

## MESA Project First Training Workshop “Citizen Science for Sustainable Development”

Can Tho University, 18 April 2019

Mekong Environmental Security Atlas Project (MESA Project) is an initiative championed by MEF/CDNC in collaboration with School of Education - Can Tho University (through the Department of Geography Education). The Project is supported by Internews EJV, the Japan-based Takagi Fund for Citizen Science and East-West Management Institute through its Open Development Initiative. MESA is a non-profit webGIS project aiming to build an online interactive map (Atlas) that empowers local contributors to register ecological conflicts and to introduce alternative policy options for better water governance and climate-resilient development in the Lower Mekong Region.

MESA Project consists of three professional training workshops covering citizen science and digital conservation, field-based data and evidence production, and environmental data journalism. A project-end workshop will be public media dialogue to introduce the project outputs and network regional journalists to the webGIS Atlas and other partners' platforms.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of April 2019, the MESA Project has been kick-started by its first training workshop, themed "Citizen Science for Sustainable Development", organized at Can Tho University. The workshop aimed to connect and educate local contributors selected to involve in the project. Basic skill set necessary for field-based data creation and real-life evidence building was introduced at the workshop.



Participants at the workshop





This is an activity that contributes to bringing the Mekong Delta Climate Response Policy (the Resolution 120) in to practice.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nguyen Van No

More than 30 participants including representatives from Farmers Union, Women Union of Soc Trang and Ca Mau provinces, experts, lecturers and students from Can Tho University attended the workshop.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nguyen Van No, Dean of School of Education, emphasized in his welcome remark: The environmental insecurity impacts are threatening the

sustainable development of the Mekong Delta and this challenge will be more complicated in the coming years. Thus, this is an activity that contributes to bringing the Mekong Delta Climate Response Policy (the Prime Minister's Resolution 120) in to practice.

Mr. James Borton, an experienced journalist reporting environmental security in Southeast Asia and former lecturer at South Carolina University, emphasized the role of local communities, especially students, farmers and women, in utilizing smartphones and social networks to contribute data for biodiversity conservation, and out-spread sustainable farming practices. According to James, today's social networking and digital tools, especially smartphones, are commonly used for communication and entertainment purposes. However, they need to be employed more for collecting biodiversity data, environmental data and sharing sustainable development information. This is a "bottom-up" approach that is currently recognized by policy-makers from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment in shaping climate change response policies in the Mekong Delta.

James Borton introduces Citizen Science concepts and the ways social networking tools can be employed to support biodiversity conservation at local level ➔



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**Internews**



The Takagi Fund for Citizen Science



OpenDevelopment Mekong

The focus of MESA webGIS platform is to network communities (women, farmers, and local youth) with experts, university scientists, and journalists in order to promote information-sharing, a dataset on ecological conflicts, environmental pollution, and climate-resilient livelihood models. In this platform, outstanding and enthusiastic university students will be recruited as “young professionals” who work to facilitate the connection between community representatives and scientists and to assist in field-work and dataset producing.

At the workshop, 15 enthusiastic students, who have strong experiences in scientific research, were trained to improve their scientific and data journalism skills. The training sessions were instructed by James Borton, Dr. Duong Van Ni (environmental scientist - Can Tho University) and Ho Chi Minh based journalist Le Quynh, from Nguoi Do Thi Magazine. An additional technical session was co-chaired by Ms. Pyrou Chung (Senior Advisor, East-West Management Institute) and Dr. Thanh Nguyen (ODM local advisor) to introduce how to connect and share their research findings in the Open Development Mekong platform (ODM).

In the final session, the students and local representatives (8 women and farmers) enrolled in professional groups in accordance with their expertise and concerns, including:

- Group 1: Environmental Security,
- Group 2: Environmental education and climate change adaptation for ethnic minority women, and
- Group 3: Climate-resilient livelihoods.

These three groups worked proactively under enthusiastic supervision from the trainers to develop their own research proposal and fieldwork plan. These groups are expected to produce journalism stories and field-based dataset reporting a local environmental issue that they concern that will be published in the MESA platform.

After a few hours jointly working on the research proposal, representatives from each group presented their research plans. Their proposed dataset is designed in various forms of visualization and media styles, such as infographic story-telling, minutes-long documentary films, primary field-based data and evidence, and photo gallery. The group presentation session drew strong attention and productive commentation from experts and local community representatives to help clarify and theorize the research problem of each group’s proposal.





Group work and presentation at the workshop

To facilitate the post-workshop fieldwork, the MESA Project has offered 3 mini-grants (\$300 each) to help three professional groups implement their projects in May 2019. Their research outputs will be reviewed and presented at the second training workshop scheduled to be held 7 June 2019. Their work then will be registered on the MESA Project webGIS as the first trial environmental stories/dataset in the Mekong Delta.

At the workshop, we also launched a post-event survey. The purpose of this survey was to gather feedback from 23 trainees to help us make informed planning decisions for future events. The survey results show that 96,65% of participants rate the workshop “excellent” and 65,22% rate “well-organized”. 95,63% find the MESA Project helpful to their voice and right to environmental justice. Almost 80% trainees are most likely to recommend the MESA Project to their friends.



Below are some photos at the workshop:



Ms. Pyrou Chung and Dr. Thanh Nguyen presenting at the workshop



Dr. Duong Van Ni (senior lecturer of the Faculty of Environment and Natural Resources, Can Tho University) teaching basic science skills and writing skills.



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Mrs. Nguyen Thi My Loan - Women Union Leader in Soc Trang Province



Farmer Nguyen Van Phu (second from left) representative from Farmers Union in Ca Mau Province

Report by MEF/CDNC Communication Team  
Photo credits: Tri Tin and Mai Khanh



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