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## INTRODUCTION

Women leaders in water governance in the region - including community leaders, activists, and members of civil society - have expressed an interest in a safe, inclusive digital space to support collaborative work across cultures and languages. Because networking and discussion spaces (both on- and offline) are typically male-dominated, women face barriers to participating. Barriers include cultural practices that minimize women's participation as well as male-led bullying. Barriers also prevent women from attending such spaces. These barriers include cultural biases leading to women having less time for and access to these tools. They are also less likely to have the skill to use digital tools.

Leaders in water governance in the region also deal with additional unique challenges. One challenge is that many women in river governance may not speak or read English or the dominant national language of the country in which they live. With the *lingua franca* of many platforms and tools being English, this limits their relevance and accessibility. Furthermore, activists have long been concerned about issues of privacy and security, and many existing digital spaces do not place digital security as a point of priority.

The needs of women must be kept in mind during the design of any tool that is meant to support them. This is notable in digital technology, which have opened opportunities for women to generate new networks and connections, but retain many of the issues identified above because such platforms have not typically been designed with the needs of women, inclusivity, or security in mind. Regardless, women are not included in the design process, given the above-named challenges. This results in a gap in the usefulness of digital and technologically-focused tools that are expected to support women.

As a form of knowledge co-production with elements of participatory action research, the production of this platform has the potential to empower women and help to build their technical and leadership capacity. The co-design work is based on assumptions on the part of the principal partnership: Open Development Initiative, Oxfam, International Rivers, and the University of New South Wales. These assumptions align with the five values that are discussed below in section II below:

- Sharing knowledge and approaches in a safe and deliberate space will enhance learning and support the modeling of workable solutions; and
- Inclusion, being heard and seen, and connecting to a network of other women will elevate standing (legitimacy) and will confront unequal power dynamics and support women to enter, or have their stories enter, spaces and contexts that have been previously inaccessible.

The development process of such a platform will support communication of lived experiences, collaboration and networking across borders. Stakeholders will be part of the development process, which allows for security and inclusivity concerns to be taken into account from inception, with regular and continued opportunities for

consultation, feedback, and support. Buy-in from inception to implementation increases the likelihood of regular use. In addition, we will provide regular training on both the platform as well as digital literacy, which increases usability of the platform while also addressing concerns about security.

The purpose of this report is to identify the components required in a technological solution for women's storytelling to support inclusion and participation in water governance. All quotes taken from interviews and surveys are included within the report as italicized text, and all quotes have been kept anonymous.

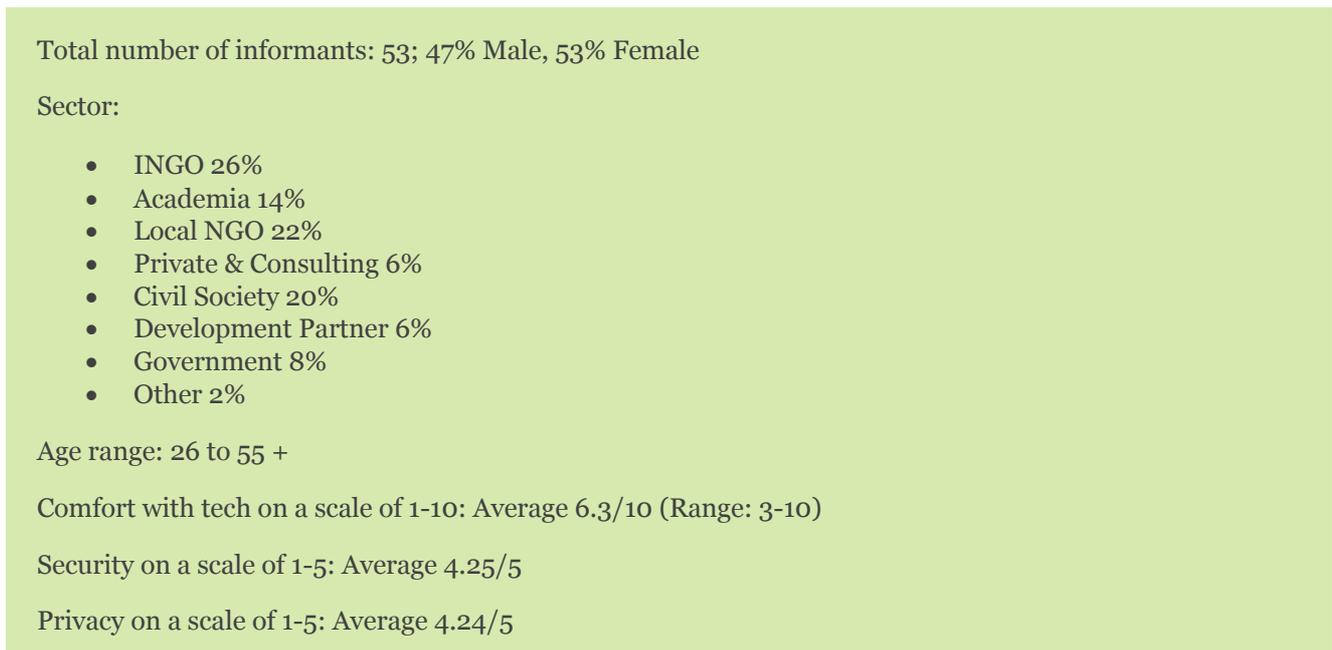
## I PROJECT METHODOLOGY

From March through July 2021, a co-design scoping process has been conducted with 53 informants (primarily in the Mekong Region, also global) to identify how a platform or digital solution could support women's voices and stories to be shared.

