Gender and the Mekong River: Inclusions and Exclusions

Over more than the last decade, a disappearance of river based-livelihoods due to hydropower development in the Mekong River has frequently increased poverty in rural communities. While, gender as a theme has been put in place in large hydropower project assessment and mitigation programs, poverty has persisted for rural poor women, men and ethnic groups who have significantly depended on river resources. Implementation of mitigation and compensation programs at many hydropower dams have failed to make up for the losses that have been experienced by females and males. While men are perceived to hold better access to resources than women, it is not necessarily the case that men are more sustainable villagers than women. Hence, embodied emotional geographies of places, peoples and resources are fundamentally grounded through resource struggles and resource conflicts. Women’s subjectivity including embodied, transversal, stresses, experience, sense and affect are excluded in hydropower management and assessment despite of the fact that these female subjectivities are believed to be transformed into political subjectivity. Thus, the paper argues that gender in the Mekong basin is in some ways recognized, but under some conditions is also missed depending on patriarchal culture and unawareness of diversity among females and males, as well as missing disaggregated data on gender issues in hydropower development and poverty reduction.

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