

IRBM

PROJECT NEWSLETTER

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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

Connection and Voices: Setting the Sail in 2024





Water knows no gender: The first step to an inclusive approach to Water Resources Management in Southeast Asia

The water crisis does not discriminate. In Southeast Asia, the primary sources of water are in peril due to pollution and other unsustainable practices that impact water quality. The increase in water usage also poses a threat of water shortage. According to the UN Water, women and girls are disproportionately affected by poor water resource management. At home, fetching of water is commonly attributed to the role of women members of the household, in as much as water is one of the primary factors that affect their sanitation and hygiene. Amid the role of women and other more vulnerable sectors in the community in water usage, their voices are often not heard and underrepresented in the planning and implementation of water resources management programmes, which further lead to their marginalisation.

The Pasac-Guagua River was once a main transport channel for Guagua residents and nearby towns in the area. But due to siltation, the flow of water was heavily impacted. More residential areas become more prone to flooding. The roads and houses in low lying areas are submerged. Among the severely impacted sectors are single-parent households, senior citizens, and small workers who need to go to work on a daily basis.”

Mr. Emy Bucud

Secretary, Municipality of
Guagua, Pampanga Province,
Philippines



The Integrated River Basin Management Project is aiming at integrating gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) in its implementation to ensure that the project intervention and governance are responsive to all sectors and issues concerning water resource management.

To promote a more inclusive approach on water resource management in Southeast Asia, a series of focus group discussions (FGD) was held in four river basins from December 2023 to the first quarter of 2024. The sites were Kampong Bay River in Cambodia, Nam Tha River in Lao PDR, and Pasac-Guagua and Imus Ylang-Ylang River in the Philippines. A total of 328 community stakeholders (167 women, 161 men) were consulted from these four river basins. The consultations were also an opportunity to build awareness and understanding on the importance of gender and social inclusion in water resource management, which includes the meaningful participation of women and marginalised groups in related decision-making processes and governance platforms. It also surfaced the different needs and perspectives of a wide range of stakeholders at the river basin level. Similar discussions and consultations will be organized also in the three remaining project sites.¹

Small or artisanal fishers are among the more vulnerable groups that can be considered marginalised and not always included in the discussion of water resource management. The daily survival of their families is heavily dependent on clean freshwater ecosystems.

“The Kampong Bay River Basin is crucial to my fishing community in various ways which lead to economic benefit for the family. Most of my family members are fishing along the river basin and use the same waterway to transport harvested resources to the market. Kampong Bay River is also a tourist spot and helps us generate lots of income in my community by renting the boat to tourists. With these, my community have to support to ensure the environmental sustainability of the river basin.”

Mr. Nak Sen

Chief, Traeuy Koh Fishing Community,
Kampong Bay River Basin, Cambodia



“Kampong Bay River Basin provides tremendous value for the Kampong Samaki Fisher Community. This river basin abounds with natural resources and people in the community rely on shallow water fishing and tourism services for their main income. People can fish until now in the basin because pollution level in our river basin has been reduced. If we allow our Kampong Bay River Basin to be impacted by solid waste and plastic waste disposal, untreated sewage discharge, soil erosion, and sedimentation, these can decrease fishing yields dramatically.”

Mr. SOK Kao

Chief, Kampong Samaki Fishery
Community, Kampot Province,
Cambodia



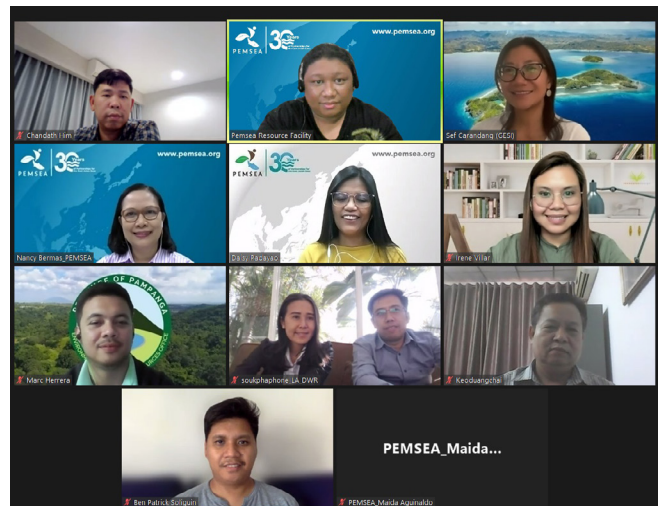
¹ Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Analysis, PEMSEA, 2024.

