

Second Call for Papers

Mekong Actual Outcomes

International Conference on Post-Facto Evaluation of Official Development Assistance
in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS)

October 5-7, 2007

Northern Illinois University, De Kalb, Illinois USA

Rationale

The Mekong River catchment encompasses most of Laos, much of Cambodia, and parts of China, Burma (Myanmar), Thailand, and Vietnam. In the three decades since the close of the Second Indochina War, hundreds of millions of dollars in multilateral and bilateral contributions—largely concessionary loans and grants—were allocated to ambitious “safeguard” projects throughout the Mekong basin. Supported activities included biodiversity protection, social and gender equity and sustainability in natural resources management, cultural preservation, and institutional development or capacity building of national and regional environmental agencies and NGOs.

Although these projects have had widely varying outcomes, formal initiatives and transparent mechanisms for comparing intended with actual results continue to be the exception rather than the rule. *Post-facto* evaluation or “downstream review” could render unexpected and negative outcomes positive by enabling learning from mistakes and suggesting corrections.

Given the phenomenal level of investment taken already and the onerous debt burden too often incurred in accepting it, such evaluation is overdue.

Conference

The Northern Illinois University Center for Southeast Asian Studies www.niu.edu/cseas/ and the Ohio University (Athens, OH, USA) Center for International Studies/Southeast Asian Studies www.ohiou.edu/seas/ and now the Asian Institute of Technology (Bangkok) www.serd.ait.ac.th/ are pleased to announce joint sponsorship of an unprecedented, Mekong-focused international symposium yielding methodologies for assessing actual outcomes and achieving downstream learning. The conference product will be a peer-reviewed **interactive e-book** of reality-based best practices that should be generalizable beyond the region.

Topics for Panels and Individual Papers

Pointed and truthful project appraisal: considerations for understandability and candor

- hidden agendas, endemic impediments, institutional constraints and conflicts-of-interest in consultancy
- compelling *post-facto* evaluation in environmental and social impact assessment (EIA/SIA), environmental action and management plans (EAMP) and strategic environmental assessment (SEA)
- the emerging visualization toolbox for producing corporate memory
- the Internet as the great equalizer in official development assistance

Actual outcomes: best and worst results in hydropower, transport, irrigation, tourism, and urban infrastructure

- sustainability as an idea whose time has come, or has already come and gone
- demonstrably successful development
- indicators of and accommodation to climate change
- cultural preservation benefits and disbenefits
- wildlife and fish as income and nutrition
- mobilizing an ecological constituency
- re-defining and re-purposing NGOs
- regularizing mega-projects within and below the Lançang headwaters
- escaping foreign donor nature worship

Deadlines

June 30, 2007 is the deadline both for panel proposals and for individual paper abstracts.

For individual papers please provide a maximum 250-word abstract with the title of paper, author name(s), author affiliation(s) and e-mail addresses, and content. For panel proposals, please provide the same and a maximum 750-word abstract of the panel’s objective(s) and content.

Venue

Northern Illinois University has long been a focal point for Southeast Asian area studies and an outstanding neutral venue for extra-regional symposia on potentially sensitive topics. “Mekong Actual Outcomes” will be held on campus in the Holmes Student Center, at which a bloc of hotel rooms has been reserved for conference participants.

De Kalb, Illinois—a university town of 35,000—is located ca. 100 km west of Chicago, America’s “Second City,” with its extraordinary cultural attractions. Conference organizers can assist in local travel arrangements to and from O’Hare and Midway airports, and also from the commuter rail terminus at Elburn, only 25 km east of De Kalb. Early October is a particularly pleasant time to visit, as the weather is crisp with autumnal colors approaching their peak in this part of the Midwest, and the Mississippi River is within range of a day trip.

Adjunct registrations are available for those unable to attend in person but who would still contribute their first-hand implementation experience to the conference’s online and physical (CD-/DVD-ROM) e-publications, aimed to engage a virtual community well along in weighing and memorizing actual outcomes.

Read More

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