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Workshop Report

Regional Workshop for Coordination of Research on Hydropower Development in the Lower Mekong Basin

Mekong River Commission Secretariat, Vientiane, Lao PDR

14-15 September 2010

Research on Hydropower in the Lower Mekong Basin Workshop

Day one – 14th September

Opening ceremony

- EC representative, Mr. Stefan Lock, welcomed the participants on behalf of the EU representation in Lao PDR, highlighting the need to improve cooperation in the region.
- Representative of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Finland, the funder of this activity, Ms. Helena Ahola, stressed the need for improving cooperation in the region and between stakeholders from all sectors, also private sector stakeholders that are necessary to include, when discussing hydropower.
- SPLASH representative Miriam Feilberg from Danish Water Forum gave the background for this activity, the need to improve uptake of research in practice as well as inclusion of the private sector.
- Mekong River Commission (MRC) Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Jeremy Bird, welcomed participants to MRC and introduced activities in the region.

Introductory Session

Kim Chi Tran-Gulbrandsen, NVE and Splash coordinator for this workshop introduced the SPLASH project and its objectives related to:

1. Improve coordination of water research for development between European countries, to reduce duplication, exploit synergies and enhance progress to MDGs
2. Understand and synthesise good research management & practice, and ensure it is used
3. Speed up transfer of results into practice and policy through improved dialogue
4. Agree on joint activities, including funding of new research which will benefit from a trans-national approach

And she further explained how the objectives of this workshop on issues like research and knowledge transfer on topics related to hydropower, overview of existing knowledge and the interest of private sector in these research themes and research done by this sector were relevant for the Splash project. This is also the case for the more specific objectives on promotion of applications of research findings and results into practical and policy levels and improving capacity building using South-South cooperation besides North-South cooperation.

Lawrence Haas, ISH Policy and Strategy Consultant at MRC, gave an overview of hydropower development in Mekong as well as MRC activities aimed at bridging IWRM and energy/hydropower development in order to ensure or facilitate that decisions of hydropower are made in a river basin context. There is a large potential for hydropower development in the basin, mainly in Laos, whereas the main



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demand for energy is from Vietnam and Thailand. Stakeholders in the basin are concerned about the role of hydropower compared to sustainability and protection of water resources in a region that is low in human development and depending on water for fisheries, agriculture etc, and where poverty alleviation and economic growth has to be linked. Answering a question Mr. Haas pointed out that MRC is not a policy maker per se, but has the task to make information available for participating countries to develop policies.

Torkil Jønch Clausen, workshop facilitator, finally in this session explained the role of meeting and structure of the agenda, including the role of the 4 working groups and the mixture of working groups and plenary sessions.

Session one

Presentations on existing research, knowledge transfer and capacity building program in the LMB:

Kjell Repp, NVE, gave a synthesis of the academic reviews with regard to findings, gaps and needs as well as recommendations from the countries. When looking at the countries together common and cross-cutting challenges are:

- Interaction between human and nature, physical, environmental and socio-economic impacts
- Climate change and adaptation
- No linkage between research institutions and private sector
- Public sector and stakeholder involvement

Reviews will now be finalized and made available on the internet. Short summaries will be attached to this report as annexes.

Mika Marttunen, SYKE, presented the results of the internet questionnaire and interviews on multi-criteria decision analysis (MCDA) and water footprint related to hydropower development in the Mekong Region. The purpose was to establish the opinions of different actors to planning methods and practices in hydropower development projects, the multi-criteria decision analysis (MCDA) and water footprint approach and to contribute to analyzing the state-of-the-art in education of water resources planning at the universities in Lao PDR, Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam.

The activity was performed as an internet questionnaire and combined with personal interviews carried out by one local consultant and Juha Sarkkula, SYKE. 44 persons answered (of which 22 to the Internet questionnaire).

Overall conclusions to this was that:

- Current planning practices including stakeholder involvement in hydro power development projects were widely considered inadequate.
- It is not only due to lack of appropriate methods but also that they are not used in an appropriate way or their results are not taken into account.
- There is a positive attitude toward MCDA and its use in the hydro power development projects, but currently the use of MCDA methods is very limited and further information is needed.
- The respondents were unanimous that more education is needed to improve planning practices in the hydropower development projects.

