

GMS Working Group on Environment 7th Semi-Annual Meeting

**Beijing, People's Republic of China
25 October 2012**

SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

Introduction

1. The 7th Semi-Annual Meeting of the Working Group on Environment (WGE AM-18) was held in Beijing, People's Republic of China (PRC). The meeting was hosted by the Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP), with support from the Greater Mekong Subregion Environment Operations Center (EOC). The major objectives of the meeting were to (i) report on Core Environment Program and Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative's (CEP-BCI) activity status and component strategies, (ii) discuss CEP-BCI implementation, and (iii) discuss related programs.
2. The Meeting participants included delegations from Cambodia, PR China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Viet Nam and Thailand. Also in attendance were Asian Development Bank (ADB) representatives; EOC staff; a representative from the Swedish International Cooperation Agency (Sida), Global Environment Facility (GEF) focal points as well as PRC government observers and a representative from China-ASEAN Environmental Cooperation Center.
3. The participants' list, presentations, and other key documentation from the meeting is available on the EOC website: <http://www.gms-eoc.org/events/WGE-SAM-7>

Session 1: Welcome and Agenda Setting

4. Ms Song Xiaozhi, MEP, PRC, welcomed participants and briefly talked about the history of the GMS Program and CEP-BCI, including the BCI approach and achievements. Ms Song reaffirmed PRC's commitment to assisting and supporting the GMS to protect the environment and thanked ADB and donors for their support.
5. In his opening remarks, Mr Sanath Ranawana, Southeast Asia Regional Department, ADB, emphasized the solid foundation CEP-BCI Phase I provides for Phase II. He reflected on his recent field trip to the BCI pilot site in Deqin county in Yunnan, and how the county government was very coherent about its plans for poverty reduction and ecological conservation. Mr Ranawana introduced the rationale behind the component strategy frameworks, describing them as a new modality for implementation with a strong focus on outcomes and results, rather than activity management.
6. Ms Li Pei, MEP, introduced the meeting agenda.

Session II: Reporting on Current Activity Status and Program Implementation Strategy

Component 1: Environmental planning systems, methods, and safeguards

7. Mr Iain Watson and Mr Lothar Linde, EOC, presented on Component 1 activity progress for 2012 and then provided an overview of the draft component strategy, outlining subcomponents, major activities, mile-stones and monitoring indicators.

8. Ms Kim Thi Thuy Ngoc, Viet Nam, suggested that economic assessment milestones should be brought forward. Dr Songtam Suksawang, Thailand, suggested that the focus should be on a regional level study as individual countries have already initiated various studies of their own. Dr San Oo, Myanmar, highlighted that his country would like to engage in Component 1 activities. Ms Cui Dandan, PRC, said that more discussion would benefit strategy development. Mr Choun Chanrithy, Cambodia, suggested that milestones and targets should vary between country to reflect different contexts, capacities, and policy situations.

Component 2: Landscape conservation

9. Mr Sumit Pokhrel, EOC, presented on Component 2 progress and the strategy. Mr Ranawana, ADB, discussed the potential of lessons learned from BCI work in Deqin to be applied to other countries as work there was technically strong. He also mentioned the potential to leverage additional funds, including from the private sector, to extend conservation corridor protection.

10. Dr Songtam, Thailand, said BCI lessons have drawn lots of attention from government, particularly on the importance of corridor landscapes. For Phase II he suggests that transboundary activities with Myanmar, Lao PDR and Cambodia are looked at, including coastal and marine work and also the Eastern Cardamoms. He pointed out the need to investigate the potential for transboundary Letter of Agreements (LoAs). Dr Songtam also emphasized the need to further engage local government in corridor work and to establish protected areas rather than national parks, with the latter not allowing non-timber forest product use by local people.

11. Ms Dandan, PRC, emphasized the importance of biodiversity conservation work as it supports national and provincial strategic planning processes. PRC wishes to add country-specific details to the strategy paper and discuss the feasibility of the timelines indicated.

