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**3-S Dam Delay Urged to Research Impacts**

***Millions of livelihoods that depend on the water flow of the 3-S River Basin, Tonle Sap and Mekong Delta are potentially under threat by dam developments in Cambodia.***

**Phnom Penh, Cambodia (Wednesday, November 21, 2012)** – Following the Cambodian government’s announcement of plans to press forward with plans to build a dam on the Sesan River last week, Conservation International (CI) and the Mekong Flows team are urging for a **two to five year delay** to allow time for adequate research to better understand the trade-offs between power generation and the dam’s potential effects on this ecosystem.

**Tracy Farrell, Senior Technical Director of CI’s Greater Mekong Program** said of the announcement, ‘careful consideration must be made now of the potential impacts of this, and other dams being considered for the 3-S River Basin, to avoid serious losses to the livelihoods of those that depend on it. This includes the people who live in the 3-S River Basin, the 1.1 million people that depend on the Tonle Sap and another 60 million people living on the Mekong Delta.’

The 3-S River Basin (Sekong, Sesan and Sre Pok Rivers), borders Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, and contains some of the region’s most unique and rare biodiversity including yellow cheeked gibbons and Asian arowana (dragon fish), among many other endangered and charismatic species.  It also supports 20% of the Mekong River water flows, ensuring food and water security for millions of people living in the basin.

A recent study of the 42 dams proposed for the basin by the Mekong Flows Team (MFT), funded by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, revealed that the development of these dams for maximum energy output would result in substantial changes to the natural fluctuation in seasonal flow.

‘The people of this region depend upon this flood pulse for their agriculture, aquaculture and other activities that provide essential food, income and health services’ said **Tom Cochrane, a natural resources engineer from the MFT**. ‘Our study found that these dams would render a 63% increase in dry season flows and a 22% decrease in wet season flows. A flattening like this of the flood pulse system could have very serious impacts on the delivery of nutrients and other critical aspects that are required for agricultural and fisheries productivity, including fish migration and reproduction.’

Additionally, a recent environmental impact assessment of the Lower Sesan 2 dam concluded that the impacts on fish populations will likely be very severe. They noted that approximately 66% of the fish species are migratory and as their passage will be blocked by the dam this could seriously reduce the reproduction rate of these species, leading to less fish downstream of the dam in the Mekong River and potentially the Tonle Sap Lake.

**Taber Hand, a technical advisor to CI** who has worked on Tonle Sap fisheries issues for over fifteen years said that a reduction in fish populations could have devastating effects on Cambodia’s people. ‘Fish are essential to the health of Cambodians, providing 85% of the population’s protein needs and an essential source of fat. Currently, the Cambodian per capita in-take of fats is the lowest in Southeast Asia and the most essential of these, the omega-3 fats which come from fish, are the least available. If there was a 30% reduction in fish, national nutrition and therefore national health will decline, further deepening Cambodia’s current situation of severe poverty.’

The MFT study also revealed that the 11 proposed mainstream dams in the upper Mekong Basin, including the **Xayaburi dam** which was recently announced to be under construction, pose equal threats as the 3-S dams.

‘The Xayaburi dam has created a false justification to build the remaining 10 dams.  We know that as much as 50% of sediment might be blocked, and perhaps 70-80% of fisheries production may collapse through this chain of dams leading to severe food insecurity in the Mekong Delta, an area which is already confronted with sea level rise,’ said Farrell. ‘Additionally, this change would likely negatively affect the wider natural ecosystem and further endanger the rare and unique species that inhabit this.’

‘CI is not against hydro-power development, we support the development of electricity generation for domestic consumption and export as these are critical components of development for Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam,’ said Farrell. ‘However, we believe that this type of development must be very carefully considered. **CI urges integrated hydro-power development and conservation planning** so that the trade-offs between energy production and other ecosystem services, particularly those vital for the survival of the poor people that depend on them are more fully understood before dams are developed. **A two to five year delay on the decision to implement these dams will allow time for research to be undertaken that will provide a better understanding of the impacts of these dams.** This will deliver decision support tools to the Cambodian government that explain how different scenarios, such as variances in the dam location, design and operation, will influence the dams impacts so they can choose a path of least negative impact for the region.’

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**References**:

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