



## *Mekong River Commission*

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# **STRATEGIC PLAN 2001 to 2005**

*Towards an economically prosperous, socially just and environmentally sound  
Mekong River Basin*

**The Mekong River Commission Secretariat**

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**STRATEGIC PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTING THE  
1995 MEKONG AGREEMENT**

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## **VISION for the Mekong River Basin:**

*An economically prosperous, socially just and environmentally sound Mekong River Basin*

## **VISION for the Mekong River Commission:**

*A world class, financially secure, international river basin organisation serving the Mekong countries to achieve the basin Vision*

## **MISSION**

in accordance with the 1995 Agreement:

*To promote and coordinate sustainable management and development of water and related resources*

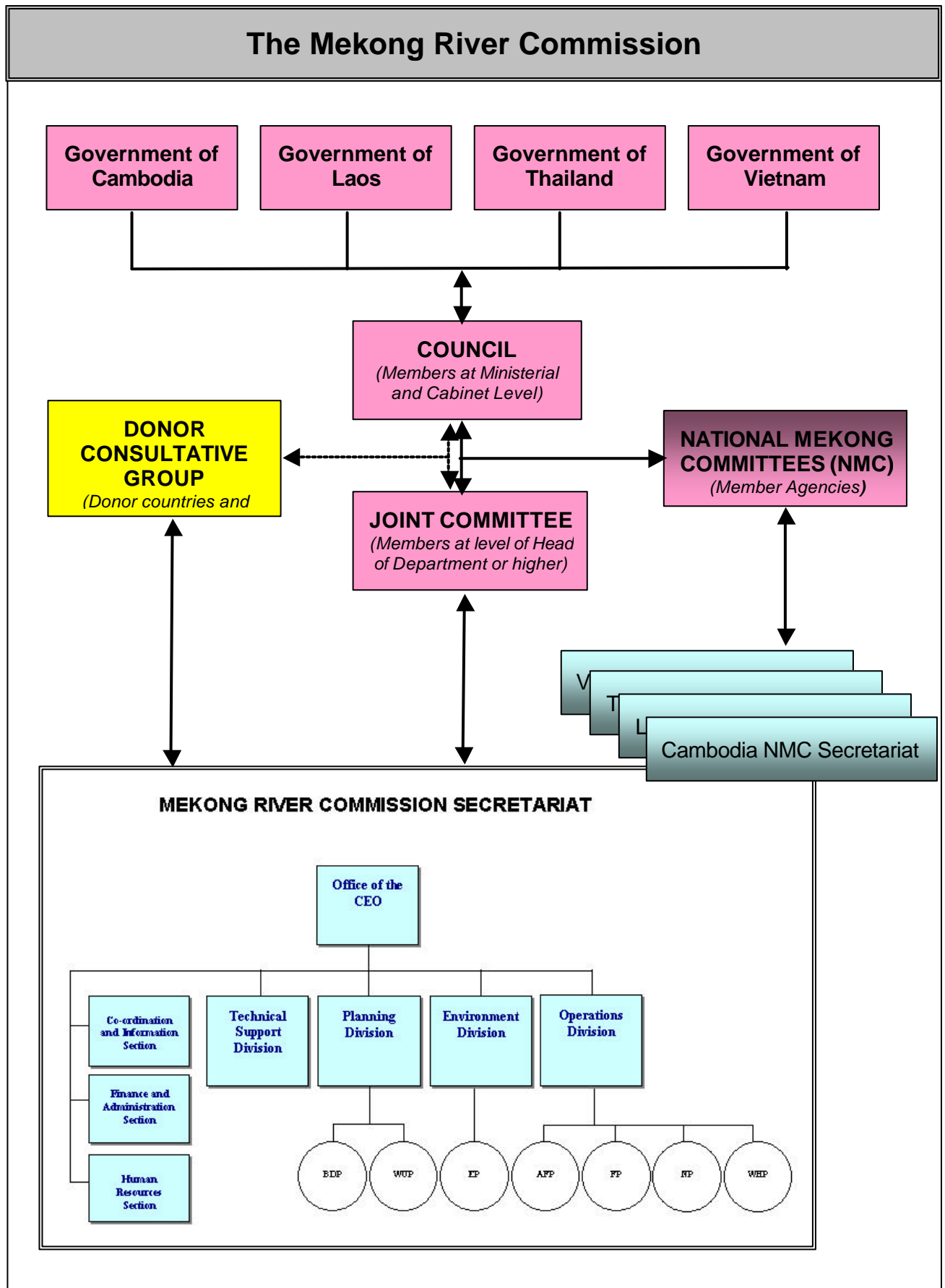
*for*

*the countries' mutual benefit and the people's well being*

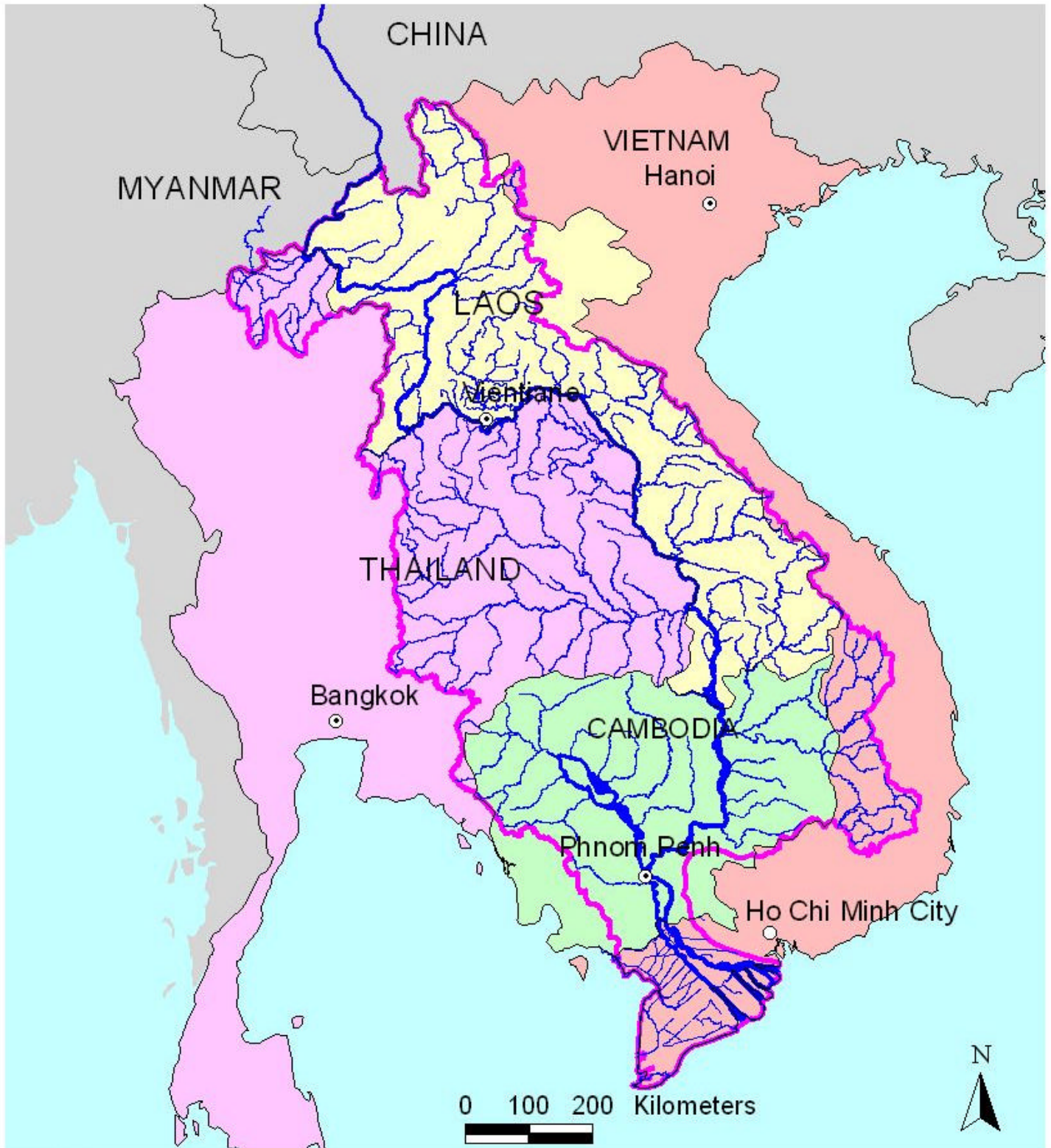
*by*

*implementing strategic programmes and activities and providing*

*scientific information and policy advice*



## THE LOWER MEKONG BASIN AND THE MRC COUNTRIES



Prepared by  
Technical Support Division  
Mekong River Commission Secretariat.

