

WORKSHOP SUMMARY

Civil Society Cooperation towards Sustainable Human Development and Peace in the Mekong Region

**YMCA for Northern Development Foundation (YNDF)
Chiangmai, Thailand
20-25 November, 2006**

**Civil Society Cooperation towards
Sustainable Human Development and Peace
in the Mekong Region
Regional Workshop
20 – 25 November 2006**

About this report

This report provides a summary of the main features and discussions in the workshop. Its primary audience is workshop participants. For this audience of workshop participants, the report seeks to provide memory of the workshop proceedings: the conceptual discussions; the contextual details of the diverse Mekong communities; and the commitment of workshop participants to a program of follow-up activities and future cooperation on the issues and themes that were raised at the workshop.

As a companion to the report, we have also prepared a shorter paper whose primary audience is those who were not participants at the workshop. Thus, we hope to further strengthen transboundary cooperation among different members of civil society, academics, governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations in achieving genuine sustainable development and peace in the Mekong region.

We wish to thank all the participants, resource persons, honorable guests and all those involved in the organizing of this regional workshop for their contribution to the success of this event.

The YMCA for Northern Development Foundation Chiang Mai, Thailand

YMCA for Northern Development Foundation (YNDF)

The YMCA for Northern Development Foundation (YNDF) was established in 1989 to work on community development, natural resource preservation and environmental education programs. The YNDF strives to revive and preserve the traditional and ethical values of the people and enhance respect and responsibility for nature and human beings.

YNDF works in the nine northern provinces of Thailand: Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Phayao, Mae Hong Son, Lamphun, Lampang, Phrae, Nan and Tak. YNDF also works with neighboring countries in the region: Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar (Burma) and Vietnam on issues of environmental education, sustainable development and peace.

Achieving the goals of sustainable development and peace needs cooperation from different sectors of society. In the Mekong region, with its diverse cultures and very different ways of life of local communities, it requires looking at the interrelated issues of society, culture and environment and, in particular, the transboundary nature of the environment where resources have to be shared, used and managed not just within the country but across national borders and boundaries.

About the workshop

YNDF has been working on critical issues related to sustainable development for many years through establishing links with civil society, non-governmental and people's organizations in the Mekong region. As part of its continuing work on society and environment, YNDF co-organized this regional workshop with the Indo-China Intersection Development Institute (IDT) to bring together different sectors of civil society for in-depth discussion and analysis of current efforts of civil society members in the region. The workshop was intended to identify priority areas for future transboundary cooperation and action towards achieving sustainable development and peace in the Mekong region.

There were 52 participants who comprised academics, researchers, and representatives from governmental and non-governmental organization from the countries of the Mekong region: Lao PDR, Myanmar (Burma), Cambodia, Vietnam and Thailand. Moreover, about ten graduate and post-graduate degree students as representative of the younger generation from three universities in Chiang Mai participated as observers, note-takers and volunteers in assisting the regional workshop.

The workshop objectives were:

To exchange critical perspectives on development and environmental management towards sustainable human development and peace;

To share experiences on strategies and practical implementation efforts to protect and promote ways of livelihood and environmental management;

To strengthen relationship and future cooperation among civil society and other actors in the Mekong region.

Opening Session

Welcome addresses

DR. CHAO DUANG DUEAN NA CHIANGMAI

PRINCESS OF CHIANGMAI, THAILAND

For a long time, the Mekong River has been a symbol of the close relations between people living in the Mekong Basin. It is also a center of great cultural diversity representing a unique and great heritage for the world.

We are proud that this unique area has kept up with the traditional balance and harmony of livelihoods in the diversity of rich ecosystems. These ecosystems have also been the foundation for agriculture-based development and food security for the people in the region.

However, over the last couple of decades, the current trend of development in the Mekong Region has changed in new directions, depending greatly on foreign investment of the sort that seeks quick investment returns. It has thus drifted away from sustainable development. People in the Mekong Region have been facing problems of environmental degradation leading to difficulties in maintaining livelihood security, increased migration for labour, and facing many social problems. Though the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) indicator has shown “progress”, there is still doubt about the Gross National Happiness (GNH).

After the financial crisis of 1997, Thai people have learned hard lesson of depending on

quick investment returns. Fortunately, His Majesty King Bhumipol Adulyadej has initiated the new development theory known as “Self-sufficiency Economy”, guiding Thai people towards a more careful and balanced way of life. It is a middle path – a way of life to achieve equitable and stable development, which is often referred to as sustainable development. (Edited excerpts.)