From March through June, data has been gathered through semi-structured interviews, through long and short questionnaires, and through email conversations. Questionnaires, interview protocols, ethics support, and project background and information have been housed on the webpage:

<https://knowledgecocreation.org/related-projects/>

### Figure 1: Informant demographics



In addition to existing contacts made through prior work, project informants were solicited through the following networks: (1) Women and Rivers Asia Conference Participants; (2) Women in Water Community; (3) Stockholm Environment Institute / Sustainable Mekong Research Network; (4) International WaterCentre / IWC Alumni Network; and (4) Mekong-US Policy Partnership Dialogues contact list. Informants were solicited through social media and individually by email. Meetings were conducted on Zoom, and all but two meetings were recorded (at the request of the informants), and AI-generated transcripts are available.

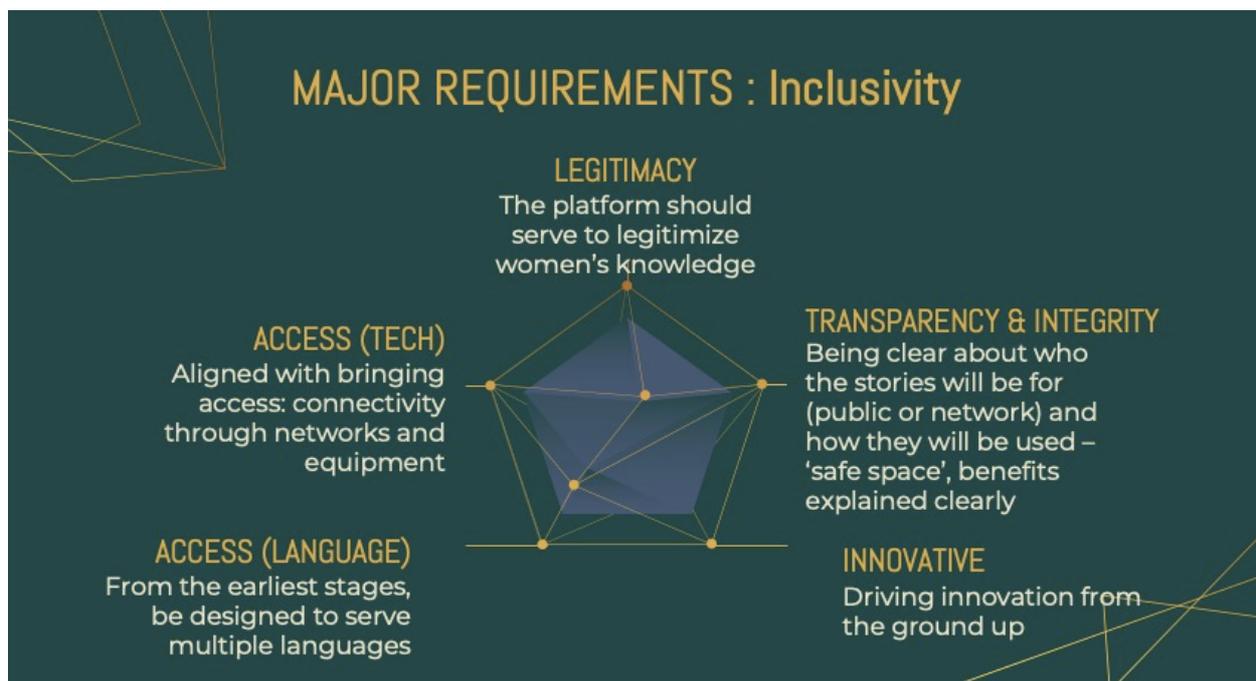
## II VALUES, VISIONS, AND KEY CONSIDERATIONS

*“Ease of opt in; democratization of data; encourage analysis to be accessible in more easily communicated formats (infographics, fact / data sheets, visual and media (moving image cartoon or animated videos).*

*In terms of inclusive - there is more capacity to engage with others using technology rather than orienting to 'in the room' or face to face. But generating deeper, collaborative work will require significant investment in time and energy - from participants, and from 'coordinators or facilitators.’’*

With inclusivity as a guiding requirement, five other key requirements were identified, listed below in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Key considerations and values underpinning the Women and Rivers Storytelling Platform**



### LEGITIMACY

*“Engaging local stakeholders as much as possible. Make sure the benefits of participations are explained clearly and persuasively.”*

Legitimacy will need to be considered carefully at every stage of development and implementation – for the participants, for the project partners, and for the collaborators contributing knowledge into the platform. Some ideas to support legitimacy include:

- Careful consideration of the dynamics between organisations operating throughout the region and how their involvement in this effort could possibly support or derail legitimacy;
- The development of 'campaigns for' in order to provide support to women sharing stories or knowledge to have a thematic approach (“How do you see climate impacting your community” around COP 26; “What is your vision for the Mekong?”, etc.)
- The provision of curated tools and trainings as a core component.