Based on the FGD, there is an opportunity for the IRBM project to address strategic GESI needs by increasing women’s and other marginalized sector’s access and control over river basin resources, improving the participation of women in decision-making; and generating socioeconomic benefits for women and men by creating equal opportunities for enterprise and employment (equal pay for equal work) and improving social systems. The enhancement of river basin management plans and strengthening of river basin governance, which will be supported by the project, can be entry points for gender and other social inequalities to be surfaced and addressed. This should be achieved without increasing women’s domestic burden, but rather promote and enable shared responsibilities in the home and in the community.²

According to Ms. Ranela Sarmiento Agapito of the Municipality of Sasmuan, the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo several decades ago altered the flow of the Pasac-Guagua River and affected a lot of small fishers in their area. They have been providing alternative livelihood to fishers affected by siltation due to lahar. Sasmuan is in the downstream area of Pasac-Guagua river system, where the river drains to Manila Bay.

With a GESI-responsive plan, and a wider representation of women and other marginalized groups in river basin decision-making bodies, supported by managers and staff with improved GESI capacities, key results can be better achieved and sustained beyond the project timeframe.

As a way forward, specific GESI action plans will be developed at the river basin level, using the input and results of the FGD to ensure that they are aligned with the project outcomes.



IRBM Project Regional Project Management Team of PRF met with the coordinators from Cambodia (Kampot Province), Philippines (Cavite and Pampanga) and Lao PDR (Luang Nam Tha Province) for the GESI consultations.

“We coordinate with different agencies to support our dredging effort in Pasac-Guagua River. We also established the Sasmuan Bangkung Malapad Critical Habitat and Ecotourism Area where we intensify seaborne patrolling to prevent illegal fishers. It has become the nursery ground for fish and different marine life. According to the local fishers, their catch has significantly increased and the size of fish were bigger since the marine sanctuary was established.”

Ms. Ranela Sarmiento Agapito
Municipal Agricultural Office,
Sasmuan Municipality, Pampanga, Philippines



² Ibid.

³ Ibid.



GESI Focus Group Discussions conducted in Nam Tha River Basin (Lao PDR; a and b); Imus-Ylang Ylang (c) and Pasac-Guagua river basins (Philippines) (d).



Local communities in Nam Tha River Basin rely heavily on agriculture particularly rice farming. Both women and men participate in agricultural activities.



Shaping Culture and Harmony in Nam Tha River Basin

During the last World Water Day 2024, we highlighted how a river basin in Lao PDR cultivates the lives of the communities and catalyzes economic progress both at the national and local levels.

The Lao People’s Democratic Republic (PDR) is the only landlocked country in Southeast Asia. However, it occupies a central position in mainland Southeast Asia and lies at the heart of the Mekong River. The Mekong River is a transboundary river, the largest in Southeast Asia, traversing six countries in East and Southeast Asia, connects major waterways in the region, and drains to southern Viet Nam towards the South China Sea, an important large marine ecosystem. Like in any other country, water is essential to the life and culture of every Laotian. It drives the economy – from household and grassroots communities to national development. Water resources are the foundation of key sectors in Lao PDR including agriculture, forestry, tourism, energy, and mining.

The river nourishes the land and its people. Even the mountains and farmlands rely on its nutrients and water supply. It gives communities a bounty harvest and helps people earn a living. Undeniably, the river is every Laotian’s way of life.

In partnership with the Department of Water Resources, the IRBM Project will contribute to the implementation of the Nam Tha River Basin Action Plan 2021-2025, which translates the provisions of the 2017 National Law on Water and Water Resources and priorities of the 5-year Action Plan on Natural Resources and Environment into actions at the river basin level. It will also contribute to the larger policy agenda at the regional level (i.e., Mekong River Strategic Action Plan) and at the global level, particularly Sustainable Development Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation.

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<https://bit.ly/namthariverstory>



IRBM Regional Project Manager Ms. Nancy Bermas together with PRF Executive Director Ms. Aimee Gonzales met with MoEF Officials to discuss the implementation of the IRBM Project in Ciliwung River Basin in Indonesia.

PEMSEA Resource Facility held courtesy visit and consultations with national government and academe partners in Indonesia

Jakarta, Indonesia– The PEMSEA Resource Facility (PRF) Executive Director Ms. Aimee Gonzales and IRBM Project Regional Project Manager Ms. Nancy Bermas had a consultation meeting with the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MoEF) to discuss the implementation of the IRBM Project in Indonesia. The MoEF serves as the National Implementing Partner of the IRBM Project in Indonesia.

The team had a fruitful discussion on the implementing arrangements for the IRBM Project with Dr. Nety Widayati, National Focal Point of the ASEAN Working Group on Water Resources Management for Indonesia and Director of Water Pollution Control Directorate and her team from MoEF.

A courtesy call with Mr. Dasrul Chaniago, Operational Focal Point (OFP) of PEMSEA and Director of Coastal and Marine Pollution and Degradation Control

Directorate of MoEF was also made to apprise the OFP of various PRF-related matters, including the IRBM Project.