Opening address

GENERAL DR. SIRI THIWAPHAN

CHAIRPERSON

THE INDO-CHINA INTERSECTION DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

The major objective of the workshop is to bring together different members of society to exchange practical perspectives and experiences on strengthening transboundary cooperation towards sustainable human development and peace in Mekong Region.

I believe that we are well aware of how we have shared the rich and valuable heritage of the world’s natural resources and its colorful cultural diversity. How could we maintain this uniqueness while reaching the status of sustainable development in the Mekong region? Do our development policies and methodology need to encompass the interrelated issues of society, culture and environment? Do we also need to consider, in particular, the management of transboundary resources with benefit-sharing across national boundaries?

Countries in the Mekong Basin today face several real developmental challenges, a key amongst which is that of poverty reduction. How can we address long-term food security for the poor with a more holistic approach to development? Agriculture is still the foundation of the economy of our countries as well as the major contributing sector to food security. Should we continue keeping growth of this sector as a priority or do we keep turning our direction towards rapid industrial development?

As mentioned earlier, though the ratio of Gross Domestic Product has shown progress, there is still doubt about the *Gross National Happiness*. There is great impact of conflicts within the region in the past and exploitation of the natural resources do further harm to human security. People in the region also have been facing difficulty in earning a living in peace and harmony. This lesson demands a search for sustainability in the Mekong River Basin, raising public recognition of the value of biological and cultural diversity, upon which sustainable development must be based.

One of the important tools is education. Education provides people knowledge and understanding of others. It helps to sustain cooperation that contributes to individual and collective well-being. It makes people realize the motives for more self-reliance and helps them become aware of their opportunities and rights. Education is the foundation of human development and human security.

Human development and human security play an important role for sustainable development. Human security consists of physical safety and of economic well-being, social inclusion, and the full exercise of human rights. Human development should be combined with human security. Human security is distinct from state security, but not opposed to it. Human

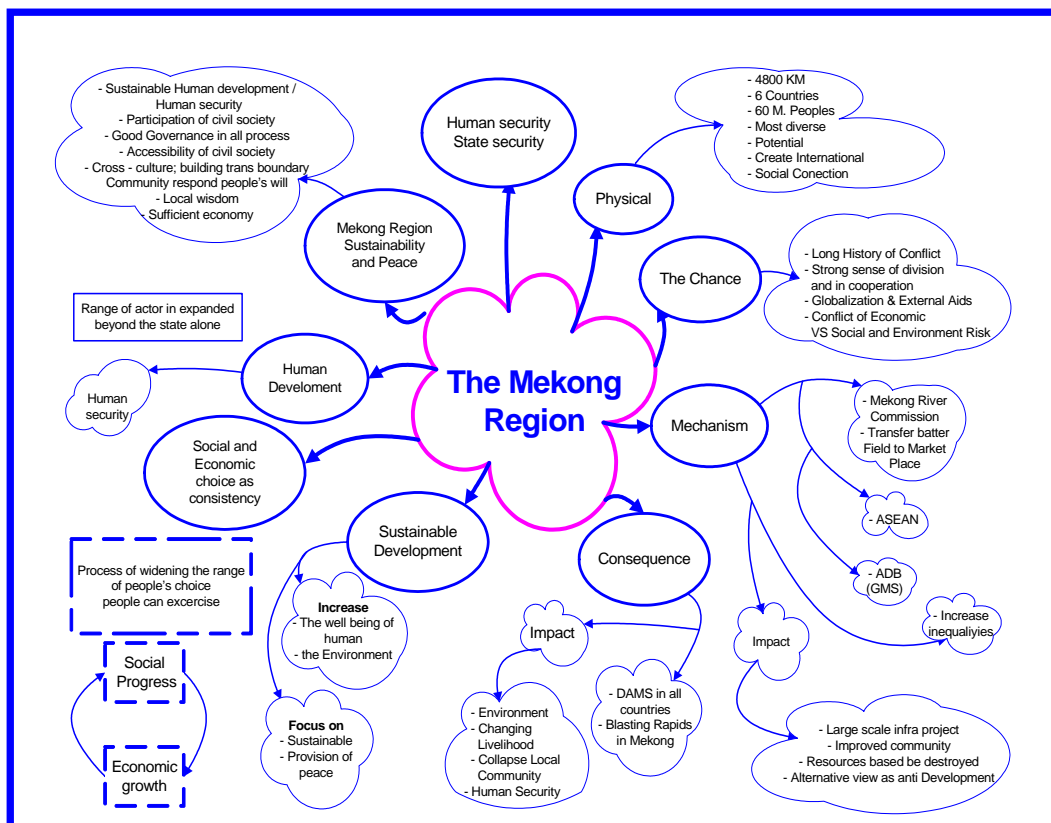
development and human security are never achieved by the state alone, but with the collaboration of governments, civil society, different sectors of communities and business in partnership towards the common goal of sustainable development.

