



## **GMS Working Group on Environment**

### **23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting**

**12 July 2017  
Siem Reap, Cambodia**

### **Summary of Proceedings**

#### **Introduction**

1. The 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Working Group on Environment (WGE) was held on 12 July 2017 in Siem Reap, Cambodia. The meeting reported on achievements and key results of the GMS Core Environment Program (CEP) in 2016 and the CEP work plan for 2017 through to the completion of the program in March 2018. The draft CEP Strategic Framework and Action Plan, 2018–2022, (Strategic Framework) and its pipeline of proposed projects was overviewed and discussed. Progress with preparations for the 5th GMS Environment Ministers' Meeting (EMM-5), scheduled for February 2018 in Chiang Mai, Thailand was also discussed. The agenda is available as [Appendix 1](#).

2. The meeting was chaired by H.E. Mr. Sao Sopheap, Director of Cabinet, Ministry of Environment (MoE), Cambodia and co-chaired by Mr. Pavit Ramachandran, Senior Environment Specialist, Asian Development Bank (ADB). The meeting was attended by representatives from the environment, agriculture, planning, finance and investment, and tourism ministries of Cambodia, PRC, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand, Viet Nam, as well as GMS National Secretariat Focal Point for . Also present were GMS Core Environment Program's (CEP) co-financing and other development partners, including from the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Resource persons for the event attended from the Climate Policy Initiative (CPI) and Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI). The full list of participants is in [Appendix 2](#). Cambodia's MoE hosted the event with the support of the GMS Environment Operations Center (EOC).

#### **Opening Session**

3. Mr. Pavit Ramachandran delivered the opening remarks on behalf of ADB. He underscored the importance and timeliness of the meeting in light of the final year of CEP Phase II implementation and preparations for the next phase of the program as well as the upcoming EMM-5. According to Mr. Ramachandran, WGE AM-23 and the EMM-5 2<sup>nd</sup> Task Force Meeting (held immediately after WGE AM-23) are strategic opportunities to engage GMS environment ministers in high-level policy dialogue and to reinforce their commitment to inclusive green growth in the region. He reported on the continued progress of CEP towards

achieving many of its 2016 milestones and significant progress in more efficient and effective program delivery as well as the formulation of CEP Phase III Strategic Framework. The Strategic Framework will guide the development of a robust thematic next phase of the program that is a demand driven, country owned “service model,” and supported by a pipeline of bankable projects.

4. On behalf of the host government, H.E. Mr. Sao Sopheap welcomed participants and recognized the achievements of the WGE over the past 10 years. He highlighted significant successes in terms of mainstreaming environment into development planning; improving cooperation on transboundary biodiversity conservation, low carbon development, and knowledge sharing. He also cautioned the meeting about the emerging environmental challenges facing the region resulting from rapid economic growth that has been underpinned on the intensive use of natural resources. He reiterated the importance and timeliness of the annual meeting in ensuring the continuity of regional cooperation and partnerships on the environment. He ended his remarks by encouraging participants to maximize opportunities to take stock of CEP progress, assess the effectiveness and readiness of the program in responding to environmental challenges, and importantly, guide the preparation of the Strategic Framework and strengthen commitment to the program. See [Appendix 3](#) for the remarks.

5. Country heads of delegation were then asked to deliver their opening remarks. They expressed their appreciation to the Government of Cambodia as host of the meeting and in partnership with EOC for the excellent meeting arrangements. They also stated their commitment to strengthened collaboration. PRC cited the usefulness of the workshop on green growth held 11 July in discussing new developments in environmental management at the global and regional levels and in exploring opportunities. Lao PDR, Thailand, and Viet Nam highlighted the importance of the WGE meeting in planning the future of the program. Myanmar took note of the significant progress made by CEP. Thailand underscored the following points: (i) the need for improved collaboration across sectors, including business, to promote and ensure their interest and involvement in environmental sustainability; (ii) its support to strengthen CEP as an environmental knowledge center for the GMS; and (iii) the need for increased action to address e-waste and chemical pollution issues. Thailand also commended CEP on the Green Freight Initiative, which opened opportunities for collaboration with the transport sector towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions and mitigation measures. Finally, Thailand, as host of EMM-5, invited member countries and development partners to actively participate in the preparation of the meeting and side events. Viet Nam stressed the role of regional collaboration in helping countries meet the Sustainable Development Goal targets and commitments to the Paris Agreement.