12. Mr Sein Moe, Myanmar, said his country is already applying integrated conservation and development activities in the Western Forest Complex. He pointed out that Myanmar would like to engage in national and regional landscape conservation initiatives under Phase II, particularly in regard to biodiversity mapping and climate change adaptation. In response, Mr Ranawana, ADB, noted that ADB and development partners are now able to increasingly engage in Myanmar and that CEP-BCI will soon work on developing a broader program of activities for the country, including under this component.

13. Mr Sounadeth Soukchaleun, Lao PDR, said lessons from Phase I are being adopted during Phase II. His government have identified provinces, districts, and villages as implementation units and that there is potential to replicate work in Namha with PRC as well as along the border with Viet Nam.

14. Mr Chanrithy, Cambodia, proposed further discussions to identify the appropriate activities on the ground. He pointed out the institutional issue Cambodia has with biodiversity and protected areas being under the Ministry of Environment while forestry sits with the Forestry Administration. Capacity from Phase I is feeding successfully into the country's work under the Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Project, but coordination problems continue. Mr Chanrithy emphasized the importance of this component, but pointed out the need to integrate with provincial and national land-use and sector plans.

15. Mr Zhou Bo, PRC, reflected on the varying levels of biodiversity planning (ecosystem, national parks, etc) that PRC had undertaken and the potential to formalize methodologies for linking economy with environment and informing national planning processes. He said best practices from Yunnan and Guangxi BCI work can be shared with other GMS countries and that work with Lao PDR on transboundary protected area management has been initiated.

Component 3: Climate resilient and low-carbon strategies

16. Following Mr Pokhrel's presentation, Mr Ranawana, ADB, clarified that the Nordic Development Fund is particularly interested in CEP-BCI's adaptation and mitigation work.

17. Ms Aree Tummakerd, Thailand, highlighted the importance of sharing REDD+ information with communities so they are encouraged to participate in forest protection and that they received more benefits from carbon credits. She also mentioned the possibility of Thailand following PRC's example in energy efficiency as a mitigation measure but said financial support for both adaptation and mitigation would need to be identified.

18. Ms Ngoc, Viet Nam, said there was particular interest in Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions, REDD+, and MRV/REL. She mentioned that CEP-BCI should ensure it builds on other programs, such as UNDP, and that there was potential for Viet Nam to work with Lao PDR on landscape management in Mekong River provinces.

19. Dr Songtam, Thailand, asked whether CEO-BCI has done site-level work on MRV/REL. He pointed out that Thailand is already working with communities to develop carbon credits. Mr Ranawana, ADB, cautioned about the need to develop best practices before scaling up, citing the issue of 'carbon cowboys.'

Component 4: Institutions and financing

19. Following the presentation on Component 4, delivered by Mr Pokhrel, EOC, a brief presentation on CEP-BCI finances was given by Mr Sompongse, EOC. There were no questions or discussion following these presentations, however, Mr Ranawana, ADB, did add additional information about ADB's administrative requirements.

Session III: CEP-BCI Phase II Implementation

20. Ms Naeeda Crishna-Morgado and Mr Linde, EOC, presented the draft Phase II Results-based Monitoring Framework, which was followed by a presentation by Mr Sompongse, EOC, on the status of National Support Units and CEP-BCI implementation procedures. Ms Ulrika Akesson, Sida, then read out a joint donor statement from the governments of Sweden and Finland.

21. Ms Ngoc, Viet Nam, sought clarification on differences between NSU recruitment of consultants and administrative staff. In response, Mr Ranawana, ADB, said that as CEP-BCI is a Technical Assistance, all consultants must be hired through the Consultant Management System. He also mentioned the various modalities for recruitment, including possible 'standing contracts' and the hiring of firms/consultants for a package of activities. He emphasized that the recruitment process in place is important for transparency.

