

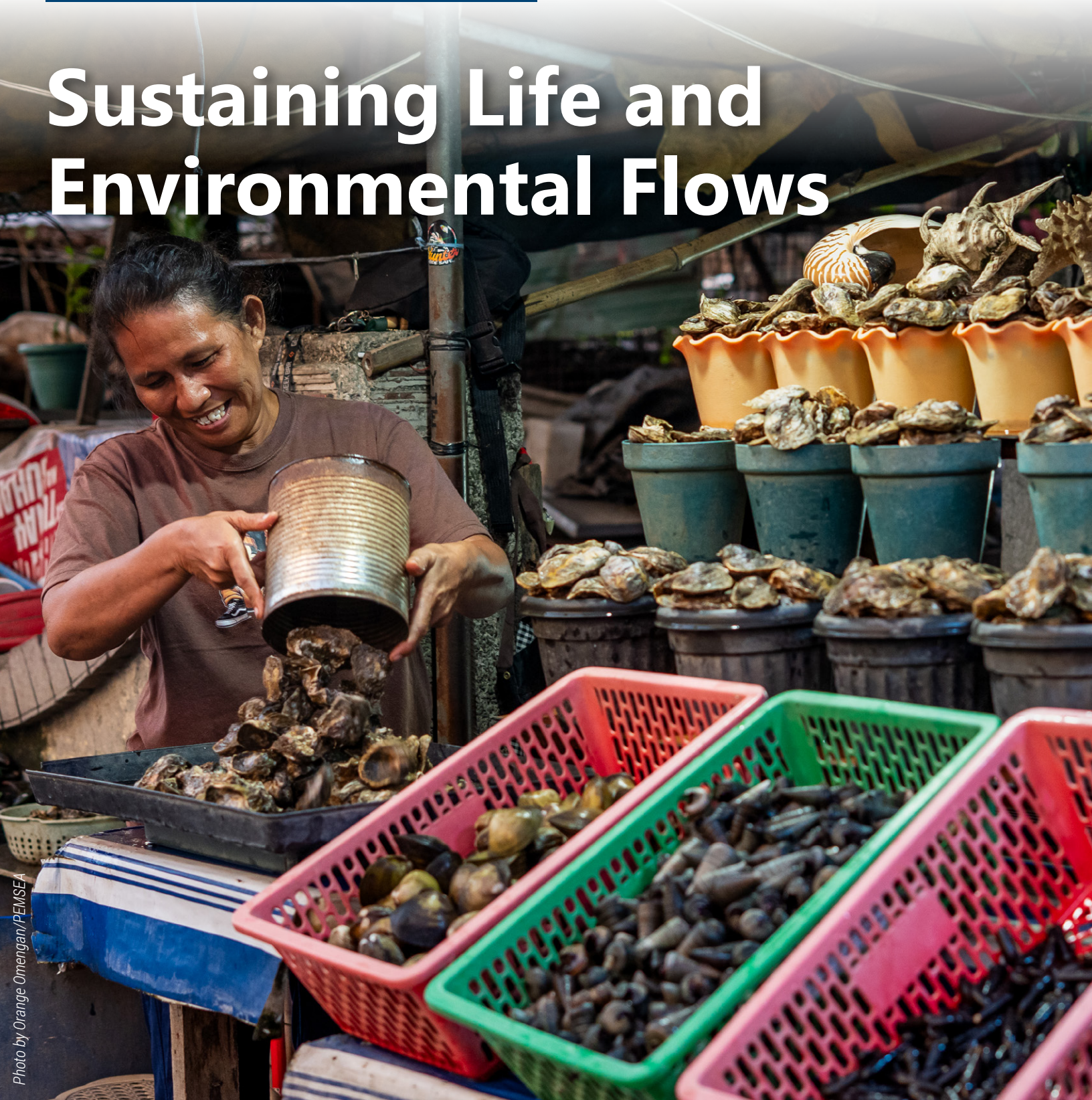
IRBM PROJECT NEWSLETTER

EDITION 8 | JUL-SEP 2025



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

Sustaining Life and Environmental Flows





A portion of the mangrove area in Kawit, Cavite, which serves as a sanctuary for waterbirds and adds greenery to the urban landscape.
(Photo by Orange Omengan/PEMSEA)

The GEF/UNDP/ASEAN Integrated River Basin Management (IRBM) Project continued to gain progress in the third quarter of 2025 with strengthened partnerships, wider knowledge sharing, and more active participation in amplifying best practices and local stories across the ASEAN region.

