

IRBM

PROJECT NEWSLETTER

EDITION 1 | JANUARY 2024



GEF/UNDP/ASEAN Project on Reducing Pollution and Preserving Environmental Flows in the East Asian Seas through the Implementation of Integrated River Basin Management (IRBM) in ASEAN Countries

Charting ASEAN Rivers: A look back at 2023





Charting ASEAN Rivers: A look back at 2023

2023 marks the beginning of a breakthrough collaboration among six ASEAN member states (AMS) and development partners in Southeast Asia for the protection and management of select priority river basins that drain into four large marine ecosystems in the Southeast Asian Region, the Bay of Bengal, South China Sea, Gulf of Thailand and Indonesian Sea.

Guided by the principle of source-to-sea system, the five-year regional project, Reducing Pollution and Preserving Environmental Flows in the East Asian Seas through the Implementation of Integrated River Basin Management (IRBM) in ASEAN Countries,

or IRBM Project, aims to establish functional IRBM mechanisms in priority river basins in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam for reducing pollution and sustaining freshwater environmental flows as well as adapting to climate change vulnerabilities.

The IRBM project is supported by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and executed by the Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of Asia (PEMSEA) Resource Facility (PRF), in collaboration with the ASEAN.

IRBM Project Sites



Project components



Baseline Assessment of Source-to-Sea Management Continuum



IRBM Pilot Projects for Improved Governance and Management of River Basins/Sub-basins and Associated Coastal Areas



Knowledge Management and Capacity Development



Monitoring and Evaluation

“The IRBM project is a testament of the ASEAN’s collective and forward-looking action to improving water resources management in our region.”

His Excellency (H.E.) Mr. Ekkaphab Phanthavong

Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN for the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community



2023

A Recap of our Milestones

2023 saw the project inception and establishment of the governance mechanism at the regional level, including the establishment of the Regional Project Management Unit at PRF and the approval and adoption of the 2023 workplan and budget. The six AMS proceeded in securing approval of the project in line with their respective government policies and procedures and initiated consultations at national and river basin levels to discuss the project’s implementing arrangements. Regional activities were also initiated including the development of State of River Basin Reporting Guidelines, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Analysis, capacity development activities, and knowledge management and communication outreach.

QUARTER 1

- Project launched and Regional Inception Workshop conducted
- First Regional Steering Committee Meeting conducted
- Regional Project Management Unit established at PRF

QUARTER 2

- Initiation of the State of the River Basin Reporting System
- Cambodia: Memorandum of Agreement with PRF signed; National Inception Workshop conducted; National Project Coordinator hired



Launching and Regional Inception Workshop of the IRBM Project in Manila, Philippines on February 16, 2023.

“Water use among ASEAN countries is growing rapidly, while water quality and quantity challenges threaten to derail much-needed economic growth.”

Dr. Selva Ramachandran
Resident Representative
UNDP Philippines



“We view this project as a natural extension of PEMSEA’s work on integrated coastal management – as rivers are natural conduits to our coasts and open seas.”

Ms. Aimee Gonzales

Executive Director
PEMSEA Resource Facility



QUARTER 3

- Lao PDR: Memorandum of Agreement with PRF signed; National Inception Workshop conducted; National Project Coordinator hired
- Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Vietnam: Series of consultations conducted on the implementing arrangements
- IRBM Project video clip shared in the Source-to-Sea Platform in line with the World Water Week 2023
- Initiation of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Analysis



Field visits in Kampong Bay River Basin (Cambodia) and Nam Tha River Basin (Lao PDR) were conducted during the national inception workshops in the respective sites.

QUARTER 4

- Technical Report on the Review of Governance and Management Indicators for SORB in the six AMS completed
- The Kampong Bay River Basin Profile story completed and included in the International Waters Portfolio Bulletin: 2023 and 6th Year End edition
- A gender-focused socioeconomic survey questionnaire developed and pilot tested in Cavite, Philippines
- Capacity development activities focused on organizing IRBM/IWRM/ICM orientations for Cambodia and Lao PDR
- An estimated 413 participants have attended various regional, national and river basin activities of which, 151 (37%) are women
- Ad-Hoc Regional Steering Committee meeting conducted; 2024 work plan and budget approved and adopted





Kampong Bay River Basin: The Lifeline of Kampot Province



Wading through the communes of Kampot Province, the glossy waters of Kampong Bay River Basin strides on to riverbanks and riprap walls, providing a steady source of food and livelihood, as well as means of transport to over 184,000 people in the southern region of Cambodia.

