

Cooperation in Water Resources Management for the Mekong River Basin through Benefit Sharing

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Abstract

This research evaluates cooperation in transboundary rivers with special reference to the Great Mekong Subregion (GMS) program in the Mekong River Basin. The benefit sharing approach has been deployed as a theoretical framework to analyze the extent to which the riparian states have achieved cooperation. The river basin governance led by the Mekong River Commission since 1995 has not adequately performed due to non-participation of upstream countries and the lack of law enforcement mechanism. Since the late 1980s, China has undertaken hydropower development unilaterally, thereby triggering discomfort from the Lower Mekong countries. The GMS program has led China to strengthening economic ties with the downstream countries through hydropower development as investors and developers. The program has also supported the establishment of economic corridors, and removal of physical barriers and has paved the way for cooperation in other sectors, such as the environment, agriculture, tourism and energy. There are challenges for further cooperation, including the development gaps between China and the downstream countries, political tensions and environment impacts of hydropower dams in the river basin. The Mekong River Basin shows the possibility of cooperation through benefit sharing. Sharing benefits accrued from the river and beyond the river between China and the downstream countries have enhanced economic ties, thereby consolidating cooperation each another.

Keywords : Mekong River Basin, Greater Mekong Subregion Program, Transboundary Cooperation, Benefit sharing, mekong River Commission

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