## ACCESS: TECHNOLOGY

*“The key challenge is that the poor communities lack of access to the internet and sometimes have to travel a long way to meet at the meeting point whereby the internet is available for the zoom call.”*

*“The lack of access to the internet is the main barriers.”*

*“Organize a meeting point at one place where communities could gather and have access to the internet for meeting.”*

*“It depends on how urgent and necessary the topics are to that community. If they still prefer the conventional channels and could not see benefits of technology in that aspect, it would be very challenging to find the interest.”*

Many communities lack access to technology and connectivity, this needs to be addressed. To do so, the overarching project will need to provide trainings in how to use and contribute to any on-line tool or platform. The project team, in particular Open Development Initiative and Oxfam, are well-suited to provide this support.

## ACCESS: LANGUAGE

*“language and terms that are used sometimes are difficult to catch up for many women who illiterates”*

*“language is a limiting factor, and often under-resourced in terms of making information available in appropriate (necessary) languages.”*

Translation will need to be considered as a key component in the development of a platform, into (at a minimum) the Mekong country languages. Translation from local ethnic languages into Mekong languages and English will also be essential, and any platform will need to be developed to be able to serve multiple languages in its earliest iteration as revising any technology system to be able to account for languages at a later date poses significant challenges related to cost and complexity.

## TRANSPARENCY AND INTEGRITY

*“These days technology plays important role in our community, we should have a safe platform for everybody to share sensitive and less sensitive stories. Also to be able to exchange ideas and brainstorm with each other without concern on the security.”*

*“A safe space for everyone to share storytelling, for this principle everybody lead their own creativity way of telling story such as a short film, or documentary film or event the novel to tell story that they want to tell, and writing an alive book like cartoon. These should be one of the ways to approach to many more women and youths to interested in telling stories from their area.”*

Ensuring transparency and integrity will require that trusted local partners are engaged to support women to understand the platform, how to provide and also access content.

The issue of a ‘safe space’ came up frequently and is flagged as one of the concepts that needs to be discussed and developed through focus groups.

Communications strategies should also be developed and implemented to guarantee the ‘safe space’ component – for example a communications plan (detailing what content will be shared where, when, and with whom and how this sharing will be undertaken); and an editorial policy and plan (supporting the process by which ethics are addressed, permission is granted for sharing or any distribution within or beyond the platform, etc.)

## INNOVATIVE

*“Women and marginalized communities are excluded from the development planning and the decision making process. The use of social media could be one way to assist the communities especially the young to raise the voices of the marginalized communities regarding their concerns and impacts from the development project... Access to social media such as facebook and twitter helps women to raise their concerns about the development project such as dam that destroy their homes and livelihoods. Creating a platform for women to share stories via social media is innovative. Organize the platform as a safe-space for women to share stories.”*

*“Fragmented water governance structure and unclear mandates amongst different ministries and agencies [is a key challenge]. There is lack of local stakeholder engagement and community engagement at grassroots level. I think technology might be able to address some aspects of these issues.”*

*“It is important to make the platform becomes the only platform about women and river and use it as a Community of Practice for Women and River.”*

Embracing innovation as a mechanism to address complex water governance challenges in the region has surfaced as a regular theme. Innovation in terms of technology made specifically for community women to address the access issues described above, and innovation to build links between women to address fragmentation in water governance provides a great opportunity for improved Mekong management.

## OTHER KEY CONSIDERATION: FUN AND ENGAGEMENT

In order to be a success, the application will need to be playful, fun, and engaging. Ideas to make this platform fun and engaging will be one of the focus group topics. Some specific ideas for engagement have been proposed as features:

*“The platform should be set up on a Facebook page with attractive contents consisting of videos, quotes, quizzes, and interactive chats. It would be useful to include simple messages with nice graphic designing.*

*The platform should be time to time hosted webinars to share women and river stories of success/challenges/innovations etc.*

*This platform can be useful if it is allowed more people to share kind of innovative ideas through competition for vouchers/gifts/tokens.”*

Exploring the acceptability and feasibility of features associated with fun and engagement for the target audience, and building these recommendations into any solution, is necessary for sustainable uptake and use of any platform.

### III KEY FINDINGS AND ISSUES

*“It requires investment to develop and engage local stakeholders.”*

Four key findings and issues have been identified through the co-design process.

1. **Inclusivity**, as a fundamental pillar, requires a focus on community-based women and civil society that have not had much of a voice in Mekong governance, having been excluded previously because of education, language, technology access.

Thus, an **inclusive engagement** will require more than just the development of a platform. Any technology solution needs to be supported by trusted community partners who can facilitate meetings, provide trainings, support translation, and coordinate campaigns to solicit and share women’s stories and women’s knowledge.

2. **Legitimacy** is a street that runs in all directions. Legitimacy pertains to all stakeholders involved in the platform’s development and operation – as well as the platform itself.

Legitimacy must be built through partnerships at the community level, with women, to bring their stories, experiences, observations, and knowledge into the public (or quasi-public) sphere.

3. **Three distinct user groups** were identified, with three sets of needs and features being identified. The most important, and complex, of these user groups is women at the community level. With inclusivity as a guiding principle, this user group represents the target primary beneficiaries.

The other two user groups were NGO women (who already have a strong existing network), and local and international researchers (who have some existing networks but would be interested in making these links stronger and being able to volunteer their time and effort to better align research and activities with community priorities).

4. **COVID-19** presents both a challenge and an opportunity. It is a challenge because face-to-face and travel is limited during certain times. It is an opportunity because issues of access are becoming a priority for international development, and because stakeholders are now accustomed to working virtually.

