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THE CONTROL OF THE MEKONG RIVER

Socialist Republic of Viet Nam

In 1999, the Mekong Delta's agriculture accounted for 30% of Vietnam's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and more than 80% of its rice exports. However, without appropriate infrastructures, the delta's many canals and irrigation networks were vulnerable to saltwater intruding from the sea during the dry season and flooding during the rainy season, thereby threatening the quality of farm soil and the reliability of harvests. Poor drinking water supply and inadequate rural transport also held back production levels and rural incomes [1].

Over the past decade, due to climate changes, 60 kilometers counting from the coastal borders, which means more than 6000 hectares of paddy fields are damaged by salinization. As a consequence, 40% of the Delta will be unusable by the end of the century.

Facing these issues, Vietnam is cooperating with the Netherlands to develop a new Mekong Delta plan. The Dutch developed their first Delta Plan after the 1953 flood disaster in the southwestern delta in the Netherlands. Their answer was a firm plan with a wide range of concrete measures for coastal protection, water availability and water quality in view of the future economic development of the country. Based on the experience with the Dutch Delta Plan in 1953, the Dutch has assisted Vietnam in making the Mekong Delta Master Plan in 1993 (Nedeco), which has been very successful during this period of economic progress in the Mekong Delta : the idea of expanding toward the sea was born. In 1998, some adjustments were made to the 1993 plan to improve it. Then, the Prime Minister Phan Van Khai agreed to develop the Saigon South New Urban Area, the Tan Thuan Processing Zone, the Hiep Phuoc Industrial Park and the Can Gio District's development plan. And two years later in 2010, city authorities decided to build the Hiep Phuoc Port Urban Area. During all the preparation period for the area, the city received strong support from Japanese experts [2].

In 2012, to improve the situation, Vietnam adopted the Green Growth Strategy [3], which will hopefully restructure its economy towards a more responsible and ecological use of natural resources. This project aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 8 to 10%, supporting the transition to green technologies, with the final objective of a mainstream Green Economic Development by 2050. Whether this project will result in a success or a failure mainly depends on the evolution of environmental issues in the near future. For now, Viet Nam is encountering problems in drought management and flood preparedness due to climate changes and the situation is worsening with the construction of dams in China and Laos, which affects the whole region of the Mekong River [4], [5], [6].

Every year, Vietnam produces 2.1 million tons of freshwater fish which represents 20% of world production. Yet, that production is threatened by the construction of numerous

dams along the river. On the one hand, they will decrease the river flow, therefore the Mekong Delta will be exposed to salt water introduction which will kill a lot of freshwater fish. And on the other hand, they will block the fishes during their migration throughout the river [7].

More recently, Vietnamese leaders expressed their support in developing infrastructures for a greener Mekong Delta and encourage the cooperation between countries in the Mekong Delta Security Council during the Tokyo Strategy 2016-2018 reunion. Other actions have also been taken in regards to the issues. For instance, the SERVIR Mekong Project, which aims to gather data in order to help the Vietnam government in using new technologies to tackle environmental problems in Mekong Delta, and more generally, around the Mekong river. It has been realized in collaboration with NASA, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and the US agency for International Development.

With all respect to the position of the other countries of the Mekong Council, Vietnam is against the use of Dong Sahong and other barrages in construction that are damaging Vietnamese end of the Mekong River. The dams themselves are damaging the nearby biodiversity, but more important, the regulation of the flow, being used to generate electricity, has affected the entire river. Thankfully, many created projects are soon given up because of threatening a world biosphere reserve (on Dong Nai River for example) or due to political reasons [8], [9]. Therefore, the delegation of Vietnam wants to request an amendment to impose a minimal flow in the downstream river and to build bypass enabling fish to swim back up the Mekong River. To put everything in a nutshell, Vietnam is doing its best to develop a greener Mekong Delta as well as building infrastructures to fight against the consequences of climate changes.

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