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Local and Traditional Knowledge in Watershed Governance

Gender and Hydropower in the Mekong River Basin

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Hydropower & The Mekong Basin

The Mekong River, flowing 4909 KM through China, Myanmar, Thailand, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Cambodia and Vietnam, is one of the greatest river systems in the world. It has great productivity and seasonal variation that provides rich biodiversity for over 60 million people living in the basin.

The Mekong Basin is primarily rural, and the livelihood sources of the majority of people living in the basin are related to different kinds of use of natural resources, including fish, other aquatic life, plants, rapids, tributaries, streams and more. Additionally, many villagers believe in animism, the belief that all natural phenomena has a spirit, is associated with nature, both land and water. **However, the value of these natural resources to people's livelihoods appears to be frequently underestimated.**

Over the past 15 years, a series of hydropower dams were constructed in China and several of them are being constructed and planned to be built in the Mekong mainstream. **Hydropower dams pose a significant threat to the river's ecology and the ways of life of communities in the basin.**



Women in the Mekong

Women in the Mekong river basin are key water use and management players. Women from diverse socio-economic statuses have different river knowledge. Poorer women (and men) are more dependent on river resources and have more in-depth knowledge than women who are better off financially, as they have spent more time on the river looking for fish and other aquatic animals for food and income. Wealthier women tend to depend more on land-based and off-farm resources.

Many dam-affected women have protested against the Mekong mainstream dams and dams located on the Mekong tributaries (see above). **Women have been forced to adapt to the environmental devastation caused by hydropower dams to survive and continue providing their household livelihoods.** sometimes they receive help from the government who have made small efforts to mitigate the impact of these dams.



Women and men are fishing partners in the Mekong tributary in Si Sa Ket Province, Thailand

Hard at Work:

Women work hard to provide for their households and generate income. Women have knowledge about fishing in particular areas, including shallow waters.

Pictured to the right is a woman collecting shellfish near the river bank (Thailand). Women are often responsible for harvesting shellfish in shallow water.

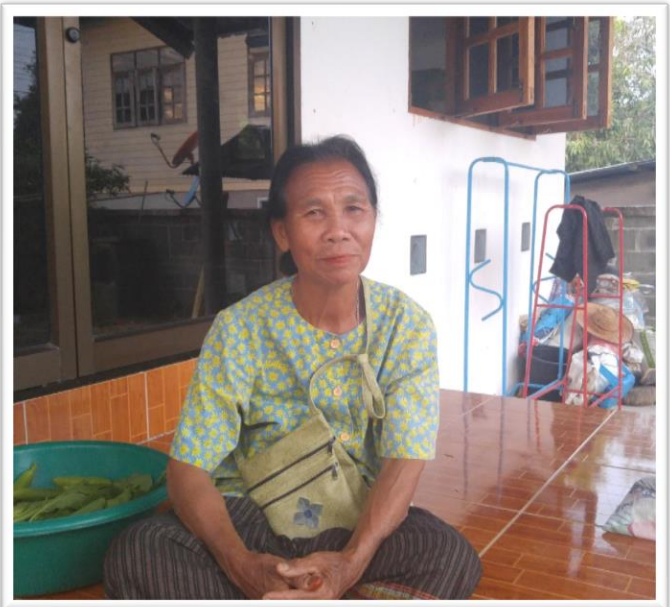




Women protesting over the Pak Mun Dam, Thailand from 1994 – 2017. This protest has persisted for over 27 years, through 16 Prime Ministers and 19 different Governments

Impacts to Women

1. Women of poorer/indigenous households are especially impacted by hydroelectric development. Additionally, they are less able to take advantage of compensation programs because of certain barriers due to gender bias.
2. Typically, women living anywhere from just below the dams all the way down to the Mekong confluence experience a reduced quality of life after dam construction.
3. In general, women have the most household responsibilities and establish clear patterns of food collection and income generation for their families.
4. Women tend to look for fish in small streams and rice fields.
5. As well as taking care of household responsibilities, women also tend to cultivate lands with their male counterparts.



Mae Mii Santaweesoong from Baan Don Sumran Village, Thailand

For more project information visit our website:

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**Fisherwoman on the Mun River,
Thailand**



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**Woman looking for snails and shells in a small
tributary of the XeBang Fai River in Laos**

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