## **PART I: STRATEGIC PLANNING IN MRC**

### **1. WORKING TOGETHER FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

#### ***International River Basin Organisations***

International river basin organisations are formed to promote integrated and balanced water sharing among member countries. By working in cooperation, the countries, through informed dialogue, can develop agreed rules and strategies for sustainable water sharing. And through ongoing cooperation, the potential for conflict over this increasingly scarce resource can be greatly diminished and hopefully avoided.

There are now some 260 international river basins. Together they cover 45 percent of the earth's land surface and carry 80 percent of its fresh water. They include parts of 145 nations, 21 of which lie entirely within a shared basin. Despite the obvious and growing potential for discord, to date negotiated outcomes on water sharing have been preferred.

It is against this backdrop that the Mekong River Commission (MRC) was formed in 1995 with the signing by the Governments of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Viet Nam, of the "***Agreement on Cooperation for the Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin***". Sharing the Lower Mekong River Basin, the riparian countries recognise the need to cooperate in all fields of basin development and resource management, river navigation, flood control, fisheries, agriculture, power production, and environmental protection. China and Myanmar, which occupy the upper 25 percent of the basin area, are not members of MRC, but participate as dialogue partners.

#### ***Water Sharing and Strategic Planning***

The purpose of strategic planning is to assist change to take place in response to changes in the internal and external environment. This is especially important for water sharing where:

- there is a high level of complexity in water resource management
- there is great variability in the hydrologic cycle
- many different stakeholders need to be satisfied
- issues are often highly political
- the context of water resources management is undergoing rapid change, and
- there is need to have sustainable use of land and water for the long term

#### ***The Mekong River Basin and its People***

At approximately 4,400 kilometres in length, the Mekong is one of the world's longest rivers. The total population in its basin at present is believed to exceed 70 million. The Lower Mekong Basin, covered by the 1995 Agreement, is home to some 60 million people. The

large majority of them earn their living from agriculture and fishing – occupations that account for 50 percent of the lower basin's GDP. Population pressure is placing increasing stress on already low living standards and food security, and exacerbating poverty. Significant investments are therefore needed in agriculture, rural development, education and basic health to increase employment, combat poverty and raise living standards. **Table 1** lists some selected technical and socio-economic statistics for the Lower Mekong Basin.

Mekong River Basin ecosystems have evolved over millions of years in harmony with the natural rise and fall of the river and its tributaries. The river and its ecosystems are now comparatively healthy, but are showing signs of increasing stress. The challenge is to find ways to manage the much-needed development so benefits are shared equitably while minimizing environmental harm.

**Table 1: Selected statistics for the Lower Mekong River Basin**

Indicator / Country	Cambodia	Lao PDR	Thailand	Viet Nam	Total
(1) Catchment Area (km <sup>2</sup> )	155,000	202,000	184,000	65,000	606,000
(2) Average Flow (m <sup>3</sup> /s)	2,860	5,270	2,560	1,660	12,350
(3) Irrigated Area (ha x mill.)	0.161	0.075	1.414	1.512	3.162
(4) Population (million)	9.30	4.70	23.2	19.8	57
(5) Per Capita GDP (US\$)	252	259	876	287	-

(Sources: Items 1, 2 from Basin Development Plan, Final Project Document Report, July 1999, and items 3, 4, 5, from NMCs for 1998, except item 5, Thailand, for 1997)

### **Mekong River Commission**

Mekong cooperation dates back to 1957, when the Committee for Coordination of the Lower Mekong Basin (the Mekong Committee) was established. Over the period 1978 to 1995 it was known as the Interim Mekong Committee.

The 1995 Agreement established the Mekong River Commission with a unique status: it forms the basis of the only legally constituted regional organisation mandated from the highest political level to deal with Mekong River management in a holistic manner. The MRC is the only wholly riparian voice speaking for the interests of riparians in Mekong River Basin matters.

Three permanent bodies administer the MRC: the *Council*, the *Joint Committee* and the *Secretariat*. The Council comprises one member from each participating riparian State at the Ministerial and Cabinet level. It is charged with policy and decision making. Accountable to the Council is the Joint Committee (JC), comprising one member from each participating riparian State at no less than Head of Department level. The JC is responsible for implementing Council policies and decisions. Serving the JC is the Secretariat (MRCS), headed by a Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Its role is to provide technical and administrative services to the Council and JC.

While not specified under the 1995 Agreement, each member country continues to use their established National Mekong Committee (NMC) as the country focal point for liaison and coordination with the MRC. Although the mandates and structures of the four respective NMCs vary somewhat, all have representation at a high political level, and members are appointed from most of the national Ministries involved with water and related resources in the Mekong River Basin. Each NMC is supported by a permanent Secretariat, which acts as a coordinator between MRCS and the national Ministries. The Ministries are the principal collectors of primary natural resources data and, in addition to their national development responsibilities, are implementers of basin-wide, or trans-boundary, programmes carried out under the MRC umbrella.

### ***MRC's Role***

Under the 1995 Agreement, MRC's role is to coordinate and promote **“cooperation in all fields of sustainable development, utilisation, management and conservation of the water and related resources of the Basin.”**

MRC's focus is now on three priority areas, each of which follows directly from the 1995 Agreement:

- ?? Developing rules for the cooperative use of water through the Water Utilization Programme;
- ?? Basin Development Planning - facilitating cooperative sustainable development of water and related resources;
- ?? Environmental management and monitoring of the basin's natural resources.

MRC is moving away from being a general development agency, a role that other agencies can fill as well as MRC. This does not mean, however, that MRC will stop planning and executing development programmes. Maintaining an operational programme is important for several reasons. Firstly, there remains a large need for externally supported quality development programmes in the region, and there are areas where MRC has a unique competence that should be harnessed for this purpose. Secondly, operational programmes help generate the data and knowledge that is needed for MRC to be a respected knowledge centre. Thirdly, operational programmes are required so MRC can engage in dialogue, and help strengthen where needed, the many institutions - government and non-government - that are involved in implementation. All MRC operational programmes are planned with these functions in mind.

The operational programmes are now truly "strategic", as called for in the 1995 Agreement. They need to have basin-wide significance. They need to deal with issues of high priority. And they need to support the knowledge-generating role of MRC. MRC needs to clearly focus on its role as an International River Commission, and avoid competing with others in being a general funding source for development projects. Since 1999 MRC has made a major move from a project-by-project approach to a flexible but strategic programme approach.



## 2. DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

### *The Mekong Basin Ecosystem*

The Mekong River Basin supports one of the most productive and diverse ecosystems in the world. The biodiversity in the upper reaches of the Basin, particularly in Laos, is exceptional and unique. The heart of the Basin's aquatic-based ecosystem lies in the wetlands and flooded forests in the Tonle Sap, the Plain of Reeds in Vietnam and Cambodia, and the Mekong estuary along the southern coast of Vietnam. The Tonle Sap, during the wet season, expands from 2,500 km<sup>2</sup> to over 10,000 km<sup>2</sup>, and supports an extensive flooded forest which provides an ideal habitat for fish spawning and nursing. Fish migrations from the Tonle Sap help restock fisheries as far upstream as China and in many tributaries along the way. In the dry season it slowly drains into the Mekong River near the head of the delta, providing a substantial part of the dry season flow in this part of the Basin and help to significantly control salinity intrusion and to conserve the mangrove forests.

The Mekong River Basin environment is degrading at a rapid rate from unsustainable development practices such as forest exploitation and intensification of agriculture. Extensive interdisciplinary measures are required now to curtail this degradation. At the same time, the institutional capacity to deal with these types of environmental problems and cumulative impacts is weak throughout the Mekong Basin countries.

### *Reducing Poverty Through Sustainable Water Resource Development*

Around 40% of the population in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam live below the poverty line, and the Thai population living within the Mekong watershed area lag far behind the rest of the country in socio-economic status. Furthermore, the population growth rate in the region is high, leading to ever-increasing demand for food and jobs. The basin's population is predominantly rural, and a high proportion depend on the river system and its resources for their livelihood. Changes in the flow pattern brought about by proposed development can have a major impact on these fragile social and economic systems.

