

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

Midpoint Momentum

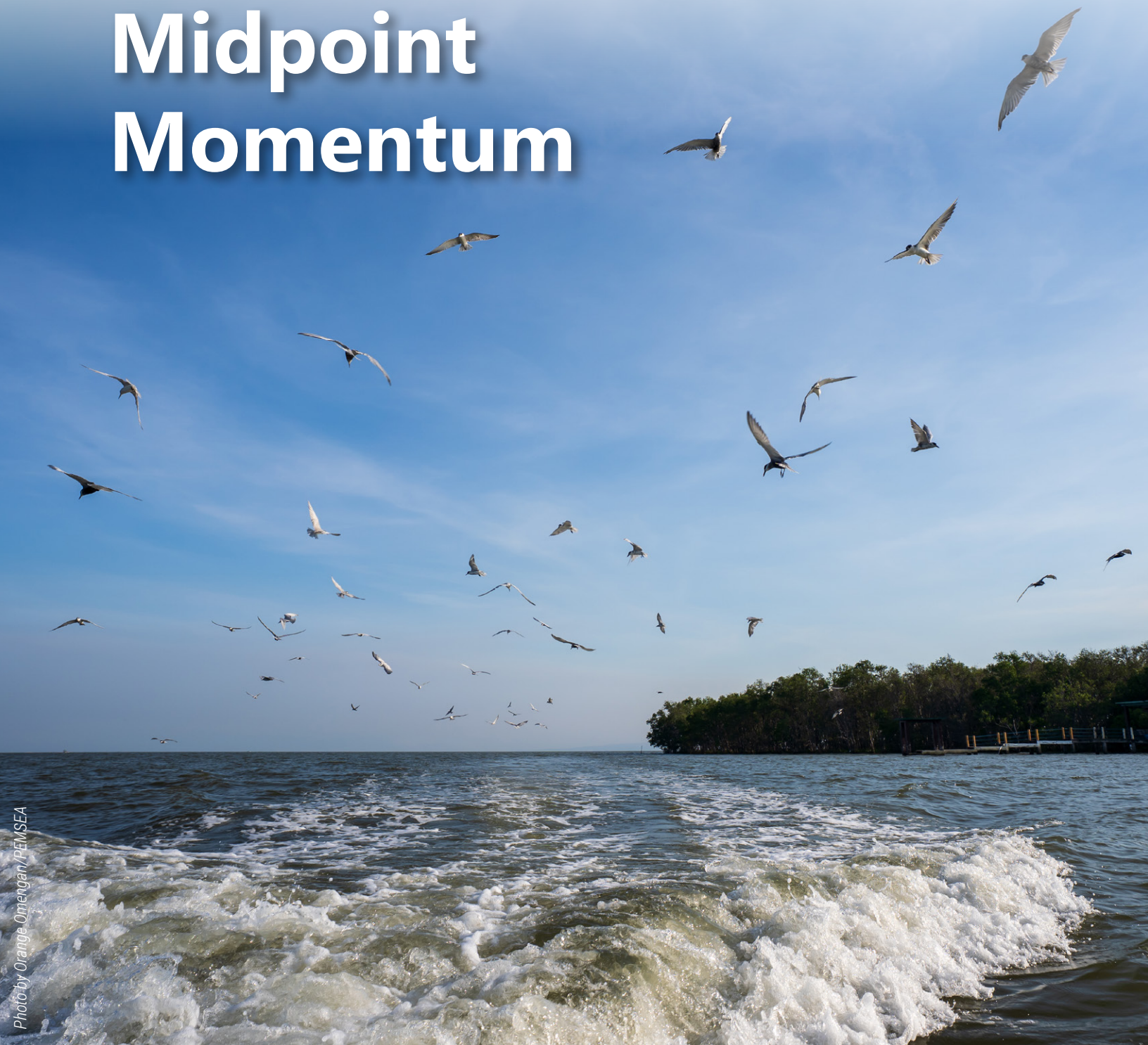


Photo by Orange Omengan/PEMSEA

Forging Ahead: Key Discussions from the IRBM Project's Third RSC Meeting and Mid-Term Review

The IRBM Project, now in its third year of implementation, has made headway in demonstrating a model for integrated river basin management within the target priority river basins in six ASEAN Member States (AMS).

This progress has been achieved through several key efforts. The project has facilitated the establishment and operationalization of river basin coordinating mechanisms. It has also promoted a better understanding of governance, socioeconomic, and ecological conditions at the river basin level with multi-stakeholder engagement through the State of the River Basin Reporting.

In addition, a methodology is being developed to test solution templates for IRBM pilot project prioritization, design, and financing at the basin level. The project has also actively engaged the ten AMS in capacity-building and knowledge-sharing activities. These efforts are complemented by the documentation of knowledge outcomes to support the upscaling of the project's good practices.

