

Regional integration and the destruction of the Mekong River



Carl Middleton
International Rivers Network

When was the Mekong region ever not integrated?



- Regional integration is actually economic or market integration
- The Mekong River threads mainland Southeast Asia together
- Can market integration result in equitable prosperity for all?

A wealth of diversity



- A region of political, social, cultural, environmental and economic diversity
- Economic and political power lies with Thailand, China and Vietnam
- Burma, Cambodia and Lao are rich in natural resources

Does a rising tide lifts all boats?

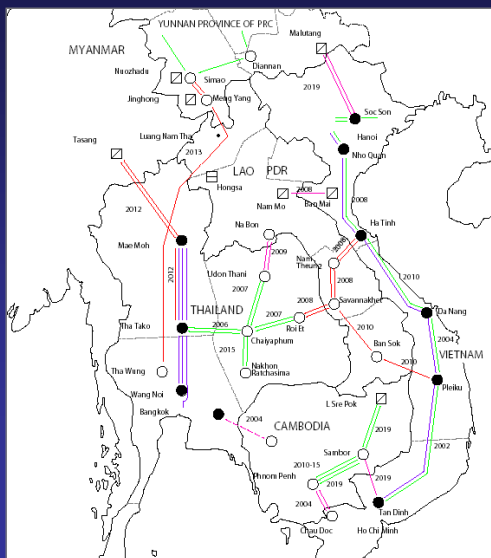


- Goal of GMS is poverty reduction
- Can a private-sector driven approach achieve poverty reduction under the current conditions?
- Economic growth is notable, but inequality is increasing



- There is increasing regional investment by regional companies, especially from Thailand, Vietnam and China
- ADB claim the GMS program is increasingly owned by regional Governments

Powering market development: The Mekong Power Grid



- ADB has promoted the Mekong Power Grid since the early 1990s
- Hydropower development is high on the agenda of all regional governments
- Hydropower development will have serious impacts on the ecological integrity of the Mekong River and livelihoods of those that depend upon it

Hydropower development in Laos



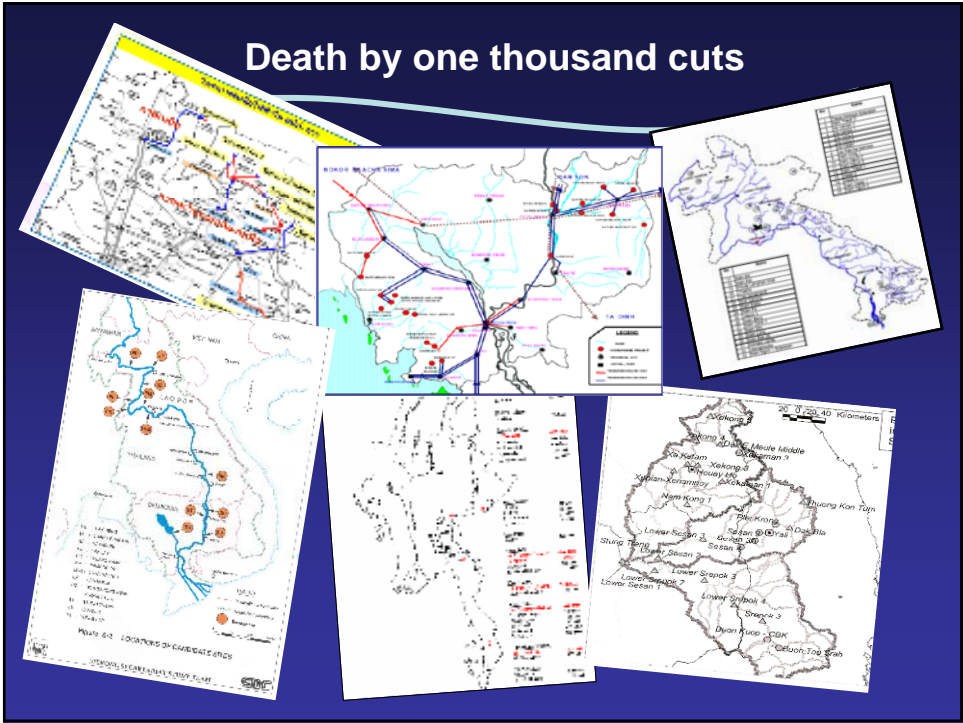
Soil erosion downstream of the Theun
Hinboun hydropower project

- An estimated 50,000 people have been affected by hydropower in Laos in the past decade (excluding Nam Theun 2)
- Many issues remain outstanding, with the projects creating rather than reducing poverty

Nam Theun 2



- Construction is proceeding on schedule whilst livelihood programs have slipped behind
- Delays in the downstream livelihoods program is of particular concern for 120,000 people living along the Xe Bang Fai river



Private sector and poverty alleviation



- For projects to achieve poverty alleviation, they must be carefully selected and designed
- Does private sector have the right incentives to intentionally support poverty alleviation?

A shared vision for the Mekong



All voices
should be
heard

Thank you for your attention



Carl@irn.org
www.irn.org