Tira Foran, CSIRO Ecosystem Sciences presented the report on: “Sustainable hydropower development, Involving the Private Sector in Research Collaboration”



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Private developers are key actors for hydropower and for economic and social development, but standards and objectives, also on regulation models and links among state, private sector and other stakeholders vary between projects. A typical financial model is based upon low returns until debts are paid and limited river basin master planning. There is a lack of integration between demand and supply such as electricity master planning.

The presentation raised four key issues for the discussion:

1. Mekong ecological resilience: Do we know enough about the consequences such as if which dams are built, would cause fisheries collapse?
2. The structure of the electricity industry: Would 'green power markets' increase the level of local benefit sharing?
3. State regulation, can this improved and how? Related issues are corruption, capacity building and the need for empowered participation & representation of affected people
4. Need for bottom-up model of hydropower development with respect to public interest in design, procurement and risk management

The study needs to be further developed on private sector involvement both in public research and their own research activities.

The discussion of session-one presentations touched upon:

Different approaches to sustainable development and private sector involvement either by providing incentives for this or by a strong regulatory framework with clear profiles on how to do it. An example was private participation in research which takes place in Vietnam, but the problem is that much is not made available for the public.

A concern was raised that if regulation becomes too strict, it would be difficult to attract private sector investments. However, another opinion was expressed that regulation that is thorough and effective will lower risks, attracting a different set of private sector investors than the risk-seeking ones, that we are seeing emerge in the Mekong.

Findings from MCDA questionnaire give a good background in order to develop recommendations for future studies related to MCDA. There are big differences in the current practices in the different countries which should be bear in mind when interpreting the results.

Can hydropower development be sustainable? One answer to this was that it is implicit that there is weak sustainability assumption (which means that trade-offs between economic, social and ecological objectives are allowed) and a need to work towards stronger sustainability (in which ecological sustainability requirement is emphasized). Stronger research in issues related to sustainable hydropower development would be beneficial in this process.

Session two - IWRM and Hydropower in the Mekong region

Juha Sarkkula, SYKE: Status of planning methods and educational programmes in support of LMB hydro power development

A general introduction to key IWRM components, their status and needs to improve the IWRM approach. Special focus should be paid on the spirit and will for integration, communication skills, social responsibility, multidisciplinary team work and true involvement of affected people in the development dialogue. Mr.



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Sarkkula further introduced key MRC activities related to IWRM such as:

- Basin Development Plan (hydrological modelling/DSF, scenarios, expert statements, stakeholder workshops)
- Initiative for Sustainable Hydropower (design guidelines, protocols/IHA, stakeholder cooperation, SEA of mainstream dams, benefit sharing, Procedure for Notification, Prior Consultation and Agreement (PNPCA, MA 1995), China cooperation)
- Social Impact Monitoring and Vulnerability Assessment (SIMVA, MRCS/Environment Programme)
- Fisheries Ecology, Valuation and Mitigation (FENV/Fisheries Programme)
- DSF extended to an Integrated Modelling Toolbox
- IWRM Programme initiated

Lawrence Haas, ISH Policy and Strategy Consultant at MRC, presented MRC programmes related to sustainable hydropower development and potential areas of future contribution by Research Networks. MRC see hydropower in river basin management plans perspectives. This programme has many opportunities for research cooperation.

The Initiative on Sustainable Hydropower (ISH) was formulated as a cross-cutting Initiative working with and through other MRC Programmes in 2008-2009 in a national and regional multi-stakeholder process. The ISH works with national and regional partners and is cooperating with MRC Bodies on research priorities such as: strategic communication, modelling tools, benefit sharing and translation of this into local levels, electricity-poverty links, sediment-nutrient topics, impact on fisheries, environmental flows, regulatory systems incorporating sustainability assessments, effectiveness of impact mitigation.

Other important element is the relevance of linking policy and practice at all stages of the planning and project cycle. Research must be relevant to stakeholder interests and their expectations.

In the discussion it was mentioned that IWRM cannot happen voluntary and there is a need for some kind of compulsory mechanism, but Mr. Sarkkula insisted that it is not possible to force the spirit of IWRM as this is a matter of communication and sharing experiences.

