

The Mekong Delta has a 736-km long coastline, representing 23% of the country's length and 360,000-km² of exclusive economic zone, so it performs a very important role in the development of marine economy and national defense.

The marine economy combines closely economic activities onshore and alongshore. The Mekong Delta's coastal area (MDCA) includes towns and districts bordered by 7 provinces of Tiền Giang, Bến Tre, Sóc Trăng, Cà Mau, Bạc Liêu and Kiên Giang.

The comparative advantage of the MDCA is a long coastline and many large islands and islets in the Gulf of Thailand and adjacent to ASEAN countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore,... These areas have abundant marine resources with large fishing grounds, huge reserves of fish and shrimp (about 1.8-2.1 million tonnes), 480,000 ha of large tidal zone, including 300,000 ha for developing fisheries, 50 islands such as Phú Quốc, Thổ Chu, Hòn Khoai, Hòn Tre..., 25 river mouths along with a network of big rivers which is useful for sea transport, numerous beautiful beaches, landscapes and relics for tourism, salted flooded forests for extending areas with deposits of silt, strengthening protective forests near river mouths, and preserving sources of forests and wild animals... In addition, the Mekong Delta coastal area also possesses a large reserve of lime (in Hà Tiên - Kiên Lương) and potential area for rice growing.

The area's population is estimated at 8.5 people in 1995, accounting for 53% of the Mekong Delta's residents. Rural areas are the main location for over two-thirds of alongshore population. The workforce makes up 50% of the coastal residents and is engaged in agriculture and fisheries. The technical workers and managers are short and cannot yet meet the local requirement for development.

Over the past years, the MDCA's economy has made significant progress. The area's GDP reached VNĐ17,887 billion, or 50% of the Mekong Delta's GDP, but per capita GDP US\$192 lower than the Delta's average. So the coastal area is not thriving and has not yet tapped its potentials.

The coastal area's economic structure is purely agricultural and backward. The GDP percentage of agro-forestry-fishery sectors is 63% of the area's figure, the industry and

ON THE MEKONG DELTA'S MARINE ECONOMY

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construction sectors make up a ratio lower than the Delta's average (20%) and the country (19.65%). The marine economy's contribution is still too low, many sectors are not available or under-developed.

Agro-forestry-fishery is a major sector of the MDCA, accounting for 53% of the Delta's GDP in this sector, in which the farming takes a better part, followed by the fishery. Rice is a principal plant, the status of monoculture is prevailing, many plants of high values are not cultivated.

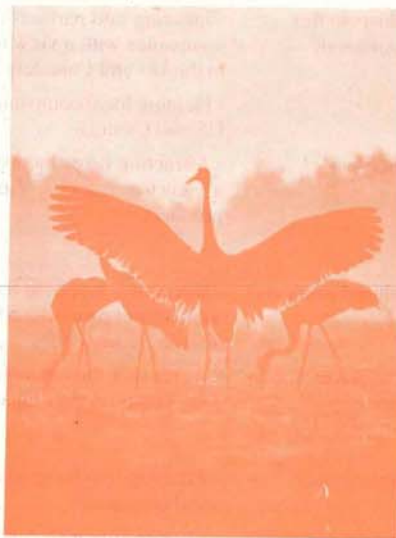
The fishery is a key sector in the MDCA's economy. In 1995 the sector exploited and raised some 550,000 tonnes of marine products, accounting for 90% of the Delta's output and 45% of the national output, but its growth has not matched up with the area's potentials.

The coastal area's industry is still in the embryonic stage. The industries of processing marine products, building and repairing ships are small and poor, the coastal industrial park and export processing zones have not been built.

The MDCA's services represent 23% of its GDP, far lower than the national percentage (41.65%), the export turnover 62% of the Delta's earnings. Its major exports include sea products and rice. Marine services have not been promoted such as sea transport, tourism...

The area's infrastructure, especially communications network, power and water supply, postal and telecommunications service, is in poor condition. The system of waterway, an advantage of the coastal area, has been worsened, not been dredged and upgraded. The electricity has been transmitted to most towns and districts, but only 50% of remote villages have been electrified. The fresh water has not been exploited for production and the people's life. Many localities are short of fresh water.

The MDCA's cultural and social life has a lot of restriction, the percentages of pupils and skilled workers are too low. The ratio of doctor is 2.1 to 10,000 people. The social issues have not been thoroughly settled, the unemployed and the poor





still makes up big percentages. The nourishing and sanitary conditions are not ensured, the ratio of children suffering from severe malnutrition is still high. The environment in some places is polluted, unclean water is still widely used.