The Kampong Bay River Basin is one of the main coastal river systems in Cambodia with 12-kilometer long or 3,018 km² total area. From Kamchay Mountain, it flows through the Teuk Chhou district and Kampot City toward the Gulf of Thailand, a large marine ecosystem shared with Thailand and Viet Nam. This river system also plays an important role in ensuring the water supply of Kampot communities and the local tourism economy in the province.

The coastal and riverbank developments, alongside the increase of pressure from utilization of water

resources in Kampot, have contributed to the continuous decline of water quality in Kampong Bay River Basin. This endangers the critical water source of the Province as it provides essential water services to different sectors including agriculture, transportation, and tourism. Kampong Bay River Basin produces hydropower up to 194 megawatts that generates electricity not only for Kampot Province but also for other cities including Phnom Penh and Sihanouk. It is also considered as the only source of clean water for people living in Kampot City.

Read our story on how the IRBM Project is working with the Royal Government of Cambodia through the Ministry of Environment and the Province of Kampot to address the challenges currently being faced by the Kampong Bay River Basin and its communities.

Published via IW:LEARN:
<https://bit.ly/kampongbaystory>

GOVERNANCE



DWR-MONRE Director General Dr. Inthavy Akkharath and PRF Executive Director Ms. Aimee Gonzales during the signing of the Memorandum of Agreement on the implementation of the IRBM Project in Nam Tha River Basin in Lao PDR.

Lao PDR signs agreement to reduce pollution and strengthen water resources management in Nam Tha River Basin

HA NOI, VIET NAM – The Government of Lao PDR through DWR-MONRE signed a Memorandum of Agreement with PRF that will serve as framework for cooperation to implement the IRBM Project in Nam Tha River in 2023-2027. The signing was held during the 15th East Asian Seas Partnership Council Meeting in Ha Noi, Viet Nam on July 27, 2023.

In Laos, the Nam Tha River Basin is considered as one of the top 12 priority river basins. It covers 1.4% of the Mekong River catchment, which is part of a protected area. The Nam Tha River is also an important source of water, channel for tourism and transport, a frontline defense of local communities against floods, and a source of hydropower for machinery in agriculture, forestry, and mining sectors.

“I would like to express our happiness on signing this agreement for the IRBM Project. We have completed

the project inception for Nam Tha River Basin. We are able to get the commitment from the governors of three provinces (Luang Nam Tha, Oudomxay, and Bokeo) to contribute and cooperate in project implementation,” said Dr. Inthavy Akkharath, Director General of the DWR-MONRE.

On July 14, 2023, the Collaborative Planning and National Inception Workshop was organized in Luang Nam Tha Province, convening officials from relevant national government agencies, provincial and district level departments of the three provinces, the private sector, DWR and PRF to introduce the project and discuss and agree on the scope of project activities and implementing arrangements, including identifying potential challenges and solutions to facilitate project implementation in Lao PDR for the period 2023-2027.



IRBM Project Manager Ms. Nancy Bermas giving an introduction on the IRBM Project during the National Inception Workshop in Kampot Province, Cambodia.

IRBM Project kicks off in Cambodia, holds National Inception Workshop for national and provincial partners

KAMPOT CITY, CAMBODIA – The IRBM Project was introduced to the officials from national government agencies, provincial departments of Kampot Province and local governments of Kampot City and Bokor City, including the academe on June 14-15, 2023 during the National Inception and Collaborative Planning Workshop.

Key actions were identified on the various aspects of the project, i.e., implementing arrangements, project results framework, capacity development, knowledge management and monitoring, evaluation and reporting, with the aim of ensuring effective project implementation in the next five years.

Two priority river basins in the Philippines hold consultations, identify lead project oversight for IRBM Project implementation

PAMPANGA, PHILIPPINES – The Subcommittee on Environment under the Committee on Economic Development of the Regional Development Council III agreed to provide oversight for the implementation of the IRBM Project in Pasac-Guagua River Basin, one of the two project sites in the Philippines. During its first meeting on October 17, 2023, Ms. Nancy Bermas, Regional Project Manager, presented the Project's objectives, components, and major outcomes to the subcommittee co-chaired by the Honorable Daniel Fernando, Governor of Bulacan and Chairperson of the RDC III Subcommittee on Environment, and Engr. Paquito Moreno, Jr., Regional Executive Director of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Region III and Vice Chairperson of the Subcommittee. It was highlighted that the project's source-to-sea framework complements the framework and priorities of existing strategic plans in the river basin, including the Climate Responsive Integrated Master Plan for Pampanga River Basin 2016-2030, which uses the ridge-to-reef framework.