David Ngula, Nile Basin Initiative, gave a presentation on hydropower development in the Nile basin and started by introducing the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI).

Mr. Ngula gave an overview of the power sector status, the development of new projects and potential of different countries to develop hydropower within the Nile Basin. The approach of NBI to hydropower development is that it should be based on IWRM principles. NBI has a number of studies on regional projects and now the Eastern African countries are about to establish regional market for hydropower.

He observed that the problems and challenges in the Nile Basin are quite similar to those faced in the Mekong region and the recommended interventions include the need to formulate a regional hydropower development strategy to guide the development of potential hydropower resources so as to contribute to meeting the present and future demand in the region. The strategy must include the preparation of guidelines specific for hydropower development covering studies, design, construction, operation and de-commissioning stages.

Further he mentioned that an inventory needs be created of the comprehensive hydropower potential of the region and a regional hydropower database established. The major identified hydropower potential schemes of regional interest need to be subjected to studies with due consideration of multi-purpose aspects. The regional hydropower strategy should also address the issue of financing and implementation arrangements



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and building of the requisite capacity.

In a region (both Nile and Mekong) with a large hydropower potential it is necessary to develop the regional framework for cooperation. Improving knowledge and research is also important, and there is a need for a unit to coordinate and spearhead research on hydropower development.

Round table discussions

1st Session on research needs and topics. Feedback from the four groups on the questions below:

1. What kind of research, knowledge transfer and capacity building could contribute to sound private sector involvement and sustainable hydropower development?

- The private sector must be involved in the whole project cycle from design to evaluation.
- Research must be able to draw in local communities, integrate them in research activities as stakeholders. We need to look into how research actually influences practice and how private sector research can make an impact. There is a need for incentives to incorporate more social and environmental aspects in project design.
- Needs assessments are relevant on capacity building for sustainable hydropower development, public participation and in general research.
- Need for more network linking and information sharing.
- We should use existing networks, like Mpower for improving research/practice links and improving communication. Organising a regional stakeholder forum could be relevant.

2. What research topics and results are important to your activities – do they respond to your needs as a user, if not how could they?

- Risk and impact assessment of hydropower development upstream and downstream (environmental flows, sedimentation, fisheries, livelihoods, navigation, settlement, dam breaks).
- Impact of climate change on regional hydropower development, mitigation and adaptation.
- Differences across countries.
- Benefit sharing and trade-offs.
- Integrated and life-cycle assessments.
- New hydropower technologies and alternative hydropower options.

3. Which methods and products are you interested in (which format)?

- Case studies for instance involvement of civil society in the development of a specific EIA.
- Development of tools for evaluation of sustainable hydropower
- Community led research.
- Delta monitoring and improving modelling and databases.
- Accessible research outputs (Strategic communication).

In general gaps remain in translating theory to practise.



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Discussion:

How can we analyse all the information collected, like for this meeting a lot of material has been compiled, how to be of use outside this group? Simple reporting procedures from research are important, not academic reports, but briefing notes.

It is important not to blur the distinction between impact assessments and research dialogue between partners. The dialogue is important and must be ensured by constant activities. If governments wish to take this further, they need to participate in dialogue.

We should not only focus on negative aspects but also look at positive side of hydropower, like flood control, electrification and positive sides of resettlement as well as the way this is seen from day-to-day activities.

How will Splash take the information compiled further: This information is an important input to future activities, such as the development of joint research call on sustainable hydropower in the Mekong region to be funded by European Splash partners.

Research on Hydropower in the Lower Mekong Basin Workshop

Day two – 15th September

Summary Day 1:

This day began with a synthesis of discussions from the first day, which provided important information related to identification of common research topics, methodologies and ways to ensure transferring knowledge between sectors as well as inclusion of private sector in research.

There is a demand for an overall needs assessment on sustainable hydropower development and ways to include and cooperate with the private sector, also an analysis of capacity building needs for researchers, private and public sectors. Benefit sharing and trade-offs is an issue with a need for capacity building.

Another issue touched upon was the need for more knowledge on the impacts of hydropower. In the MRCS an IWRM model toolbox exists (hydrology, sediments/nutrients, primary production, fisheries, socio-economic indicators), but there is still need for more information on impact on fisheries, social and economic benefits and costs of hydropower development, social impact monitoring as well as resilience and vulnerability of the local communities to changes in natural resource availability and ecosystem services. There is a significant need for new primary data and information.

