Executive Summary

Gender Action Plan and Policy Recommendations
Integrating Women's Voices into Mekong River Governance

Based on

Community Consultations with Women Leaders

from

Loei province, Nong Khai province, Bueng Kan province,
Nakhon Phanom province, Mukdahan province, Amnat Charoen province,
Ubon Ratchathani province
in Northeastern Thailand

Organized by

Community Resource Centre Foundation (CRC)

Partner with

The Association of Northeast Thailand Community Network in 7 Provinces along the Mekong Basin (ComNetMekong)

Ubon Monitoring Group on Flood and Mekong Dam

With Support from

International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

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1. Background

This document, "Gender Action Plan and Policy Recommendations: Integrating Women's Voices into Mekong River Governance," was developed through participatory community consultations and regional workshops with women leaders and Mekong River communities from seven provinces in Northeastern Thailand: Loei, Nong Khai, Bueng Kan, Nakhon Phanom, Mukdahan, Amnat Charoen, and Ubon Ratchathani. The process was led by the Community Resource Centre Foundation (CRC) in partnership with the Association of Northeast Thailand Community Network in 7 Provinces along the Mekong Basin (ComNetMekong) and the Ubon Monitoring Group on Flood and Mekong Dam, with support from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

The consultations and workshops created participatory spaces for women leaders, affected communities, and local networks to exchange experiences, strengthen mutual learning, and collectively reflect on the environmental, social, livelihood, and gender-related impacts associated with changes in the Mekong River, hydropower development, environmental degradation, climate variability, and emerging transboundary pollution concerns. The workshops also aimed to strengthen community understanding of rights, participation, environmental governance, and women's leadership in Mekong River governance and community resilience.

Regional workshops were held in Nong Khai Province on 12–13 March 2026 and in Ubon Ratchathani Province on 18–19 March 2026, bringing together communities from seven Mekong provinces across Northern and Southern Isan. Throughout the consultations, participants highlighted that communities along the Mekong River are increasingly affected by irregular water fluctuations, declining fisheries, riverbank erosion, worsening water quality, flooding, drought, biodiversity loss, and livelihood insecurity linked to hydropower development and transboundary environmental changes occurring upstream outside Thailand.

Communities and partner organizations also raised growing concerns regarding transboundary pollution risks associated with upstream mining activities, including potential heavy metal contamination and toxic pollutants affecting tributaries connected to the Mekong River system. Participants emphasized that cumulative impacts associated with hydropower development, mining pollution, sediment loss, and ecosystem degradation may create serious long-term risks to fisheries, food security, public health, livelihoods, ecosystems, and community wellbeing throughout the Lower Mekong Basin, potentially affecting more than 60 million people in the region.

The findings and recommendations presented in this document are grounded in the lived experiences, perspectives, and proposals shared by affected women and Mekong communities throughout the consultation process. The document calls for more gender-responsive, rights-based, participatory, and community-centered Mekong River governance grounded in human rights, environmental justice, climate justice, Business and Human Rights (BHR) principles, and stronger transboundary accountability.

2. Key Findings from Community Consultations

Community consultations across seven Mekong provinces in Northeastern Thailand revealed six major findings related to environmental change, gender impacts, climate vulnerability, and governance challenges affecting Mekong River communities.

2.1 Environmental and Livelihood Impacts

Communities reported increasing impacts associated with hydropower development, irregular water fluctuations, flooding, drought, riverbank erosion, declining fisheries, worsening water quality, biodiversity loss, sediment changes, and livelihood insecurity. Participants also expressed growing concern regarding transboundary mining pollution and potential heavy metal contamination affecting the Mekong River system.

2.2 Gendered Impacts on Women

Women described increasing burdens related to household survival, caregiving, food and water management, livelihood recovery, and community wellbeing as environmental and economic pressures intensify across the Mekong Basin.

2.3 Women as Environmental Leaders and Community Actors

The consultations confirmed that women are already playing important roles as community organizers, communicators, environmental volunteers, ecosystem protectors, local advocates, and holders of local ecological knowledge, yet remain under-recognized within formal governance systems.

2.4 Climate Change and Community Vulnerability

Participants highlighted worsening floods, droughts, unpredictable weather patterns, declining fish populations, and growing livelihood insecurity linked to the combined impacts of hydropower development and climate variability.