#### Agriculture

At its present rate of growth, the Basin's population will increase to approximately 120 million by year 2025 with an equivalent increase in the demand for food and clean water year round. Even at a lower growth rate, the population in the Lower Mekong Basin will, in the next decades, reach alarming levels. Agriculture is the predominant economic sector and, in order to be able to feed this population, a key element in each riparian country's development strategy. Because of the long dry season, irrigation development is essential for long term growth of the agriculture sector, especially in Cambodia in the lower basin where little development has so far taken place. Increased productivity of existing agriculture, especially in north-east Thailand and the Vientiane plain in Laos in the upper basin, and in the delta of the lower basin in Vietnam, will also be led by expanding irrigation water supplies to support intensification.

#### Fisheries

The importance of the inland fisheries sector has often been grossly under-reported, because of the difficulties in measuring it. MRC estimates that the market value of the lower Mekong fisheries exceeds USD 1.000 million. Fish is the single most important source of

animal protein in the diet. Together with rice, it forms the basis of the food security for the people in the Lower Mekong Basin. Wetlands that are vital for the maintenance of the fishery depend on the annual ebb and flow of the Mekong River system.

### Navigation

The Mekong River is an important transport route for goods and people in the basin. Inland river transport is possible on the whole Mekong River system and constitutes in most areas the only way of communication between remote villages to serve even the most basic social needs such as access to hospitals, schools and agricultural centres. Maritime navigation, possible in the delta, provides significant revenues from international trade. Changes in the Mekong river flow regime, sedimentation and construction of reservoirs may affect navigation. Co-operation and proper agreements between the riparian countries are required to ensure cross-border and safe passage in the Basin.

### Hydropower Generation

Economic development in the Basin will require, as well as lead to, increased use of power. The Basin has a considerable potential for the generation of hydropower, and hydropower development within the Basin, including Yunnan Province in China, is increasing. Yet, the development of the hydropower sector by means of large dams must be undertaken with care. Negative side effects on the overall flow regime of the Mekong river, on other resources, such as fisheries, or communities living up-stream or downstream of dams are to be avoided or minimised.

### ***Preventing Conflicts and Ensuring Balanced Development***

Use of water resources for development purposes in one country can have negative effects for other countries, unless possible impacts are properly considered during planning. The 1995 Agreement recognised the potential for conflict arising from water scarcity on the mainstream river in the dry season. Prevention of conflict, and resolution of conflict should it arise, is therefore a key task of the Mekong River Commission.

Laos and Cambodia rely heavily on river transport and the reduction of dry season flows could adversely affect navigation. Cambodia has the long-term potential for increasing its irrigated agriculture. Vietnam and Thailand have developed extensive irrigation systems that currently face dry season water constraints. Seawater intrusion into the Mekong Delta during the dry season adversely affects irrigation and domestic water supplies. Thailand has been studying options for diverting water from the Mekong, and for inter-basin diversions of water from Mekong tributaries.

A number of issues affect the water quality of the Mekong River, including industrial production, urban waste disposal, use of fertilisers and pesticides, water reservoirs, clearing of forest cover, irrigation and salt water intrusion in the Mekong Delta. Maintaining good water quality is critical for the agriculture sector and for domestic and commercial water supplies.

The 1995 Agreement emphasises sustainable livelihoods. This means that future activities in the basin must aim for a balance between the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development. The aquatic and terrestrial environment of the Basin supports the livelihood of the majority of the people living here, especially the rural poor. Environmental management and related socio-economic factors must be understood as integrated in a development process that helps to sustain existing livelihoods and promotes

the alleviation of poverty, while reducing the risk for conflict over the use of resources within and between countries.

### ***Flood Management***

Also of major concern for the riparian countries is flood management. Excessive flooding during the wet season can cause great economic and human loss in the Basin, as witnessed during the floods in year 2000. MRC will therefore prioritise the development of a Mekong Basin flood management strategy and action plan.

### ***Natural Resources Planning and Development***

Only through sound management will it be possible to ensure long-term sustainability of the natural resources, the environment and the quality of life of the Basin's people. Some critical challenges being faced in the management of the Basin resources are:

- ?? inadequate understanding of how the Basin functions as a system;
- ?? incomplete policy and regulatory frameworks;
- ?? weak enforcement capabilities, co-ordinating action and data exchange across international boundaries;
- ?? inadequate data and information of the natural resources in the Basin;
- ?? insufficient awareness among stakeholders, including economic planners and decision-makers regarding the monetary and social value of the Basin's complex ecosystems and habitats;
- ?? inadequate participation by all stakeholders in the planning process;
- ?? inequitable distribution of the benefits of development;
- ?? only four of the six Mekong Basin countries are members of the MRC.

There are also a number of opportunities, however. Some of these are:

- ?? the Mekong River Basin eco-systems are still largely in a healthy shape, and bio-diversity in the Basin remains among the richest in the world;
- ?? the legal and institutional set-up for regional co-operation is basically in place;
- ?? the understanding of the eco-systems has increased significantly over the last decades;
- ?? there is potential for increased agricultural production in the region, based on an increased yet sustainable use of the Mekong River waters;
- ?? there may be significant potential for small-scale hydro-electric power schemes with limited negative environmental impact;
- ?? there is increasing dialogue between MRC and the two non-MRC members, China and Myanmar.

### ***Other Mekong Region Development Initiatives***

During recent years a number of new development initiatives have emerged in the region. The most important of these include: ADB Greater Mekong Subregional Initiative (GMS), Quadrangle Economic Co-operation (focusing on navigation, trade and tourism, and comprising China, Laos, Myanmar and Thailand), the ASEAN Mekong Development Fund (focusing on roads and railways) and ESCAP Decade for Mekong Development.

In building partnerships with these organisations and initiatives, MRC will take advantage of its unique status as the only regional institution with a legal framework to promote and co-ordinate management and development of water and related resources in the Basin. With more than 40 years of accumulated hydrometeorologic and other natural resources data, extensive experience in co-ordinating multi-disciplinary development activities in the Mekong River Basin, and a solid legal framework, the Mekong River Commission is well placed to

take the leading role in co-ordinating the development of water and related resources in the Basin.

### 3. STRATEGIC PLANNING – A CONTINUOUS PROCESS

#### *The First Strategic Plan 1999-2003*

In order to better fulfil its role outlined above, MRC developed a first Strategic Plan for the period 1999-2003. Over the past two years many important improvements to MRC's operations have been implemented accordingly, all directly addressing the goals of the 1999-2003 Strategic Plan.<sup>1</sup> Also, the Secretariat was restructured in line with this first Strategic Plan.

But although considerable progress has been made, many areas of MRC's work still need improvement. For example, progress is required in the following areas:

- ?? programme management
- ?? project and programme evaluation
- ?? communications and coordination between the MRCS, NMCs and line agencies
- ?? teamwork and multi-disciplinary approach to work activities
- ?? institutionalising the strategic management system
- ?? raising MRC's profile and status
- ?? professional staff capacity
- ?? knowledge and data bases

#### *Developing the Strategic Plan 2001-2005*

Consequently, the MRC Strategic Plan 1999-2003 was reviewed in late 2000. The planning process was done in a participative manner, with a series of interviews and workshops at regional as well as national levels, involving not only representatives from the Mekong River Commission Secretariat and the National Mekong Committee Secretariats, but also from relevant line agencies. The Strategic Plan was then finalised in a Regional Workshop in February 2001 and submitted to the Joint Committee for endorsement.

It was agreed that the MRC vision and mission statements formulated in the first Strategic Plan remain valid. Only the former goal statements had to be modified, and their number reduced from five to four.<sup>2</sup>

MRC operations are presently structured around nine programmes (three Core Programmes, five Sector Programmes, and one Support Programme). All of these programmes have objectives that need to be reflected in the Strategic Plan. They have been phrased into "Strategic Objectives" which support the achievement of one or more of MRC's four Goals.

However, the fundamental strategic direction of MRC remains unchanged from the 1999-2003 Strategic Plan. This current strategic plan is a refinement of the previous plan, reflecting the contemporary situation.

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<sup>1</sup> Progress toward achievement of each goal since 1999 is included in Annex 1.

<sup>2</sup> See Section 5 for details.