In the Philippines, national implementation advanced with the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and PEMSEA Resource Facility sustaining collaboration for project implementation in the Pasac–Guagua Watershed and Imus–Ylang Ylang–Rio Grande Rivers. Additionally, consultations in these two river basins helped identify priority issues for pilot project development and implementation, focusing on addressing water

scarcity, improving wastewater management, and promoting nature-based solutions.

In Malaysia, coordination with government counterparts was carried out in preparation for the official launch and full-scale implementation of the Project along the Kedah River Basin.

For each participating ASEAN Member State, multi-stakeholder workshops on Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystem (WEFE) Nexus were held to gather local perspectives and anecdotal information on changes and trends, including gender responsive approaches, relating to water, energy, food, ecosystem, and disaster risk reduction, and potential synergies and trade-offs across these sectors.

At the regional level, the Project expanded its knowledge and capacity building network through initiation of the establishment of IRBM Learning Centers for the Project and linked to the PEMSEA Network of Learning Centers (PNLC). The Project also participated in key international and regional platforms—from Korea’s 20th anniversary celebration of Total Pollutant Loading Management to the GEF Project Oversight Training in the East Asian Seas Region held in the Philippines —sharing lessons learned and best practices on project oversight and implementation.

The Project also highlighted the importance of visual storytelling through local narratives that can drive understanding and action during the GEF IW:LEARN webinar. The Project was also able to profile the Imus-Ylang Ylang-Rio Grande Rivers in the Philippines highlighting community realities and the steps the government has initiated in conserving this river basin.

Together, these efforts reflect a shared commitment to integrated and inclusive river basin management - one that bridges science, governance, and community voices to build a more resilient and sustainable future for ASEAN’s river basins and watersheds and associated coastal and marine areas.



Ms. Melody Gaguit of the Mangrove Farmers Association in Barangay San Rafael, Noveleta. (Photo by Orange Omengan/PEMSEA)

Restoring the Flow: Imus-Ylang Ylang-Rio Grande Rivers



A view of the Imus–Ylang–Ylang–Rio Grande Rivers in Barangay Dulong Bayan, General Trias. (Photo by John Castillo/PEMSEA)

A River Remembered

At 70, Mr. Reynato Robles, a river ranger, recalls the glory of the river he grew up with. He remembers a time as a young fisher, when the river teemed with fish and seashells, and families could earn a living without leaving the riverbanks.

“Back then, the river was clean and children could swim in it,” he recalls of his youth in *Libis sa Nayon* during the 1960s. Today, pollution and flooding have made survival harder. Yet like many Caviteños, Reynato persists. His story reflects both the struggle and hope of communities bound to the Imus–Ylang Ylang–Rio Grande Rivers.

South of Metro Manila, the bustling capital of the Philippines, lies Cavite, a province balancing breezy highlands, rapid industrial growth, and crowded coastal towns. One of the province’s major river systems is the Imus–Ylang Ylang–Rio Grande Rivers—a network of three rivers that once sustained ten cities and municipalities.

Flowing from the cool highlands of Tagaytay, Amadeo, and Silang, through the midstream centers of Dasmariñas, General Trias, and Imus, down to the coastal towns of Bacoor, Rosario, Noveleta, and Kawit



Mr. Reynato Robles, a river ranger who has witnessed the river's journey from its former glory to its deterioration. *(Photo by John Castillo/PEMSEA)*

Large stretches of the river basin are now degraded, unable to support aquatic life. Domestic wastewater and solid waste, siltation, flooding, and water scarcity are among its pressing challenges. But the story is not only about decline. Local and national governments, communities, non-government organizations, and private companies are exploring solutions - from river rangers and flood basins to mangrove restoration. Slowly, the river's story is shifting: from deterioration to renewal and restoration.

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before draining into Manila Bay, the rivers irrigated farmlands, nourished fishing communities, and served as natural drainage and transport routes.