The agreement to include the Provinces of Aurora, Zambales, and Bataan in knowledge management



Participants of the meeting of the Subcommittee on Environment under the Committee on Economic Development of the Regional Development Council III in Pampanga, Philippines.



Participants of the meeting of the Imus-Ylang Ylang-Rio Grande Rivers WQMA Governing Board of Region IV-A held in Tagaytay City, Philippines.

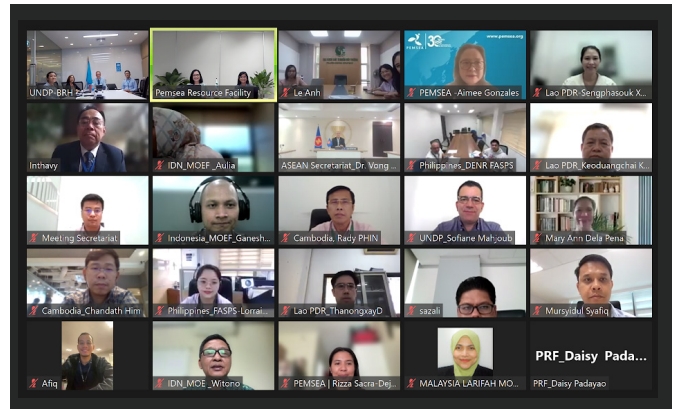
activities of the Project will facilitate replication of good practices involving other provinces in the Pampanga River watershed where Pasac-Guagua River is one of the sub-basins.

As part of the oversight function of the Subcommittee, progress in project implementation will be reported during their regular meetings and their guidance will be sought in addressing the implementation gaps and challenges.

Meanwhile, on November 26, 2023, the Imus-Ylang Ylang-Rio Grande Rivers Water Quality Management Area (IYRR WQMA) Governing Board of Region IV-A has agreed to lead the project oversight for the IRBM Project in Imus-Ylang Ylang River Basin. The Governing Board appreciated how the IRBM project complements and support the achievement of targets of the IYRR WQMA Action Plan 2016-2025. The Board agreed to draft a resolution to formalize its designation as coordinating mechanism for the project for adoption in its next meeting.

Regional Steering Committee approves IRBM Project 2024 plan and budget

The Ad Hoc Regional Steering Committee Meeting of the IRBM Project was convened via Zoom on November 24, 2023 and co-chaired by Mr. Gerd Trogemann of



A Zoom meeting screenshot of the participants of the Ad Hoc Regional Steering Committee Meeting of IRBM Project.

UNDP in Asia and the Pacific and Dr. Inthavy Akkharath, Chair of AWGWRM. Attended by representatives of the AWGWRM national focal agencies from the six participating AMS, UNDP, the ASEAN Secretariat, EAS executive Committee and PRF, the Ad Hoc RSC discussed the progress of project implementation in 2023 and adopted the 2024 work plan and budget.

IRBM Project organizes stakeholder consultation for the Pasac-Guagua River Basin in the Philippines

PAMPANGA, PHILIPPINES – A collaborative planning and stakeholder consultation for the implementation of IRBM Project in Pasac-Guagua River Basin in the Philippines was held on December 1, 2023 in San Fernando City, Pampanga. Mayor Catalina Cabrera-Bagasina of Sasmuan Municipality joined the local partners in the consultation and signified the commitment of the local government to the project.



Collaborative planning and stakeholder consultation meeting for the implementation of IRBM in Pasac-Guagua River Basin.

The implementation of the Project is a welcome development in helping address some of the priority issues in the river basin which include flooding, erosion, and pollution from domestic and agricultural/aquaculture activities.

As host to Sasmuan Bangkung Malapad Critical Habitat and Ecotourism Area, which is part of the larger Sasmuan Pampanga Coastal Wetland, a declared Ramsar Site in 2021 and the very first in Central Luzon, the contribution of the IRBM Project to the protection of the wetland would be critical.

