Dialogue on Priorities for Post-Pandemic Green and Resilient Recovery in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS)
Virtual Meeting of the Working Group on Environment (WGE)
Hosted by Asian Development Bank, 23 June 2020

Summary of Discussion

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The **COVID-19 pandemic has taken a drastic toll on human life**, with close to 15 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 and over 600,000 deaths around the world. The Greater Mekong subregion (GMS), **is greatly affected in terms of income, food security, and livelihood**. M**illions of people** in the GMS are likely to **fall into extreme poverty, with the existing poor already experiencing even worse conditions**. COVID-19 now adds to the existing set of uncertainties and challenges in terms of climate and other environmental changes.

Asian Development Bank (ADB) recognizes the devastating effect of COVID-19 pandemic on the GMS countries and emphasized the critical role of multilateral cooperation in managing the pandemic and mitigating its health, social and economic impacts. In response to COVID-19 crisis, **ADB aims to support the GMS member countries in restoring their momentum with post pandemic green and resilient recovery.**

On 23 June 2020, **ADB held a virtual dialogue with the GMS Working Group on Environment (WGE) with the theme "Priorities for Post-Pandemic Green and Resilient Recovery**". There were **over 140 participants** from six GMS countries, namely: Cambodia, China, Myanmar, Lao PDR, Viet Nam, and Thailand; international organizations; non-government organizations (NGOs); research institutions and universities. The virtual dialogue aimed to **present and discuss COVID-19 impact on development; assess the progress of GMS countries' response to the pandemic, including challenges and opportunities; and the national government priorities for COVID-19 response and recovery.** The GMS-WGE dialogue has been highly successful and productive in terms of knowledge sharing and resulted to a formulation of practical measures for post-pandemic green and resilient recovery. Highlights of the discussions were:

- **The significant impact of the pandemic on key sectors requires integrated and strategic implementation of national priorities.**
- **Financing is key to implementing post-pandemic measures.**
- **Better coordination and harmonization are needed among the GMS countries.**
- **South-South knowledge exchange and partnerships with appropriate institutional responses are essential.**
- **The broader public, including civil society and private sector, need to be fully engaged in post-pandemic response and recovery.**

CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION

1. **In a little over six months since the emergence of the COVID-19 coronavirus, there are more than half a million deaths, almost 15 million infections** and meanwhile, infections are still being detected, and in some places rising sharply. Those are just the confirmed numbers, plus an estimated $10 trillion in economic stimulus from the world's governments. According to United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), despite vast efforts worldwide to address the symptoms of the coronavirus pandemic, the root causes have been largely ignored. It was also largely ignored to rebalance the needs of people, the planet and animals and to describe how so much of human activity in recent years has laid the foundations for this pandemic of such huge magnitude. Increased urbanization, the rapid expansion of cities and industrialized agriculture are some of the biggest causes for concern and between them, they have caused unprecedented levels of climate change, loss of biodiversity and environmental damage.

2. **COVID-19 is a human tragedy that turned into global public health crisis and developing into worst economic recession that humankind not experienced.** To understand this historical significance of this current COVID situation, Asian Development Bank (ADB), convened the GMS-WGE virtual meeting on 23 June 2020 with all GMS country focal points, invited speakers and discussants, subject matter experts and ADB colleagues to understand the historical significance of this worst pandemic situation and its broader impact on society, economies, culture, government, and human behavior. Through timely, insightful presentations and interactive sessions, this dialogue is served to unite a subregion toward solutions to benefit all of Asia region. This event is also to discuss with GMS member countries about their national priorities to address the the impact of the coronavirus pandemic and outline opportunities to make society fairer, smarter and greener, and get humanity off the road to climate catastrophe.

3. **GMS-WGE dialogue on "Post-Pandemic Green and Resilient Recovery" and meeting objectives.** Dr. Ancha Srinivasan, facilitator, GMS-WGE dialogue introduced the event to the virtual participants and highlighted how COVID-19 is devastating to our lives and our economies and how the poorest and the most vulnerable are suffering the most, directly through loss of life and indirectly through loss of livelihoods. It was emphasised that, **to prevent future outbreaks, national governments must be much more deliberate about protecting the natural environment.** It was also recapitulated that outbreaks will emerge unless governments take active measures to prevent other zoonotic diseases from crossing into the human population. Science is also very clear stating, if wildlife is exploited and ecosystems destroyed continuously, then future could be expected to see a steady stream of pandemic diseases jumping from animals to humans in the years ahead.

4. The **objectives of this dialogue were set out to bring together GMS national government focal points, public and private organizations** to: i) **explore the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for bottom-up transformations to sustainability in GMS subregion and** ii) **discuss the immediate challenges of COVID-19 for GMS countries and to set priorities for working to ensure livelihoods for people in marginal environments**.

5. Given the GMS location is in southeast Asia, the dialogue focused not only on Asia but also covered global trends on COVID-19 policies, strategies, and investments. The following meeting agenda were adopted that read as follows (see Annex-1 for official virtual meeting agenda).

(i) *Opening remarks* – Ramesh Subramaniam, Director General, Southeast Asia Department, ADB followed by 3-minute video on ADB's response to COVID-19

(ii) Presentations by GMS WGE representatives on *post-COVID environment-friendly and climate-resilient response and recovery efforts* in each of the GMS

countries (Cambodia, China, PRC, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, Viet Nam), and expectations of ADB's support in priority themes (WGE 2020 Co-chair**s:** Jiangfeng Zhang, Director, SEER, ADB and Sounadeth Soukchaleun, DDG, MONRE, Lao PDR)

(iii) Updates on (i) *ADB TA 9915: GMS Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability Program*, and (ii) *GMS Regional Investment Framework 2022 for Environment* – Srinivasan Ancha, Principal Climate Change Specialist, ADB

(iv) *Kickstarting Post-Pandemic Green and Resilient Recovery in the GMS*. Presenter - Srinivasan Ancha, ADB; Discussant - Stefanos Fotiou, Director, Environment and Development Division, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (ESCAP); and Reflections by GMS WGE representatives and other participants

(v) *Post-Pandemic Priorities for Biodiversity and Wildlife Management in the GMS* – Presenter - Xi Jiao, Resource Person, ADB; Discussant - Colin Poole, Regional Director, Greater Mekong Wildlife Conservation Society; and Reflections by GMS WGE representatives and other participants

(vi) *Post-Pandemic Priorities for Sustainable Waste Management in the GMS*. Presenter - Mushtaq Memon, Regional Coordinator for Circular Economy, United Nations Environment Program; Discussant - Stephen Peters, ADB; and Reflections by GMS WGE representatives and other participants

(vii) Concluding Remarks by WGE 2020 Co-Chairs

II. SESSION 1: OPENING REMARKS

6. In the opening session, the Director of SERD, **Mr. Jiangfeng Zhang** has delivered the opening remarks on behalf of DG Ramesh Subramaniam (hereafter the Director). All the participants such as distinguished WGE focal points from all six GMS member countries, development agencies and civil society including the private sector and ADB colleagues were welcomed for this virtual WGE dialogue. Mention was made about the outline of the new CCESP TA programme and welcomed its upcoming launch. The key highlights from the DG's message were as follows.

7. COVID-19 has provided an opportunity to rethink the scientific conference and the online meetings has become the new norm new normal. This meeting was original planned to be held in person in Bangkok in March 2020. It was emphasised that, it is good to have meeting virtual to bring momentum as it is very critical and to set priorities in the context post-COVID-19 pandemic recovery.

8. The COVID-19 is unprecedented and unpredictability of the COVID-19 pandemic has indeed triggered rethinking of existing economic models all over the world at various levels and in the GMS too. The impacts of this coronavirus exacerbated the pre-existing vulnerabilities of developing countries in Asia and other parts of the world, and how are the nations going to support the urgent needs of people and communities. This is time for reflection.

9. The important question raised was what kind of post-pandemic recovery is need in the region and the subregion? Which should be stronger, more resilient, more inclusive, and more sustainable than the earlier efforts?