***Strategic Planning - An Ongoing Process***

Strategic planning is a regular process of setting goals and measuring the results through systematic feedback. The strategic plan provides an important framework for MRC to structure its organisation and prioritise work activities. It also enables member countries and development partners to see clearly how their investments in MRC directly contribute to co-operative, basin-wide, sustainable development activities.

MRC's goals have been defined as short to medium term in nature. This means that, provided MRC's work is both efficient and effective, significant progress toward their achievement could be expected over the next five years. Within this time span the goals should not change significantly, but nevertheless they will be examined for their continued relevance every two or three years.

Strategic objectives serve the organisation's goals. These will change periodically as core, sector and support programme components or activities are either completed, augmented or otherwise modified. They will be reviewed annually.

## **PART II: STRATEGIC GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **4. STRENGTHENING MRC**

#### ***MRC Organisational Issues***

Major efforts have been made over the last two years in improving the institutional capacity of MRC. A major restructuring of the Secretariat has taken place, new staff has been recruited, management systems and operational procedures have been improved, and new staff training programmes have been developed. The NMC Secretariats are also being upgraded through recruitment of additional staff, improvement of management and operational systems, and technological upgrading.

Although this has led to an improvement in the capacity of MRC, significant further improvement is required before MRC will be able to live up to its vision of being a world-class river basin organisation. The 1999-2003 Strategic Plan Goal of institutional strengthening therefore remains a key Goal of the 2001-2005 Strategic Plan.

It is the staff of MRC who more than anything else determine whether the goals will be achieved or not. An increased emphasis will be placed on attracting and recruiting the best possible quality of staff, and on providing staff with a positive work environment that enables them to perform their best and receive recognition for their work.

The administrative and financial systems of MRC are also crucial to the success of the organisation. A further major effort is needed for MRC to be able to implement all its programmes effectively. This is a priority task of the present Strategic Plan.

The National Mekong Committees and their Secretariats play an essential role in the MRC system. They take the leading role in co-ordinating MRC programmes at the national level, and provide the link between the MRC Secretariat and the national Ministries and other line agencies. MRC emphasises the role of the NMCs and the NMC Secretariats, and will prioritise strengthening their capacity so that they can be effective co-ordinators of MRC programmes.

#### ***Databases and Information Systems***

A key challenge of MRC is to improve data collection and information exchange among the riparian countries and MRC, as well as with other users or donors. Data items include quantity and quality of both surface and groundwater, other natural resource information, and the range of hydrologic, economic and social models to analyse and utilise the data.

MRC also recognises that local community knowledge forms a critical source of natural resource information in the basin. MRC operations must access local anecdotal information as an adjunct to conventional data monitoring networks.

The data and information provided by the riparian governments and collected through MRC and other programmes, need to be available in a comprehensive MRC database. Given the large and diverse nature of the information, and the lack of uniform data formats in the four riparian countries, this is a daunting task. Recognising the importance as well as the

challenge of this task, the Technical Support Unit of the MRC Secretariat has been upgraded to a Division, and staffing has been increased. The success of this Division in establishing a sound, comprehensive and easily accessible database on the Mekong Basin water and related resources will be critical.

### ***Modelling***

To be able to establish and monitor agreements on the use of the Basin's water, MRC must have in place comprehensive modelling tools that can simulate the effect of different environmental events and development interventions in the Basin. Modelling is also required to determine the most beneficial development options. A major task of MRC during 2001-2005 strategic plan will therefore be to develop and refine suitable modelling packages for the Basin, modifying tools used elsewhere where possible. This task will be another major responsibility of the Technical Support Division of the MRC Secretariat, with external support and in partnership with other institutions, including a transfer of technology also to the NMCs.

### ***Raising the Status of MRC***

In order to be able to perform its functions effectively, MRC needs to be well known and well respected, in the riparian countries as well as internationally. This requires that MRC delivers quality work products and services that truly and visibly benefit the riparian countries. This implies that MRC - the Secretariat and the NMCs - must produce and widely distribute high quality information material and have a strong public communications strategy.



## 5. GOALS

Four Goals have been identified that MRC should strive to achieve progressively over the next five years or so.<sup>3</sup> MRC's four Goals are:

- GOAL 1:** to establish and implement “rules” for water utilisation and inter-basin diversions;
- GOAL 2:** to establish a dynamic basin development planning process as a framework for natural resource management and sustainable development; and to plan and execute corresponding priority sector programmes and projects;
- GOAL 3:** to establish and promote MRC environmental and socio-economic management systems, recommendations, and policy guidelines;
- GOAL 4:** to establish an effective organisation, capable to promote, in partnership with other institutions, basin-wide development and co-ordination.

These goals are considered realistic and achievable, given sufficient resources are available and MRC's organisational structure, staffing levels, motivation, and skills, and management and financial systems are appropriate and constantly improved.

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<sup>3</sup> With this, the number of Goals of the 1999-2001 Strategic Plan has been reduced from 5 to these 4. Goal four was integrated under goals 2 and 4 of the updated strategic plan. Apart from this change, the goals remain essentially the same as for the previous plan.

## 6. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The following strategic objectives reflect the primary aims that must be attained if MRC's goals are to be achieved. The strategic objectives under each goal will be subject to annual updates, with the first update planned for late 2001. In the updates, completed objectives will be deleted and new objectives may be added.

**GOAL 1:**     *to establish and implement "rules" for water utilisation and inter-basin diversions*

### **Strategic Objective 1.1:**

Information needed for establishing and implementing water use "rules" identified, and effective and efficient information exchange and sharing among riparian countries and MRC established

### **Strategic Objective 1.2:**

The data, information, and knowledge base needed to establish and implement water use "rules" developed, maintained and shared among riparian countries (complementing the MRC environmental information and knowledge base – Goal 3, strategic objective 3.3)

### **Strategic Objective 1.3:**

A modelling package of the water and related resources of the basin developed and maintained

### **Strategic Objective 1.4:**

"Rules" for water utilisation, in line with the 1995 Agreement, developed and ready for adoption by the riparian countries

### **Strategic Objective 1.5:**

Institutional capacity of MRCS, NMCs, and line agencies strengthened so that the water utilisation programme can be effectively implemented

**GOAL 2:**     *to establish a dynamic basin development planning process as a framework for natural resource management and sustainable development; and to plan and execute corresponding priority sector programmes and projects*

### **Strategic Objective 2.1:**

A basin planning process established and on-going, to improve co-ordination of basin-wide development initiatives and promote development while minimising negative environmental and social impacts

**Strategic Objective 2.2:**

A data, information, and knowledge base on water-related development trends, opportunities and challenges in the Mekong River Basin established, maintained, and shared among riparian countries

**Strategic Objective 2.3:**

A prioritised list of natural-resources-related basin development projects formulated, appraised and agreed upon by the riparian countries

**Strategic Objective 2.4:**

Comprehensive MRC sector programmes in support of the Basin Development Plan formulated and implemented<sup>4</sup>

**GOAL 3:** *to establish and promote MRC environmental and socio-economic management systems, recommendations, and policy guidelines*

**Strategic Objective 3.1:**

Capacity of MRCS, NMC Secretariats / related line agencies in environmental monitoring and assessment improved

**Strategic Objective 3.2:**

A comprehensive data and knowledge base on environmental and socio-economic issues developed and maintained (also supporting Goals 1 and 2, water use “rules” and the Basin Development Plan)

**Strategic Objective 3.3:**

Systems for environmental information exchange, sharing, and communication between the riparian countries and MRCS improved

**Strategic Objective 3.4:**

Basin-wide water related guidelines for environmental policies and legislation, including aspects on gender, ethnic, cultural and socio-economic issues, in place and promoted

**Strategic Objective 3.5:**

Awareness and capacity of MRC, riparian government personnel and other key stakeholders to address basin-wide and trans-boundary environmental issues, with public participation improved

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<sup>4</sup> See table in Annex 2 for sector-specific strategic objectives as of the end of 2000. Sector programmes also support Goals 1 and 3, water “rules” and environmental management

**GOAL 4:** *to establish an effective organisation, capable to promote, in partnership with other institutions, basin-wide development and co-ordination*

**Strategic Objective 4.1:**

MRC Council recognition of MRCS and NMCs/related line agency staff as the key resource for achievement of MRC's Vision and Mission, and their qualifications and experience continuously developed through training-of-trainers, coaching, education programmes, and on-the-job training

**Strategic Objective 4.2:**

MRCS/NMCS project management, planning and execution systems strengthened, including a comprehensive system for participatory monitoring and evaluation of MRC programme efficiency and impact (applies to MRC programme efficiency and impact only; environmental monitoring is covered separately under Goal 3)

**Strategic Objective 4.3:**

The financial, administrative, personnel, logistics and information and communication technology systems of MRCS, NMC Secretariats and operational programmes running efficiently, effectively, and with sufficient transparency.

