

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE COMPLETION REPORT

Division: SEAE

TA No., Country, and Name			Amount Approved: \$1,600,000	
TA 6069-REG: National Performance Assessment and Subregional Strategic Environment Framework in the Greater Mekong Subregion			Revised Amount: -	
Executing Agency : Asian Development Bank	Source of Funding: TASF (\$800,000), GEF (\$800,000)		Amount Undisbursed: \$189,937	Amount Utilized: \$1,410,063
TA Approval Date: December 2002	TA Signing Date: N/A	Fielding of First Consultant(s): 6 October 2003	TA Completion Date Original: 31 December 2005 Actual: 30 April 2007 Account Closing Date Original: 31 December 2005 Actual: 14 April 2008	
<p>Description</p> <p>The technical assistance (TA) grew out of a consensus reached among the countries in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) at the 10th and 11th Ministerial Conferences on Subregional Economic Cooperation in Yangon, Myanmar, on 27–29 November 2001 and Phnom Penh, Cambodia, on 23–25 September 2002. The countries agreed to continue the efforts started under the first phase of the Strategic Environmental Framework (SEF) initiative funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to integrate environmental considerations in economic development planning and implementation in the GMS program. The TA was provided to develop common environmental strategies for protecting the environment, globally significant resources, and community interests.</p> <p>In line with the integrated ecosystem management objectives of the Global Environment Facility's (GEF's) Operational Program 12, the TA was aimed at developing a comprehensive framework for managing natural systems across sectors and political or administrative boundaries for sustainable development.</p> <p>Expected Impact, Outcome and Outputs</p> <p>The TA was intended to promote sustainable development in the GMS through capacity building for national and subregional environmental performance assessment. The planned outputs were: (i) national and subregional core environmental indicators and performance assessment database; (ii) national and subregional needs assessment and gap analysis; and (iii) decision support software for assessing the social and environmental impact of projects and programs.</p> <p>Delivery of Inputs and Conduct of Activities</p> <p>The steering committee comprised representatives from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Institute of Global Environment and Society (IGES) of the United States, the National Institute for Environmental Studies (NIES) of Japan, the GMS countries (Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand, Viet Nam, and Yunnan Province of the People's Republic of China [PRC]), and the consultants. A secretariat with a full-time TA coordinator was set up at the UNEP Regional Research Centre for Asia and the Pacific (RRC.AP) in Bangkok, Thailand. Two administrative/research assistants (\$63,000, national) supported the TA coordinator in day-to-day activities. Three international consultants provided overall guidance in economic and environmental development planning (12 person-months), environmental policy and management (6 person-months), and environmental monitoring and database management (6 person-months). Twelve national consultants (two from each country, for a total of 120 person-months) assisted the country representatives. The draft inception report was presented at a subregional meeting of stakeholders.</p> <p>Several consultative workshops were held at the start to build ownership and get consensus on common approaches and methodology. Three expert meetings in each participating country and at the subregional level reviewed the findings of the secretariat on the proposed indicators, database and computer modeling framework, indicator compilation guidelines, and performance assessment. ADB conducted five TA review missions. Periodic progress reports were submitted to the GEF. The final workshop was held in Bangkok in March 2006 and the outputs were shared at the 12th Meeting of the GMS Working Group on Environment, also in Bangkok, in April 2006.</p> <p>Delay in the initial implementation and publication led to three extensions of the project completion. The international and national consulting services were also extended (by 5 months for international and 6 months for national). The consultants generally performed well. The limited staff resources (only one full-time coordinator) allocated by the UNEP were a delaying factor. To fulfill a condition set by ADB for approving the extension, the UNEP assigned three more staff members to the project in July 2005 to strengthen management capacity.</p>				

Evaluation of Outputs and Achievement of Outcome

The TA produced the following main outputs and disseminated them through national and subregional consultative workshops and the UNEP website:

(i) National Environmental Performance Assessment (NEPA). The six GMS countries produced their NEPAs through participatory consultations. From the country priorities, indicators were selected in the following categories: forest resources, biodiversity threats, fish resources, water resources, agricultural land management, air pollution, hazardous substances, inland water pollution, and climate change. The indicators were based on the Pressure-State-Response (PSR) model, which logically links the sources of environmental problems with the resulting concerns and policy and institutional responses. The quality of the first draft assessments varied between countries, reflecting their level of understanding and the capacity of the country and the national consultants. Consultants helped strengthen and improve the contents. The NEPA indicators developed during the TA activities were endorsed by the GMS environment ministries. The PRC State Environmental Protection Agency adopted the methodology used to develop the EPA for Yunnan Province for replication in other provinces. Myanmar also decided to continue the NEPA activities beyond the TA period with its own funds.

(ii) Case Studies. Each participating GMS countries produced two case studies based on their priority concerns, applying the PSR model to location-specific environmental problems. As with the NEPA, the quality of the draft case studies varied between participating countries. Additional support was provided to improve the studies.

(iii) Subregional Environmental Performance Assessment (SEPA). The PSR model was applied to priority concerns like fisheries, illegal trade in wildlife, hydropower, tourism, irrigation, navigation, and degree of harmonization of policies and regulations in an attempt to identify subregional indicators. Geographic differences and limited data reliability made it difficult to identify common indicators. As part of the SEPA, efforts were made to develop the Environmental Sustainability Index (ESI)—a composite index reflecting different environmental states, pressures, and responses—to allow comparisons of environmental performance between countries. Using the ESI methodology originally developed at Yale and Columbia universities, the consulting team selected 13 national policy concerns and 3 transboundary policy concerns as core areas for indicators and conducted country consultations to validate the data sets and the methodology. While the methodology needs to be improved, the ESI was the first systematic attempt to demonstrate and compare environmental conditions in the GMS countries.

Overall Assessment and Rating

Overall, the TA was a success. An important environmental initiative resulting from TA 5783-REG: Strategic Environmental Framework for the GMS, it promoted sustainable environmental management at the national and subregional levels. The TA contributed to (i) shared recognition of the causal relationships between environmental threats and responses, and (ii) the development of a framework for national performance assessment. In the process it generated interest among donor agencies to continue supporting capacity building for strategic environmental performance assessment, and led to the development of the SEF III subcomponent under TA 6289-REG: Core Environmental Program and Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative in the GMS.

Major Lessons

The initial delay during TA implementation could have been avoided had more emphasis been placed during TA design on country ownership and activities that matched the needs of the participating countries and the skills of the participating institutions. For instance, the development of decision support software was dropped and the expected technical inputs from IGES did not materialize. It is also important to ensure that (i) the lead agency has adequate staff resources, and (ii) participating countries are well informed and fully supportive of the project activities. Without an agreed baseline and a single subregional institution mandated to monitor environmental progress, subregional indicators will be difficult to institutionalize. The intermittent consulting and lead agency inputs during the TA were not adequate for building country capacity for EPA monitoring and reporting.

Recommendations and Follow-Up Actions

The indicators developed under the TA are being used as a reference point to refine the environmental priorities of the GMS countries and incorporate social concerns in socioeconomic development planning, under the EPA and sustainable development planning component (component 3) of TA 6289-REG . Close monitoring of component 3 activities is recommended, to be able to integrate relevant indicators in future ADB-funded projects and country environmental analyses.

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