Lao PDR government leaders convene for the High-level Policy Forum on Water Resources Management

OUDOMXAY PROVINCE, LAO PDR – Led by DWR of MONRE, Lao PDR, High-level Policy Forum on Integrated Water Resources Management was organized on December 14, 2023.

The forum was attended by H.E. Mr. Chanthanet Boulapha, Vice Minister of MONRE; H.E. Mr. Khammuan Zomsihapanya, Vice Minister of the Committee on Economy, Technology and Environment, National Assembly; H.E. Mr. Onkeo Ounarlom, Vice Governor of Oudomxay Province; Dr. Inthavy Akkharath, Director General of DWR,

and high level officials from the eight provinces in northern Lao PDR (Oudomxay, Bokeo, Luang Nam Tha, Phongsaly, Houaphan, Xiengkhuang, Luang Prabang, Xaiyabouly). The Vice Minister of MONRE, Vice Minister of the Committee on Economy, Technology and Environment of the National Assembly and Vice Governor of Oudomxay Province co-chaired the forum.

With 119 participants in attendance, the Forum aimed to disseminate and raise awareness on the policies, laws and regulations on water and water resources management, as well as gather feedback on the level of implementation of these policies at the local level.

“Every level of governance, i.e., national, provincial, district and village, has responsibility in implementing water laws and regulations with the engagement of all sectors that are directly and indirectly deriving benefits from the water resources,” said H.E. Mr. Chanthanet Boulapha, Vice Minister of MONRE.

“Water resource is life; without water, people will not survive. Its protection and sustainable use should always be considered”, stressed H.E. Mr. Khammuan Zomsihapanya, Vice Minister of the Committee on Economy, Technology and Environment, National Assembly.



Participants of the High-Level Policy Forum on Integrated Water Resource Management held in Oudomxay Province, Lao PDR on December 14, 2023.

Among the priority issues in Nam Tha River Basin that were raised during the forum were the mapping of flood zone including flood forecasting and early warning system, knowledge and information sharing among different sectors on river protection and water resource management, and the inclusion of women and youth in grassroots level activities.

The participants also shared their experiences in the implementation of relevant policies and regulations on water, including challenges, and collectively identified possible solutions to enhance the effectiveness of existing policies.

Project Steering Committee Meeting organized for the Nam Tha River Basin

OUDOMXAY PROVINCE, LAO PDR – Spearheaded by DWR of Lao PDR, the first meeting of the Project Steering Committee (PSC) of the IRBM Project in Nam Tha River Basin was held on December 15, 2023 to discuss the roles and functions of the committee at the national and provincial levels (Oudomxay,



DWR led the first meeting of the Project Steering Committee of the IRBM Project in Nam Tha River Basin on December 15, 2023.

Bokeo and Luang Nam Tha provinces). The PSC also reviewed and approved the workplan and targets for 2024.

A field visit was organized to the World Bank-funded Nam Kor and Nam Mao River Improvement and Disaster Risk Management Project in Oudomxay Province. The project covers river widening and reinforcing the embankment along the 8-km stretch of the river, including setting up of early warning system to enhance preparedness and response to flooding incidents in the city.



Led by H.E. Mr. Chanthanet Boulapha, Vice Minister of MONRE, a field visit to the World Bank-funded Nam Kor and Nam Mao River Improvement and Disaster Risk Management Project in Oudomxay Province was conducted following the 1st PSC meeting.

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT



Representatives from different ministries and offices and local government departments participated in the four-day ICM and IRBM orientation in Kampot Province.

National and provincial leaders in Kampot Province, Cambodia take part in Integrated Coastal and River Basin Management Training

KAMPOT PROVINCE, CAMBODIA –The IRBM Project organized a four-day orientation on ICM and IRBM with 40 national government representatives from different ministries and offices as well as local government departments involved in or with relevant scope of work in the Kampong Bay River Basin.

The orientation shared the concepts, principles, framework, tools, and application of ICM and IRBM and how both management approaches can complement each other, if not merged, to address in an integrated manner the challenges and threats in managing river basins and the adjacent coastal areas.

As support tools to implement ICM and IRBM, the orientation also introduced the basics of integrated information management system, communication planning and knowledge management, and the State of River Basin (SORB) reporting.





IWRM and IRBM Training in Luang Prabang City, Lao PDR.

