

# Review of: "The Spatial Politics of the Tonle Sap: A Multi-Scale Analysis of Conservation and Development Challenges"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

## General Comments:

This paper sought to analyze the political ecology of the Tonle Sap Lake (TSL) by examining the interplay of different actors across scales and levels in the governance of the TSL. The paper further examined the overlapping and conflicting policy and legal frameworks and institutional arrangements on the governance of TSL.

This paper will significantly contribute to the understanding of the complex interplay between the governance structures, institutions, actors, interests, and their powers that impact the governance of the TSL. However, the paper did not adequately demonstrate how and why these complexities influence the management and exploitation of the TSL resources. The paper is largely a series of facts that are structured around the ecology of the TSL and socio-cultural interactions, management issues, governance structures and institutional arrangements, and transboundary issues.

## Specific Comments:

- There are different theoretical approaches to political ecology analysis. The paper provided descriptions/definitions of the political ecology framework but did not indicate the approach/framework the study used. This area is not sufficiently worked out yet, which means that there is not a clear theoretical framework being applied.
- It is not clear to me how the political ecology framework informed the data collection (stakeholder engagement, key informant interviews, and the FGs discussions) and analyses. The methodology lacks details about how stakeholders were selected, the institutions/economic sector representations, sample size, gender considerations in stakeholder selection, etc.
- The political ecology approach is a tool that helps ask questions and demonstrate types of power relationships. However, the paper did not adequately demonstrate how the interplay of actors, institutions/arrangements with their interests/powers influences the governance of the TSL and the Mekong River Basin in general. It would have been very informative if the paper gave some mapping of the actors/institutions with their interests and powers (i.e., power brokers), which would have helped to appreciate the analysis, especially how power brokers influence the exploitation of the TSL and water resources in the Mekong River Basin.

- The paper discussed the increased Chinese presence in Mekong Cooperation and riparian states through their investments and the development of hydropower dams, which have altered the hydrological regimes of downstream riparian countries. I think it will be a good idea to discuss the decision-making around the development of hydropower dams in the Mekong River Basin, given that it is a transboundary basin, as well as the role the Mekong Cooperation plays in mediating potential negative impacts on downstream riparian countries, including an assessment of the effectiveness of the Cooperation.
- The paper says: *"Despite the assurance to protect TSL, it is very vague and unclear on protecting the dry season flow and the flow levels in general, but what is the dry season? How much is the acceptable low flow? How can we ensure the 'acceptable' dry and wet season flow under the scenarios of hydropower dam development? Hitherto, the real meaning of these terms is left out with no clarification or explanation (Sneddon, 2003)."* This is not unusual about agreements and policies. Such stipulations can be very broad and overarching without technical details and specificity. More flesh and details are provided by relevant Sector Ministries and agencies. Do these stipulations and technical details find expression in the strategic implementation plans of the appropriate/relevant ministries/agencies ?
- In terms of the structure, the paper is couched to suit more local/national readers than international readers. Particularly, the paper made references to institutions/policy actors by their acronyms without defining them in full at first mention.
- The conclusions drawn from the study were not adequately demonstrated in earlier sections of the paper.
- The paper requires major language improvement, and I suggest thorough editorial work.