**Strategic Objective 4.4:**

A panel of international/regional experts on river basin / natural resources management meeting regularly to provide advice to the Joint Committee and senior management of MRCS and NMCs on MRC's progress and strategic direction

**Strategic Objective 4.5:**

MRC providing ample quality information to the public on the basin's water and related resources, including a periodic "State of the Basin" report

**Strategic Objective 4.6:**

Strong partnerships established between MRC and other institutions dealing with water-related management or development in the basin

**Strategic Objective 4.7:**

MRC performing the role of an effective facilitator and mediator for conflict prevention and resolution on water-related trans-boundary disputes

**Strategic Objective 4.8:**

Relations with Upper Mekong River Basin Countries intensified and improved.

## ***PART III: IMPLEMENTATION AND INSTITUTIONALISATION***

### **7. THE PROGRAMME APPROACH**

#### ***The Shift from Projects to Programmes***

Of the organisational changes implemented by MRC over the past two years, perhaps the most significant is the move from a “project” to a “programme” focus. Prior to 2000, MRC operations centered on many, generally small, projects that commonly reflected member country national interests, or donor development preferences. Since then, however, MRC has used the strategic plan to guide development of a comprehensive series of programmes, the collective purpose of which is to achieve MRC’s goals and reach toward its Vision.

The new approach aims to make future MRC activities part of comprehensive programmes supporting basin-wide strategies adopted, or to be adopted, by the riparian countries.

Programme objectives incorporate most of the strategic objectives listed in **Section 6** and **Annex 2**.<sup>5</sup>

#### ***The MRC Programmes***

There are three types of programme: core, sector and support programmes. Together they reflect current and future riparian needs under the 1995 Agreement.

##### Core Programmes

The Water Utilisation Programme (WUP), Basin Development Plan (BDP) and Environment Programme (EP) are assigned as **Core Programmes** as they specifically address the key Articles of the 1995 Agreement. Core programmes are central to MRC’s purpose, and are intended to remain with the MRC in the long term.

##### Sector Programmes

Five **Sector Programmes**, covering all water and related resource areas as required under the 1995 Agreement, are: Fisheries Programme; Agriculture, Irrigation and Forestry Programme; Navigation Programme; Water Resources Programme; and the Tourism Programme. Sector programmes basically fall within the purview of, and support, the Basin Development Planning process. They address important sectoral issues from a basin-wide perspective, complementing and supporting national and bilateral development initiatives. The intention is that in the future, as national capacities are strengthened, basin level sectoral programmes will be assumed by riparian member country line agencies working in full co-operation and collaboration.

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<sup>5</sup> Brief programme descriptions are given in **Annex 3**.

Due to the evolution process of the sector programmes, the objectives phrased in their respective planning documents are not yet all in line with the philosophy of this Strategic Plan. It is a challenge for the time to come to streamline the objectives statements of all programmes accordingly and to show their relation, in particular, to Goal 2.

### Support Programme

A crosscutting **Support Programme**, the Capacity Building Programme, aims to raise the capacity of MRC and relevant member country Ministries to implement the strategic plan. It also supports and helps coordinate parallel technical capacity building activities that form an integral part of all Core and Sector Programmes. As capacity increases, the programme will be reduced and, as needs dictate, will be augmented by other institutional development activities.

## **8. IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY**

### ***Financing***

MRC's Vision for itself as a world class international river basin organisation includes the aim to be "financially secure". As in 1998, MRC remains largely reliant on external funding for its continued existence. However, in the two years since the first strategic plan was prepared, several important actions have been taken on the path to financial security. Their aims are to reduce reliance on donor contributions to core funding, and to improve MRC's approach to diversifying, securing and managing long-term funding for strategic programmes and activities.

The implementation of the Strategic Plan 1999-2003 has become the catalyst for renewed donor confidence in MRC's performance. It provided a clear picture of how funds were to be used strategically and aligned toward a shared Vision. Long term programme funding commitment has consequently increased substantially, with the priority being on implementation of the three core programmes – Water Utilization Programme, Basin Development Plan and Environmental Programme.

The MRC members accept that as a minimum they should own and support the core of the organisation. This covers the basic structure as defined in the 1995 Agreement – the Ministerial Council, Joint Committee and Secretariat, establishing and monitoring water sharing agreement, basin development planning, and the fundamental data systems and models that underpin MRC's operations. In support of this aim, MRC Council has recently approved a new core funding strategy whereby the four member countries will annually increase their contributions to MRC so that within 12 to 15 years they will bear full organisation infrastructure costs.

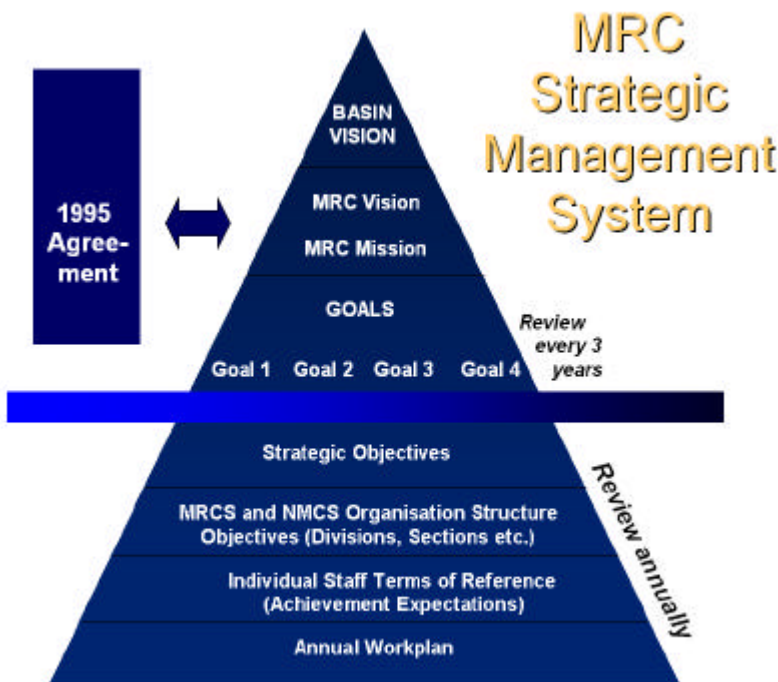
### ***National Mekong Committee Strategies***

As part of the Capacity Building Support Programme, all NMCs are now in the process of developing strategic plans to complement MRC's plan.

The MRC strategic plan sets down a shared Vision, Mission, Goals and Strategic Objectives for the whole MRC, including the NMCs. Thus, in developing their corresponding strategic plans, NMCs will use these key strategic elements from the 2001-2005 Strategic Plan as their starting point. They will also develop extra strategic objectives, as needed, to reflect extra roles and responsibilities under their respective national mandates. In so doing, NMCs will focus on how the MRC strategic objectives can best be achieved at the national level. Strengthening of NMC Secretariats' capacities to enable them better to perform their fundamental role of liaison and coordination between line Ministries and MRCS is already being done under the Capacity Building Support Programme. Likewise, the Secretariats' roles in activity monitoring and evaluation is being clarified as part of the capacity building programme, and appropriate strengthening measures will be undertaken.