Provincial and district leaders in Nam Tha River Basin receive training on Integrated Water Resources Management

LUANG PRABANG CITY, LAO PDR – The IRBM Project continues to roll-out national level activities in Lao PDR. From December 18-21, DWR, National University of Laos and PRF facilitated a training on Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) and IRBM held in Luang Prabang City. Among the participants are representatives from the Provincial and District Offices of Natural Resources and Environment of the provinces of Bokeo, Oudomxay, Luang Nam Tha, and Luang Prabang City, relevant sectors in Nam Tha River Basin, national government agencies, DWR, and the National University of Laos.

The training aimed to enhance understanding on the concept of IWRM and IRBM, and the application of relevant tools and methodologies in the field.

Prior to the training, DWR conducted a needs assessment among government staff who have mandates and roles in water resources management in Nam Tha River Basin on November 13-17, 2023. The assessment identified the current capacity and gaps to ensure that the trainings will fit the need of the government staff, and the skills acquired will facilitate the effective implementation of policies and programs on water resources management.

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT



IRBM Project Manager Ms. Nancy Bermas attended the Cavite Water and Solid Waste Summit to introduce the IRBM Project.

IRBM Project supports Cavite Water and Solid Waste Summit 2023 in the Philippines

CAVITE, PHILIPPINES – The Provincial Government of Cavite in the Philippines, through the Office of the Provincial Environment and Natural Resources, hosted the biennial Cavite Water and Solid Waste Summit with the theme “Cavite Ecological Network: Establishing Consortium of Academic Institution for Open Data Bank.” The summit was held in partnership with Cavite State University, De La Salle University Dasmarias, and PEMSEA on November 20-21, 2023 at the International Convention Center, Cavite State University-Main Campus, Indang, Cavite.

Attended by more than 200 representatives from local academic institutions and other government and nongovernment partners of Cavite Province, the Summit discussed the establishment of a “one-stop” database under the Provincial Government’s website covering environment-related data/information including relevant policies, laws and ordinances, academic researches and studies, and project outputs, among others.

The Consortium of Academic Institutions for Sustainable Development of Water Resources of Cavite comprising of 17 colleges and universities

in Cavite Province were present and pledged their commitment and support for the sustainable development of water resources in the province.

The IRBM project was presented particularly highlighting the potential role of the consortium in its implementation in Imus-Ylang Ylang River.

STATE OF RIVER BASIN

State of River Basin framework and indicators introduced in Cambodia and Lao PDR

The SORB framework and indicators were introduced to national and provincial partners in Kampong Bay River Basin during the four-day training on ICM and IRBM in Kampot City, Cambodia on November 17, 2023 and in Nam Tha River Basin during the IWRM Training in Luang Prabang City, Lao PDR on December 18, 2023. The SORB will serve as the monitoring, evaluation and reporting mechanism for IRBM implementation.

In Cambodia, Dr. Pham Ngoc Bao, Deputy Director, Adaptation and Water, Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES), introduced the

SORB framework and indicators while PRF introduced and facilitated the discussions on SORB in Lao PDR.

During the workshop, the participants reviewed the initial list of governance and management indicators, including the monitoring parameters for the SORB reporting, as appropriate and relevant for Cambodia and Lao PDR. The review of the applicability of the indicators by national and local partners in consideration of the local context is necessary to ensure that appropriate data is collected and analyzed to further support program interventions and policy responses on water resources management.

The SORB will be piloted and implemented in all six participating AMS, with the end goal of sustaining the reporting mechanism by the countries beyond project duration.



SORB facilitated discussions in Kampot Province, Cambodia.



SORB facilitated discussions in Luang Prabang City, Lao PDR.

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2024 KEY EVENTS



Regional Steering Committee Meeting

TBD
Cambodia



10th GEF Biennial International Waters Conference

23-26 September 2024
Punta del Este, Uruguay



East Asian Seas Congress 2024

6-8 November 2024
Xiamen, China



About the Integrated River Basin Management (IRBM) Project

Supported by the Global Environment Facility, the IRBM Project aims to set-up a functional management mechanisms in priority riverbasins of six ASEAN countries to reduce pollution and sustain freshwater environmental flows as well as adapt to climate change vulnerabilities. The Project is being implemented by UNDP and executed by PEMSEA in collaboration with ASEAN.

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