## **Session 1: Progress and Achievements and Workplan**

6. The six GMS member countries reported on their respective country achievements and progress in the implementation of CEP during 2016. Progress on regional and cross-cutting components of the program were then presented by EOC. Also covered in the various presentations were the challenges encountered in program implementation, opportunities that can be pursued, and work plan for the remaining duration of the program.

7. Mr. Khieu Borin, Cambodia, highlighted CEP support to develop the country's *National Environment Strategy and Action Plan* (NESAP), which has been submitted to the National Council for Sustainable Development for review before it goes to Cabinet for endorsement. Progress was also made in the preparation and finalization of a memorandum of understanding

(MoU) for collaboration between Cambodia and Thailand in transboundary areas between the Cambodian Cardamom Mountains and Thailand's Eastern Forest Complex. Also in securing government agreement for the preparation of studies and a policy on payment for ecosystem services (PES) and the piloting of PES schemes by the Ministry of Environment (MoE). The application of the industrial pollution projection system; capacity building on environmental impact assessment (EIA), climate change adaptation and community risk and vulnerability assessment were among the other highlights mentioned. Mr. Borin, head of the Cambodia CEP National Support Unit (NSU) was recently appointed as Director General for the General Directorate of Local Community, MoE. This provides a welcome opportunity to mainstream environmental and climate change considerations into MoE strategies and policies. Approval of the NESAP documents is among the main deliverables for 2017. See [Appendix 4](#) for the presentation.

8. Ms. Hu Yunfang, PRC, reported on the establishment of the ASEAN-China Environmental Framework in 2016 that aims to strengthen cooperation in the joint conservation and management of and knowledge sharing on natural resources and the environment. Achievements in strengthening transboundary landscape monitoring and management included: the development and implementation of a transboundary conservation plan for Cao Vit Gibbon by Guangxi, PRC and Cao Bang, Vietnam and the development and application of the *Guidelines for Tropical Restoration for Xishuangbanna*. Other important achievements during the reporting period include the completion of a pilot project on participatory land use planning the Nabanhe-Mangao biodiversity corridor; the joint development of the first transboundary wild elephant conservation plan in the GMS between Yunnan in PRC and Luang Namtha, Oudomxai, and Phongsali in Lao PDR; the provision of village development funds to three villages in Guangxi and Yunnan provinces; and the preparation of a *Guide on EIA—Impact on Biodiversity* and a video on Xishuangbanna's biodiversity conservation corridors. Also mentioned were the various capacity building and knowledge sharing events conducted with CEP funding. In terms of challenges, the operationalization of the MoU on transboundary biodiversity conservation cooperation between PRC and its neighboring countries was highlighted. The accumulated best practice examples and learning experience from the decade-long engagement in CEP activities is viewed as an opportunity to document, analyze, and disseminate information for replication and up-scaling. Deliverables for 2017 include the preparation of a publication on scaling up of best practices, a regional knowledge sharing event on transboundary biodiversity landscape management in the GMS. See [Appendix 5](#) for the presentation.

9. Mr. Lonkham Atsanavong, Lao PDR, informed the meeting that the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE) has created various mechanisms to operationalize and enforce the government's vision towards green and clean economic development with environmental sustainability by 2030. He reported that efforts toward strengthening subregional and national strategic planning capacity has progressed well through the development of a monitoring framework for the Industry Pollution Projection System, the preparation of a concept note on pollution control strategy, and consultation and capacity building activities on strategic environmental assessment. Bilateral activities with PRC were carried out, including the development of a transboundary wild elephant conservation plan and preliminary consultative discussions on a cooperation framework on the environment between Xishuangbanna, Yunnan PRC and Luang Namtha, Lao PDR. A situational analysis of non-timber forest products in Biodiversity Conservation Corridor project sites in Sekong, Champasack and Attapeu was undertaken as part of the CEP regional value chain activity. Fuel efficient technologies, eco-driver training, and improved logistics measures were successfully pilot tested under CEP's