### ***Goals, Objectives, Work Plans and the MRC Organisational Structure***

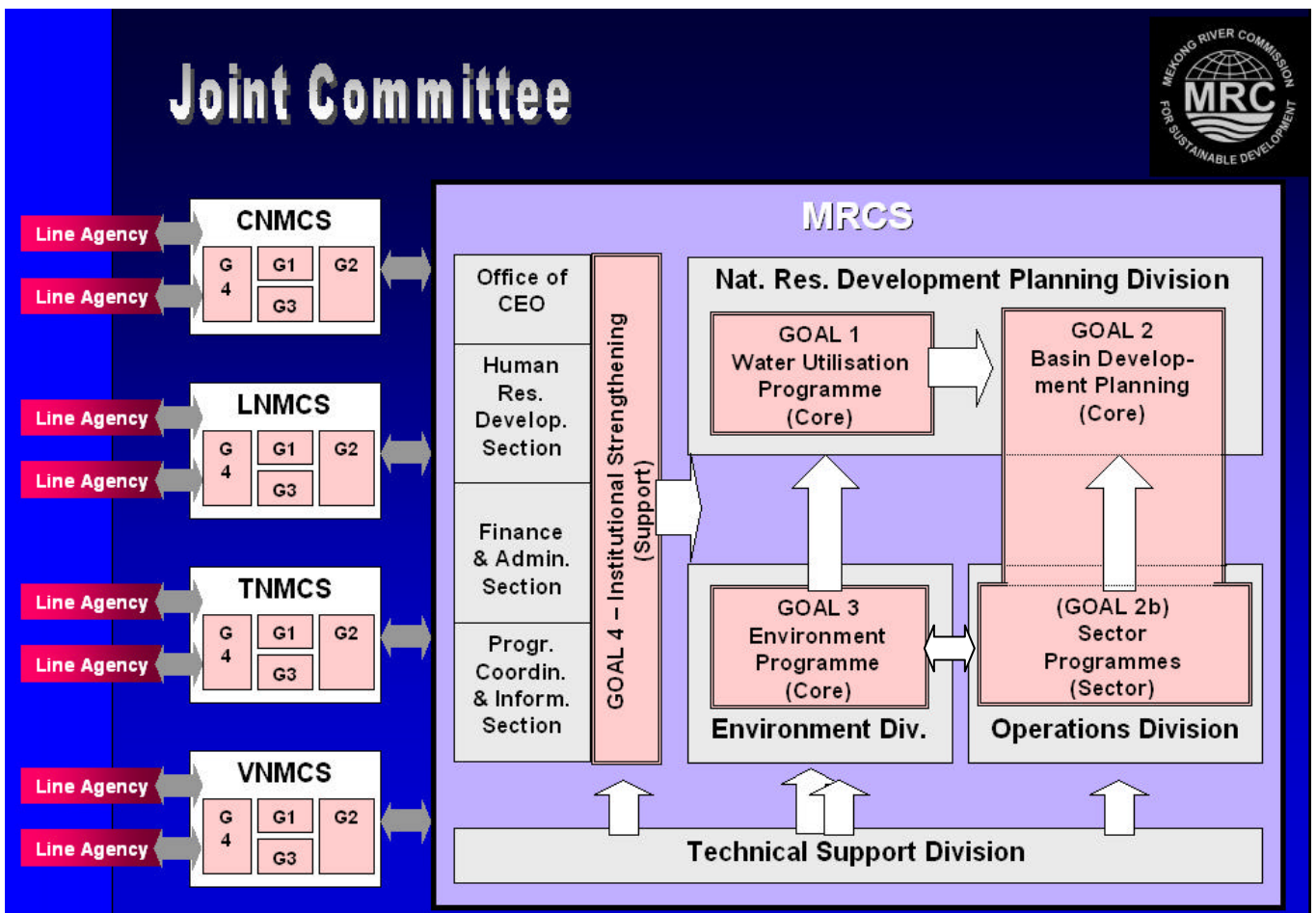
The adoption of the programme approach by MRC and the formulation of four goals with supporting strategic objectives provide the foundation for MRC to generate annual work plans. Each MRCS Division and Section, and all NMCs have already developed, or are in the process of developing, their respective organisational objectives. These incorporate both the strategic objectives as well as the Core, Sector and Support Programme objectives.



Complementing these are staff terms of reference which set down each individual's objectives or achievement expectations, and these are aligned with their respective organisational unit objectives.

So there is now a hierarchy of objectives ranging from strategic, to programme, to organisational unit, to individual level. This hierarchy allows each individual and organisation element to plan in detail its contribution to MRC's annual work activities.

Figure 1, left, shows the MRC Strategic Management System, and Figure 2 shows how the Strategic Goals, Programmes, and the MRC Organisational Structure are related to each other, under the guidance and direction of the Joint Committee.





Complementing this is the funding system which comes principally from three sources:

- (i) from member countries, for core funding;
- (ii) from donors, through funding of core, sector and support programmes; and
- (iii) from donors, through direct funding of international managerial and professional staff based in MRCS and NMC Secretariats.

In 2001, MRCS and the NMCs have started to prepare overall workplans covering all administrative units. These plans will guide MRC's activities over the respective year, and provide an effective means of monitoring and assessing the organisation's operational efficiency

### ***Regular Assessment of Progress***

The essence of a Strategic Plan is first to set goals and objectives. Later on, one also has to measure progress towards their achievement, and subsequently to review objectives in the light of performance achieved. This is to be done by means of indicators. Extensive discussions between the MRC member countries will be required to reach agreement on a full set of such indicators and the way of collecting the corresponding information on their achievement.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Institutionalising the Strategy***

Already a number of key steps toward institutionalising the strategy have been taken. The organisation has recently been restructured around the critical strategic elements; most of the resources needed to match the strategy have been mobilised; new administrative and financial systems, policies and procedures are being implemented in support of the strategy; and personnel reward systems linked to achievement of the strategy are being developed.

A number of actions will be taken to help embed the strategic planning system in the organisation's operations:

- ?? All MRC reports to the Council and Joint Committee will report on progress toward achievement of Strategic Objectives;
- ?? The Annual Report will also set down progress toward Strategic Objectives;
- ?? MRC and its constituent organisational elements (including NMCs) will prepare detailed annual Work Plans in accordance with the strategic planning system;
- ?? MRC reports to formal and informal Donor meetings will include a statement on progress toward achievement of Strategic Objectives;
- ?? Performance indicators will be introduced throughout the organisation, covering: Basin Development Indicators; MRC Impact Indicators; and MRC Efficiency Indicators;

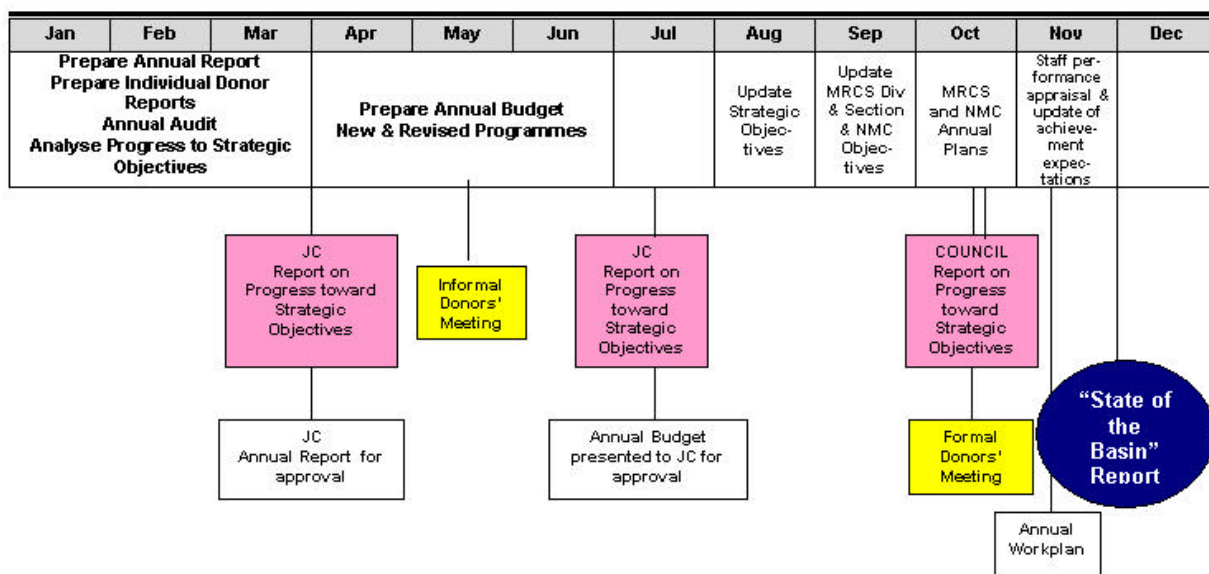
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<sup>6</sup> Further details on performance indicators are given in **Annex 5**

- ?? The CEO will present a periodic “State of the Basin” report containing the latest facts and figures on the economic, social and environmental status of the basin and opportunities and challenges for sustainable development;
- ?? Annual strategic planning reviews will be held between MRCS and NMCs at which strategic objectives and goals will be examined;
- ?? Annual updates of organisational element objectives and tasks will be undertaken in alignment with the strategic plan;
- ?? Annual management and staff performance appraisals and updates of achievement expectations will be based on a strategic planning framework.