River rangers clear the clogged section of the Imus River in General Trias to help restore its flow. *(Photo by Orange Omengan/PEMSEA)*

WEFE Workshops Conducted in IRBM Project Sites to Strengthen Water Resource Management



In Lao PDR, the Department of Water Resources held the WEFE consultation for the Namtha River Basin on 7–9 July 2025, engaging stakeholders from the provinces of Bokeo, Luangnamtha, and Oudomxay. *(Photo courtesy of the Department of Water Resources, Lao PDR)*

The IRBM Project, in partnership with national implementing partners from six participating ASEAN Member States, convened a series of multi-stakeholder workshops on the Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystem (WEFE) Nexus across seven priority river basins from July to September 2025.

These consultations brought together representatives from government agencies, academic institutions, civil society, the private sector, and development partners to identify key threats and develop

coordinated strategies that balance water, energy, food, and ecosystem needs while reducing disaster risks.

The workshops aimed to surface local perspectives and anecdotal insights on emerging changes and trends—including gender-responsive approaches—as well as explore potential synergies and trade-offs across the WEFE interconnected sectors. They were conducted across project sites in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Viet Nam.

Common challenges raised included deforestation, agricultural expansion, flooding, water scarcity, pollution, and ecosystem degradation. Participants across the basins underscored the need for stronger cross-sectoral coordination, more sustainable resource use, and inclusive governance mechanisms.

Collectively, these discussions highlighted the importance of integrated approaches that connect water, energy, food, and ecosystem priorities to build resilience. By fostering cross-sectoral collaboration and community engagement, the IRBM Project and its partners are advancing a more sustainable and climate-resilient future for ASEAN's rivers and watersheds and associated coastal and marine areas and the communities that depend on them.



In Cavite, Philippines, members of the Imus-Ylang Ylang-Rio Grande Rivers Water Quality Management Area Governing Board participated in the WEFE workshop held on 10 July 2025 for the Imus–Ylang Ylang–Rio Grande Rivers. The event was jointly organized by the RPMU, the Office of the Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Officer and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources - Environmental Management Bureau (DENR EMB) Region IV-A. *(Photo by Orange Omengan/PEMSEA)*



The WEFE workshop was also held on 30 July 2025 in Pampanga, Philippines for the Pasac–Guagua Watershed and was jointly organized by the RPMU and the Provincial Government Environment and Natural Resources Office. *(Photo by Orange Omengan/PEMSEA)*



In Cambodia, the WEFE workshop was held on 25 July 2025 in Kampot City, bringing together representatives from government agencies, communities, and civil society groups. *(Photo courtesy of the Ministry of Environment, Cambodia)*



In Indonesia, the Ministry of Environment and the Institut Pertanian Bogor University jointly organized the WEFE workshop on 7 August 2025 in Bogor, West Java, for the Ciliwung River Basin. *(Photo courtesy of the Ministry of Environment, Indonesia)*



In Malaysia, the Department of Irrigation and Drainage and the Regional Project Management Unit co-organized the WEFE workshop on 19 August 2025 in Alor Setar for the Kedah River Basin. (Photo by IRBM RPMU/PEMSEA)



In Viet Nam, the Viet Nam Environment Agency in close coordination with the Da Nang Department of Agriculture and Environment convened the WEFE workshop on 19 September 2025 in Da Nang City for the Vu Gia – Thu Bon River Basin. (Photos courtesy of Viet Nam Environment Agency and Da Nang Department of Agriculture and Environment)

DENR and PEMSEA Sign MOA for the Implementation of the IRBM Project in the Philippines



Undersecretary for Policy, Planning, and International Affairs Jonas R. Leones of the DENR and PEMSEA Executive Director Aimee Gonzales signed the MOA for the IRBM Project on 17 July 2025. *(Photo by Francesca Cortez/PEMSEA)*

Quezon City, Philippines – The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the PEMSEA Resource Facility represented by the DENR Undersecretary for Policy, Planning and International Affairs Jonas R. Leones and PEMSEA Executive Director Aimee Gonzales, signed the Memorandum of Agreement to implement the IRBM Project in the Philippines for its two project sites: the Imus-Ylang-Ylang–Rio Grande Rivers (IYRR) in Cavite and the Pasac-Guagua Watershed (PGW) in Pampanga in a ceremony held at the DENR Central Office on 17 July 2025.

