outreach and activities.



Project participant, Cambodia. Photo © Oxfam in Cambodia