This is a challenge for us: How can we achieve sustainable development and prosperity in the region by sharing among the countries of Mekong River a common bond and destiny? It is essential to join hands between our countries and engage in mutually beneficial cooperation to achieve the common goal of promoting a balanced development within the region. (Edited excerpts.)

Group Discussion

Understanding the Mekong region: Sustainable human development and peace

Participants were grouped by their respective countries to reflect and discuss their experiences regarding the lives and livelihoods of the Mekong communities they are working with, from their specific entry points such as agriculture, education, environment etc.



Plenary Discussion

Governance for community development and human security

The World Bank defines governance as “the exercise of political authority and the use of institutional resources to manage society’s problems and affairs.”

An alternate definition suggests that governance is “the use of institutions, structures of authority and even collaboration to allocate resources and coordinate or control activity in society or the economy.”

Governance covers a wide range of rather different developments such as:

- The introduction of self-government at the local level or in certain policy sectors;
- The outsourcing of central government functions to the private sector (including security functions to private military and security companies);
- The increasing network-type of cooperation between states, international organizations and private actors as illustrated by the transitional governance of post-conflict societies under international auspices.

Governance describes the process of decision – making and the process by which decisions are (or are not) implemented. Thereby, public institutions conduct public affairs, manage public resources and guarantee the realization of human rights. Good governance accomplishes this in a manner essentially free of abuse and corruption, and with due regard for the rule of law.

Good governance can be understood as a set of 8 major characteristics:

- participation
- rule of law
- transparency
- responsiveness
- consensus orientation
- equity and inclusiveness
- effectiveness and efficiency and accountability

These characteristics assure that:

- corruption is minimized
- the views of minorities are taken into account and
that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making

Participants were divided into groups under four themes:

1) Human-centered economic and social development

This group focused on the importance of education and knowledge, in particular, community education as a means of achieving social and self-sufficient economic development. They stressed vocational training, development of skills, and capacity building; youth as important in human resource development; capacity building on “human rights”; gender issues and women’s empowerment; and health care delivery to all poor and ethnic minority people.

They called for a “Micro-Macro Development” policy that could help improve knowledge in marketing of local production and is based on traditional and cultural practices. They also

stressed public participation and transparency in development and civil society cooperation in the Mekong Region as a good direction for economic and social development.

2) Environment: resource management, pollution and infrastructure

Deforestation is affecting many countries. This leads to soil contamination and soil erosion.

Land grabbing is a hot issue in Cambodia, and an issue in Vietnam. It is decreasing the fish population which in the Mekong River. People have not been taking care of the water.

Pollution is another problem that we are facing. Water pollution and contamination are being produced by Industrial activities and residential areas. Air pollution due to forest burning is prevalent in Myanmar. In Cambodia, we have a poor regime with garbage which is affecting water quality and residential living. Infrastructure problems relate to roads, buildings, people taking land for agriculture, dams, housing, industrial process...all of these things are contributing to the pollution problem in the environment.

Our solution: We need rules and regulations within the government. We also need education to raise awareness of the people to protect the environment. We need to focus on local and surrounding areas. We realize that it would be difficult to enforce environmental law on a national level due to different laws. That is why we must focus on a more local level so we can pinpoint problems and deal with them on a local and community level which would include local authority, making laws on environmental protection, and the public.

We should require a regional awareness on the environmental issues at hand. We need to identify the common problems within the country and implement the solutions. We suggest a regional common law to protect the regional environment and resource management. We

demand good government to help protect the environment. The government, along with a regional level, public and civil society, is a main part and key factor to help protect the environment. There must be good government. We also need support in terms of funding for resource management.

We want to commit to actions, but we need financial assistance so that we can do so. We need participation of the public from all sectors. Capacity building is important. Civil society and the public should be willing to join in environmental awareness. We need to have strong human resources to get our strategy across.