Moreover, PRF visited IPB University to meet and discuss with Dr. Yonvitner, President of PEMSEA Network of Learning Centers and Director of Center for Coastal and Marine Resources Studies (CCMRS), which hosts the PNLC Secretariat, potential areas for engagement in the IRBM Project.

Similar to other priority river basins, Ciliwung River, which was identified as a priority site in Indonesia for the IRBM Project, is a critical source of water supply and supports the livelihood of many communities in Bogor, Depok City, and Jakarta. However, it also faces continuous decline of water quality due to pollution, and other unsustainable practices from domestic, industrial, and agricultural sectors.



IRBM Project RPMU visited the Sasmuan Pampanga Coastal Wetlands together with Pampanga PG-ENRO as part of the series of site visits in Pasac-Guagua River Basin.

Scoping and delineation of Pasac-Guagua River discussed, field visit held within its RAMSAR site

Pampanga, Philippines– The IRBM Project team held an online meeting with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources - Region III and the Provincial Government Environment and Natural Resources Office (PGENRO) of Pampanga to discuss and agree on the geographic boundaries of the Pasac-Guagua River. For the purposes of the IRBM Project, the delineation of the boundaries is important since it will determine the scope and coverage of project activities.

The meeting unanimously agreed that the IRBM Project will adopt the delineated boundaries of Pasac Watershed in line with the Area-based Management Plan (ABMP) of Pasac Watershed (2017-2021), which was developed by DENR Region 3, covering eight (8) municipalities in Pampanga Province, namely: Sta. Rita, Guagua, Lubao, Bacolor,



IRBM Project Regional Project Management Team of PRF conducted interviews with fisherfolks involved in the mangrove planting activity in Sasmuan, Pampanga.

Sasmuan, Porac, Macabebe and Minalin. The meeting also agreed to use Pasac Watershed in lieu of Pasac-Guagua River Basin for consistency with the ABMP in subsequent consultations and documentations related to the project.

The governance mechanism of the Pasac-Guagua River is under the Regional Development Council – Region III (RDC III) being led by the National Economic Development Authority Regional Office in Central Luzon. The RDC III manages and governs the different sectors within the river including but not limited to water usage, energy, and food production. Among the major issues that adversely affect the river and the sectors that depend on it are pollution from domestic, commercial and agricultural sources, change in topography due to lahar from the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo over 20 years back, saline water intrusion and land subsidence, and fish kills.

Recently, the IRBM Project team conducted a site visit in the upstream and downstream areas of the river, including the Sasmuan Bangkung Malapad Critical Habitat and Ecotourism Area, a 405-hectare RAMSAR site comprising patches of lush mangrove forests. According to PGENRO Pampanga, the mangrove areas which were affected by the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo in 1991 have started to regenerate. Through



The provincial government of Pampanga started a mangrove nursery in the Municipality of Sasmuan that also provides the fisherfolks an alternative livelihood option.

the leadership of PGENRO, a mangrove nursery was established providing seedlings for the rehabilitation of the mangrove areas along the river basin. As they propagate in the area over the years, it becomes a nursery and feeding ground for fish, crustaceans, and other marine animals. It is also home to different species of water birds and refuge for migratory birds.



Sasmuan, Pampanga Coastal Wetlands is designated as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention.

2024 KEY EVENTS



23rd Large Marine Ecosystems Consultative Meeting

3-5 June 2024 | Paris, France

The LME23 provides a global forum for Global Environment Facility (GEF)-funded projects and other marine and coastal practitioners, partner organizations and institutions, including Regional Seas organizations and Fisheries Management Organizations. Attendance is by invitation.

Regional Steering Committee Meeting

2-3 July 2024 | Siem Reap, Cambodia

The IRBM Project is holding its 2nd Regional Steering Committee Meeting, back-to-back with the ASEAN Working Group on Water Resources Management meeting. Attendance is by invitation.



10th GEF Biennial International Waters Conference

23-26 September 2024 | Punta del Este, Uruguay

The 2024 IWC resumes after 6 years, in its 10th edition, hosted by the Government of Uruguay, in Punta del Este, under the theme: "Transformative actions and impacts for the water and ocean SDGs: The GEF IW response to the global challenge", to reunite the IW portfolio and celebrate 30 years of the GEF IW focal area. More information about the registration [here](#).



East Asian Seas Congress 2024

6-8 November 2024 | Xiamen, China

Connect with thought leaders and networks on sustainable marine and coastal management and learn about the latest on ocean science conservation, policy, practice, and financing. Register [here](#). Interested in hosting a session? Submit your [expression of interest](#) now!



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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