A number of these activities are shown diagrammatically in **Figure 3**, below, as annual milestones for institutionalising the MRC Strategic Management System.

**FIGURE 3: ANNUAL MILESTONES FOR INSTITUTIONALISING MRC STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**



## 9. MRC WORKING PRINCIPLES

To achieve its mission and the above outlined goals and objectives, MRC will strive to live up to the following guiding principles in its work.

- Neutrality:** to work in a neutral manner for the collective benefit of all people in the Basin.
- Openness:** to be open and honest in sharing knowledge and information with all stakeholders and to seek broad stakeholder participation in the planning and implementation of programmes.
- Learning:** to be a learning organisation, enabling staff continually to develop their professional, technical and administrative skills to high levels.
- Teamwork:** to have a multi-disciplinary team approach in all work, and to continually explore ways to enhance and improve cross discipline integration.
- Quality:** to establish the skills, competencies and systems to ensure management practices and work across all programmes.
- Dialogue:** to be tolerant of individual and cultural differences in values and viewpoints, and seek mutual respect and understanding through dialogue.

# ***ANNEXES***

## A1: PROGRESS TOWARD ACHIEVEMENT OF 1999-2003 GOALS

The following list describes some of MRC's main achievements, over the past two years, in its progress toward achievement of the goals of the Strategic Plan 1999 to 2003.

**Goal 1. Establish and implement the Rules for Water Utilization and Inter-Basin Diversions (*Water Utilisation "Rules"*):**

- ?? Water Utilisation Programme (WUP) documentation developed, funding secured and work commenced in 1999
- ?? Institutional set-up for developing water "rules" established
- ?? Progress made in establishing rules and procedures for data and information exchange between the riparian countries

**Goal 2. Formulate the Basin Development Plan to provide an effective general planning tool and process for sustainable management and development. (*Basin Development Plan*):**

- ?? Basin Development Plan (BDP) project documents developed, part funding secured and work to commence early in 2001
- ?? Preliminary work for the Basin Development Plan carried out as part of MRC sector programme planning, including the development of a draft MRC Hydropower strategy and an Agriculture, Irrigation and Forestry programme

**Goal 3. Establish and implement MRC environmental management policies and guidelines for the use and conservation of water and related resources, and integrate socio-economic considerations into all MRC development activities. (*Environmental Policies and Socio-Economic Considerations*):**

- ?? Environment Programme (EP) developed, part funding secured
- ?? Gender and Public Participation policies and strategies adopted
- ?? Scoping of socio-economic parameters commenced
- ?? Environmental training programme commenced

**Goal 4. Complete and evaluate the currently funded on-going programmes and projects, and progressively initiate new development activities in accordance with the Strategic Plan. (*Completing and Evaluating Projects and Developing New Projects*):**

- ?? Projects funded under earlier Work Programmes completed:
  - Study on the Roles of Women in Water Resources Development in the Lower Mekong Basin
  - Inventory and management of Cambodian Wetlands

- Flood control planning for Development of the Mekong Delta
- Hydrographic Survey on the Bassac River from Phnom Penh to Vam Nao Confluence
- Inundation Mapping in the Lower Mekong Basin completed
- Management of the Reservoir Fisheries in the Mekong Basin Project
- Harmonisation of the Aids-to-Navigation Systems along the Mekong River
- Chaktomuk Area: Environment, Morphology,Hydraulics (Phase 1)<sup>7</sup>

?? New activities planned under the following sector programmes: (i) Fisheries; (ii) Agriculture, Irrigation and Forestry; (iii) Water Resources and Hydrology and (iv) Navigation. Partial funding secured for Sector Programme activities.

**Goal 5. Improve the capacity of the MRC to implement its Mission, to play the leading role in coordinating the Basin's water related activities, and to meet stakeholder expectations. (*Strengthening the Capacity of MRC*):**

- ?? The staffing levels, management procedures and office support systems of the NMC Secretariats have been improved
- ?? MRCS organisation restructured in line with critical strategic elements
- ?? New financial management system introduced at the MRC secretariat
- ?? MRC public information material has been improved
- ?? The dialogue with relevant partner institutions has been improved
- ?? The Capacity Building Programme developed and commenced under part funding
- ?? New MRC staff recruited based on qualifications and experience
- ?? Member countries committed to increased contribution toward MRC core funding
- ?? MRC leadership committed to institutionalising the strategic planning process

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<sup>7</sup> The last two projects (Aids-to-Navigation Systems, Chaktomuk, Phase 1) are both to be finalized in June 2001, but a continuation (Phase 2) is planned. If funded, these will be part of the new Navigation Programme.

## A2: STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES OF THE FIVE SECTOR PROGRAMMES

### Sector

#### Programme      Strategic Objectives

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- Agriculture, Irrigation and Forestry Programme**
- To develop a collaborative applied research network between the riparian countries to improve water use efficiency
  - To institutionalise catchment management planning (combining agriculture, irrigation, forestry and other key catchment issues) in trans-boundary and other priority areas
  - To improve the capacity of MRC and NMCs/line agency staff to plan sustainable development of agriculture, irrigation and forestry on a collaborative basis.

**Navigation Programme**      *Note: Strategic objectives are tentative. The programme is expected to be fully developed during 2001:*

- To develop a framework for cross-border navigation and common legislation and to ensure freedom of navigation without regard to territorial boundaries (article 9, 1995 Agreement);
- To assist in mitigating the physical and non-physical barriers to safe and continuous access to inland and maritime ports on the Mekong river system
- To develop a knowledge base on river training issues, including river morphology and river bank stability, and propose protection measures;
- To establish a basis for standardising training in water transport use and development to reduce shipping accidents and increase river transportation with due regard to the environment;
- To create greater awareness of the potential and impacts of maritime and inland waterway transport for commercial and social considerations, judging its performance in comparison with other modes of transport.

**Sector****Programme Strategic Objectives**


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<b>Water Resources Programme</b>	<p><b>Note: Programme formulation will be completed during 2001. Strategic objectives may be modified:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Forecasting for Mekong River high flow and low flow conditions improved</li> <li>- A flood management strategy developed and approved, and flood management action plans formulated and implemented</li> <li>- Generate and disseminate information and knowledge on best practices in hydropower planning and development in the riparian member countries</li> <li>- Assist the riparian member countries in strengthening the hydropower planning and implementation capability of the institutions responsible for, or involved in, such activities</li> <li>- Promote co-operation and collaboration among all the riparian countries in the planning and utilisation of the Mekong river and tributaries for the purpose of hydropower generation and other uses</li> </ul>
<b>Fisheries Programme</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fisheries management systems established, ensuring sustainable economic utilisation and conservation of the bio-diversity; and institutions strengthened to sustain these achievements in a regional context</li> <li>- Farmers' income raised through development of the potential for economic and sustainable small to medium-scale fish production, and institutions strengthened in order to further pursue this goal in a regional context</li> </ul>
<b>Tourism Programme</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A tourism programme developed and implementation started</li> </ul>



### **A3: BRIEF DESCRIPTIONS of CORE, SECTOR and SUPPORT PROGRAMMES**

#### **1. CORE PROGRAMMES**

##### **Water Utilisation Programme (WUP): Goal 1**

The WUP commenced in early 2000 and is planned to run for 6 years. It will help establish permanent and functional mechanisms to support Mekong Basin water resources management consistent with the 1995 Agreement. Its aim is to achieve “reasonable and equitable” water use among member countries while maintaining the Basin’s ecological integrity.

The WUP comes from member countries’ recognition, in the 1995 Agreement, of the seriously damaging impacts that can occur through uncontrolled economic development or environmental exploitation. For example, if Mekong River water quality deteriorates through industrial or agricultural pollution, or other actions, then there are obvious threats to the basin’s vital fish stock, to domestic water supplies, and to food production generally. Likewise, if uncontrolled land clearing, large hydropower development, or irrigation development are permitted, flooding could increase, low river flows could fall further, navigation could be disrupted, salt water intrusion could occur and fish breeding patterns arrested. The impacts on agricultural production, poverty, food security, social harmony and environmental degradation are apparent. And the potential for discord, or conflict, between countries sharing the basin is obvious as those impacted negatively accuse those who they consider are to blame. The WUP, and its resultant water sharing arrangements, are specifically designed to afford agreed means of conflict prevention and resolution between member countries.