10. Reference was made about the lessons learnt from the recent deliberations of ADB's hosted first High-Level Experts Dialogue (6-9 June 2020) on "COVID-19 Transition and Recovery in Southeast Asian". Also highlighted was the ADB's launched COVID-19 monitoring dashboard and policy database as tools for information sharing and regional cooperation in adjusting with COVID-19; and the starting of policy advice on COVID-19 economic recovery dialogue series. ADB is also learning the COVID-19 recovery measures that were

implemented and successfully earned results from the countries like South Korea recovery plans, New Zealand approach and tomorrow on the tourism revival with participation of GMS Tourism Coordination Group.

11. GMS has received world-wide appreciation as it has done extremely well in adjusting to the pandemic in comparison to the southeast Asian nations and also to the rest of the world. Despite its success in minimizing the human loses, GMS nations however, did not escape from serious socio-economic impacts of the pandemic. It should be noted that, GMS as subregion is still relatively small, and open and dependent on external demand for its growth. Domestic demand in the GMS is very important, but is not enough to drive entire GMS economy for a long-time; when its agriculture products, tourism and energy are essential.

12. For GMS countries to fully recover from this pandemic, it is very important that the rest of the global economy need to recover as much faster as well.

13. Regional cooperation in diversifying the devising of the post-pandemic recovery efforts is critical, and also what GMS could do to revive global cooperation. In this context, ADB believes that it is very essential that the GMS leaders and senior officials of the member nations show directions to other regions.

14. Four key points were listed to determine the post-pandemic recovery for the member countries to reflect upon:

(i) Firstly, do we need to invest more in competitive clean energy and low-carbon transport sectors? Or do we continue to provide support to older carbon intensive and polluting industries?;
(ii) The International Energy Agency (IEA) is projecting a 20% decline in the global clean energy investment amounting to US$ 400 billion, which is historic projection. However, it is believed that GMS countries can partly reverse this projection.
(iii) ADB believes that under post-pandemic recovery plans, GMS countries can take-up lead in supporting clean energy and transport investments and take this pandemic crisis as an opportunity for transition to development of more renewable energy sources.
(iv) So far, during the pandemic, renewable energy has been the most resilient energy sources. ADB is committed to support clean energy investments of at least $ 4 billion per year, with 65 percent of it devoted to promotion of renewable energy.
(v) Secondly, GMS economies and livelihoods are dependent on success of agriculture, tourism, industry and other services sectors. What structural changes are critical in making these sectors and the communities that are dependent on these sectors would be made more resilient to future pandemics. Do we want investment in more healthy and resilient recovery systems or do we want to investment in more vulnerable systems as we had before? For example, COVID-19 has anticipated food insecurity in many parts of the world and also in some GMS countries.
(vi) Thirdly, the links between disease, health and biodiversity had made it more clear by the COVID-pandemic. Current economic thinking unfortunately has not recognized that human race depends on nature heels. We have seen many diseases emerge over the years such as ZIKA, AIDS, SARS, MERS, EPRa and now the COVID, who all originated from animal population on the conditions of severe environmental pressures such as increased poaching, illegal logging, and forest fires. It is known that many countries are hastily engaged in the environmental conservation which is needed the most during this time. It is also time to invest in climate-smart landscape, protection of

biodiversity, and sustainable wildlife management or rather than continue to exploit more environment and wildlife that will emanate more of COVID type pandemics.

(vii) Fourthly, COVID-19 has also led to generation of plastic and medical waste. ADB report estimated that medical waste in southeast Asia will increase 6 times during the period of the 2-3 months of COVID-19. For example, in Thailand, the pollutions control dept. had reported that the amount of plastic waste in packaging has increased to 15 percent from 5500 tons to 6300 tons per day due to three-fold increase in food demand delivery. So do we want to invest in the circular economy when the issue of waste is quickly phased-out or continue to use single-use plastics that pollutes air, water, soil and the marine?

15. All GMS countries have committed to SDGs and the Paris climate agreement for Asia to meet its SDGs and shift to renewable energy for sustainable environment. The IEA has noted that Asian countries need to spend US$ 3 trillion each year over the next decade. ESCAP findings for their recent assessment found out that, limiting the global temperature increase to 1.5^{o}C as per Paris agreement is highly dependent on how GMS countries will choose to pursue their post-pandemic recovery.

16. GMS countries should avoid focusing on the quick-wins and further continuing with business-as-usual approaches, and getting locked-in decades of high carbon and unsustainable development.

17. It is also interesting to note that GMS countries are adopting quickly to new technologies, and armed with information, knowledge and know-how and ADB's willingness to provide additional support for GMS countries to make structural changes in transitioning to green economy. Under this overall objective, ADB is willing to learn and understand from the heads of delegations how ADB could support countries in the post-pandemic recovery and also move towards green, inclusive and resilient economies.

18. Towards the end of the opening remarks, DG Ramesh Subramanian, himself has joined the meeting and added few more remarks. It was highlighted that, GMS is one of the most vibrant regional cooperation program among all the regional programs that the ADB is implementing. DG has emphasised that this meeting is very important and very timely, and also noted how countries are looking closely about the post-recovery process, how fast the recovery process could be and how to make the recovery more sustainable.

19. The event also highlighted the efforts to provide more technical assistance to the countries through the consolidation of the two support program (CCESP and SAFSP) by allocating more internal funds from ADB. Regionally, ADB is providing additional assistance to countries in the region on Health aspects in parallel to these two programs, which is on high priority for countries to address the pandemic. The DG also has recollected the establishment of the High-Level Expert Panel including the stalwarts like Nick Stern (London School) to provide expertise for countries and to make recovery process more green and sustainable. In this context, ASEAN-ADB Infrastructure Fund was set-up with two windows consisting one of ASEAN Catalytic Green Financing Facility that supports projects on mainstream environmental impacts with green focus; and another one with inclusive financing window that will support concessional assistance to Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar. Lastly, the DG also emphasized about the PRC Fund for poverty reduction and regional cooperation supporting the regional cooperation and integration aspects for the GMS subregion.

III. SESSION 2: COUNTRY PERSPECTIVES ON POST-COVID RESPONSE AND RECOVERY BY GMS WGE COUNTRY REPRESENTATIVES

20. Presentations were made by GMS WGE representatives on post-COVID environment-friendly and climate-resilient response and recovery efforts in each of the GMS countries, and expectations of ADB's support in priority themes.

A. Cambodia

21. The presentation was made by **Sao Sopheap**, Secretary of State, Ministry of Environment, Government of Cambodia.

22. It was highlighted that Cambodia is working very hard to contain the outbreak of the COVID and totally 129 infected with 100 percent treated and recovered and there are no community outbreaks in the country. **Government has issued strict quarantine guidelines on controlling the outbreak in the countr**y.

23. The service sector has affected the countries with government sectors being affected to a very large extent.

24. **People who rely on the service sector and government sectors and their livelihoods and income sources were seriously affected**.

25. The government also stressed that it has been watching very closely **the COVID-19 outbreak seriously impacting on the natural resources management and the biodiversity of the country**. The government was also estimating the number of protected areas that were seriously impacted due to this outbreak situations. The exact number is not still known and however, the initial monitored small-sized protected areas that could be under the affected areas could be around 7.2 -7.3 million hectares.

26. Their respective Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment is working closely with the development partners, ADB, World Bank, USAID, and NGO such as Conservation International.

27. Under the protection of conservation work, the Government is continuously monitoring the impact of the COVID outbreak on protection conservation and biodiversity aspects as an ongoing process. **The migrant workers who used to rely on the government sector and service sector (CT Center or provincial town) for income has now lost jobs due to COVID and they are now moving to their communities**.

28. Government, through Ministry of Environment is taking important measures with alternative livelihood opportunities. The ministry has around 168 community protect areas in the country, and providing livelihood opportunities through livestock interactions and non-timber products value chains for the workers.

