

MOVIES

'Mekong 2030' Anthology to Focus On Plight Of Mekong River

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Courtesy of Luang Prabang Film Festival

Filmmakers (from left) Sai Naw Kham, Kulikar Sotho and Anysay Keola.

A new Luang Prabang Film Festival initiative has asked five Southeast Asian directors to focus on the vital river's future.

Five Southeast Asian directors will present their visions — and fears — for the future of the Mekong river, one of Asia's most vital waterways, through the anthology *Mekong 2030*, which is set to tour the world's festival circuit next year.

"I heard about global warming and climate change and stuff like that, but that was just hearing. Being on the shoot myself, on the river, only then did I realize that it's actually coming toward us," said Cambodian filmmaker Kulikar Sotho, part of the project and previously a Special Jury Award winner at Venice for *Ruin* (2013).

Sotho has been joined on the project by Anysay Keola (Laos), Sai Naw Kham (Myanmar), Anocha Suwichakornpong (Thailand) and Pham Ngoc Lan (Vietnam).

Initiated by Laos' Luang Prabang Film Festival (LPPFF), the "cross-border" collaboration tasked the five filmmakers with looking to the year 2030 and envi-

sioning the condition of the river — which carves its course through China, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam — as well as the communities that depend on it.

The river has come under increasing threat from pollution and from a series of massive dams, according to the Mekong River Commission (MRC).

"We need to address these issues now in order to minimize further environmental harm and protect remaining wetlands and riverine habitats before they are gone, while leveraging the benefits of more secure and increased dry season flows and achieving a more optimal and sustainable development of the Mekong basin," said Dr. An Pich Hatda, CEO of the MRC secretariat, at last month's launch of his organization's "State of the Basin" report.

The anthology has been supported by The Asia Foundation, Oxfam, Heinrich Böll Foundation and the MRC.

"LPPFF plans to submit these as a collective program to festivals and conferences across the world, in order to raise awareness among international audiences for the issues addressed in

the films," festival organizers said.

The five films:

***Soul River*, Kulikar Sotho (Cambodia):** *Soul River* is a cautionary tale framed as a lighthearted road (or, rather, river) movie. Set in 2030 in a remote northeast region of Cambodia, it urges contemporary audiences to reconsider their attitudes toward environmental degradation and the impact of climate change on the Mekong basin.

***The Che Brother*, Anysay Keola (Laos):** Xe returns to the nearly deserted Mekong fishing village in which he was raised. There, he intervenes in a dispute between his siblings over the ethics of exploiting their elderly mother's blood. The blood has become a valuable commodity to a Western corporation that has been developing a cure for a deadly plague outbreak.

***The Forgotten Voices of the Mekong*, Sai Naw Kham (Myanmar):** This film tells a story of two women fighting to claim their lost spirits' attachment to the Mekong River, while channeling community resilience toward its protection.

***The Line*, Anocha Suwichakornpong (Thailand):** As an artist prepares to open a new exhibition focusing on animism and river ecology, the boundaries between the artwork and the world it represents begin to merge into a site where different forms of knowledge converge.

***The Unseen River*, Pham Ngoc Lan (Vietnam):** This film tells a story about a middle-aged woman traveling upstream to find a lover she hasn't seen in 30 years, told alongside a story of a young couple traveling downstream to a strange temple in search of a cure for chronic insomnia.