Exploring Mekong Futures for Vietnam

Enhancing Vietnam's capacity to improve sustainability of the Mekong Delta.

Key lessons for development

- The Vietnamese Government has ambitious plans for the Mekong Delta, however some provincial governments question the strategy to increase rice production, suggesting that it may not be the best use of land and water resources or the best livelihood option for people in all circumstances.
- Vietnamese rice exports have become increasingly relevant for global food security, however increasing salinity levels in the delta have reduced productivity, and rice yields have declined. Strategies that invest in large scale infrastructure as well as practices to introduce farming practices that are adaptive to higher saline levels are likely to be more effective than infrastructure only solutions.
- Well-designed participatory planning processes that are underpinned by science can lead to a change in beliefs by actors and encourages consideration of better targeted solutions to complex development challenges.

The issue

The government of Vietnam has an ambitious vision for the Delta, promoting food security and a better life for farmers. However, climate change is projected to have significant impacts in the Mekong Delta as a result of changes in rainfall and sea level, increasingly exposing people in coastal communities to erosion, salt-water intrusion and storm surges. The Government plans to construct significant large infrastructure measures to control salt water intrusion.

What did the project deliver?

Skills and knowledge were built with the Can Tho University (CTU) team, enabling local researchers to analyse and document climate projections and develop scenarios looking at the potential impact on livelihoods of different energy production options upstream and water use options downstream for the Mekong Delta provinces. This integrated assessment of the possible futures for the water-food-energy security nexus was designed to assist the development of management plans in Vietnam's Mekong Delta and the national food security plan.

A salt water intrusion map of the Delta was produced, drawing on latest scientific evidence of trends in sea level rise. The map identifies optimal land uses under different scenarios. It provides an evidence base for decisions about energy, water and agricultural development in the Delta.

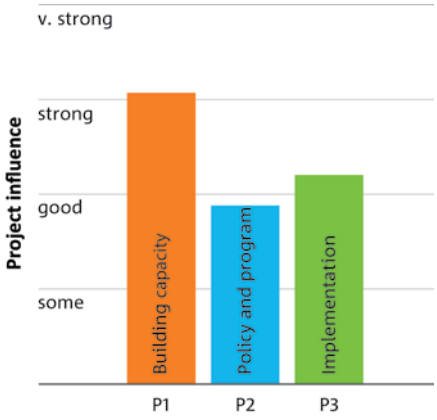
A participatory planning method, Challenge and Reconstruct Learning (CHARL) was introduced in a series of six workshops. CHARL challenges current thinking by introducing development scenarios and scientific evidence, engaging stakeholders in a participatory process designed to identify a range of development options beyond the status quo.

Project evaluation and impact

In April 2014, CTU and CSIRO undertook an evaluation to assess the project's influence on participants' adaptive capacity. The project consisted of three linked phases to identify where impact had been achieved. Phase 1 focused on 'building planning capacity and tools'. This enabled Phase 2 'policy and program development', which was followed by Phase 3 'implementation, adoption and scaling out'. Phase 1 encompassed the project's activities, while Phases 2 and 3 were out of the project team's direct control. Parts of Phase 2 and all of Phase 3 'impact with beneficiaries' extend beyond the life of the individual projects and are dependent on key stakeholder support over time.

The results showed that the participatory approach and training have significantly built the capacity of the Can Tho research team in climate projections and the development of scenarios of the Mekong Delta. These skills and the project's participatory planning process have influenced management plans and cross-sectoral partnerships in Phase 2, resulting in positive impacts as project knowledge and processes are being use to inform the development of plans for the provinces and more broadly in the Delta in Phase 3, the implementation phase.

For example, CTU are combining scenario planning, the new scientific evidence and participatory approaches developed through the Mekong Futures project into planning for agricultural development in the Delta with the Ministry of Agriculture, provincial Departments of Agriculture, the Dutch Master Plan for the Delta, the Mekong River Commission, World Bank and USAID.



Summary evaluation results for the three phases of the project impact pathway

Project partners

This four year collaborative project was led by CSIRO and the Can Tho University (CTU) College of Environment and Natural Resources, DRAGON Institute, and the Southern Institute for Water Resources and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

Australian Aid

DFAT-CSIRO RESEARCH FOR DEVELOPMENT ALLIANCE
This project was funded by the Research for Development Alliance, a strategic partnership tackling complex development challenges in the Asia Pacific region.

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