22. Ms Dandan, PRC, highlighted the need for ongoing technical support on different aspects of program management and suggested a half day session on this to occur around annual and semi-annual meetings.

23. Mr Chanrithy, Cambodia, in response to the donor statement thanked the donors for their ongoing assistance and requested financial and technical support for NSU establishment and operations. He highlighted that NSU establishment in Cambodia is underway with a letter to the Minister to be followed by institutional discussions. Mr Chanrithy emphasized that Cambodia supports Myanmar in whatever activities they want to be involved in under the program. On mainstreaming environment into other sectors, he said more capacity is still required and so far that

had been a lack of follow up activities from the tourism strategic environmental assessment due to the low engagement of the tourism ministry. Mr Chanrithy identified an energy sector SEA as a priority and also the need to strengthen data systems.

24. Mr Heuan Chanpana, Lao PDR, thanked the EOC for their work to implement activities and mentioned the need for their help to further develop workplans and data sharing with other countries.

25. Mr Wang Xin, PRC, agreed with the donor statement and said that Phase II preparations are stronger than those for Phase I. He emphasized the importance of having clear targets but warned some may be difficult to reach. Mr Wang proposed to use semi-annual meetings to cover other implementation or technical topics and said he hoped the good rapport and cooperation will continue for Phase II.

26. Dr. Oo, Myanmar, pointed out with the large political changes in his country, that there is a growing momentum to be involved in CEP-BCI and other environmental programs. Ms Khin Thida Tin, Myanmar, added that they were appreciative of the scheduled safeguards workshop for the country and suggested that NSU establishment could be discussed further around that event.

27. Mr Long Rithirak, Cambodia, mentioned the need to look at water resources including upstream and downstream issues. He highlighted the need to provide greater support to Myanmar, including through the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

28. Ms Tummakerd, Thailand, mentioned that NSU establishment should be further discussed and potentially completed by next year.

29. Mr Ranawana, ADB, expressed appreciation to both co-financing partners for their continued support during a difficult economic period in Europe and also for their hands on participation in the program. He noted challenges in transitioning into Phase II, including with recruitment and particularly with the Technical Program Head position not yet being successfully filled. Mr Ranawana pointed out the lengths ADB goes to ensure recruitment is fully transparent including the WGE 'no objection' layer. He noted the need for the program to better engage with the private sector and also mentioned that to avoid duplication with the Mekong River Commission, CEP-BCI should deal with transboundary water management in the context of area based plans and water/energy security,

Session IV: Other Related Programs

30. Ms Wang Hui, China-ASEAN Environmental Cooperation, presented on that program's recent activities as well as its overall strategy. Mr Ranawana, ADB, then presented on the GEF Forest and Biodiversity Program, focusing on its regional work and linkages with CEP-BCI and GEF's national projects.

Session V: Closing

31. Mr Soukchaleun, Lao PDR, pointed out that according to the country rotation schedule for hosting WGE meetings, Lao PDR will be holding the next meeting. His delegation will consult with their ministry to confirm dates and location for the WGE 19th Annual Meeting. Provisionally, the proposed dates are 26–27 March 2013 and will possibly be held in Xieng Khoang. This would see the WGE meeting be back to back with the planned GMS Working Group on Environment annual meeting.

32. Mr Ranawana, ADB, confirmed the desirability of dovetailing with the WGA annual meeting. Additionally, he explained the changes in the WGE meeting schedule to be 3-months after the revised annual and semi-annual reporting periods. No national holidays were identified during week of week of 25-30 March.

33. The meeting chair and co-chair expressed their appreciation for the work accomplished since the May WGE 18th Annual Meeting and recognized that a clear structure is now in place for program implementation. Congratulations were given to Myanmar for their full involvement in the program and PRC committed to renewed efforts to support CEP-BCI. Mr Ranawana, ADB, thanked EOC staff for their hard work, and study tour organizers, participants and donors for attending. With that, the meeting was closed.