29. **Regarding climate resilience, there is absolute need for environment friendly and climate protection with infrastructure facility at community level during and post – pandemic situation**

30. On the energy sector, **Cambodia is still pursuing energy mix policy and Government is at 25 percent of renewable energy initiatives through solar power**. Government is also undertaking drastic reforms in the municipal waste management system e.g. Phnom Penh city. Under this new system and with new service provider that 3,500 to 5,000 tons of waste will be generated per day. Country-wide, a new sustainable plastic waste management will also be established.

31. The **priorities Cambodia enlisted for post-pandemic support** from the ADB-CCESP project are: **community development, livelihood options compatible with locally**

available resources, climate resilient infrastructure for local community, transboundary biodiversity conservation, and REDD+ with carbon credits

B. People's Republic of China

32. The presentation for PRC was made by **Zhou Jun**, Acting Director, Division of Asian, African and Latin American Affairs, Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Ecology and Environment, the Government of PRC.

33. The **Government is committed about addressing the outbreak of COVID-19, and has taken decisive measures by putting its people's life and health first with more holistic approach tackling the COVID-19 impact on economy and society**. Currently, the pandemic control has been gradually consolidated and life and work is returning to normalcy.

34. It was emphasized that the **Chinese government puts high importance in the participation of the GMS environmental cooperation with its neighbouring countries.** PRC, under the ADB's 10-year core environment program has enhanced communication, facilitated knowledge sharing, improved environmental governance capacity, and achieved positive progress in biodiversity conservation, climate change and promotion of mainstreaming of its environmental policies.

Excerpts from the Speech:

- **Chinese government put people's life and health first.**
- **The government took a holistic approach in addressing the impact of COVID-19 on the economy and society; and on ecological and environmental protection with more balanced approach.**
- **Gradually, life and work returning to normal at a faster speed.**
- **COVID-19 outbreak highlighted the importance of international cooperation in tackling global challenges.**
- **The Government strongly advocates regional environmental cooperation and continue to actively support and participate in the GMS environmental cooperation, synergize the mechanisms and work along with other GMS countries**
- **The Government is willing to work with other countries to boost the green and low-carbon recovery and contribute positively to sustainable development in the subregion.**

35. For the ecological and environmental protection, it was stated that the Chinese government has been consistently issuing series of steps with a balanced approach. They are:

(i) Formulation of positive list for **environmental impact assessment (EIA**) to facilitate the launch and implementation of projects through promotion of simplification or exemption of EIA procedures for 3 categories of construction projects;

(ii) Formulation of positive list for **improved efficiency and effectiveness of environmental law enforcemen**t through promotion and adoption of modern sensing and big data technologies, and facilitation of off-site supervision to maintain a level playing field for businesses;

(iii) Enhanced technological guidance and instruction for **improving the environmental protection capability** of the businesses, key industries, and companies with pollution treatment technologies;

(iv) Facilitation of **effective implementation of preferential policies and development of specialized market for environmental industries**. The improved mechanisms were "polluters pay + third-party treatment", accelerated tax benefits, financial support for environmental industries, and also the launch and operation of national green development fund.

(v) The other improved mechanisms that promoted were **integration of environmental industries with emerging technologies such as 5G,**

Artificial Intelligence, Industrial Internet, Big Data, Cloud Computing, and Blockchain, to incentivize the development of new green infrastructure.

36. Further, Chinese government highlighted the growing importance of international cooperation in tackling global challenge such as the COVID-19 pandemic. China has always been an active participant in global environmental governance, and a steadfast champion of multilateralism.

37. **China, as strong advocator of regional environmental cooperation, would continue to actively support and participate in the GMS environmental cooperation**, and work along with other GMS countries to synergize the mechanisms of GMS environmental cooperation, Lancang-Mekong environmental cooperation, China-ASEAN environmental cooperation and BRI Green Development Coalition and promote green and sustainable economic growth, and benefit all peoples in the subregion.

38. Lastly, the Government enlisted **China's post-pandemic priorities** for the proposed ADB-CCESP project. They are:

(i) Kickstarting green and resilient recovery and potential environmental cooperation in the GMS countries through the **GMS environmental cooperation platform** and willing to work with other GMS countries **to boost the green and low-carbon recovery** and contribute positively to sustainable development in the subregion.

(ii) To work on **biodiversity and wildlife management** with the GMS countries and create a shared community for life on earth **featuring harmony between man and nature.**

(iii) To promote **sustainable waste management** by sharing experiences on **zero-waste cities** within GMS countries and also work together to promote the **sustainable urban development** in the subregion.

C. Lao People's Democratic Republic

39. The presentation was made by **Sounadeth Soukcheleun**, Deputy Director General for the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Government of Lao PDR.

40. **Some of the key achievements for Lao PDR under the previous CEP programme** were highlighted (see exhibit 1), which were: strengthened sub-regional and national strategic planning capacity; strengthened transboundary biodiversity landscape monitoring and management; developed and tested low carbon interventions for transport and energy sectors; and establishment of an NSU capable of effective program implementation and sector coordination.

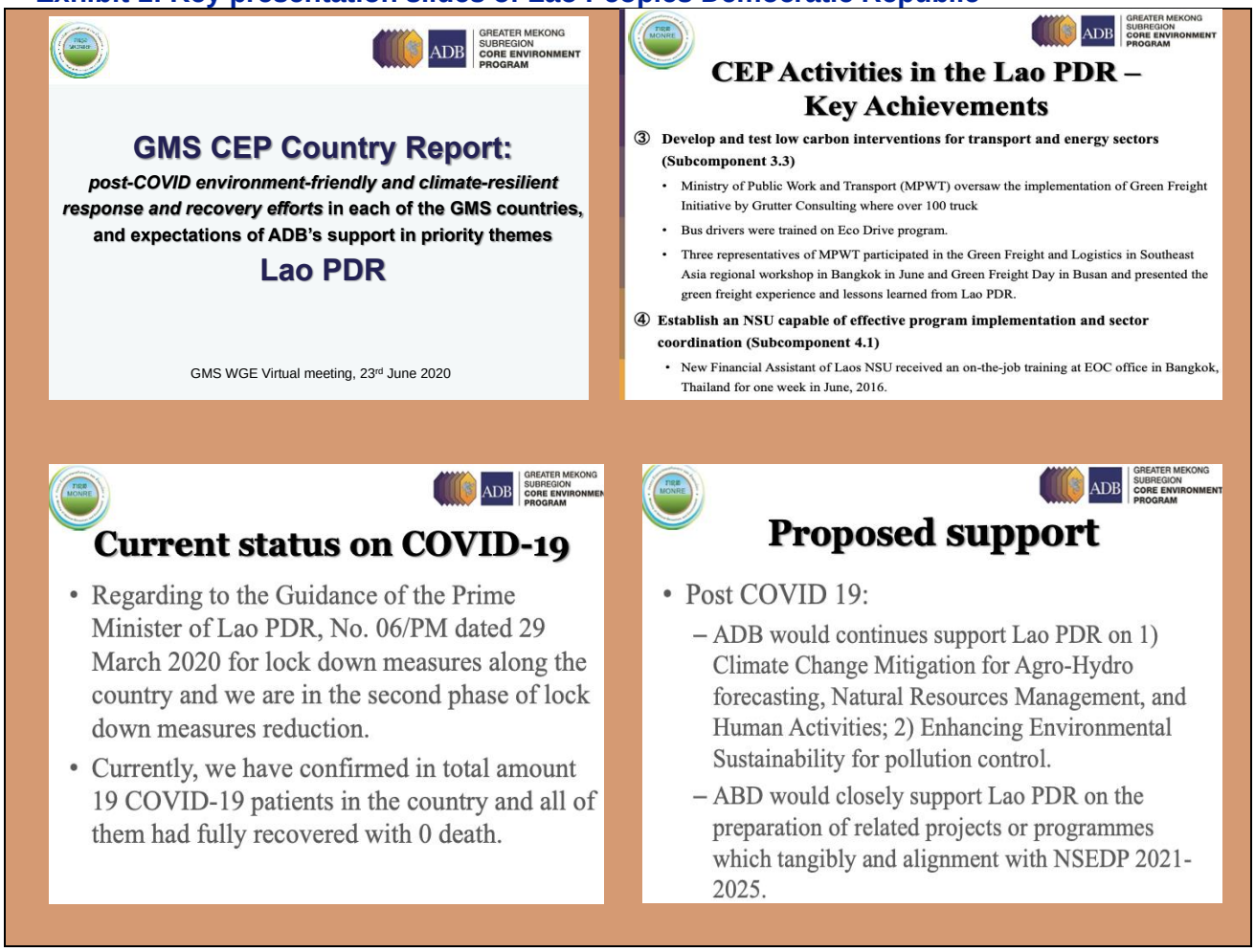
41. Update was also made on the current status of the COVID-19 outbreak and its impact on the country and the necessary measures that were taken by the Government. It was mentioned that the **Lao PDR has been effectively implementing the COVID-19 response measures by following the Prime Minister's guidance note on lockdown**. Totally, Lao PDR has registered 19 infected COVID patients and all of them fully recovered with no casualties.