The WUP will also support formulation and execution of the Basin Development Plan (BDP). As an umbrella programme, the WUP covers planning, data collection, development of a basin modeling and knowledge base, establishment of monitoring systems and river basin management. The overriding principle governing the WUP process is that it is owned by the member countries, with the Secretariat acting as a facilitator.

##### **Basin Development Plan (BDP): Goal 2**

Detailed preparation for the BDP was completed in July 1999. Formulation will commence early in 2001 and is planned to run for 3 years. The output is envisaged to be both a general planning tool, and an enduring, dynamic process, for use by the Joint Committee to help identify and prioritise development programmes and projects that meet the cooperative and sustainability criteria of the 1995 Agreement. The BDP formulation process will rely substantially on inputs from WUP, Environmental and Sector Programmes, most of which are in their early stages of implementation. All MRC programmes will be closely integrated, as difficulties in one programme will affect the others. The BDP aims to identify trans-boundary economic development activities that balance the Basin peoples’ development needs with sustainable water quality, quantity and long term environmental integrity.

##### **Environmental Programme (EP): Goal 3**

A new, strategic, long-term MRC environmental programme covering the period 2001-2005 has recently been approved for implementation. In contrast to the more technically oriented approaches of the past, the People of the Basin are now the central focus and starting point.

It adopts a programmatic approach, focussing on Basin environmental issues and integrating social and economic concerns. Its overall aim is to achieve sustainable development in the Mekong River Basin. It will carry out studies and research, and build a quality environmental, social and economic data and knowledge base for the Basin. In addition to their intrinsic social and scientific value, outputs from the environmental programme will contribute directly to WUP formulation and to sustainable development activities under the BDP. It will provide the environmental and social bases to assist the WUP to make decisions on water sharing and the BDP to decide on development needs and priorities.

## **2. SECTOR PROGRAMMES: Supporting Goal 2 (BDP)**

### **Fisheries Programme**

Continuation of the long-running MRC fisheries programme is presented in the newly formulated "Fisheries Management and Development Cooperation Programme – (2001-2005)". The programme aim is to achieve coordinated and sustainable management, use and development of the economic and nutritional potential of inland living aquatic resources in the Mekong River Basin. Information and Knowledge from the programme will contribute essential input to the WUP and the BDP.

### **Agriculture, Irrigation and Forestry Programme**

Formulation of the new, fully integrated and comprehensive, MRC "Agriculture, Irrigation and Forestry Programme (2001-2005)" was completed in October 2000. Based on a catchment approach, it focuses on activities to promote the sustainability and further development of food production from the land and water resources of the Basin where cooperation between member countries is required for success. The overall programme development objective is to achieve "cooperative sustainable development and utilisation of land and water resources to the benefit of the basin community, and to contribute to poverty alleviation and food security". The programme will be undertaken using a collaborative learning approach to effect change in resource use. It too will contribute to development of the WUP and the BDP.

### **Water Resources Programme**

This programme is being formulated. It will aim to support and promote sustainable Basin development to help meet the social and economic needs of the basin's large, rural, predominantly poor and growing population. This will be done by addressing water-related issues of a trans-boundary and basin-wide nature, and helping to identify water resources and hydropower projects suitable for development. Information developed and synthesized under the programme will provide vital input to the WUP and BDP. In formulating specific development initiatives through the BDP, full stakeholder participation, and coordination between national agencies and international organisations will be key tenets.

### **Navigation Programme**

This programme is being formulated. It will aim to "promote freedom of navigation on the Mekong River system" as stipulated in the 1995 Agreement which recognises the member countries' common interest in facilitating river transport and increasing international trade. The Mekong River is an important transport route for goods and people in the basin. Inland river transport is possible on the whole Mekong River system and constitutes, in most areas, the only way of communication between remote villages to serve even the most basic social needs such as access to hospitals, schools and agricultural centres. Maritime navigation, possible in the delta, provides significant revenues from international trade. The main ports

here are Can Tho and Phnom Penh. River transport is an essential link in the multimodal transport chain. Changes in the Mekong River flow regime, sedimentation and construction of reservoirs or other barriers may affect navigation. Co-operation and proper agreements between the riparian countries are required to ensure cross-border and safe passage in the Basin.

### ***Tourism Programme***

This programme is under development.

## **3. SUPPORT PROGRAMME: Goal 4**

### ***Capacity Building Programme***

With the advent of the strategic planning process late in 1998, it became apparent MRC needed to develop new, and strengthen existing, institutional and personnel capacities to permit effective process implementation. A comprehensive programme was therefore formulated, integrating all MRC capacity building and human resource development efforts. It commenced in late 1999, with initial activities planned over a five-year period. The programme focuses on those personnel and systems factors that provide staff with needed leadership, managerial and administrative knowledge, skills and attitudes for them efficiently and effectively to implement the strategic planning process. It complements training and skills development undertaken by the various programmes, and addresses broad basin-wide capacity building issues not addressed under core or sector programmes.

#### **A4: NOTE ON PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

The essence of a strategic plan is to set objectives, measure progress toward their achievement, and subsequently to review objectives in the light of performance achieved. Objectives must be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-based if they are to have any basis in reality. This means that MRC will have to develop objectively verifiable performance indicators, and the means of verification, for each of the Strategic Objectives. Each programme will likewise have to develop an appropriate set of performance indicators. Extensive discussions between the MRC member countries will be required to reach agreement on a full set of indicators and means of verification. This will be carried out under Strategic Objectives 3.1 and 4.2 of the Strategic Plan.

There are three main types of achievement indicators relevant to MRC operations:

**Basin Development Indicators: Indicators reflecting changes in the social, economic and environmental state of the Basin.**

Basin development indicators reflect progress (or set-backs) in reaching towards the Vision of an economically prosperous, socially just and environmentally sound Mekong Basin. They provide an indirect measure of MRC's success only, since a large number of factors outside the control of MRC determine the overall development of the basin. They nonetheless provide a general measure of the success of MRC and provide guidance and direction for the work of the organisation. It falls within the core mandate of MRC to track and create public awareness on the basin development indicators. As part of the proposed MRC "State of the Basin" report (Strategic Objective 4.5), a unified set of indicators will be developed and agreed to by the MRC member countries, and annual assessment of progress and set-backs will be reported.

**MRC Impact Indicators: Indicators that reflect the social, environmental and economic impact of MRC operations, including indirect impact in terms of strengthened riparian institutions and improved political climate and decision-making.**

The purpose of MRC operations is to help create the conditions whereby the Basin's resources can be managed so that social, environmental and economic conditions in the Basin are improved. The main impact of MRC's operations will therefore be in improving political decision-making, in increasing awareness among key stakeholders, and in strengthening riparian institutions. These are areas where impact can not be measured in an exact quantitative way. A monitoring system including both qualitative and quantitative indicators is therefore required to measure MRC impact.

**MRC Efficiency Indicators: Indicators that reflect the efficiency of MRC operations in terms of planning, management and execution of programmes and other key activities.**

Key indicators for efficiency include the time and cost for preparation of new programmes, the quality of programme design, and timeliness and cost-effectiveness of programme implementation and implementation of other key activities.

## **A5: CRITERIA FOR PRIORITISING MRC ACTIVITIES**

### **1. Themes**

All MRC Programme activities or components should contribute centrally to the goals and strategic objectives of the MRC Strategic Plan. They should also, as far as possible, incorporate cross-cutting themes of environment, gender, poverty, employment and people-centered development generally.

### **2. Regional or Basinwide Quality**

In order to remain quite distinct from country-based programmes or projects, while being complementary to them, MRC initiatives should conform to the following criteria:

- ?? promote the sharing and/or joint management of resources;
- ?? be trans-boundary in nature;
- ?? contribute to or promote regional institutions, norms and policies;
- ?? foster research that cannot be adequately or effectively undertaken nationally;
- ?? create or sustain networks or contacts among governmental or non-governmental organizations in different member countries.

### **3. Global Links**

Programmes, projects or activities should actively seek linkages to global and inter-regional initiatives as well as build on national programmes which reinforce the strategic direction of the MRC.

### **4. Regional Capacity Building**

Programmes, projects or activities should help to develop capacity of line agencies, NMCs and MRC, and should draw, whenever possible, on region-based expertise.

### **5. Emerging Needs**

Programmes should help riparian countries to respond to the challenges generated by rapidly evolving development needs.