- Raising Awareness on energy efficiency, water efficiency, and recycling
- Start from your backyard and spread around your house
- Organize public events to raise environmental protection
- Efficiency consumption
- Needs balance among individual communities & environment sectors to use resources wisely
- Teach the community how to use the resources beneficially
- Awareness raising for the people to love and care for natural resources and environment
- Encourage people to understand more about natural disasters
- Awareness raising of natural resources
- Recycle products
- Awareness-raising (through publication and meeting)
- Participation
- Participatory planning for construction working

- Law & enforcement
- Heavy fines & punishments to pollution makers
- Conduct strong law enforcement and have good supervision
- Policy & plans of resource management to be transparent to the community.
- Education on environment to be in school programs
- Environmental education from pre-school education or would
- Control environment pollution by more education to each citizen
- Training for all people on the needs of environment today and for the future and how to protect it
- Organize awareness training to present environment at border areas of Mekong
- Strengthen human resource capacity building

Networking

- Green network composed of members to force environment protection
- Transboundary resource management, networking exchange of important

Mekong River Commission (MRC)

- Reinforce the role of MRC
- Setting up more programs within the framework of the
- MRC for example drought monitoring and management program

Miscellaneous

- Environment and economic development need to be balanced

- Wise Government / wise leaders / concerned leaders need
- Protection of the environment
- Stop expanding industry

Organic and self-sufficient living

- Stop using chemicals
- It needs forestry protection if want fresh water in MKR
- Organic farming in region – exchange information,
- Promote self sufficient life
- Stop forest concessions
- Reforestation

3) Human security: Needs and threats, special vulnerabilities

Three main topics of discussion were:

Needs

Threats

Special Vulnerabilities

These are the problems that we discussed in our groups. We see that the problems are in land-less, lower education, unemployment and family handicaps and ethnic minorities, and food security.

We all come from different countries but we are all in the same boat because we see these same problems regarding the land-less, because of migration. Because of lack of land-rights and security, people are becoming landless. This is one of the problems for the region.

Another problem concerns low levels of access to education facilities especially for children.

Unemployment and low income is another serious situation as also domestic violence. For handicapped people, there are little opportunities for getting work and income. Ethnic groups and cultural identities likewise are being eroded because these groups are marginalized.

Migration is a problem with the youth. Elders - nobody takes care of them while they are forced to take care of their grandchildren and orphans. The Landless problem in Cambodia is serious in a country where about 80-85% of the population are farmers. They are having problems with farmland and that they don't have any infrastructure for education system. They cannot guarantee food for their families, where normally in poor villages they could get food for a certain amount of time. This is a food security issue. So people are migrating for jobs.

If you want peace it must start in the community. The government needs to listen to the community and to the exact issue of the problem even if it takes a long time, and if the government listens to the community then peace will come soon.

Some important issues: Children and nutrition/gender equality, training, child labor reduction, youth community development, social security, gender awareness, vocational training.

Also important: more access to information on governance and development projects, making information network, supporting food security and public health, social needs of ethnic

community, exchange and information among people in the region.

Civil society networks are important for engagement of ethnic minority. Also: Women's participation in policy and upgrade of education for women, gender awareness training and encourage gender and youth participation in projects, gender network promotion.

4) Peace and conflict resolution

The elements for peace that contains 4 things:

Human well being

Human security

Poverty reduction

Respect for human rights

Border issues: China to Vietnam-Vietnam has tried to have an agreement with China and also Cambodia, Laos. We learned that Thailand has problems with neighboring countries. So when we look at the situation along the border, it is insecure. The solution is about overcoming fear, as fear leads to conflict.

One step towards solution is to look closely at the role of the media. At the first stage we need truthful media, and for the second stage constructive engagement where we need to talk things out. The third stage is government to government solution to help stop conflicts. The roles of the people are important because people can bring peace themselves. Let the victims speak out the truth and we can make peace with ourselves rather than creating more conflicts.

Two points in the group about regions. The religions, themselves, are not the conflict, not the problem. Religions are usually misused. They can be used by politics as a tool to make an incident or conflict.

A common issue among countries - if there is imbalance whether you are a minority or majority, if you feel that it is alright, and if we accept it, stay with it peacefully then it won't pose problems. All in all, the conflicts we face come from imbalance. In order to avoid conflicts we need to branch out to the society about peace.

Synthesis of Small Group Discussions

Following are the main area of small group discussion

HUMAN SECURITY

Some of the issues raised are:

Protection from tangible and intangible threats to life and livelihoods, from natural disasters, from human-made disasters.