Green Freight Initiative. Delays in the implementation of activities were noted due to technical capacity constraints and issues on advance liquidation and fund replenishment. The recent transfer of the WGE focal point to the Department of Environment Quality Promotion (from the Department of Pollution Control) is seen as a positive development in strengthening cross-department coordination and cross sector cooperation. See [Appendix 6](#) for the presentation.

10. Dr. San Oo, Myanmar, highlighted environmental safeguards strengthening as the major CEP achievement during 2016. This included the launch of the *EIA Procedure and Environmental Quality Emission Guidelines* in January 2016, the ongoing preparation of the mining sector EIA guidelines and ambient environmental quality guidelines. Also mentioned were the updating and expansion of the Myanmar Environmental Information Portal to include new indicators. Capacity building activities on EIA report review and compliance monitoring were carried out during the reporting period with personnel from the Environmental Conservation Department (ECD), other relevant ministries. Best practices and learning experiences on transboundary biodiversity landscapes and biodiversity conservation corridors were discussed and exchanged with PRC. Expansion of the activities of the ECD to the district level provides opportunities to enlarge its sphere of influence but at the same time implies an increased workload of staff and highlights the need for ongoing capacity building. Priorities for 2017 include the completion of the *National Environmental Quality Standards* (based on interim ambient and emissions guidelines), guidelines on EIA for the mining sector, expanded support for EIA report review and approval, as well as project compliance monitoring, technical support for capacity development of new ECD staff, technical assistance on pollution control for air and water quality monitoring in Nay Pyi Taw, and accelerated NSU activity implementation. See [Appendix 7](#) for the presentation.

11. Ms. Kingkan Kheawsaad, Thailand, reported on key achievements in three main areas: biodiversity conservation corridors in the Eastern Forest Complex, the piloting of the Green Freight Initiative to foster low carbon sustainable freight transport, and the establishment of a Steering Committee to provide direction and oversee the implementation of CEP activities. The Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plants Conservation conducted an impact assessment of the CEP Phase I project in the Western Forest Complex, results of which showed the effectiveness of interventions in ecosystem/habitat restoration through the village development fund and community participation. CEP facilitated consultations between Cambodia and Thailand that have resulted in the preparation of a draft MoU for joint conservation management of border areas of the Cardamom Mountains and Eastern Forest Complex. Pilot testing of fuel efficient technologies as part of the Green Freight Initiative showed improvement in vehicle performance indicators from 5%–15.6% with implications on reduced fuel consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. Encouraged by the initial outcomes of the green freight pilot testing, a green freight Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Action proposal to the Green Climate Fund will be developed for funding consideration. Priority activities for 2017 include the following: impact and land use change assessment reports on the CEP biodiversity conservation corridor support in the Western Forest Complex; a habitat assessment report and guidelines and action plans for biodiversity landscape management in the Eastern Forest Complex, agreement on the MoU between Cambodia and Thailand, continued pilot testing of green freight initiative measures, and preparations for the EMM-5, which Thailand will host. See [Appendix 8](#) for the presentation.

12. Dr. Kim Thi Thuy Ngoc, Viet Nam, stated that the national action plan to implement the sustainable development goals and the action plan to implement the Paris Agreement provide the foundation for pursuing green growth in the country. CEP provided technical support to

Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE) in drafting guidelines on monitoring, planning, and safeguards that will be used in formulating an environmental protection circular accompanied by technical guidelines. Biodiversity landscape assessment and profiling were conducted and workshops were held to draft biodiversity landscape management strategies and actions plan. Capacity building activities among community leaders were also carried out as part of the ecological/habitat restoration project in the Sino-Viet Nam Karst Biodiversity Landscape. The Green Freight Initiative was successfully pilot tested, including assistance to two trucking companies in obtaining green freight accreditation. Technical support was also extended to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in the development of a Payment for Forest Environmental Services (PFES) Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. Various institutional strengthening and outreach activities were conducted throughout the reporting period. Viet Nam successfully hosted the 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting of the GMS WGE on 26–27 July. Dr. Ngoc identified collaboration among line ministries and the sustainability of CEP results and initiatives beyond the duration of the program as key challenges. On the other hand, the National Action Plan to implement Sustainable Development Goals, the *Paris Agreement Implementation Plan*, among others, present opportunities to pursue and collaborate on and scaling up of green growth initiatives. The workplan for 2017 will deliver on the following outputs: biodiversity landscape management strategies and actions plan, Green Freight Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Action, further support to Viet Nam's Natural Capital Platform, and field trials on a PFES Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. See [Appendix 9](#) for the presentation.

13. Following the country presentations, the Chair supplemented information on various efforts by the Government to sustain their natural resource base, including the formulation of the NESAP (2016–2023) which is targeted for government endorsement in August 2017 and launch later the same year, ongoing biodiversity conservation corridor projects and the establishment by government of several biodiversity conservation corridors covering 1.3 million hectares, PES engagement, and high level support on natural resources management. He mentioned interest in exploring collaboration with Thailand on biodiversity corridor management and with Viet Nam on PES. The Co-chair commended the countries for the significant progress made, particularly in transboundary landscape management and institutional strategy and policy development, and highlighted the need to identify opportunities or entry points for scaling up as the CEP Phase III Strategic Framework is being developed. Mr. Teak Seng, WWF, reinforced the need to scale up the landscape management approach to address some of the emerging conservation challenges in the region. He also expounded on the basic building blocks of a landscape approach that involves multiple stakeholder participation as a key element. Ms. Lourdes Adriano, GMS Core Agriculture Support Program (CASP), highlighted possible synergies between CEP and CASP involving the whole segment of the value chain to reduce the carbon footprint and promote resource efficiency. Dr. Sumani, focal point from the Agriculture Ministry of Cambodia, cited transboundary management and GMS biodiversity corridors as possible opportunities for CASP-CEP collaboration.

14. Mr. Suchat Katima, EOC, then presented the achievements of the program in delivering cross-cutting results. CEP strengthened regional cooperation on the environment and natural capital by bringing together key stakeholders from the GMS development sectors, national GMS Secretariats, CEP strategic and implementing partners, among others, in regional events to exchange, learn, and plan strategic and collaborative measures to sustain the environment. The program also contributed to the development of the national policy and strategies of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam, and an initiative to establish a transboundary mechanism in protected area management and biodiversity conservation between Cambodia and Thailand.

CEP initiatives, knowledge products, and a new regional information portal have all contributed towards strengthening the role of EOC as a regional knowledge hub and resource center. Key deliverables for the remainder of CEP Phase II were noted as follows: the National Pollution Control Strategy for Lao PDR, a GMS environment performance assessment report (2006–2016), launch of the Cambodia NESAP, PRC biodiversity conservation and management best practices and experiences, various guidelines on biodiversity conservation and climate adaptation, Green freight NAMAs for Viet Nam and Thailand, the CEP Phase III Strategic Framework, and the delivery of EMM-5 including various lead up events. He concluded with a request to the WGE to help in expediting the implementation of CEP activities in their respective countries. See [Appendix 10](#) for the presentation.

## **Session 2: CEP Way Forward**

15. Mr. Sumit Pokhrel, EOC, summarized the direction planned for the next phase of the program by providing an overview of the draft CEP Strategic Framework. He stated that through its decade long implementation, the program has a track record of achievement and developed core competency in the following areas: as an emerging regional center of excellence on strategic planning, policy and regulatory frameworks; knowledge management, decision support and best practices; and stimulating environment and climate investments. Building on these achievements and core competencies and to expand the impacts of the program, he explained the proposed design for the next phase of CEP and the process that went into design formulation. He expounded on the activities that will be supported by the next phase of the program that will cover knowledge management, policy advisory, strategic planning technical support, and investment preparation. He also discussed the implementation arrangements of the program that will be financed initially through a regional technical assistance from ADB. CEP will also source financing for its activities from other funding agencies to finance a proposed pipeline of projects. An initial list of six priority projects that were proposed by the countries were discussed, some of which were identified as candidates for inclusion in the GMS Regional Investment Framework (RIF). Inputs from the previous day's "Workshop on Green Growth in the GMS: Best Practices" were discussed as guide in revising the project pipeline. Finally, the timeline for delivering on key outputs was explained with the objective of securing the endorsement of the CEP Phase III Strategic Framework and project pipeline at EMM-5. See [Appendix 11](#) for the presentation.

