

**Session III – Connecting People and the Ecosystems That Support Them
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Water and Poverty in the Coastal Region of the Mekong Delta, Vietnam

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Abstract

Water accessibility and use, poverty, and environment are closely inter-related in the coastal zone of the Mekong delta, Vietnam. A case study, undertaken in indicative districts of the coastal zone, revealed that more than 50% of local households are considered poor. The poverty rate is high with areas of high Khmer population. Poor households own limited assets for livelihoods, including having poor accessibility to existing water resources and lacking the ability to use them in a productive way. In contrast, richer households own more land, have better access to water for domestic uses and use the water for agricultural and aquaculture more efficiently. The wealth of most poor households has been unchanged or even declined, while that of about 70% of the better-off households have been improved in recent years. The gap between the rich and the poor would therefore be wider lacking effective interventions from the government, particularly in rural poor areas. All of existing water resources do not meet the demands in both quality and quantity. Key water-related problems are associated with not only agriculture and aquaculture and domestic needs, but also environment and human health. The severity of the problems differs with wealth groups, agro-ecological areas (saline and rain-fed) and zones. Local people adopt coping solutions to overcome the problems but in the long-run more adaptive options are needed. Policies and interventions should be given to specific agro-ecological and socio-economic settings and multiple dimensions of integrated water resources management need to be considered.