42. Lao PDR also expressed their concern about some outstanding issues related to the previous phase of CEP program with more serious being the delayed implementation of activities on climate change and environment.

43. The **list of key priorities that were proposed by Lao PDR** for the proposed new ADB-CCESP project support were:

(i) **Climate change mitigation for Agro-Hydro forecasting**; natural resources management, and human activities;
(ii) Enhancing environmental sustainability for **pollution control**; and
(iii) Any additional resourceful **support from ADB towards preparation of pipeline projects** or programmes aligning with the thematic priorities of NSEDP (2021- 2025).

Exhibit 1: Key presentation slides of Lao Peoples Democratic Republic



D. Myanmar

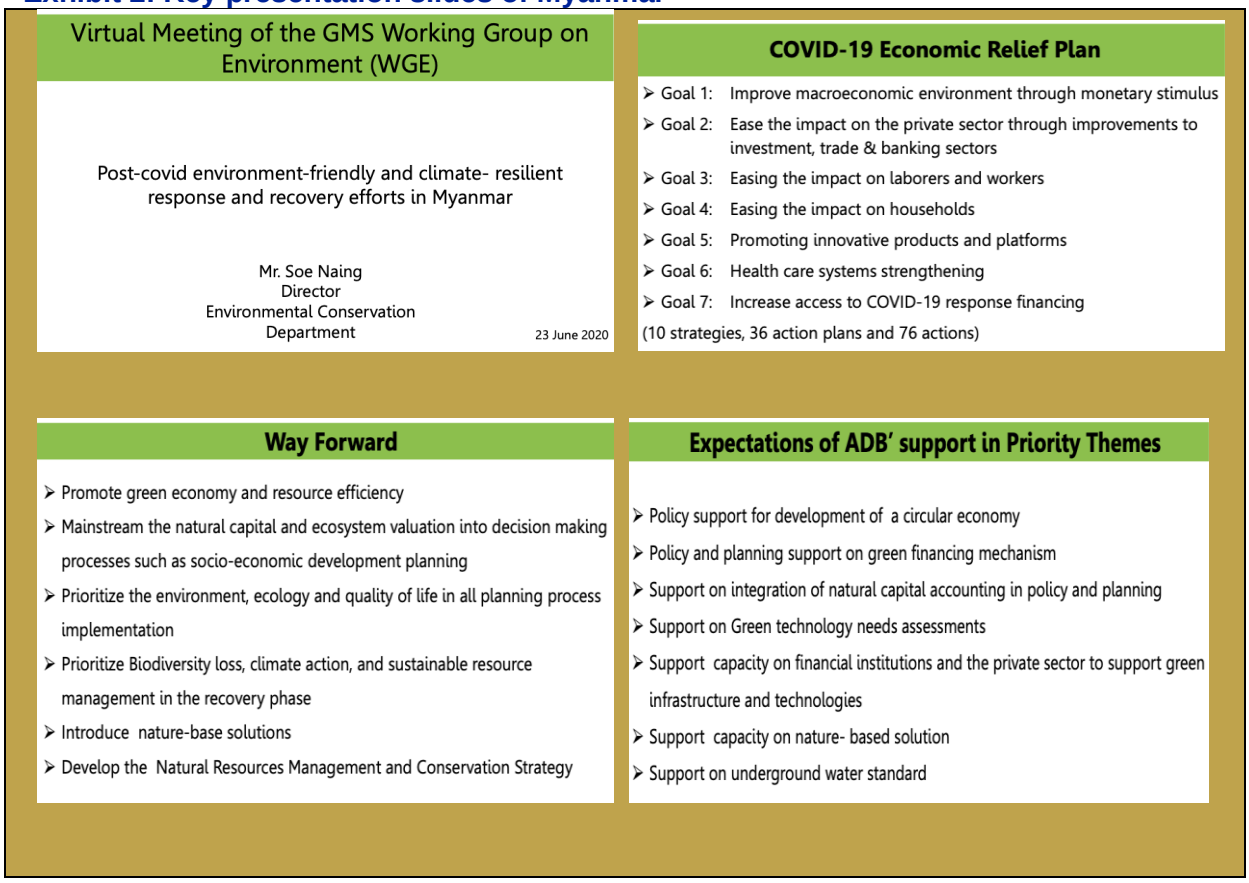
44. The presentation was made by **Soe Naing**, the Director for Environmental Conservation Department in the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation, Government of Myanmar.

45. The Government of Myanmar is deeply involved in environment and sustainable development taking into consideration of its diverse ecosystems, natural resources and environmental assets.

46. The Government also showed **some of the key challenges faced in the environment and natural resources and biodiversity conservation**, which are: **pressure on ecosystem and habitats; illegal wildlife trade; land use change; population growth; pollution; climate change; overharvesting; invasive species; and complex interconnections among the health of people, animals, plant and environment**.

47. Myanmar launched many measures in addressing the COVID-19 to guide response and recovery for the country. The country also established the Government's economic relief plan consisting of 7 recovery goals for countering the current pandemic situation and bringing the economy back on wheels (see exhibit 2). The details of these goals are: **improve macroeconomic environment through monetary stimulus (Goal # 1); ease the impact on the private sector through improvements to investment, trade & banking sectors (Goal # 2); easing the impact on laborers and workers (Goal # 3); easing the impact on households (Goal # 4); promoting innovative products and platforms (Goal # 5); health care systems strengthening (Goal # 6); and increase access to COVID-19 response financing (Goal # 7)** (10 strategies, 36 action plans and 76 actions). In this line, the Director presented list of various environment, natural resources and climate related policies, strategies and enacted laws.

Exhibit 2: Key presentation slides of Myanmar



48. In the way forward, the Government also presented **some of the critical sectoral issues for consideration in the proposed new phase of ADB-CCESP project implementation**. They are: promoting of green economy and resource efficiency; mainstreaming of the natural capital and ecosystem valuation into decision making process; prioritizing environment, ecology and quality of life in all national planning process; prioritizing biodiversity loss, climate action, and sustainable resource management in the recovery phase; introduction of nature-base solutions; and development of natural resources management and conservation strategy.

49. Myanmar's **proposed national priorities** for the new phase of ADB-CCESP project include the following:

(i) Policy support for **development of a circular economy**;
(ii) Policy and planning support on **green financing mechanism**;
(iii) Support on integration of **natural capital accounting** in policy and planning;

(iv) Support on **Green technology needs assessments**;
(v) Support capacity on financial institutions and the **private sector to support green infrastructure and technologies**;
(vi) Support capacity on **nature- based solution**; and
(vii) Support on **underground water standard**.

E. Thailand

50. The presentation for Thailand was made by **Rungnapar Pattanavibool**, the Director of Foreign Affairs Division in the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Government of Thailand.

51. The Government of Thailand have had significant involvement in international negotiations in this year (1-10 June 2020), with a particular focus on UNFCCC virtual proceedings and particularly SDG 13 on climate change. the focus of this even was to maintain momentum in the UN Climate Change process and showcase progress in climate action. The Government also highlighted about the present ongoing situation of COVID-19 outbreak, its economic impact followed with the recovery process be aligned with UN 2030 Agenda for SDGs and the Paris Climate Agreement's goals as the blueprints for green and sustainable recovery.

