

# BRIDGE: Building River Dialogue and Governance

Mekong region: the Sekong, Sesan and Sre Pok (3S) Rivers



## Context

The Sekong, Sesan and Sre Pok Rivers of Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam\* are the only trans-boundary tributaries of the Mekong. The 3S Rivers, as they are collectively called, are instrumental in the hydrology of the Lower Mekong, contributing up to 18% of its annual total discharge.

The 3S Basins are also a bread basket for over three million people, many of whom depend directly on the resources provided by the rivers. As the Asian region develops, and given the basin's high irrigation and hydropower potential, the 3S rivers are expected to continue playing a significant role in the economic growth of the basin, and the region as a whole.

## Our approach

Collaborative trans-boundary governance is central to the sustainable and efficient use of water resources in the 3S Basins.

IUCN, under the umbrella of the Building River Dialogue and Governance (BRIDGE) project supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), seeks to facilitate cooperative processes in the 3S region by developing and strengthening water governance capacities through governance reforms, stakeholder dialogues and knowledge exchange programmes.

\*The Sekong is shared by Viet Nam, Lao PDR and Cambodia, the Sesan by Viet Nam and Cambodia, and the Sre Pok by Viet Nam and Cambodia.

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### Water governance

Water governance sets the ‘rules of the game’ for the way water is managed. It determines how—or even whether—sustainable water resource management is implemented. Poor water governance results in degradation and over-allocation of water resources, contributes to biodiversity loss, leads to weaker and less resilient livelihoods and economic growth, and makes poor people even more vulnerable.

Water governance is organized according to policy, laws and institutions in a country. In trans-boundary basins, good water governance requires countries which share waters to cooperate.

### Objectives in the Mekong Region

Over the past two decades, the 3S Basins have seen a proliferation of human settlements, and with it, rapid social and economic growth. A suitable long term strategy to meet the needs of the growing population and the environment is needed to stem burgeoning pressures, and to ensure equal benefit sharing of river resources.

To promote a shared vision for sustainable use of water resources in the 3S Basins, IUCN, is working towards the development of an enabling environment for trans-boundary cooperation in the 3S countries through:

#### *Establishing frameworks for institutional arrangements and trans-boundary cooperation*

Appropriate country-driven frameworks for institutional arrangements are being developed for the Sekong, Sesan and Sre Pok River Basins.

#### *Enriching and fortifying knowledge sharing*

Data from situational analyses conducted to fill in knowledge gaps are consolidated into basin profiles and GIS maps, and hosted within an accessible online database. Stakeholders can use this database as a knowledge resource hub. The project is also supporting the development of a trans-boundary framework for water ecology assessment in the 3S Basin.

#### *Enhancing leadership and governance capacities*

Training programmes on water resource management concepts, such as environmental flows, benefit sharing and hydro-diplomacy are offered to local leadership to encourage integrated water resources management and policy advocacy engagement.

### The Global BRIDGE Project

The BRIDGE project is implemented in 14 trans-boundary rivers and lakes in five regions worldwide: in the Andes, Mekong, and Mesoamerica (since the Project’s inception in 2011), and in West and Central Africa, and in East and Southern Africa (since 2014).

### Resources

The resources below are available online.

- Water and Nature Initiative (WANI) toolkits:
  - SHARE: Managing Water Across Borders
  - NEGOTIATE: Reaching Agreements over water
  - RULE: Reforming Water Resource
- The Sekong River in Viet Nam, Lao PDR and Cambodia: An Information Sourcebook for Dialogue on River Flow Management
- Sekong, Sesan and Sre Pok Basin Profiles
- Sekong (a short film about the Sekong River)

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### About IUCN

IUCN helps the world find pragmatic solutions to our most pressing environment and development challenges.

IUCN’s work focuses on valuing and conserving nature, ensuring effective and equitable governance of its use, and deploying nature-based solutions to global challenges in climate, food and development. IUCN supports scientific research, manages field projects all over the world, and brings governments, NGOs, the UN and companies together to develop policy, laws and best practice.

IUCN is the world’s oldest and largest global environmental organization, with more than 1,200 government and NGO Members and almost 15,000 volunteer experts in some 160 countries.

IUCN’s Asia Regional Office is in Bangkok, Thailand, with country, programme and liaison offices in Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Lao PDR, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Viet Nam.

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