Support and improve health and nutrition; vocational training and guidance; love, caring and happiness for children; for vulnerable and marginalized groups; women; aged; disabled; youth; ethnic and religious communities and ethnic minorities; refugees and the internally displaced.

Increase access to information; human rights promotion, protection and fulfillment; access to justice; balanced development; and community-building and empowerment.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Some of the issues raised are:

Promote: political stability, and human centered, holistic and balanced development; agricultural and regional development; protection of forests, soil and land, fisheries and water

resources.

Support for all: education; health; youth; micro-macro linkages; participation; capacity building related to community and vocational skills development

ENVIRONMENT

Some of the issues raised are:

Awareness-raising for: sustainable consumption; conservation and recycling; water and energy security.

Promotion of: education and training at development of skills, and capacity strengthening in specific areas for environmental sustainability. This also includes special training programs and workshops for environmental education; integrating environmental concerns into regular curricula; networking to exchange information, experiences and materials on environmental sustainability.

Promoting good practices on environmental laws and enforcement; engaging the Mekong River Commission for participation at all levels of society; and promoting self-sufficient economy.

PEACE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Some of the issues raised are:

Building individual capacities for peace, conflict prevention and conflict resolution; understanding neighbors and accepting differences; working hand in hand; working together across countries.

Promoting understanding and solidarity “upstream and downstream” through sharing information and experiences; preventive diplomacy; forming a Mekong Youth Peace Network; initiating cooperation programs and projects.

Influencing government policies and programs on economic development and budgets; decentralizing power; managing shared resources; laws and implementation/enforcement; and skills development.

Promoting education for: peace and conflict resolution; human rights and law; nonviolence strategies; religious education; and reconciliation.

Future steps and areas for cooperation

The participants proposed the following areas for cooperation and future steps for specific action:

Sustaining contact and increasing understanding between the peoples of the Mekong region towards building understanding; identifying and addressing shared issues; resolving problems and disputes; Training and education; community-building; sharing good and bad practices to the regional network.

The workshop participants agreed to undertake the following specific steps as follow-up action. YNDF would try and facilitate follow-up after the workshop including bringing out a workshop report.

The workshop proposed a “Civil Society Mekong Network” (or Working Group or Coordinating body) to enable continued cooperation among the participants on the different

issues as well as to expand the networks of cooperation.

Other points:

- Annual Forum or follow-up workshop.
- Country baseline studies (adopting participatory rural appraisal methods) to enable information on various country-based and regional issues.
- E-Newsletter for dissemination and sharing of the collected information
- Website to be hosted by one of the groups also for dissemination and sharing of the information among the network and local organizations.

Appendix 1

List of key note presentations, resource person inputs and country presentations

1. Concept paper: The Mekong region as a shared resource contributing to sustainable human development and peace by Ms. Phanomwan Yoodee, The YMCA for Northern Development Foundation and Dr. Clarence Dias, International Center for Law in Development.
2. Keynote presentation: The relevance of the new paradigm of human security for the Mekong region by Mr. Vichai Rupkumdee, School of Social and Environmental Development, NIDA.
3. Key challenges of environment and energy security in the Mekong region by Asst. Prof. Dr. Chirapol Sintunawa, Association for the Development of Environmental Quality, Faculty of Environment and Resource Studies, Mahidol University.
4. River in jeopardy and the role of civil society in river restoration: Thai experiences by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Wasan Jompakdee, Chairperson, Coordinating Committee for the Protection of the Ping River Basin and the Environment (CCPE).
5. Governance for development and peace: Towards transboundary cooperation by Dr. Perapong Manakit, Faculty of Social Development, National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA).
6. Keynote Presentation: The relevance of the new paradigm of human security for the Mekong region by Mr. Vichai Rupkumdee, School of Social and Environmental Development, National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA).

7. Country presentation Lao PDR: Experiences in addressing the issues of environment, development and peace. Technical and Vocational Education in Lao PDR.
8. Country presentation Cambodia: Cambodian Perspectives toward sustainable development.
9. Country presentation Vietnam: Challenges and opportunities for sustainable agricultural development by Asst. Prof. Dr. Duong Van Xanh, General Director of Agricultural Projects Management Board, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD).
10. Country presentation Thailand: GMS for Development and Sustainable by Asst. Prof. Sethasilp Ammawath, PhD. Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna, Lampang, Thailand.
11. Country presentation Myanmar (Burma)

Appendix 2

Field trip to Chiang Dao district, Chiangmai province - Civil society cooperation for development and peace with cultural diversity

The workshop field trip provided an opportunity for first-hand observation of: 1) Development strategies to achieve sustainable human development and peace in the local communities; 2) The process of creating and strengthening cooperation of civil society to promote sustainable human development and peace in the local communities.