A general concern for governments' capacity to regulate the private sector was mentioned and capacity building on this issue can be relevant to ensure strategic planning and looking into different objectives and alternative energy sources or at large scale vs. small scale hydropower.

An ongoing discussion is how to secure dialogue between private sector, government and researchers. For example, in Laos there are activities to promote this, which can benefit from the discussions here. Further activities to promote development dialogue are encouraged. Needs are to create opportunities and safe spaces for dialogue and to provide professional negotiation capacity. To ensure this, dissemination of local language policy briefs, maximal involvement of stakeholders and improvement of researcher- practitioner communication are necessary.



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Session 3 – Linking Research to Practice

Jan Moen, NVE: “Interactions among states, private sector and academia” introduced a discussion about academic research and private investments in hydropower, the role and impact from academics to the private sector vis-à-vis sustainable development. He also presented examples of power reforms from Europe and America clearly showing that the political link is essential, and targeting and understanding the political processes are important. Political will, timing and coordinating are important factors for change in the power sector.

A core issue is how to influence the political processes to make new legislations and policies. Necessary input here is that regulators and other stakeholders well organized, existence of research institutions willing to organize and implement core activities to coordinate as well as private companies that are willing to make sponsorships. Important to discuss here is opportunities and barriers in the Mekong Basin?

Miriam Feilberg, DWF, “Application of research to policy and practical levels”, presented key Splash findings on the relevance of research development, barriers to uptake of research in practice and means to promote better links to practice such as improving communication.

Important messages to convey to policy makers are that research is relevant for development and contributes poverty reduction. Research and economic growth is closely linked: R&D have positive effect on growth, there is robust relationship between spending on R&D and economic growth. Improving water knowledge and management such as rain fall storage will lead to growth. Investment required for meeting MDG on water is 11.3 billion USD, whereas economic benefits are assessed to have 8-fold rate of return – 84 billion.

Splash key findings on the role of North-South (N/S) partnerships are that research uptake is improved where Southern researchers are involved and have ownership. N/S partnerships are formed between researchers known to each other already, but donors can influence nature of N/S partnerships by paying attention in call texts etc.

Sam Ath Chhith, The NGO Forum on Cambodia: Improving research on hydropower development in the Lower Mekong Basin: key issues, concerns and recommendations. An introduction to NGO involvement in Hydropower Issues in Cambodia and key activities such as promoting dialogue among stakeholders, raising awareness on the risks and benefits of hydropower, conducting and/or commissioning different types of research, capacity building of civil society to voice concerns and advocating for international best practice standards in energy planning

Key recommendations from the NGO Forum are to:

- Open research project designs to public scrutiny to improve its objectivity and scope
- Include stakeholders in the research process
- Improve information sharing and flows among all stakeholders
- Respect the added value of Community Based Research, especially in its ability to interpret microcosms and reflect local realities;
- Improve information dissemination to communities and stakeholders
- More research is needed in the Mekong region before informed development decisions can be made.
- The MRC should play a key role in ensuring policy-makers and the public fully understand benefits, risks and information gaps before decisions regarding development projects are made.



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Dao Trong Tu, CEWAREC, IWMI-CPWF Representative –Vietnam gave an outline of hydropower development in Vietnam, with key actors and interactions among key stakeholders and opened up for a discussion on limitations to community consultation during EIA processes and lack of public information. This was however questioned by the Vietnamese government representative in the workshop.

Mukand Babel, AIT, Contribution of academic activities at AIT to sustainable hydropower development in Asia.

AIT carry out research related to hydropower and sustainable development, also linked to IWRM, but Dr. Babel pointed out that as most of the large hydropower projects are developed by international investors, who also bring the critically needed technical and managerial expertise from overseas there is a general lack of qualified local specialists and skilled labor, also for project planning, implementation and operation. There is also shortage of human resources at key sector regulatory agencies to ensure cost-effectiveness and compliance with relevant government policies.