2.5 Governance, Gender, and Transboundary Accountability Gaps

Communities emphasized major gaps in participation, access to information, access to remedies, and transboundary accountability within existing Mekong governance systems. Participants stressed the need for stronger legal empowerment, public participation, gender-responsive governance, and integration of Business and Human Rights (BHR), climate justice, environmental justice, and the extraterritorial obligations of states into Mekong governance processes.

2.6 Growing Concerns Regarding Transboundary Mining Pollution and Cumulative Impacts

Participants and partner organizations raised urgent concerns regarding mining-related pollution risks associated with upstream mining activities in Myanmar, including potential heavy metal contamination and toxic pollutants affecting tributaries connected to the Mekong River system. Communities emphasized that cumulative impacts associated with hydropower development, mining pollution, sediment loss, and ecosystem degradation may create serious long-term risks for fisheries, food security, public health, ecosystems, and the wellbeing of more than 60 million people living throughout the Lower Mekong Basin.

3. Key Priorities of the Gender Action Plan

Based on the consultations, the document proposes a Gender Action Plan focused on seven key priorities aimed at strengthening gender-responsive, rights-based, community-centered, participatory, and transboundary Mekong River governance. The priorities reflect the perspectives, experiences, concerns, and recommendations shared by women leaders, affected communities, CRC, and partner networks throughout the consultation process.

Priority 1: Strengthening Women's Leadership in Mekong Governance

Supporting women's meaningful participation, leadership, and representation in community, provincial, national, regional, and transboundary Mekong governance and decision-making processes, while recognizing women as environmental protectors, community communicators, water stewards, ecosystem protectors, and holders of local ecological knowledge.

Priority 2: Strengthening Women Paralegals and Community Legal Empowerment

Building women's capacity to document environmental and social impacts, understand rights, engage with governance and public participation mechanisms, strengthen community evidence collection, access remedies, and support legal empowerment and community advocacy related to water governance, environmental justice, Business and Human Rights (BHR), and transboundary environmental harms.

Priority 3: Community-Based Environmental Monitoring

Supporting women and communities in water quality monitoring, ecosystem monitoring, fisheries and livelihood monitoring, transboundary pollution monitoring, disaster preparedness, and

community-based evidence collection related to environmental, health, cultural, and livelihood impacts throughout the Mekong Basin, including cumulative impacts associated with hydropower development, climate-related changes, and mining pollution risks.

Priority 4: Reducing Women's Livelihood and Care Burdens

Supporting sustainable livelihoods, livelihood recovery, food security, women-led community enterprises, ecological restoration, and community resilience while reducing the increasing environmental, economic, social, and unpaid care burdens carried by women in affected Mekong communities as a result of fisheries decline, flooding, drought, environmental degradation, and livelihood instability.

Priority 5: Strengthening Disaster Preparedness, Early Warning Systems, Climate Resilience, and Access to Remedies

Improving flood preparedness, drought response, early warning systems, community adaptation measures, gender-responsive disaster management approaches, communication systems, and access to remedies, compensation, and recovery support for communities affected by environmental, climate-related, and transboundary impacts along the Mekong River.

Priority 6: Protecting Culture, Local Knowledge, and River-Based Identity

Protecting traditional livelihoods, fisheries, local ecological knowledge, cultural practices, traditional food systems, river-based identity, and intergenerational knowledge connected to the Mekong River, while strengthening women's roles in preserving local culture, environmental stewardship, and community resilience.

Priority 7: Strengthening Gender-Responsive Transboundary Governance and Accountability

Promoting stronger regional accountability, precautionary governance approaches, Business and Human Rights (BHR) principles, public participation, access to information, access to remedies, and gender-responsive transboundary environmental governance related to hydropower development, mining pollution, climate-related changes, and cumulative environmental impacts throughout the Mekong Basin, including recognition of the extraterritorial obligations of states in addressing cross-border environmental and human rights harms.

4. Key Policy Recommendations

The consultations produced policy recommendations directed toward the Mekong River Commission (MRC), Thai government agencies, international and regional environmental governance mechanisms, and public advocacy actors. The recommendations emphasize the need for gender-responsive, rights-based, participatory, and transboundary Mekong River governance grounded in human rights, environmental justice, climate justice, Business and Human Rights (BHR), and stronger regional accountability.