## IV USERS AND FEATURES

### USER GROUP 1: WOMEN COMMUNITY MEMBERS

*“It depends on how urgent and necessary the topics are to that community. If they still prefer the conventional channels and could not see benefits of technology in that aspect, it would be very challenging to find the interest.”*

*“I think the platform should be user-friendly as most residents along or around Mekong River still live under the poverty line. Despite carrying a (smart) phone each, technology still looks strange to them. So the more our Khmer language is used to inform or educate them, the more access they gain to reveal and promote their stories. Also, the more visuals, the better on the selected content, be it on a website, a social media platform, an artwork or a video.”*

One informant clearly delineated four groups of women:

*“Women live near river bands whose livelihoods rely on rivers (use water for daily life, farming, fishing...etc). Even in this group also divided in small groups like ethnic group (Khmer people, Cham people) or majority group (Kinh people). They are more close to rivers and know well about rivers. However, their capacities in technologies may be not good enough.*

*Women -Local staff in different levels (commune, district, province, state). They know about rivers and implement policies in water management. They are quite good in technology.*

*Women in social- economic organizations such as in women association, they are active in activities related to women.*

*Women work in university. They are researchers and deeply understand that.”*

Community women, living along or near the Mekong, depending on the river in some way for livelihood activities have been identified as the primary target audience and beneficiaries of this project, particularly if the platform aims to be truly inclusive. However, these women have been difficult to engage in the co-design process because of language barriers. It is likely that there will continue to be a reliance of English-speaking community partners to represent them in the co-creation process.

These women are the source of an incredible amount of knowledge and stories that have received limited recognition and validated through existing water governance-related processes and mechanisms. Often, these women speak only ethnic languages and/or Mekong country languages.

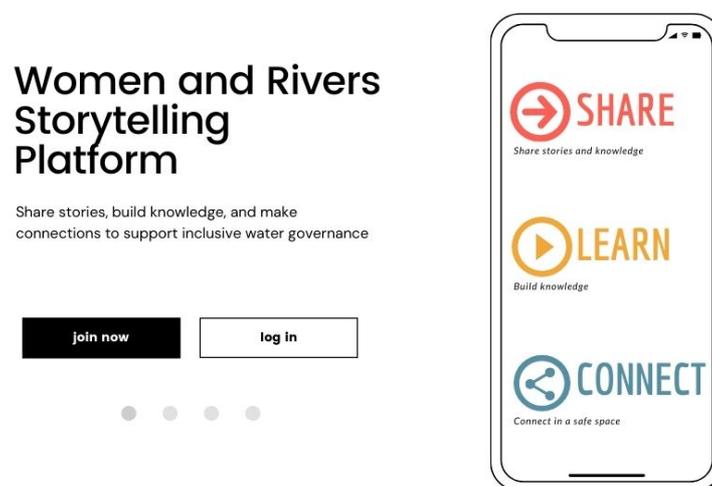
In developing any tool, platform, or solution, the recognition that access to technology and connectivity has gender dimension or is often non-existent. Furthermore, as discussed in the State of Knowledge – Women and Rivers Mekong Region paper, the ability to ‘speak out’ also can be made difficult because of gender norms within a community or challenges around agency. Subsequently, women may require some support in order to better be able to ‘speak out’ or craft messages.

Simplicity and ease of entry were identified as key requirements for engaging this user group in any technology platform. A simple three-button design was proposed as a prototype for getting these women into the system (provided below in figure 3 as a mobile application prototype).

Each of the three ‘areas’ of the app would need to be designed in consultation with partners and women community members to be able to best suit their requirements, however, the following features were suggested by the informants:

- **Share:** A simple application that allows for providing and accessing stories, photos, artwork, and citizen-collected Mekong data and observations as a ‘feed’ of content. The option to geo-reference the content could be a feature option. Content would be tagged and categorized by ‘campaign for’, content type, and possibly also to ‘report’ violations or issues of concern.
- **Learn:** Access to core tools, news, and trainings as curated content to support key water governance priorities as identified as by a steering committee and/or user beneficiaries.
- **Connect:** The option for members to directly connect with one another in a ‘safe space’.

**Figure 3: Mobile Application Prototype**



Subsequent discussion with project partners has identified three distinct audience segments: Thai women leaders, Cambodian community women, and regional women stakeholders. These different audience segments are described more in Section V below, and they are also considered as users in the ‘share’, ‘learn’, and ‘connect’ components described in the subsequent sections.

## USER GROUPS 2 & 3: WOMEN MEKONG RESEARCHERS & WOMEN IN NGOS

A secondary user group was identified by a number of informants: women Mekong Researchers. Most researchers already have existing networks and platforms to support collaboration. However, women conducting research on the Mekong are very interested in being involved in order to build stronger connections with local actors, particularly given the restrictions on travel and fieldwork imposed by COVID-19. In addition, some women also expressed the desire to be able to find ways to better support community-based women and local NGOs through remote volunteering opportunities.

This secondary user group, ideally, would want to be able to ‘plug into’ whatever solution is developed to support the community-based women (primary beneficiaries, described above) to provide this support. Women who work in NGOs can also be invited to ‘plug into’ the platform being developed for community women, but for both of these other user groups, it is not recommended to build an independent technology solution to support their needs.