AIT find that hydropower can be developed and utilized, but there is a need for improved knowledge such as impact studies, careful planning and management while minimizing the negative social, environmental and health impacts AIT is ready to provide regional academic curriculum and research at the masters level in Sustainable Hydropower in collaboration with partners in the region and beyond.

If the knowledge base is improved, opportunities exist in order to optimize benefits from many existing dams, to address outstanding social issues and to strengthen environmental mitigation and restoration measures. AIT can assist here, but policy levels need to realize that management and operation practices must adapt to environmental change including climate change.

Kim Geheb, CGIAR Challenge Program on Water and Food (CPWF) presented experiences and strategies on bridging the gap between research and development in order to reduce poverty and foster development by optimizing the use of water in reservoirs. Improving coordination is an important tool in this respect, which can looking into the basics of good communication and creating spheres for influence, dialogue ‘spaces’ and multi-stakeholder platforms (MSPs), and by improving issues such as the need for capacity building and for taking advantage of innovative and creative media.

After this session the discussion continued in working groups.

Round table discussions

2nd Session on research needs and topics. Feedback from the four groups on the questions below:

1. Recommendations to improve research results transfer to users (including policy-makers and private sector):

- Need to identify users, targets groups among developers, researchers, policy makers and others; and engage them early in the process of research design. The projects must include this element in timeframe and resource distribution.
- Need for better dialogue and provision of facilities to connect between researchers and users, for instance key workshops targeted to decision makers, include them in the group giving messages.
- Create applicable and clear messages. Policy briefs and other kinds of material in a form that is targeting policy and decision makers are important. This must also emphasize the role of policy makers in the projects and its impact in the national context.
- Need for lobby activities – both formal and informal. Transfer of key research to high level meetings.



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- To improve this, findings must be translated into languages, which are easy to understand and simple. Findings should be acceptable for different groups of stakeholders. Need for champions, key persons who can translate this into local messages that are easily acceptable. We must build up institutional capacity to understand decision making processes.

- Develop communication strategies to include media, also regular broadcasts.

2. How to increase interactions and sustain dialogue among stakeholders:

- There is a need for a continuous and sustainable dialogue and for broad stakeholder partnerships (public/private partnerships), but the challenge is how to cooperate in the partnerships and attract new members here. The dialogue should include key organizations in a constructive dialogue among interested parties, which can lead to building confidence. Open annual stakeholder meetings could contribute to building trust.
- Building informal relations between research, private sector and governance levels could be valuable. There is a need to overcome the gap between researchers and communities.
- Researchers and practitioners need to understand each other better. Researchers must communicate findings better and policy makers could improve their understanding of interdisciplinary and research methods.
- Need to understand legal processes in the countries. One group had a discussion of research on hydropower, who is allowed to participate at which level in the countries as there are different rules and regulations about this.
- We must exchange knowledge and information through relevant forums, publications, and websites and transform information into a knowledge base through systematic processes in the countries.

3. How to improve funding for research and dissemination

- Disseminate information on research need assessments. In this workshop and the country reviews an initial overview of needs and gaps was made, which should be disseminated broadly.
- Research is generally funded by universities, but there is also a need for more training, also linked to private sector.
- We also need to get funding from private sector to research. They should set aside their own funds.
- Doing an institutional mapping on funding sources.
- Basket funds set-up to attract more funding from international
- Create mechanisms and institutional arrangements for research networks

Special session on Multi-criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA) and its application opportunities in environmental planning and decision making.

MCDA was presented by **Mr. Mika Marttunen, SYKE**

The session covered the following issues:

- Phases of the MCDA analysis
- Experiences from real-life projects
- Application opportunities in hydropower development projects



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- Demonstration of Web-HIPRE software on MCDA

Based on the results of the SPLASH questionnaire and experiences from real-life projects, MCDA would be a very useful tool in the planning and evaluation hydro power development projects. For instance, it could be applied to the comparison of long-term strategies and scenarios, evaluation of the sustainability of different projects, comparison of alternative project options, evaluation of different mitigation and compensation measures and definition of the scope and requirements of EIA. One way to learn the philosophy and use of MCDA is a retrospective analysis of a completed project. In addition, MCDA can provide great support when the principles of IWRM are implemented into the practice.