From the MDCA's poor socio-economic infrastructures and untapped potentials, the development direction is to intensify its marine economy. The area's advantages in this field are rather plentiful. But in recent years the area has not made the best use of these advantages. As a result, to develop the MDCA's sea economy will be a means of industrializing and modernizing this area in particular or the country on the whole.

The target is to secure the coastal area a growth rate higher than the Delta's average and restructure its economy in the direction of combining economic development with defense and security.

The following are some fields to focus efforts on:

1. Improvement of catching and breeding marine products:

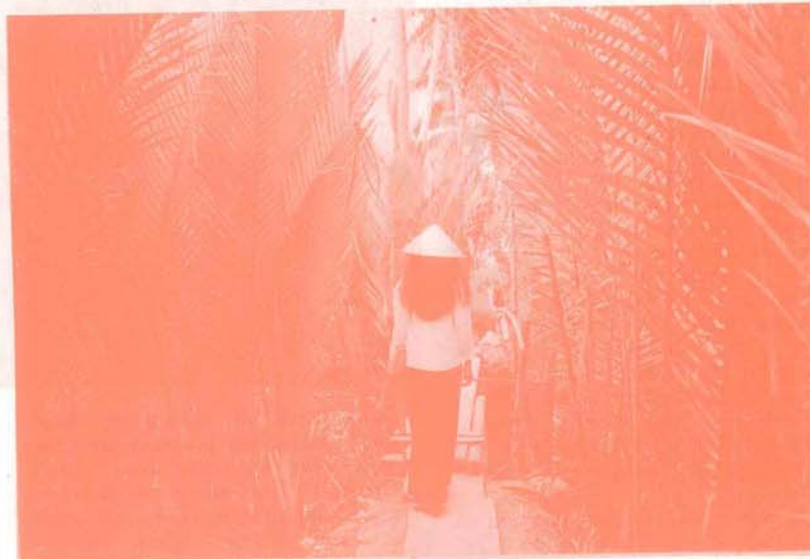
- The area shall tap its potentials and favorable position to speed up growth rate of exploiting and breeding marine products and make its production thrive sustainably.

- The area shall strengthen its distant offshore fishing, limit coastal exploitation, give priority to investment in fishing infrastructures and facilities and enhance the breeding of sea products alongshore, at the islands and tidal zones.

2. Construction and development of sea communications and transport:

The sea transport sector shall build Kiên Lương sea port with a capacity of 3-4 million tonnes/year, Cà Mau port 1,5 million tonnes/year, and upgrade ports of Năm Căn, Đại Ngãi, Đại An and Mỹ Tho.

In addition the sector shall set



up a seagoing fleet to travel to ASEAN countries with a capacity of 10,000 tonnes and 1,000-tonne barges running on Tiền and Hậu Rivers.

3. Developing coastal tourism:

The ecological system of salted flooded forests including Năm Căn forest is an abundant tourist resource of the Mekong Delta with an area of about 300,000 ha, ranking third in the world after Brazil and Philippines. In addition, offshore islands, such as Phú Quốc, can be also attractive to tourists. Phú Quốc, the

country's biggest island, with an area of 660,000 ha, has a wildlife preserve and many beautiful beaches. Similarly, Thổ Chu, an southeastern island from Phú Quốc possesses a picturesque plant cover and beaches.

With the above advantages, coastal tourism should be developed into an important sector of the area.

4. Establishing factories to build and repair ships:

The demand for ship repair and building of coastal provinces in the Mekong Delta is increasing. To meet this demand, the factories for ship repair and building shall be established. Ship building companies in the southern and northern focal economic areas should be paid attention to when the area maps out the investment plans to develop its ship building sector. Based on this, investments should be concentrated on providing services of repairing 15,000-tonne ships and building 6,000-tonne ships.

5. Building IPs, EPZs and sea economic centers

Most of the Mekong Delta's

coastal provinces planned to build 1-3 IPs, including coastal IPs such as Kiên Lương, Bạc Liêu, Đại Ngãi and Đại An, sea economic centers such as Cà Mau, Phú Quốc. These centers will concentrate their resources on boosting trade, export, tourism, processing industry.

However to make the coastal area's plans come true is a very difficult task to develop the entire delta. But once its potentials are tapped, the area should contribute significantly to the Delta's wealth ■