Many of these women would belong to the initial target audience of the platform, the women who have participated in the Women and Rivers Asia Congress, held by Oxfam and International Rivers in 2020. These women and how they would engage the platform are considered in the subsequent sections under the regional audience segment.

## **DISCUSSION**

Developing a platform that engaged community women and local NGO workers to share their stories, experiences, and photography of life related to the Mekong – through a map-based interface, ideally – emerged as the ‘innovative’ features, and as features not already in existence. The challenge is not in the development of the platform to do this, it is in soliciting the stories and images to populate the platform, and the effort required to legitimize the platform and the knowledge that it will contain.

For all user segments, the issue of privacy, safety, and security remains a key issue to be addressed. The issues surrounding how to govern the platform and ensure a strong ethical approach, using – for example – Free, Prior Informed Consent (FPIC), will need to be determined by the governing structure, policy, and Code of Conduct.

## V PLATFORM ELEMENTS IN DETAIL: SHARE, LEARN, CONNECT

The three components of the digital solution, although complementary, warrant exploration as standalone products to better understand the way that these elements could be developed. The following sections explore what each of the three elements would become – who they would be built for (beneficiaries), what project partners would need to be engaged, and how potentially they could be funded. The emphasis is provided on developing a pilot project that is actionable and allows for easy engagement success and scalability. The pilot projects would also be designed to be able to solicit feedback from the user base.

The following need to be developed in the earliest stages of each of these components, building upon existing work underway:

- 1) Governing structure, including a Code of Conduct
- 2) Editorial Policy

These pieces will inform the technology requirements for the development of the ‘safe space’ in terms of where the data will be housed, and how access will be allowed and controlled to support the maintenance of this ‘safe space’.

**Three audience segments have been identified – each representing unique opportunities and challenges. Cambodia has been chosen as a pilot to be able to engage women who have limited literacy and digital literacy, where many active partnerships and projects are currently underway to support women’s inclusion and empowerment. Thailand has been chosen to engage women who have a rich history of speaking out and taking leadership, with a history of Thai Baan research and more digital access and connectivity. The regional audience will be targeted through a future Women and Rivers Congress and through Women and Rivers Fellowship Program which is currently in development (International Rivers).**

### V.1 SHARE: “SPEAK OUT”

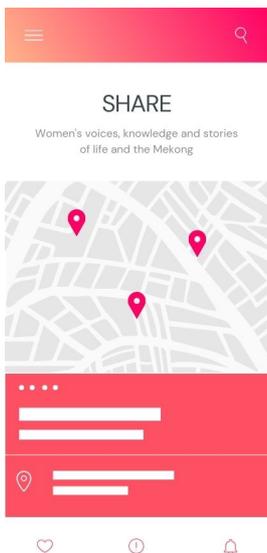


Figure 4: Share Component Prototype

#### OVERVIEW

The Share portion of the platform would allow for registered users to be able to upload and consume the following content:

- Vlogs<sup>1</sup>
- Stories told (audio files) while looking at a photograph
- Artwork, with or without stories being told
- Short amateur films taken with a mobile device
- Images and text

<sup>1</sup> A video blog or video log, sometimes shortened to vlog, is a form of blog for which the medium is video. Vlog entries often combine embedded video with supporting text, images, and other metadata. Entries can be recorded in one take or cut into multiple parts (source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vlog>).

The content would appear on a map-based interface (see Figure 4), with a content feed on the side that users could zoom in and out of to better explore stories and knowledge coming from a particular country or province.

Co-designers have identified that the knowledge could support sharing information on particular issues to achieve community objectives (to support transparency, accountability) – but this all depends on the community and their needs.

The co-design process identified the need for digital literacy, particularly in relation to privacy and security issues. Co-designers clearly articulated the need for both privacy and security, and many also suggested that existing social media be used as a principal means for sharing stories and connecting, many of which offer compromised privacy and security to users. However, other co-design participants have noted that evidence shows Environmental Defenders having recently been targeted on social media platforms and their privacy and security has been compromised.

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## BENEFICIARIES AND PROVIDERS

The ‘share’ element is unique in that the primary beneficiaries and providers are the community women, with NGOs and other project partners serving a facilitation role in the development and provision of this element. As discussed below, it will need to be decided what the specific criteria are for being able to join and engage with the platform, and a meaningful and relevant Code of Conduct (not just a click-through process) will need to be developed and communicated to everyone interacting with the platform.

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## ALIGNMENT WITH CORE REQUIREMENTS

Objectives, aligned with underlying principles:

Principle	Alignment	Consideration
Inclusivity	The platform aims to gather the stories and perspectives of women whose voices have been marginalized. The ‘share’ element of the platform is for and about women’s stories and knowledge.	How will the approvals process work for women to be allowed on the platform? Will they need to submit an ID or will there be some kind of verification process? Can a 3 <sup>rd</sup> party (for example an NGO or researcher) post on the behalf of others? These questions will need to be addressed in privacy, security, and/or editorial policies.
Legitimacy	The platform aims to build legitimacy for women’s knowledge through allowing for sharing in a ‘safe space’.	The development of the policies that define the ‘safe space’ architecture will need to be developed. Legitimacy can be built through the alignment of campaigns in conjunction with the ‘learn’ element of the platform.
Access	The platform will use simple, intuitive symbols instead of complicated text explanations to support navigation by women who have limited language skills. The local language functionality must be incorporated at the earliest stages of development (5 Mekong languages + English).	Prototypes and pilot projects will need to test symbols. Language capabilities will need to be built in and tested through secure AI translation systems.