### **Development Partner Statement**

16. Mr. Erik Holmqvist, Nordic Development Fund (NDF), representing the co-financing partners acknowledged progress and achievements made in the implementation, administration, and communication aspects of the program resulting from engagement and mobilization of NIRAS Finland Oy to manage CEP implementation since 2016. Going forward, he encouraged the program to build on its achievements by developing an economically viable pipeline of green investments for the region for its next phase. He stressed the need for countries and partners to continue and strengthen their commitment to a green growth path for region. In closing, he encouraged strengthened closer sectoral collaboration, starting with the Core Agriculture Support Program, to maximize on green investment opportunities. See [Appendix 12](#) for the presentation.

17. Country representatives, the Chair, and Co-Chair acknowledged NDF and the Government of Sweden as strong co-financing partners and look forward their continued support. The Chair and Thailand noted the suggestion on strengthened collaboration between

CASP and CEP. Thailand suggested the linkage between livelihoods and biodiversity landscapes as an area to explore. PRC summarized three key points in the donor statement as follows: (i) closer collaboration between CEP and CASP, (ii) better utilization of project results, and (iii) ensure country inputs. Cambodia and PRC pledged their renewed support to the program.

### **Breakout Groups on Needs Assessment**

18. Country representatives were then divided into breakout groups to discuss country needs including areas where CEP support will be required under the next phase of the program. Development partners were grouped separately to discuss possible areas of collaboration with CEP. Facilitators were assigned to each group to guide discussions. Results of the breakout group will be analyzed by EOC as an input to the development of the CEP Strategic Framework.

### **Closing Session**

19. The draft WGE AM-23 Record of Discussion was read out and then discussed with some minor changes being made before it was endorsed by the countries. See [Appendix 13](#) for the Record.

20. Ms. Rhodora Concepcion, ADB, provided an overview of upcoming events in the GMS. Of particular relevance to the CEP are: (i) the 22<sup>nd</sup> GMS Ministerial Conference on 18 and 20 September 2017 in Ha Noi, Viet Nam, where the Ha Noi Action Plan (2018–2022) and the RIF are among the key deliverables. Also the 6<sup>th</sup> GMS Summit on 29–31 March 2018, in Ha Noi, where the adoption of various sector strategies and action plans, including for environment, are among the possible deliverables. She presented on the preparations for the 22<sup>nd</sup> GMS Ministerial Conference, where inputs from the environment sector are requested (e.g., Chair's Report on the Environment during the Senior Officials' Meeting, Joint Ministerial Statement on the Environment, a sector assessment, inputs to the Ha Noi Action Plan and RIF. She then reported on the initial assessment of the Midterm Review (MTR) of the GMS Strategic Framework (2012–2022), which noted the relevance and alignment of the program with country and regional priorities and needs but pointed to the implementation of RIF investment projects as an ongoing challenge. Overall, MTR findings on the environment sector were generally positive. Preliminary recommendations of the MTR and details on the Ha Noi Action Plan were also presented. See [Appendix 14](#) for the presentation.

## Appendices

All appendices are hyperlinked, click on the title to access.

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- Appendix 2:** [List of Participants](#)
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- Appendix 4:** [Core Environment Program \(CEP\) Implementation Progress–Country Highlights in 2016: Cambodia](#)
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- Appendix 14:** [Upcoming GMS Program Events and Initial Assessment of the Midterm Review of the GMS Strategic Framework \(2012–2022\)](#)