Exhibit 3: Key highlights of Thailand presentation

52. In Thailand, the Government has carefully considered how to tackle COVID-19 outbreak in unison with their national priorities and related strategies (see exhibit 3). Priorities for COVID response and pandemic recovery include: i) **preparedness of health systems by controlling spread of infection, and development of vaccines**; ii) **economic recovery through restarting economic activity,** rebooting the way of conducting business for a sustainable future, and reconnecting to the disrupted global value chain; and iii) **environment protection and natural resource management** by turning crisis into opportunity to work towards a more sustainable world, while **adjusting to the "new normal"**, **combating climate change, reducing marine debris, and preserving biodiversity**.

53. The Thailand Government is fully engaged in the national and international efforts with a strong commitment to address climate change, environmental vulnerabilities, biodiversity conservation, ecosystem services, pollution control and other natural resources management and environment sustainability. The government has adopted various official mechanisms to encourage the fulfilment of national and international climate change and other environment targets and is planning to further strengthen them with new strategies.

54. Some of the **Government's 'climate actions' and ongoing related initiatives** with in the country and across the subregion include:

(i) "**Groundwater Resources in the Greater Mekong Subregion: Collaborative Management to Increase Climate Change Resilience**", covering Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Viet Nam, and Thailand (Department of Ground Water Resources, MONRE) with UNESCO as the implementing entity.

(ii) "**Mekong EbA South: Enhancing Climate Resilience in the Greater Mekong Subregion through Ecosystem-based Adaptation in the Context of South-South Cooperation**", covering Viet Nam and Thailand (Department of Water Resources, MONRE) with UNEP as the implementing entity.

55. The following are the **Thailand's priorities proposed** for consideration under the ADB-CCESP project support. They are:

(i) **Sending Plastic Back Home Project**" by recycling plastic waste leading to maximum benefit as the circular economy concept

(ii) **Policy on closing all national parks for three months per year** (currently this concept is on the study of appropriate time to implement)

F. Viet Nam

56. The presentation for Vietnam was made by **Kim Thi Thuy Ngoc**, Head of the Division of Science and International Cooperation in the Institute of Strategy and Policy on Natural Resources and Environment, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Government of Vietnam.

57. Vietnam reported that it has registered only a little more than 300 cases and zero deaths since the outbreak of COVID-19 in the country. Government has attributed this success to its well-developed public health system, strong government monitoring mechanisms, and proactive containment strategy of comprehensive testing, tracing, and quarantining. Despite this accomplishment, the country still had s**erious impact on its economic sectors such as export, tourism, agriculture and others** (see exhibit 4)**.** The other significant risk factor that emerged with this outbreak has been the generation of high amount of waste from the hospital and households. Government is also making great strides through the prevention and control

of the COVID-19 impact on the economy by introducing innovative response and recovery measures such as tourism promotion, tax reduction for enterprises, etc.

Exhibit 4: Key presentation slides of Vietnam

58. Some of the **countries key issues that were raised in the context of post-COVID** for the environment-friendly and climate-resilient response were: **promotion of waste management (generation and plastic waste); environmental pollution (air and water); water resources (dry and salinity in the Mekong Delta); biodiversity conservation; addressing climate change vulnerability and impacts; revising of environment protection law; and revising of national strategies on environment and natural resources**.

59. **Vietnam's priorities for the new phase of ADB-CCESP project** were:

(i) Support policy development on **waste management/circular economy**
(ii) Promote **Circular Economy (CE)** in business sector
(iii) Apply economic instruments for **pollution control and waste management**
(iv) Information/digital tools to support **environmental management/policy planning**
(v) Innovative **climate and disaster risk financing instruments**

IV. SESSION 3: UPDATES ON ADB TA 9915: GMS CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY PROGRAM, AND GMS REGIONAL INVESTMENT FRAMEWORK 2022 FOR ENVIRONMENT

60. The presentation was made by **Dr. Ancha Srinivasan**, Principal Climate Change Specialist and Project Officer for the ADB-CCESP TA 9915.

61. ADB is launching the new phase of the CESP (2020-2024) in response to growing concern about three keys burning issues that has been challenging this subregion in the environment sector which are related to **increasing climate vulnerability and GHGs, degradation of landscapes, growing pollutions and limited adoption of innovative technologies**. Innovative partnerships, with a focus on pilot projects, policy advisory, and knowledge support are critical to meet national priorities and international commitments and foster regional cooperation and integration. The aim of this **TA project is to enhance climate resilience, green growth, and environmental quality in the GMS countries**. Reference was also made to various key priorities that were discussed and deliberated among the member countries at the 24th GMS-AM organised in Kunming (Yunnan Province, PRC) in April 2019.

62. The TA will support the implementation of the **GMS Core Environment Program Strategic Framework and Action Plan**. It will support countries in achieving biodiversity and climate action-related Sustainable Development Goals, and the Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. The program has six thematic areas comprising of climate and disaster resilience (theme#1), low carbon transitions (theme#2), climate smart landscapes (theme#3), environment sustainability (theme#4), green technologies (theme#5), and financing instruments for climate and disaster risk (Theme#6); and three outputs and associated activities. Currently ADB is in the process of finalization of the consulting firm recruitment and the winning firm will be on board by September/October 2020 for commencing TA implementation.

63. ADB made presentation to the GMS-WGE representatives about the second progress report and brief update on the GMS Regional Investment Framework (RIF) 2022 and also reminded about the commencement of the preparatory process for the upcoming third round of progress report and update for RIF-2022 .

V. SESSION 4: KICKSTARTING POST-PANDEMIC GREEN AND RESILIENT RECOVERY IN THE GMS

64. The technical session facilitating on the theme of post-pandemic green and resilient recovery in the GMS countries was presented by **Dr. Srinivasan Ancha** of ADB followed with elaborated views from discussant **Dr. Stefanos Fotiou** of UNESCAP and overall reflections on the two discussions from the GMS WGE representatives and other participants.

65. It was accentuated that, **coronavirus pandemic is the humanity's worst health and economic crisis ever since WW-II,** disrupting health, wellbeing and jobs, economic losses and creating extraordinary uncertainty and long-lasting effects. The **territorial impact of COVID-19 has disproportionally affected the most vulnerable population in the world including the Asia and the GMS** potentially with devastating social, economic and political implications.

66. The world is caught in an unprecedented economic crisis. **The focus is now on fighting the pandemic and its immediate consequences and starting to shift towards how to rebuild our economies.** Though the post-COVID recovery process would be normally slow, the important question that arise is, what the next phase of recovery will look like and the role of strong public action in boosting demand, providing replacement income, and facilitating new investments. Much support is need for the national governments to help build prosperity and resilience, by contributing to the long-term potential and sustainability of a country's development pathway. **COVID also provides striking opportunity for national governments to make transformational changes and paving the way for fulfilling national commitments towards SDGs, Paris Agreement Objectives and NDCs.** In GMS countries, national governments are adopting different phases of response and recovery to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 outbreak by restarting their economic engine, through eco-smart stimulus investments and financial packages.

67. As parts of the world start to anticipate life beyond this crisis, a key question that arise is how to respond quickly and efficiently to future shocks. This could make a significant difference for populations vulnerable to shocks, like that provoked by this pandemic, as well as to the impacts of climate change. Moreover, countries implementing or contemplating large stimulus packages for addressing the Covid-19 outbreak need to **assess these packages based on key climate-smart, pro-poor, pro-growth criteria.**

68. ADB contributes to mitigate the socio-economic impact of the pandemic in the GMS countries by working with the national governments and its key stakeholders and **identified**

eight priorities to stimulate a green and resilient recovery for the subregion for rebuilding their economies for positive change. They are:

69. **Build holistic community resilience and promote shared prosperity**. Vulnerable people are the most impacted by COVID-19. Policymakers must focus on the bottom 30% of society to support the poor from falling further into poverty. A holistic community resilience promotes human-health resilience; disaster resilient infrastructure; coastal resilience; urban resilience; water supply, quality management and sanitation; climate-resilient infrastructure; climate-smart and resilient agriculture systems; and women and child-centered climate change adaptation.