Innovation	Many of the women who will be engaged in using this platform will have limited experience with digital technology, and this mechanism for sharing stories and knowledge is being designed specifically to include and support them. Where they may not have yet been influenced by more available technologies, this provides women with a way to connect in a safe and ethical manner. This, in and of itself, is innovation.	The reason that other platforms are as large and successful as they are is because they are operating with monetary gains to support their development through advertising, etc. The challenge is that this approach does not rely on these means for financial sustainability and is intentionally being set up as a scalable, lightweight, ideally low-cost solution to support inclusion. The long-term financing of this initiative needs to be developed (impact investing?) as the potential positive impacts to social and environmental systems are noteworthy.
Transparency / Integrity	Some information will need to be developed and provided up front as to how the knowledge may or may not be used. A community Code of Conduct will need to be developed and communicated as a part of the on-boarding process for women joining the platform.	Will there be public and private facing versions of the 'share' part of the portal?
Fun & Engagement	The images and stories collected would be linked with campaigns that are of relevance and interest for women – and themes will need to be developed by the implementing team to reflect these interests.	The 'colloquialisation' of knowledge, and the use of metaphors and myths will support the development of fun and engaging themes.

## PILOT PROJECTS AND POTENTIAL PARTNERS

The pilot project approaches have identified Cambodia, Thailand, and Regional as three separate audiences. Each of these three communities represents a different segments of the target audience.

### 1) Cambodia:

Partner organisations are engaged at the community level with women to support their voices being heard, and empowerment through projects currently underway, detailed in the chart below.

### 2) Thailand:

Thailand, in particular, has higher data literacy and a long history of Thai Baan research, and women are already very engaged as leaders in their communities around water governance. This project would provide an opportunity to collect and showcase some of those stories, to explore what issues and information they are most interested in engaging with.

### 3) Regional:

A Mekong-wide regional pilot project would be open to others not targeted by the above two pilots to be able to register for the platform and be able to share and view content. This will be 'launched' through the Women and Rivers Congress / Women and Rivers Fellowship.

Community Partners:

Pilot Project	Partner Contact & Organisation	Comments
NE Thailand	International Rivers	Staff working in NE Thailand will get a sense of the relevance and value of the platform through local partners with local partners.
3S Cambodia	Oxfam	Strong community partners in Lower Sesan Dam II area
3S Cambodia	AIPP	Building upon their Framework to address Digital Rights / Human Rights for Environmental Defenders
3S Cambodia	IR	Staff in Cambodia
3S Cambodia	Open Development Initiative	The project will leverage existing work underway, particularly ODI's work with community partners that supports Indigenous, community women who have limited technology literacy around empowerment in Cambodia.
Mekong Region	International Rivers	Targeted at NGOs and civil society – provides an opportunity to test out language access. The future Women and Rivers Congress (date TBD) will be an opportunity to engage active regional actors as a captive market.

In addition to the key partners listed above, there has been a suggestion that the project team fundraise a set amount (e.g., US\$5,000) and open up a process whereby community leaders and/or local NGOs apply for a mini-grant (\$100-500) to do the following: (1) participate in on-line training about the platform ; (2) work with members of their community to solicit women's stories and upload them into the portal (collecting a minimum number of pieces of content as a part of the mini-grant). Stories and content would be tagged in accordance with developed protocols and campaigns, and security restrictions may be required.

The platform itself will be designed for the community but be available for the regional actors to engage with as well. The idea is to develop something that allows for organic scaling, made to serve the beneficiary community.

## NEXT STEPS & TIMELINE

In order to move forward with the development of a pilot project for this element of the platform, the following steps will need to be taken:

### September – February 2021:

- 1) Consolidation and commitment of project partners, with additional details specifying roles, financial requirements, and the development of a timeline;
- 2) The development of a budget and securing funds;

- 3) The development of governing structures and protocols – in consultation with Lower Mekong Network, building upon their experience.

#### January – June 2022:

- 4) The development of a prototype, technology selection and development of the 'share' element;
- 5) Development of Privacy, Security, Editorial policies and the Code of Conduct;

#### July – December 2022:

- 6) Tech development, testing, and roll-out
- 7) Implementation of mini-grants approach, with monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of this approach;
- 8) Evaluation and identification of scaling possibilities.

## V.II LEARN : DIGITAL LITERACY, WATER/RIVER GOVERNANCE

### OVERVIEW

The Learn portion of the platform would allow for registered users to be able to access knowledge in local Mekong languages to understand concepts related to water governance and also to shape the landscape around digital literacy and privacy. The materials provided would be content that has been carefully curated in partnership with community NGOs. The 'learn' element will link to webinars, webinar recordings, and have an interactive component to keep engagement high. The 'learn' portal will apply best practices in mobile learning design to keep beneficiaries engaged.

The 'learn' component is secondary to the above-described 'share' component, and will build off of input received through the initial roll-out of the 'share' component to best meet needs identified from the three audience segments.

**Figure 5: E-learning Interactive Prototype**



Source: <https://www.shiftelearning.com/blog/a-comprehensive-guide-to-mobile-learning-design>

This platform, over the long term, will provide the opportunity to broaden the literacy experience and to implement and inform best practices around digital literacy. The governing structure will need to consider how to best leverage the existing work of NGOs around digital literacy to support the scalability and uptake of this knowledge to support a broader culture of understanding and engagement around digital literature.