The reflection on the workshop discussions from the MCDA perspective was presented. MCDA can support the identification of research needs and policy related participation. Before planning impact studies and information needs it is important to identify the decision making or policy evaluations situation that they would relate to. MCDA often reveals lack of understanding of cause and effect chains and new information needs. MCDA can also be used in the stakeholder involvement to find out stakeholders' opinions to alternative options. The advantage of MCDA is that it produces information in the format which can be easily utilized in the decision making.

More information on MCDA can be obtained from SYKE: Mika Marttunen: mika.marttunen@ymparisto.fi

Tira Foran: Synthesis of the second day

Discussions on the second day of the workshop covered the dimensions of knowledge production, its technical content, the legitimacy of research and response to research by outsiders, looking into the very important question: does research meet communities' needs?

It can be a challenge that technical knowledge may have a high scientific quality but may not meet all users' needs in terms of local languages, policy messages. Therefore information to stakeholders in a less scientific form is important. We must also remember that knowledge produced without stakeholder consultation may not be perceived as legitimate by stakeholders.

Contexts and Stakeholders are diverse and there is a need for participatory research. This is important to avoid an outcome where knowledge that does not fit with users' goals & priorities is produced, but rejected by key stakeholders, however we need to keep in mind that stakeholders' existing goals and priorities may be part of the problem.

Generating and dissemination of research related to sustainable development also implies re-thinking established processes, priorities and values. Thus producing usable knowledge becomes even more challenging and there is a need for dialogue about more sustainable processes. Case studies on impacts etc can make findings more relevant for users.

But related to hydropower we are facing a challenge of the rapid pace of hydropower development in this region.



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Torkil Jønch Clausen, DHI, summarised the workshop and its conclusions

This workshop was organised to discuss 5 important questions:

1. Assess the needs in curriculum reform, research and capacity building programs at the academic level in order to contribute to sustainable hydropower development in the basin
2. Assess the relationships between research activities (ongoing or under preparation) and activities carried out by development and management actors/organisations in the basin
3. Identify the existing links, communication degree / gaps and mechanisms among the water sector actors (researchers, development actors, private sector and policy-makers) with regard to research related to hydropower development
4. Identify and assess means to enhance the application of research results to the policy and practical levels, and contribution of research activities to the sustainable hydropower development in the basin.
5. Identify and assess means to enhance the contribution of research, knowledge transfer and capacity building programmes at universities to contribute to MRC programmes in hydropower development

As you will be able to see from the report, we did address these issues and have important feedback to Splash.

Important to note further is that more than 60 people from all countries and providing inspiration even from far away as the Nile and representing all spheres of society participated in plenary sessions and actively contributing to a good working group sessions.

We started by setting the stage: learning what Splash is and getting an introduction to the setting in the Mekong basin, the research reviews and the questionnaire on MCDA and water footprints.

We also gained an insight in what we are doing for sustainable hydropower development. A lot is happening in the region, but we are still a long way before sustainability. There are many needs to achieve this, not only on technology as we normally hear, but more on social impacts and a lot on benefit sharing, improving on laws and regulations. How can we make private sector an interesting partner for development?

There has also been focus on understandable and accessible information and cooperation among different stakeholders.

The second day started by looking at state and private research for development cooperation and experiences to learn from other regions. We also had an introduction to benefits from investing in research and technological development and in improving water management. Investing in both research and water managements is good business. We can see that it pays off, but have to ask ourselves: why does it not get off, perhaps we have a lack in communication and in developing partnerships among research stakeholders.

We have also learned about MCDA, which could be a good tool for systematic involvement of stakeholders.

Also today there was a good group work, again focussing on communication, dialogue and partnerships.

We covered a lot of ground that now has to be put into reports testing if Splash partners are able to get the message across.



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Closing ceremony

SPLASH representative, Miriam Feilberg, DWF and Kjell Repp, NVE closed the workshop by thanking participants for a very active cooperation during the workshop. This contributed to establishing a research agenda on sustainable hydropower development in the region, which we will now develop into a concept note and propose to the European Splash partners as an idea for a joint research call related to development of sustainable hydropower in the Mekong.

MRC was thanked for hosting the workshop and the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs for funding this activity, which not only includes the workshop but also the preparatory activities such as the research reviews.