70. **Invest in clean air, water, and soil through low carbon transitions.** Reducing pollution must be prioritized especially in the energy, transport, and agriculture sectors, the three highest contributors to pollution in the GMS, due to practices such as inefficient energy practices, use of old vehicles, and agricultural residue burning. Post-pandemic recovery plans of GMS countries can take the lead in supporting clean energy and transport investments. The crisis from COVID-19 pandemic also presents an opportunity to pursue an energy transition toward the development of more renewable energy sources. The ADB is committed to support at least $5 billion clean energy investments for 2020, with 65% of it for promotion of renewable energy.

71. **Promote nature-based solutions to sustainably manage landscapes, cityscapes, seascapes, and wildlife.** More than half of the global GDP depends on nature; ecosystem services provide benefits of $125-140 trillion per year. Nature based solutions promise a win-win for both people and nature, e.g. large scale restoration of degraded ecosystems and protection of critical ecosystems, such as coral reefs and mangroves, can prevent the occurrence of storm surges; forest landscape restoration; transboundary water governance through community ecosystem-based actions; etc. Nature based solutions directly avoid degradation of the ecosystem, aiding in its protection, restoration, and management and deliver clear biodiversity benefits in terms of well-managed and functioning ecosystems.

72. **Rebuild livelihoods and create jobs without compromising ecosystem integrity.** Some of the hardest hit due to the global pandemic have been livelihoods of the poor and low-income workers. And how can the impacts of this outbreak on livelihoods could be mitigated and reduce the longer-term implications for the livelihoods of the people. A restart presents a good opportunity to make transformational changes to people's lives. As governments work to rebuild and restore livelihoods, the focus must be on developing sustainable livelihoods and resilience against future crises. In tourism, governments could reorient stimulus packages to promote nature-based tourism, adventure tourism, and biodiversity tourism. In agriculture, transform rural food and land use systems and promote alternate uses of agricultural residues and livestock manure. More flexible working schedules and teleworking could also be continuously encouraged.

73. **Reduce supply chain risks and vulnerabilities to future shocks through resilient infrastructure** in key sectors unlocking economic opportunities for people and for countries. Governments could seize new opportunities in green freight and logistics; work with the private sector to find alternative supply channels to handle potential surpluses or potential food loss and waste; keep regional and international markets in agriculture and food products open, transparent, and predictable; and introducing new performance measures for supply value chain designs, to measure resilience, responsiveness, and reconfigurability.

74. **Mainstream innovative green and blue financing in stimulus packages**. Focusing on vulnerable populations, governments must reorient stimulus packages to promote the financial inclusion of communities dependent on green and blue economy. Regional private sector cooperation must be also enjoined. In 2019, ADB launched the ADB Oceans' Financing

Facility. ADB is also a partner in the ASEAN Catalytic Green Finance Facility. Supporting financing for the One Health approach, which looks at the interrelatedness of animal health, human health, environmental health, is another critical need of the hour.

75. **Deploy digital and spatial technologies for accelerating recovery from the pandemic.** Digital technology has proved a useful and necessary tool to help ensure that local and regional governments on the frontline of the emergency continue to provide essential public services during the COVID-19 crisis. New digital and spatial technologies are not just changing the way we live; they can be utilized to promote sustainable environmental recovery and optimize use of natural resources. Digital tracking tools can be used to enhance trade facilitation and logistics; drones can be employed for reforestation and sustainable forest management; 'intelligent' environmental quality monitoring systems can be implemented at local, national, and regional levels; and machine learning and artificial intelligence can help power early-warning systems.

76. **Employ systems approach and nexus thinking in designing and implementing recovery and stimulus packages**. Managing the impact of COVID-19 is not a silo approach, but rather a system approach. Policymakers in the region must implement systems-based paradigm or roadmap to manage the 'spectrum' of pandemic risk to national, subregional, and global security. The building blocks of a systems approach are leadership and governance/coordination; sectoral policies and vested interests; technology and innovation; financing; information systems; human resources; essential commodities and related logistics; operational interventions/service delivery capacity. He also underscored nexus thinking—analyzing synergies and trade-offs among post-pandemic stimulus measures, in post-pandemic recovery.

77. Some of the key questions that was raised during this presentation that simulate discussion among the GMS member countries and other participants were:

(i) How can the GMS Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability Program (CCESP), at the sector or multi-sector level, support the countries in bringing Eco-smart COVID 19 recovery along the 8 priorities identified?
(ii) Which actions are countries taking at a national level, and how could these be coordinated to enhance their impact (regional public goods – regional ecosystem health, regional livelihood resilience)? Is there a role for CCESP/WGE in such coordination?
(iii) What opportunities can we create to bring these ideas to the GMS Ministers, Sector Ministers and Leaders?

A. Discussion

78. The technical session continued with brief presentation by Dr. Stefanos Fotiou representing UNESCAP with key insights discussed on different perspectives and policy response for pandemic recovery that is ongoing globally and at Asia regional level.

79. This focused on more details of the post-pandemic response and recovery through with a presentation on the topic of "Getting Back Better: Protecting biodiversity and supporting climate action through economic stimulus for COVID-19 response". The key discussion points under this presentation were, health as the entry point to getting back better by taking measures such as: (a) symbiotic relation between humans and ecosystems; (b) stopping harmful environmental practices and the subsidies that are supporting them; and (c) taking nature into account by using physical capacity of ecosystems to frame financial policies.

80. Further, Dr. Stefanous illustrated the important lessons that need to be considered for the green recovery, some of which are: putting science and scientists first; protecting and

improving common goods; making the global value chains climate resilient; fixing and making sustainable food systems; and ensuring credible information for the public discussion.

VI. SESSION 5: POST-PANDEMIC PRIORITIES FOR BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT IN THE GMS

81. The presentation was made by **Ms. Xi Jiao** of ADB (Consultant) followed with detailed views on the topic by discussant **Colin Poole** of the Mekong Wildlife Conservation Society and reflections shared by the respective GMS WGE representatives and other participants.

82. The occurrence of COVID-19 pandemic is an interlink between disease, health, and biodiversity and demonstrate not only complex interrelationship between the environment and human health but also a powerful message that "our system is broken". **The spillover of this recent pandemic has its implications on the biodiversity and on economic impacts of marginalized rural communities who rely on the natural resources and biodiversity related tourism/ecotourism activities.** The other disruptions of the global pandemic is having interruptions in biodiversity policy and global frameworks interms of their planning process and also loss of global funding resources for biodiversity conservation.

83. **The GMS is home to rich biodiversity that harbor global importance for rich flora and fauna.** Most of the economic sectors in the GMS countries depend on this natural economic area for its economic activities. But, biodiversity in all its forms are being lost at unprecedented rate currently. Logging, mining, and illegal wildlife trade are all threats to the continuity of the landscape in this subregion and forests in this area are among those that are most likely to be affected by global climate change. **Moreover, continuous exploitation of biodiversity and wildlife is also leading to conducive environment to zoonoses, including the present COVID-19 type diseases.** An emphasis was placed on the sustainable management of these biodiversity corridors by increasing investments in climate-smart landscapes and protection of biodiversity and sustainable wildlife management.

84. Some of the **priorities that needed for post-pandemic response for biodiversity and wildlife management in GMS** are:

(i) Transboundary biodiversity landscape conservation;
(ii) Ecosystem based climate-smart landscape;
(iii) Sustainable livelihoods; and
(iv) Wildlife management.

85. And the **guiding principles that required for an holistic and integrated framework for biodiversity conservation and wildlife management in GMS include**:

(i) Ecosystem-based approach;
(ii) Resilience and climate-smart; and
(iii) Multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholders approach.