As co-lead implementing agencies of the Project, DENR's Environmental Management Bureau (EMB) and National Water Resources Board (NWRB) will provide guidance and technical support to the project in line with their mandates on pollution management and water resources management.

While implementation of basin-level activities have been initiated, such as the preparation of the State of the River Basin (SORB) reports and consultations on IRBM pilot project development, in close coordination with the local governments of Cavite and Pampanga

and the regional offices of DENR, the signing of the MOA formalizes national-level arrangements for the continuing implementation of the project. Planned activities for the two river basins in 2025 include the finalization and publication of the SORB reports for IYRR and PGW, confirmation of hotspot locations and priority issues for the IRBM pilot project, and the

application of a generic solutions template for pilot project development and implementation. A National Stakeholders' Forum will be convened to discuss the implementation arrangements and progress made in basin-level activities, following the establishment of a National Project Steering Committee and Inter-Agency Technical Working Group.

IRBM LEARNING CENTERS: Creating Science-Policy Interfaces for River Basin Management



PNLC Executive Committee Meeting convened in Bogor, Indonesia on 15 September 2025 with the PNLC EC members and PNLC Secretariat.
(Photo by Francesca Cortez/PEMSEA)

Bogor, Indonesia — The PEMSEA Network of Learning Centers (PNLC) Executive Committee has reviewed and endorsed the process of designating IRBM Learning Centers for the IRBM Project during its Executive Committee meeting held on 15 September 2025 in Bogor, Indonesia.

This initiative aims to designate and engage IRBM Learning Centers in each of the participating countries, linked under the PNLC framework, to enhance capacities on IRBM through experience and skills sharing and technical assistance across the network.

Moreover, this initiative is a strategic opportunity for selected PNLC members and other interested university partners in the participating countries to broaden their scope of expertise in relation to IRBM and Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), in addition to Integrated Coastal Management (ICM), which can be linked to enhance understanding of the upstream-downstream connectivity across the Source-to-Sea (S2S) continuum.

In line with the IRBM Learning Center Operational Plan (2025-2027), the RPMU is in the process of coordinating with the targeted PNLC members in the six participating AMS and potential university partners for their designation as IRBM Learning Centers.

IRBM Project Mission to Malaysia Strengthens Partnerships for Kedah River Basin



Courtesy visit of the IRBM Regional Project Management Unit with Ir. Mohamad Radzi bin Abdul Talib, Director General of DID, and senior officials of the Division of Water Resources Management and Hydrology in Cyberjaya, Malaysia, on 19 August 2025. (Photo by IRBM RPMU/PEMSEA)

Cyberjaya and Alor Setar, Malaysia – The Regional Project Management Unit (RPMU) of the IRBM Project completed a mission to Malaysia from 19–21 August 2025, to discuss project approval and implementation

arrangements with the Department of Irrigation and Drainage (DID), the Kedah Water Resources Board and Kedah State Economic Planning Division.

The mission began with a courtesy visit to Ir. Mohamad Radzi bin Abdul Talib, Director General of DID under the Ministry of Energy Transition and Water Transformation, where the RPMU shared updates on overall project implementation, outlined the objectives of the mission, and expressed appreciation for DID's effort in facilitating the project approval process.

This was followed by discussions with the Division of Water Resources Management and Hydrology, led by Ir. Mat Pua'at bin Mat Husain, together with representatives of the Division of River Basin Management. Discussions focused on the status of the MOA, the establishment of the governance mechanism comprising the National Steering Committee and National Technical Committee, DID's co-financing contribution through 2027, and priority activities for 2025.

The mission concluded with a meeting with the Head of Kedah State Economic Planning Division, staff from Kedah Water Resources Board and DID Kedah, followed by a cruise along the segment of Kedah River in Alor Setar City.

The field visit offered valuable insights into the State's cultural heritage, the community's connections to the river, the threats it faces, and the management interventions currently in place. The visit highlighted key issues including flooding and water pollution, as well as ongoing efforts to address the challenges in the Kedah River Basin.

The Kedah River Basin is a vital freshwater resource providing water supply to residents and significant agricultural production in the area.