## BENEFICIARIES AND PROVIDERS

The 'learn' element will have depth and can provide resources for women looking to gain knowledge in any number of areas. The primary target audience, however, will be local women, initially in Cambodia and Thailand, who are looking to build their understanding of river/water governance, develop leadership skills and engage in decision-making, and who want to build their digital literacy in a fun and engaging manner.

## ALIGNMENT WITH CORE REQUIREMENTS

Objectives, aligned with underlying principles:

Principle	Alignment	Consideration
Inclusivity	'Learn' will target women and aim to be accessible for an audience that has been largely excluded	In order to do this effectively, the development of the tool will need to be done as an iterative process, starting small and scaling in size strategically. Determining what the entry points are for 'learn' from the project partners will need to be determined collaboratively.
Legitimacy	The underpinning assumption is that building knowledge will support legitimacy.	The organisations providing the learning modules will bring legitimacy to 'learn'.
Access	The platform will use simple, intuitive symbols instead of complicated text explanations to support navigation by women who have limited language skills. The local language functionality must be incorporated at the earliest stages of development (5 Mekong languages + English).	Prototypes and pilot projects will need to test symbols. Language capabilities will need to be built in and tested through secure AI translation systems.
Innovation	As with 'share', many of the women who will be engaged in using this platform will have limited experience with digital technology, and this mechanism for sharing learning is being designed specifically to include and support them.	
Transparency / Integrity	Knowledge needs will be identified by partner organisations, and project beneficiaries will be able to request additional trainings based on their needs.	Knowledge and training will be curated by lead partner organisations.
Fun & Engagement	The images and stories collected would be linked with campaigns that	The 'colloquialisation' of knowledge, and the use of metaphors and myths

	are of relevance and interest for women – and themes will need to be developed by the implementing team to reflect these interests.	will support the development of fun and engaging themes.
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## PILOT PROJECTS AND POTENTIAL PARTNERS

Three pilot project audiences have been identified:

1 & 2) Area-based pilot projects in the 3S River Basin and in NE Thailand

Both of these pilot projects rely upon community partners that work directly with women community leaders. In particular, there is a possibility to incorporate new and existing elements of 'Mekong curriculum' that are and have been developed.

3) A Mekong-wide regional pilot project would be open to others not targeted by the above two pilots to be able to register for the platform and be able to share and view content.

Community Partners:

Pilot Project	Partner Contact & Organisation	Comments
NE Thailand	International Rivers	
NE Thailand	Ubon Ratchathani University	In early stages of co-development of Mekong curriculum that may be able to be digitised
3S Cambodia	Wonders of the Mekong	Have developed games and interactive learning, have an active facebook community that could be engaged ( <a href="https://www.facebook.com/MekongWonders">https://www.facebook.com/MekongWonders</a> )
3S Cambodia	Oxfam	Partnering with Women's Rights groups across Cambodia and the region
3S Cambodia		
Mekong Region	International Rivers	Conveners of the Women and Rivers Congress and the Women and Rivers Fellowship (with Women's Earth Alliance)
Mekong Region	AIPP	Digital Rights Framework for Environmental Defenders
Mekong Region	Oxfam	Gender toolkit (with IR)
Mekong Region	Open Development Initiative	Women's empowerment activities underway in Cambodia and Vietnam with an emphasis on digital democracy

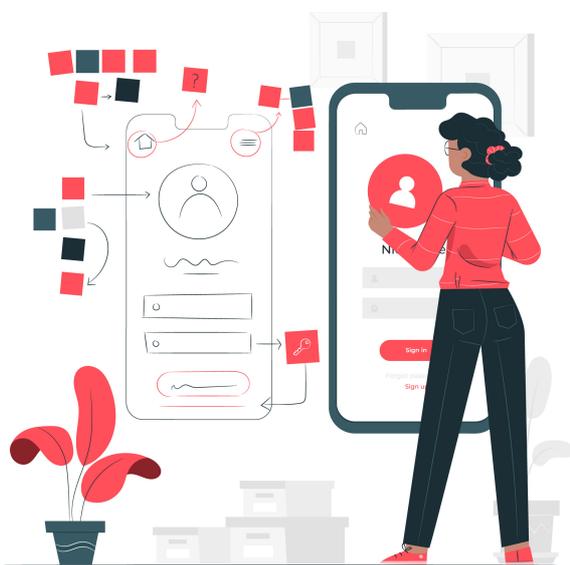
## NEXT STEPS

In order to move forward with the development of a pilot project for this element of the platform, the following steps will need to be taken:

- 1) Identification of 'learn' steering committee and work with identified partners to catalogue key knowledge products and identify community needs;
- 2) The development of a prototype, technology selection and development of the 'learn' element;
- 3) Development of communications strategy around learning modules linked with 'share' campaigns;
- 4) The development of a budget and securing funds;
- 5) Monitoring, evaluation, and identification of scaling possibilities.

## V.III CONNECT

### OVERVIEW



The 'Connect' element of the platform would provide a way for women to connect with one another in a safe and secure manner, and may include the following features:

- Instant messaging
- Discussion forums
- Webinar capability
- Chat rooms

The 'connect' element, at the time of development of this report, could benefit from further input from co-designers.