86. GMS countries are parties to the Convention on Biodiversity. Each country plays an essential role in contributing toward the achievement of the 2050 Biodiversity Vision. **Covid-19 economic stimulus measures for GMS countries must include safeguards for nature to reduce risks of future pandemics with a radical re-think of budgets, investments, and destructive policies that harm biodiversity is essential for long-term recovery after this crisis**. It was also briefed about the previous work on safeguarding biodiversity landscapes in the GMS some notably are the Core Environmental Program (CEP, 2006-2011); Biodiversity Conservation Corridor Initiatives (BCI, 2012-2018); Transboundary Biodiversity Landscapes (TBLs, 2011-2020); Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Viet Nam GMS CCESP (2020-2025).

87. To safeguard the subregion's rich biodiversity and restore its valuable ecosystem landscapes, the following priorities were recommended for the GMS countries.

88. **Prioritize post-pandemic measures and interventions on biodiversity conservation and wildlife management.** This includes strengthening regulations and law enforcement on wildlife trade and enhancing wildlife protection and habitat conservation. Since many cases of wildlife trafficking are organized crimes, multi-agency collaboration and operations are more effective in cracking them down. There is also an opportunity to utilize the COVID-19 stimulus fund to hire additional rangers and increase applications of remote monitoring technologies in wildlife protection, such as through drones and camera traps, to boost wildlife protection and habitat conservation.

89. **Assess financial needs and resource availability, and explore innovative financing solutions during- and post- pandemic**. As more countries move toward recovery amidst the current health crisis, rebuilding livelihoods must not compromise biodiversity and the ecosystem. Stimulus funds can be used to provide compensation and food support. Local communities can be engaged in conservation work with provision of compensation. Subsidies and technical assistance can be used to facilitate transition to alternative sustainable livelihoods. It should also be reiterated that investments in biodiversity are investments in the SDGs, that contribute directly to poverty reduction, resilience, economic growth, and sustainability of GMS member countries.

90. **Engage in a multi-sectoral approach, and mainstream biodiversity considerations into other sectoral planning and investments**. There is an opportunity to deliver *better* when values and costs of biodiversity are internalized into economic and financial analysis of investment projects and when biodiversity is institutionalized into ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) criteria for responsible investments. Biodiversity standards and credit mechanisms can also be offered for biodiversity offsets for infrastructure projects.

91. **Promote synergies.** The GMS Working Group on Environment and the GMS Working Group on Agriculture can leverage existing subregional cooperation to further enhance agriculture ecosystem biodiversity conservation and sustainable agriculture practice for a healthy food system.

92. **Build on existing sub-regional, transnational and national efforts and mechanisms**. Draw lessons learned in moving forward from the COVID-19 crisis by maximizing cooperative mechanisms and governance, promoting knowledge exchange and transfer, and through data management and data sharing platforms.

A. Discussion

93. This presentation was followed with discussion by **Mr. Colin Poole** of the Mekong Wildlife Conservation Society, on some additional issues related post-pandemic biodiversity priorities in the GMS.

94. It is suggested that **deforestation and degradation of ecosystems in GMS countries could lead to a rise in the occurrence of diseases like COVID-19** and there are **great chances for increase in transmission of zoonotic, or animal-to-human diseases.** This is an important factor where species in the ecosystems and humans are associated with each other. Another factor for increase in transmission of **animal-to-human-disease to large extent is the trading of wild animals**. A previous study conducted in Viet Nam on rats examined by researchers found the spread of coronavirus at different stages of the rats movement from the forest to markets. **Research found surprising results from this study, where the percentage of virus in rats increased from 2% to 56 %** from the time they were caught to the time they were transported, moved to trading house and to the market and to restaurants under different conditions, stress and cages.

95. Virus moves from animals to animals, animals to species, etc. and there is all potentiality for arising novel viruses. What we really need to do to **protect the ecosystems and bring changes in the human behavior** to further reduce the zoonotic viral diseases.

96. Biological diversity has been emerged as a core concept in management and conservation of diverse ecological systems. To protect the environment and ecosystems in the subregion, it is very important to scale up for biodiversity conservation in landscape system. There is need to adopt multi-scale strategies and efforts such as **one health approach for health of ecosystems, health of humans, health of plants and health of animals** to conserve biodiversity and ecosystem landscapes.

97. **National governments need to provide proper guidelines and steps towards prevention of commercial sale of animals** and very particularly wild animals, on which some communities exclusively depend for protein sources. Because any informal and unlawful commercial trading activities of wildlife would largely increase further chances of risks and transmission of diseases from animals to humans. **Globally, there is no such thing called safe and sanitized market for sale of the wild animals**. National governments **adopting to essential prevention measures is crucial for maximum policy effectiveness**. For example, it is **commendable to note about the regulatory measures taken by China and Vietnam in understanding risks and actions taken to crackdown the commercial trade for wild animals.**

98. While it's already been reported that damage to biodiversity likely contributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, the pandemic itself could also have an effect on biodiversity affecting the economies which depend on them. **The impact of COVID-19 on the biodiversity landscapes in the GMS countries is more of an economic tragedy**, because people and communities has lost main sources of income from tourism, ecotourism, foreign remittances of family members, loss of jobs; decrease in the supply chain of forest products. People who are depending on the ecosystems for their livelihoods are the ones in the frontline of protecting the ecosystems. **National governments in the GMS countries need to be support depended communities on ecosystems through making financial compensations and implementing program with localized activities** by the local NGOs and civil society thus creating economic value for these people.

VII. SESSION 6: POST-PANDEMIC PRIORITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE WASTE MANAGEMENT IN THE GMS

99. The presentation was made by **Mr. Mushtaq Memon** of UNEP followed with further brief views from the discussant **Stephen Peters** of ADB (Senior Energy Specialist), and overall reflections from the GMS WGE representatives and other participants.

100. ADB statistics has shown that, *during the period of 60 days since the outbreak of COVID-19 Pandemic*, Asian cities collectively churn out over 60,000 tonnes of infectious medical waste polluting both environment and the society in large. It was also mentioned about alarming levels of increase in the overall usage of waste plastics and a substantial decrease in recycling. The main reason for this increase during the COVID-19 was due to packaging of online shopping and home delivery of food parcels. The decrease in the recycling was due to pressure on the governments to address other urgent challenges due to COVID-19, and less focus on minimizing waste plastics. This widespread use of plastics throughout the world due to pandemic is creating massive upstream supply chain disruptions and downstream waste disposal problems. To contain the COVID-19, world need to apply a wide range of social and environmental responses with varying degrees of success.

101. According to the Executive Director of UN Environment, Ms. Inger Andersen, of UNEP, there is not only a clear need to focus on an immediate humanitarian response on COVID-19, but also governments to not to lose sight of environmental sustainability. Moreover, the UN Environment analytics further underscored sustainable waste management should consider (i) the growing population from 7 billion today to 9 billion by 2050, (ii) economic development and increasing global trade, (iii) growing middle-class with changing consumption patterns, and (iv) increasing consumption of biomass.

102. Presentation on pandemic and waste management under medical, plastic and disaster situations were elucidated. Under all these scenarios unsustainable waste management practices cause problems such as uncontrolled dumping, leading to public health risks, and to open burning or uncontrolled incineration, leading to the release of toxins in the environment and to secondary transmission of diseases to humans. This waste can also reach water sources and add to riverine and marine pollution.

103. Current disaster waste management planning is mainly focused on debris (e.g. earthquake). Optimisation and decision-making tools are lacking to support disaster waste management planning. Hence, the present time calls for disaster waste management principles. It is also known that the pandemic created a longer-term disaster-like situation, requiring appropriate storage and treatment systems. Basic principles for disaster management—prevention, preparedness, response/removal, and recovery—must be integrated in waste management strategies at local, state, and national level. For example, the city of Wuhan (PRC), has quickly adapted to an improved waste management system to manage COVID-19.