IRBM PMU and Kedah State authorities during the field visit in Alor Setar, Malaysia. (Photo by Daisy Padayao/PEMSEA)

IRBM RPMU Shares the Project's Progress at DENR-FASPS Special Session on ASEAN Synergy



Representatives from PEMSEA Resource Facility participated in the D.R.I.P. Series of DENR-FASPS. (Photo by John Castillo/PEMSEA)

Quezon City, Philippines – The Department of Environment and Natural Resources – Foreign-Assisted and Special Projects Service (DENR-FASPS) hosted a special session entitled, “FASPS Discussions and Results and Innovations of Projects (D.R.I.P.) Special Feature: The ASEAN Synergy”, on 20 August 2025, which aims to highlight ASEAN-aligned initiatives and projects implemented through FASPS in partnership with the PEMSEA Resource Facility.

Representing the project, Mr. Earl Justin Tiu, National Coordinator for the Philippines and Capacity Development Coordinator, presented the goal, objective and key components of the IRBM Project focusing on national and basin level implementation in the Imus–Ylang-Ylang–Rio Grande Rivers in Cavite and Pasac–Guagua Watershed in Pampanga. He highlighted ongoing work on the State of the River

Basin (SORB) reporting and Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystem (WEFE) Nexus analysis, both developed to enhance evidence-based decision-making and promote sustainable, integrated management at the basin level.



Earl Justin Tiu, IRBM National Coordinator for the Philippines and Capacity Development Coordinator presenting during the session. (Photo by John Castillo/PEMSEA)

The presentation emphasized how the IRBM Project contributes to addressing the triple planetary crisis through innovative, science-based, and participatory governance and management approaches. His presentation mentioned the Project's contribution to the implementation of the SDS-SEA by showcasing local actions to strengthen governance, reducing pollution, sustaining freshwater environmental flows and adapting to climate change vulnerabilities.

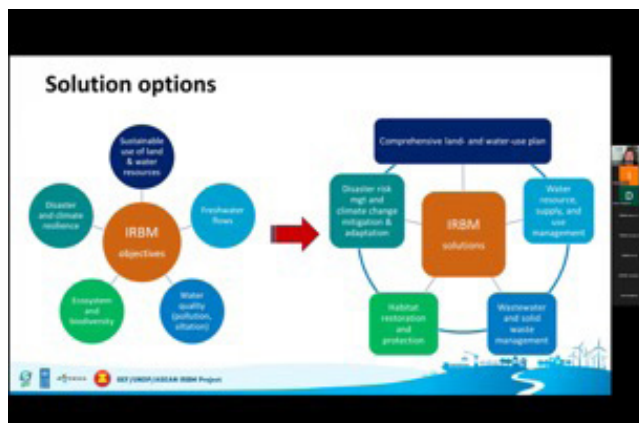
DENR-FASPS, through its Project Monitoring and Evaluation Division (PMED), leads the assessment of foreign-assisted and special projects by evaluating outputs and outcomes, and by documenting and mainstreaming learnings and innovations.

The session also featured other PEMSEA-led initiatives in the country, showcasing integrated management approaches to addressing sustainability challenges.

Stakeholder Consultations Shape IRBM Pilot Projects in Pasac-Guagua Watershed and Imus-Ylang-Ylang-Rio Grande Rivers



Stakeholder consultation meeting with the Sasmuan Pampanga Coastal Wetlands Management Board, which includes representatives from national and local government agencies, the academe, and people's organizations on 11 September 2025. (Photo by Orange Omengan/PEMSEA)



Online consultation with OPENRO Cavite on 3 September 2025.

Pampanga and Cavite, Philippines – The Regional Project Management Unit (RPMU) of the IRBM Project conducted stakeholder consultations in Cavite on 3 and 13 September 2025 and in Pampanga on 11 September 2025, to identify potential pilot projects addressing priority river basin issues in the Imus-Ylang Ylang-Rio Grande Rivers and the Pasac-Guagua Watershed. In Pampanga, the Sasmuan Pampanga Coastal Wetlands (SPCW) Management Board agreed to implement coastal and riparian reforestation as the pilot project for the Pasac-Guagua Watershed. Meanwhile, initial consultations with the Office of

the Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Officer (OPENRO) Cavite leaned toward prioritizing wastewater treatment as a potential pilot project for the Imus-Ylang Ylang-Rio Grande Rivers.