4.1 Recommendations to the Mekong River Commission (MRC)

The consultations call on the MRC to:

- integrate gender perspectives, human rights, climate justice, and community rights into Mekong governance and hydropower processes;
- ensure meaningful participation of women and affected communities in consultations and decision-making processes;
- strengthen transparency, public access to information, and community-based environmental monitoring;
- conduct or support independent studies on transboundary mining pollution, heavy metal contamination, and cumulative environmental impacts;

- apply precautionary approaches and review Mekong development projects if serious transboundary environmental risks are identified;
- strengthen accountability of hydropower developers, investors, and financial institutions;
- and protect environmental defenders, women leaders, and community advocates from intimidation, criminalization, and reprisals.

4.2 Recommendations to Thai Government Agencies

The consultations recommend that Thai government agencies:

- strengthen women's participation, legal empowerment, and community-based environmental governance;
- support women paralegals, public participation, community evidence collection, and access to remedies;
- improve disaster preparedness, flood and drought response, and early warning systems;
- strengthen coordination among relevant agencies responsible for water governance, public health, fisheries, climate adaptation, and environmental protection;
- support independent scientific studies and monitoring related to transboundary mining pollution risks;
- provide fair and accessible livelihood recovery, compensation, and social protection measures for affected communities;
- and strengthen protection for environmental human rights defenders and community leaders.

4.3 Recommendations to International and Regional Environmental Governance Mechanisms

The consultations recommend that international and regional mechanisms:

- strengthen gender-responsive, rights-based, and participatory environmental governance;
- promote women's leadership and protection within transboundary governance processes;
- support community-based evidence collection, environmental monitoring, and legal empowerment;
- integrate climate justice, environmental justice, and Business and Human Rights (BHR) principles into regional governance frameworks;
- strengthen regional cooperation on water quality monitoring, climate adaptation, biodiversity protection, ecosystem restoration, and transboundary pollution monitoring;
- and strengthen regional commitments related to public participation, access to information, environmental human rights, and access to remedies.

4.4 Recommendations for Public Advocacy and Communication

The consultations emphasize that women should be recognized not only as affected persons, but also as leaders, knowledge-holders, environmental defenders, caregivers, and protectors of ecosystems, culture, and future generations.

Participants also emphasized the importance of:

- communicating the real-life impacts of hydropower development, climate change, environmental degradation, and transboundary pollution on livelihoods, fisheries, food security, health, culture, and women's wellbeing;
- promoting public understanding that Mekong governance is also a matter of human rights, gender justice, climate justice, environmental justice, and community rights;

- strengthening solidarity and cooperation among women leaders and affected Mekong communities;
- and supporting public communication grounded in dignity, participation, resilience, environmental justice, and intergenerational responsibility.

5. Conclusion

This document emphasizes that protecting the Mekong River is not solely a matter of water management or infrastructure development, but also about protecting people, ecosystems, livelihoods, food security, culture, dignity, human rights, and the future wellbeing of communities throughout the Mekong Basin.

The consultations highlighted growing concerns regarding cumulative environmental impacts associated with hydropower development, climate-related changes, ecosystem degradation, and emerging transboundary mining pollution risks, including potential heavy metal contamination affecting tributaries connected to the Mekong River system. Participants emphasized that these risks may create serious long-term impacts on fisheries, food security, public health, ecosystems, and community livelihoods throughout the Lower Mekong Basin.

Communities and partner organizations therefore called for stronger regional cooperation, precautionary governance approaches, transparent scientific studies, cumulative impact assessments, stronger public participation, and greater accountability from Mekong states and the Mekong River Commission (MRC) in addressing transboundary environmental harms affecting more than 60 million people across the Mekong region.

The consultations further confirmed that women living along the Mekong River are not passive victims of environmental change, but are already playing important roles as community leaders, environmental protectors, caregivers, communicators, advocates, and holders of local ecological knowledge.

Ultimately, the document emphasizes that sustainable and just Mekong River governance will only be possible when women's leadership, gender equality, environmental protection, climate justice, community knowledge, meaningful participation, human rights, and transboundary accountability are fully recognized and placed at the center of decision-making processes throughout the Mekong Basin.

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