104. A note about GMS countries becoming hotspot for waste plastics and its impact felt was mentioned. Major challenges that were encountered for sustainable waste management in the GMS countries are:

(i) **Regulatory frameworks**, such as the lack of updated policies;
(ii) **Institutional arrangements and enforcement**, including the lack of clear institutional arrangements;
(iii) **Financing mechanisms**, including the lack of budget on waste collection;
(iv) **Business models** - private sector participation in waste management value chain is not designed to sustain on self-earning models and provide effective services;
(v) **Technologies and infrastructure** - most of places still rely on primitive technologies and infrastructure;
(vi) **Informal sector** - there is no change in informal sector practices, gender, child labor and livelihoods even after many decades requiring steps to change informal to the formal sector with green jobs and quality livelihoods; and
(vii) **Behavioral challenges**, such as proper disposal, waste reduction, and waste segregation at source.

105. Furthermore, the Mekong region has transboundary challenges (water, pollution, natural resources, environment, climate change, etc), which has significant impact on the nations surrounding it. This requires regional and subregional governance models, in addition to national and local governance models to find solutions that can best materialize through regional cooperation.

106. In terms of financial support for waste management, the importance of large investment support is much needed. Institutions like ADB and other private financial entities need to extend technical assistances that help improve waste management in least developed countries and also in the GMS member countries, as well as promote environmental sustainability and achieve SDGs.

107. Successful containment efforts, and adequate management of waste is essential for combating the COVID-19. As the GMS sets forth in improving waste management amidst the pandemic and in the post-pandemic era, policymakers need to consider:

(i) **Key areas of waste management system**, including setting out a clear set of objectives on what they want to achieve from the waste, capacity to conduct an inventory or assessment of the waste, and agreed upon definitions as the region looks into a transboundary arrangement of cooperating towards sustainable waste management.

(ii) **Capitalize on the subregion's South-South cooperation** to establish common inventory systems, definitions, labelling, controlling illegal movement of waste, trade and investments in environmental services, and knowledge sharing. Mr. Memon urged the creation of a subregional hub for South-South cooperation to share knowledge to support the investments, trade, and share the technologies.

(iii) **Major investments upstream and downstream** involving private sector participation, international agencies, and financing for zero emissions in open environments through circularity.

A. Discussion

108. The presentation was followed with discussion by Stephen Peters of ADB on perspectives of waste management. With the COVID-19 pandemic, the volume of **medical waste has quickly risen**, as have questions of proper disposal. With the surge of concern and need for healthcare, however, the world urgently needs to start addressing how we can make sure medical waste is not contaminating our environment and increasing the spread of other diseases in the future. Further, the world was also not paying much attention to the **waste that was generated by people eating food packed in plastics that were delivered through online orders and restaurant take-aways.** This increase in the amount of waste generated during the COVID outbreak is not only the major problem in the developing countries but also a similar situation from the societies of the developed nations.

109. COVID-19 is seen as the first crisis where economic activity has come in direct opposition to public health. Societies are forced to think of new ways to make things work, like new trends in the way to produce, distribute, purchase and consume things. In this line, the most important question is, what is going to happen for the circular economy and how is COVID-19 going to impact the circular economy. The pandemic has paused mass recycling of things to some extent. It would be too early to mention whether the new world after the pandemic will get "back to normal" and return to previous levels of recycling the waste. And most importantly, the outbreak of COVID-19 will certainly lead to **"new-normal situations"** of managing waste and infections causing during the recycling process of the waste is something very alarming issue.

110. Going through the pandemic will change the way the waste is managed. Circular economy will certainly rise above the crisis with the next level of thinking to reshape the formulation of the new economy that is more environmentally conscious and responsible. Some of the key suggestions made for post-COVID-19 recovery process in the waste management are: **digitization of waste strain** has profound impact in managing the waste, government central planning will have transparent process through digitization; **backing the small enterprises in the waste management** (e.g., the tremendously successful work of commercial waste management done by the One Planet in Thailand); **effective legislating, regulating**, and enforcement of circular economy will give more appropriate results; setting-up a **driving ecosystem** is critical for transition to circular economy. COVID-19 has created many barriers and has also lifted some barriers as well in the waste management.

VIII. SESSION 7: CONCLUDING REMARKS

111. The Chair and Co-chair reflected on the national governments need to continuously put enormous efforts to invest in ending the over-exploitation of wildlife and other natural resources, managing environment sustainably, reversing land degradation and protecting ecosystem health. They also reiterated to governments the need to urgently adopt an integrated human, animal and environmental health expertise and policy into a one health approach.

112. The Chair thanked all GMS member countries focal points for their participation in the meeting and for the constructive contributions, and also wished them successful for post-pandemic response and recovery at national level and also the implementation of the CCESP TA. The Chair also advised the ADB Project Team to make follow-ups on the action points raised during this meeting with member countries.

113. The meeting was informed that CCCESP TA will officially commence once the consulting firm will be on board by this October. However, member countries (implementing partners) should take this as an opportunity to demonstrate how the five years of project implementation would benefit Government policies, budgeting and planning in terms of environment sustainability.

114. This meeting started at 1330H and ended 1630H. There were more than 140 members who participated in this virtual dialogue (video conference) and overall, the meeting went well and considered successful.

Annex-1: GMS-WGE Virtual Meeting Agenda

ADB

Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS)
Working Group on Environment (WGE) Dialogue on

Priorities for Post-Pandemic Green and Resilient Recovery in the GMS

Tuesday, 23 June 2020 / 1:30-5:00 pm
(Bangkok time, GMT+7)

How to join:
Click on this link:
"Join Microsoft Teams Meeting"
Choose web app. When prompted, enter the Conference ID:
477 941 086#

WGE Co-Chairs

- ***Jiangfeng Zhang,*** *Director, Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture Division, Southeast Asia Department, ADB*
- ***Sounadeth Soukchaleun,*** *Deputy Director General, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Lao People's Democratic Republic*

Program

1:30 pm - 1:40 pm	**Opening remarks** *Ramesh Subramaniam, Director General, Southeast Asia Department, ADB,* followed by 3-minute video on ADB's response to COVID-19
1:40 pm - 2:10 pm	**Presentations by GMS WGE representatives on *Post-COVID Environment-Friendly and Climate-Resilient Response and Recovery Efforts in Each of the GMS Countries, and Expectations of ADB's Support in Priority Themes*** • **Cambodia** *(Sao Sopheap, Secretary of State, Ministry of Environment)* • **China, People's Republic of** *(Zhou Jun, Acting Director, Division of Asian, African and Latin American Affairs, Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Ecology and Environment)* • **Lao People's Democratic Republic** *(Sounadeth Soukcheleun, Deputy Director General, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment)* • **Myanmar** *(Soe Naing, Director, Environmental Conservation Department, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation)* • **Thailand** *(Rungnapar Pattanavibool, Director of Foreign Affairs Division, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment)* • **Viet Nam** *(Kim Thi Thuy Ngoc, Head, Division of Science and International Cooperation, Institute of Strategy and Policy on Natural Resources and Environment, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment)*
2:10 pm - 2:20 pm	**Updates on (i) ADB TA 9915: GMS Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability Program, and (ii) GMS Regional Investment Framework 2022 for Environment** *Srinivasan Ancha, Principal Climate Change Specialist, ADB*
2:20 pm - 3:10 pm	**Kickstarting Post-Pandemic Green and Resilient Recovery in the GMS** Presenter: *Srinivasan Ancha, Principal Climate Change Specialist, ADB* Discussant: *Stefanos Fotiou, Director, Environment and Development Division, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (ESCAP)* **Reflections by GMS WGE representatives and other participants**
3:10 pm - 4:00 pm	**Post-Pandemic Priorities for Biodiversity and Wildlife Management in the GMS** Presenter: *Xi Jiao, Resource Person, ADB Consultant* Discussant: *Colin Poole, Regional Director, Mekong Wildlife Conservation Society* **Reflections by GMS WGE representatives and other participants**
4:00 pm - 4:50 pm	**Post-Pandemic Priorities for Sustainable Waste Management in the GMS** Presenter: *Mushtaq Memon, Regional Coordinator for Circular Economy, United Nations Environment Program* Discussant: *Stephen Peters, Senior Energy Specialist (Waste-to-Energy), ADB* **Reflections by GMS WGE representatives and other participants**
4:50 pm - 5:00 pm	**Concluding Remarks** by *WGE 2020 Co-Chairs*