The consultations brought together representatives from government agencies, the academe, and local communities to share insights, validate proposed solutions, and strengthen collaboration toward sustainable river basin management. The outcomes of these engagements will inform the design of the IRBM pilot projects for the two river basins in the Philippines.

Commemorating the 20th Year Anniversary of Total Pollutant Loading Management System (TPLMS) implementation in Korea



Representatives from MOF, KMI, local governments, academic and research institutions, and civil society organizations, including the PEMSEA Resource Facility and Chuo University, Japan, gather at the Busan Port International Exhibition and Convention Center to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Total Pollutant Loading Management System (TPLMS). *(Photo courtesy of the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries, Republic of Korea)*

On 10 September 2025, the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries (MOF) and Korea Maritime Institute (KMI) hosted and organized, respectively, a Commemoration Ceremony for the 20th Year Anniversary of TPLMS implementation in Korea at the Busan Port International Exhibition and Convention Center. The event was attended by representatives from MOF and KMI, from Masan Bay, Lake Sihwa, Busan Coast, Ulsan Coast and Gwangyang Bay with ongoing TPLMS programs, academic institutions involved in TPLMS studies and non-government and civil society organizations, including PEMSEA Resource Facility (PRF) and Chuo University, Japan.

The ceremony included a conference where PRF, represented by Ms. Nancy Bermas, Regional Project Manager of the IRBM Project shared how the East Asian Region has benefited from the Regional Twinning Programme and Networking Arrangements that MOF and KMI supported between 2005-2011, which served as platform for knowledge and experience sharing on innovative approaches to ecosystem-based management of selected watersheds, estuaries and coastal and marine areas in the region.



Ms. Nancy Bermas, Regional Project Manager of the IRBM Project, delivering her presentation on Upscaling TPLMS Application in River Basins and Coastal Areas in East Asia during the event. (Photo courtesy of the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries, Republic of Korea)

The presentation also elaborated how the learnings and knowledge that were generated from the two decades of TPLMS implementation and practices can provide guidance to similar priority hotspots in Southeast Asia that may benefit from implementing the same total pollutant loading assessment. The conference was concluded with a panel discussion involving representatives from the scientific community, national and local governments and civil society groups. The event also featured an exhibition that showcased environmental artworks and activities in the TPLMS sites.

The courtesy call made to the President of KMI, Dr. Cho Jung-Hee, after the conference reiterated PRF's interest in providing the platform for potential

replication of Korea's TPLMS 20-year experience in Southeast Asia through capacity building and knowledge sharing under the IRBM Project and the two networks of PEMSEA, the PEMSEA Network of Learning Centers and PEMSEA Network of Local Governments.



IRBM Project Highlights Lessons on Project Oversight at the GEF Operational Focal Points Training for East Asia



GEF Operational Focal Points from Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, the Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam during the training. *(Photo courtesy of GEF Secretariat)*

Taguig City, Philippines – The Global Environment Facility (GEF) concluded a two-day Regional Project Oversight Training on 23 September 2025, convening Operational Focal Points (OFPs) from six East Asian Seas countries: Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, the Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam. The event was jointly organized by the GEF Secretariat, the Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA), and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) of the Philippines.

The training aimed to strengthen the capacity of GEF OFPs in overseeing project planning and implementation while reinforcing regional collaboration to meet global environmental targets. To date, GEF has invested USD 6 billion in Asia and the Pacific, mobilizing over USD 44 billion in co-financing.

Representing the IRBM Project, Ms. Nancy Bermas, Regional Project Manager, shared lessons from three decades of regional partnerships and project implementation in the East Asian Seas Region.



Ms. Nancy Bermas, Regional Project Manager of the IRBM Project, delivering her presentation during the event. *(Photo courtesy of GEF Secretariat)*

Her presentation highlighted practical experiences in project development, monitoring, evaluation, and oversight, emphasizing the need for strong governance and innovation.

Bermas underscored the importance of aligning projects with global, regional, and national priorities; mainstreaming Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI); strengthening monitoring and reporting; and building institutional mechanisms for sustainability, replication, and scaling up.

“Keeping stakeholders informed and engaging them in the early stages of project implementation promotes ownership and appreciation of their roles and contributions in delivering the outputs,” she noted.

Her insights reinforced the value of collaboration and innovation in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and supporting commitments under Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) by 2030.



