



Phnom Penh, 2nd June 2020

Press Statement

Prior Consultation of Luang Prabang hydropower project should be delayed

Insufficient detail of Transboundary Impact Assessment and lack of concrete measures to mitigate impacts on lower part of the lower Mekong countries have been observed to be the significant issues of the prior consultation process of proposed Luang Prabang hydropower project.

These issues were identified after CSOs in Cambodia participated in the prior consultation process of Luang Prabang project, which has taken place since late 2019. It has been requested that further detail is provided concerning these issues for meaningful consultation with relevant stakeholders. There is insufficient detail of the assessments regarding fish migration, hydrology and sediment flow and the impacts to Tonle Sap Lake. The lack of sufficient detail of the assessment limits the ability to identify concrete mitigation measures that may result in definitive impacts. For instance, the study did not assess the reverse flow of Tonle Sap, which is a natural flow of the great lake that facilitates fish to migrate to spawning and feeding grounds. The change of natural water flow regime would impact Tonle Sap, the growing of fishes and the food security of Cambodians. On the other hand, it has been observed that the impact assessment of Tonle Sap has used out of date studies, dating back to 2014. This has occurred even though there are studies conducted more recently.

Cascade dams on the Mekong mainstream will capture much of the sediment from upstream catchments. The water flow will severely fluctuate and diminish sediment flows downstream leading to concerns about bank erosion and related changes of the river, which includes changes in aquatic and terrestrial biota. This discussion is not seen in the report. Meanwhile, we have also observed that the report neglects to consider the migratory fishes that travel long-distance to upstream spawning grounds and downstream to feeding grounds. The project has initiated a good design of fish passage, however there is a doubt as to whether it will work or not.

We have also seen that the technical review report of MRC on Luang Prabang has also recognized the insufficient detail of the assessment, making a comprehensive review difficult.

We understand that the lack of sufficient study will impact the prior consultation process that MRC has to scrutinize before consulting with relevant stakeholders. In this case, MRC should do a reflection on the process and improve the procedure particularly concerning the process of checking the completeness of project information. Making sure not to simply tick a box, but to analyze and scrutinize contents and substances of the project documents to allow meaningful consultation, otherwise it will impact the decisions of relevant stakeholders regarding their participation in consultations in the future.

The risks caused by hydropower dams on the mainstream pose issues for Cambodian communities who rely on the Mekong for their livelihood. CSOs working on water governance in Cambodia request to delay the prior consultation process of proposed Luang Prabang project by giving project developers more time to conduct further rigorous studies that would enhance the discussion for the sustainability of the Mekong River.

On June 4th, 2020, the MRC's Joint Committee is going to meet to discuss on a finalization of the prior consultation process of Luang Prabang. They will discuss whether to decide to close the process or suggest further studies on the consultation process, which has been organized since October 2019. The decision to close the process will lead to the construction of the Luang Prabang project, which will be due to start by the end of 2020, as planned.

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