The participants visited the Muang Na School where they observed civil society cooperation to strengthen the community and promote sustainable development by the members of the Chiang Dao civil society comprising local administrative organizations, the Army's Second

Cavalry Department, the 32nd Military Development Mobile Unit, and Muang Na School students.

The participants observed an exhibition of integrated agriculture and future professional development for young students of the schools in Muang Na subdistrict such as Rinluang School, Chiangdao Wittayakom School, Ban Arunothai School, Anurothai Wittayakom School, Ban NamRoo School, Nong Kiew School, Muang Na School.

The participants visited the Pakasit Garden to learn and observe the system of the water and soil conservation for sustainable agriculture; and the Muang Ngai Garden which is a project under the patronage of Her Majesty the Queen for promotion of mushroom and fruit tree cultivation.

After returning to the workshop from the field trip, participants shared their reflections from the field visit. Some of the main points that emerged related to the importance of various areas and sectors in promoting peace and sustainable development: children (for future as well as for the present); education (toward human development, human security, better environment and peace); nature and the importance of education to preserve nature.

The school is a multi-purpose institution for all community members and not only teachers and students. All concerned groups and organizations, members of civil society and the government have to engage as part of the education process.

Appendix 3

Workshop Agenda

Session and Topic		Format
Previous evening: Arrival and registration of participants Dinner and stay at the International Hotel (Chiangmai YMCA)		
Day One		
07.00-08.30	Breakfast	
09.00-10.15	Opening ceremony and welcome address - Introduction to workshop goals and agenda - Brief introductions by participants	
10.15-10.45	Break	
10.45-12.00	Presentation of concept paper: “The Mekong region as a shared resource contributing to sustainable human development and peace”	Presentation and plenary discussion
12.00-13.00	Lunch	
13.00-14.30	Understanding the Mekong region: Sustainable human development and peace	Small group discussions: Reflections on country experiences
14.30-15.00	Break	
15.00-16.00	Small group report	

16.00-16.30	The Role of Civil Society in River Restoration	Case Study
19.00-21.00	- Welcoming dinner	

Session and Topic		Format
Day two		
09.30-10.45	Country presentations: Experiences in addressing the issues of environment, development, and peace 1) Lao PDR 2) Cambodia	Team presentation by each country members illustrating their own experiences and highlighting needs, obstacles and achievements
10.45-11.15	Break	
11.15-12.00	3) Vietnam	Presentation contd.
12.00-13.00	Lunch	
13.00-14.15	4) Myanmar 5) Thailand	Presentation contd.
14.15-14.45	Reflection on country papers presentation by moderator	
14.45-15.00	Break	

15.00-16.00	Thematic discussions in small groups 1) Human-centered economic and social development 2) Environment: resource management, pollution and infrastructure 3) Human security: Needs and threats; special vulnerabilities e.g. women, children, youth and ethnic communities 4) Peace and conflict resolution	Four small group discussions
16.00-17.00	Synthesis of small group discussion	Plenary
18.30-20.00	Dinner	
Day three Field trip Theme: “Civil society cooperation for peace with cultural diversity” Study areas - Intercultural understanding; alternative agriculture, environment, youth and gender development, peace activities		
Day four		
07.00-08.30	Breakfast	
09.00-10.00	Reflections from field trip 1) Lessons learned 2) Development strategies 3) Cooperation of civil society	Plenary presentations and discussion
10.00-10.30	Break	
10.30-12.00	“Key Challenges of Environment and Energy Security in the Mekong region”	Plenary Presentation

12.00-13.00	Lunch	
13.00-14.30	“Governance for development and peace: towards transboundary cooperation”	Plenary Presentation and discussion
14.30-15.00	Future direction for cooperation and action plans in each country and across countries; ideas for networking and cooperation	Plenary discussion
15.00-15.30	Break	
15.30-16.15	Synthesis and conclusion: Identification of future steps and areas for collaboration	Plenary discussion
16.15-17.00	Closing ceremony	
18.30-20.00	Cultural Night	
Day five		
Breakfast Departure of participants		