WATCH HIGHLIGHT VIDEO

IRBM PMU Showcases Visual Storytelling at GEF IW:LEARN Webinar

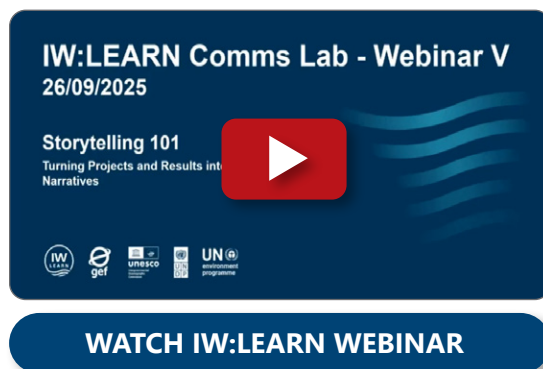


Ms. Orange Omengan, Communications and Knowledge Management Specialist of the IRBM Project, discusses visual storytelling and editing during the webinar.

Online – The Global Environment Facility IW:LEARN platform hosted a webinar on 26 September 2025 titled “Storytelling 101: Turning Projects and Results into Compelling Narratives.” The session aimed to build participants’ skills in communicating science and project results through engaging stories. The webinar brought together GEF International Waters project managers, coordinators, communications staff, and technical experts to exchange ways to use storytelling to inspire action and strengthen engagement.

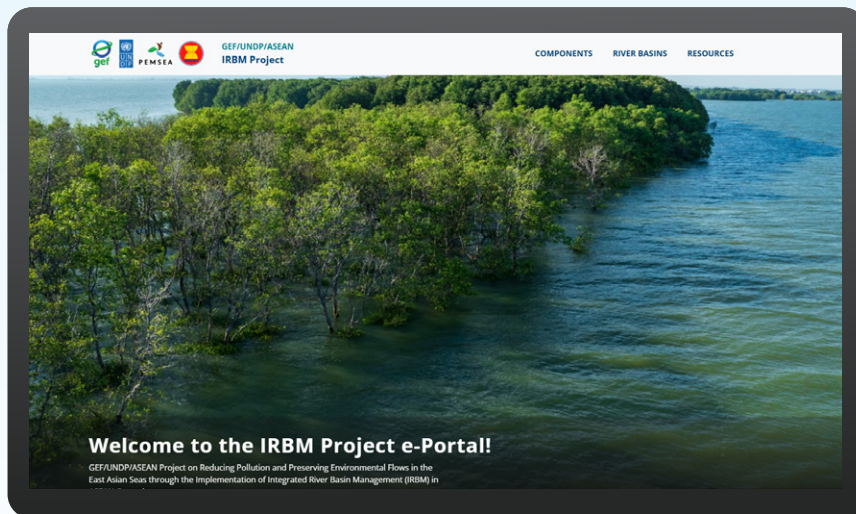
Representing the Project, Ms. Orange Omengan, Communications and Knowledge Management Specialist, shared how visual storytelling connects project initiatives with community realities. Using the Project’s feature *“The Women of Sasmuan: Sustaining Life along the River,”* she showed how narratives can amplify local voices, highlight partner experiences, and humanize environmental issues.

She emphasized storytelling as a tool to bridge technical knowledge with lived experiences by showing the realities of communities affected by the IRBM Project implemented in Sasmuan, Pampanga which is part of the Pasac Guagua Watershed, one of the project sites in the Philippines. Through its communications initiatives, the IRBM Project continues to demonstrate how visual storytelling enhances knowledge sharing, inclusive participation, and more effective river basin governance across the ASEAN region.



Get the latest updates from the IRBM Project e-Portal at PEMSEA's SeaKnowledge Bank!

The IRBM e-portal on PEMSEA's SeaKnowledge Bank offers a dedicated space for sharing key resources, updates, and stories from our work across the region's river basins.



Website Features

- ✓ About the project
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irbm.seaknowledgebank.net





About the Integrated River Basin Management (IRBM) Project

Supported by the [Global Environment Facility](#), the Integrated River Basin Management (IRBM) Project aims to set-up functional management mechanisms in priority river basins 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 the [United Nations Development Programme](#), and executed by [Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia](#), in collaboration with [ASEAN](#).



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