



LMI: Mekong Basin Climate Change Adaptation Program

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The effects of climate change, such as sea level rise and increasing temperatures, will have a major impact on the flora and fauna of the Mekong River Basin and thus the life of the millions of people who depend on it for their food and income.



Photo by Watcharee Limanon, ECO-Asia

Climate change may mean that current methods and strains of rice may no longer be viable, if temperatures and weather patterns change dramatically.

BACKGROUND

The Mekong River Basin is home to 60 million people, of whom 70 percent are engaged in subsistence agriculture. These culturally diverse people are among the poorest in Asia, and they depend heavily on the river and its tributaries for food, income, transportation, and drinking water. As such, they are highly vulnerable to changes in climate. One of the expected consequences of this change is rising temperatures. As temperatures rise, many species of crops, fish and animals lose their vigor and are less able to compete, while other animal, plant and insect species move in to take their place. This can be very disruptive to agriculture and fisheries and the people that depend on them. Another change that scientific models predict is a substantial increase in weather variability. This too can have a dramatic effect on the kinds of crops that can be grown or harvested from nearby land.

While critical tipping points in these areas have not yet occurred, it takes time to alter long-established patterns of behavior. Accordingly, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) believes it is time to begin planning for the consequences of climate change and to work with the people and governments in the Lower Mekong Basin to prepare for the conditions expected in the years to come.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES IN THE LOWER MEKONG BASIN

Target Countries: Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam

As part of the Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI), USAID is preparing to launch a new \$9 million, five-year Mekong Climate Change Adaptation Program. An implementing partner is expected to be selected prior to September 2011. The purpose of the program is to help the people and governments of the Lower Mekong Basin adjust to the anticipated consequences of climate change. The basic outlines of the program are as follows:

First, USAID will conduct a study of potential impacts of climate change on the flora and fauna of the Lower Mekong Basin, looking ahead at both 20 and 50 year intervals. It will also collect information on the value of ecosystems (such as wetlands) to the region and help them develop systems to account for and protect these natural resources. After the study is complete, the program will set up pilot projects to determine the viability of new crops and alternative approaches to fishing and farming. The best of these will be scaled up using pre-feasibility studies for nation-wide, community-based adaptation projects. Finally, the program will also establish a regional platform to gather information about adapting to climate change and share it widely throughout the region.