### BENEFICIARIES AND PROVIDERS

The 'connect' element would allow for community women to be able to connect with one another directly – through an instant messaging system – or be able to participate in discussion forums or even chat rooms around specific topics and issues.

Figure 6: Designing 'connect'. Source: freepik.com

### ALIGNMENT WITH CORE REQUIREMENTS

The primary purpose of this component would be to provide a place for women to network and connect in a 'safe space' that protects digital rights of all users of the platform. The 'connect' component of the platform could start with simple instant messaging capability and expand to provide additional functionality upon request.

The governing structure will be responsible for providing oversight and guaranteeing the security of the 'safe space'.

### NEXT STEPS

In order to move forward with the development of a pilot project for this element of the platform, the following steps will need to be taken:

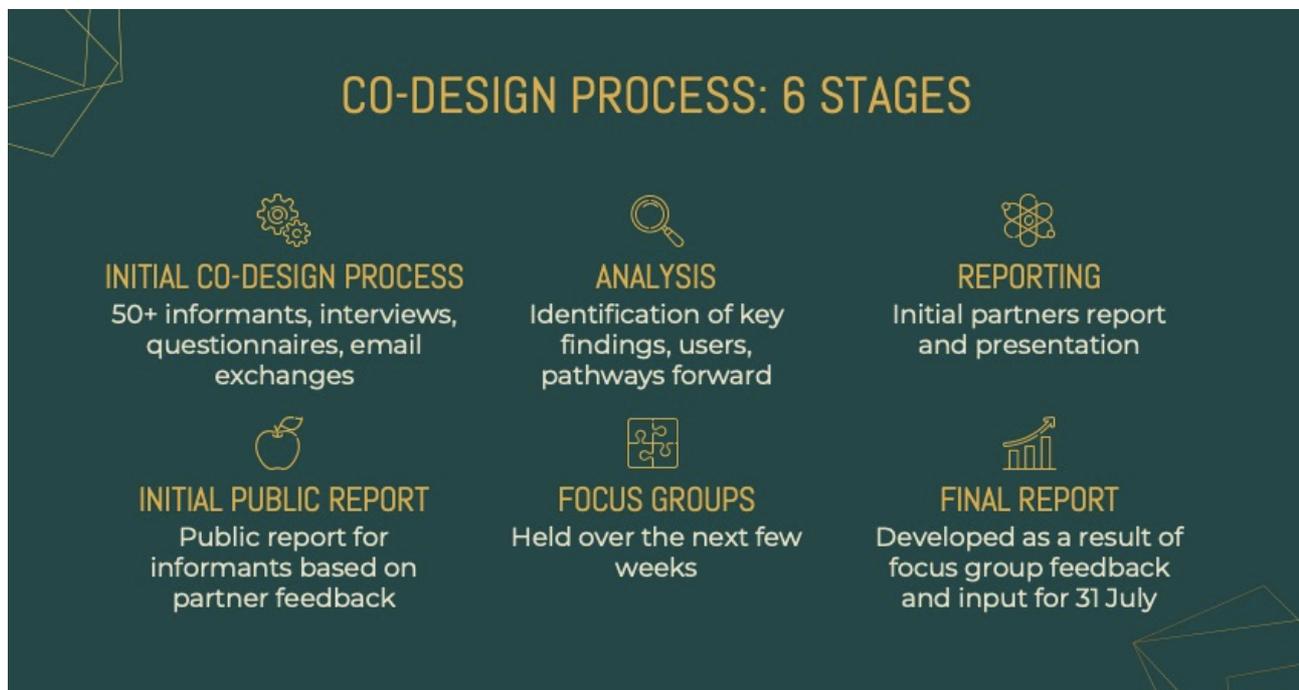
- 1) Consolidation and commitment of project partners, with additional details specifying roles, financial requirements, and the development of a timeline;

- 2) Development of Privacy, Security, Editorial policies and the Code of Conduct;
- 3) The development of a budget and securing funds;
- 4) The development of a prototype, technology selection and development;
- 5) Evaluation and identification of scaling possibilities and the development of additional features as required.

## VI NEXT STEPS AND CONCLUSIONS

The Women and Rivers Storytelling Platform has six activity areas that are being undertaken, and the first three stages are underway/complete.

**Figure 4: Six stages of co-design**



The following three stages will complete the co-design process: the development and distribution of an initial public report, based on the feedback from this report; focus groups; and the development of a final report.

Each of these steps is described briefly below.

### INITIAL PUBLIC CO-DESIGN REPORT

Based on the feedback and discussion from key project partners based on this report and the presentation on 8 July, an initial project report will be circulated to the 53 informants and through other mechanisms as determined by the project partners.

## FOCUS GROUPS

Focus group sessions will be conducted in July to cover some of the key points raised in this initial findings report and to discuss perspectives on key themes and topics identified, including but not limited to:

- 'Share'
- 'Learn'
- 'Connect'

For each of these three focus groups, the following would be explored:

- General feedback and input
- Creating a 'safe space' – what does this mean and how does it look like in technology?
- Fun and engagement – how to bring this into the elements?
- Consolidation of project partners and other stakeholders
- Identifying priority features
- Delineating how to use existing technology and where a new platform is needed

## FINAL REPORT

The final report will take into account feedback on the initial public report and through the focus groups.