Collectively, these initiatives are charting the course toward improved governance, more responsive water resource management, pollution reduction, conservation of freshwater environmental flows, and strengthened regional collaboration among AMS, facilitated through the Regional Steering Committee as a platform for annual dialogue and coordination.

Third IRBM Project RSC Meeting Convenes in Bali, Indonesia

The Third IRBM Project Regional Steering Committee (RSC) Meeting, held on 4 June 2025 in Bali, Indonesia, brought together key partners to evaluate project implementation progress, review the Mid-Term Review (MTR) results, and outline the strategic direction moving forward.

Held back-to-back with the 25th Annual Meeting of the ASEAN Working Group on Water Resources Management (AWGWRM), the Third RSC Meeting gathered representatives from the AWGWRM National Focal Agencies (Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam), National Implementing Partners of the IRBM Project, the ASEAN Secretariat, East Asian Seas Executive Committee, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), including local governments from the seven priority river basins and university partners. In his opening remarks, Dr. Oudomsack Philavong, Chair of the AWGWRM, established the meeting's direction and priorities.

"This very important meeting serves as a platform for us to review our progress, reflect on challenges, and chart the way forward in our collective effort to sustainably manage water resources across the region through the implementation of the IRBM Project. The project is in its third year of implementation. We should carefully reflect how we can further support the countries that are lagging behind, as well as sustain the momentum of countries that are progressing well."

Dr. Oudomsack Philavong
Chair of the AWGWRM



Dr. Oudomsack Philavong, Chair of the AWGWRM chaired the Third RSC Meeting with UNDP.



Dr. Rasio Ridho Sani, Deputy Minister of Pollution and Environmental Degradation Control at the Ministry of Environment of Indonesia delivered the welcome remarks on behalf of the host country.

Underscoring the host nation's dedication to sustainable water management, Dr. Rasio Ridho Sani, Deputy Minister of Pollution and Environmental Degradation Control at the Ministry of Environment, affirmed Indonesia's commitment to the project's initiatives.

“Through this forum, Indonesia commits to continue our active contribution to policy development, knowledge sharing, and the development of technology and best practice in river basin management.”

Dr. Rasio Ridho Sani
Deputy Minister of Pollution and Environmental Degradation Control at the Ministry of Environment, Indonesia

Evaluating Project Trajectory

The IRBM Project is considered to be at a critical juncture after completing its MTR. As Dr. Oudomsack Philavong furthered, *“We are at mid-point of implementing the project, and we need to carefully review and consider the results of the midterm review to be able to identify strategies on how project implementation can be on track to achieving the desired outputs.”*

During the half-day meeting, the RSC reviewed the decisions and recommendations, including actions taken from the 2024 RSC Meeting. They also discussed the implementation progress across the six participating ASEAN Member States (Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Philippines, and Viet Nam) and at the regional level. Furthermore, the committee sought concurrence on the management response that outlined proposed actions and responsibilities to address the MTR recommendations and requested the approval of the reprofiled 2025 and 2026 annual workplan and budget.

Photos by OOmengan/PEMSEA



Mr. Vorng Say, Deputy Director of the Department of Water Quality Management, Ministry of Environment, presented project implementation updates for Kampong Bay River Basin in Cambodia.



Mr. Firdaus Alim Damopolii, Director of the Directorate of Water Quality Protection and Management, Ministry of Environment, shared the efforts of the national and local governments that contribute to the management of Ciliwung River in Indonesia.



Mr. Thanongxay Douangnoulak, Director of the Division of Water Resources Assessment, Department of Water Resources, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment presented implementation updates for Nam Tha River Basin in Lao, PDR.



Mr. Roslan bin Sukimin, Deputy Director of the Division of Water Resources Management and Hydrology, Department of Irrigation and Drainage, highlighted coordination updates on the memorandum of agreement for project implementation along the Kedah River in Malaysia.



Atty. Ricky Arzadon, Executive Director of the National Water Resources Board, presented implementation updates for the Pasac-Guagua Watershed and Imus-Ylang Ylang-Rio Grande Rivers in the Philippines.



Ms. Tran Thi Le Anh, Deputy Head of Environment Quality Management Division, Viet Nam Environment Agency, Ministry of Agriculture and Environment highlighted the project launch on 18 April 2024 and planned activities for 2025 for Vu Gia Thu Bon River in Viet Nam.

MTR Findings: Progress, Challenges, and Future Direction

Mr. Gerd Trogemann, Manager of the Global Policy Network and Regional Programme for UNDP Asia and the Pacific, also opined that, *“It is very encouraging to see that the Mid-term Review confirms meaningful progress of the IRBM Project at regional and subnational levels, particularly in the development of key tools such as the State of the River Basin Reporting system and the solution templates for pilot project design.”*



Mr. Gerd Trogemann, Manager of Global Policy Network and Regional Programme for UNDP Asia and the Pacific co-chaired the RSC Meeting.

The MTR rated the overall progress of the project as moderately satisfactory with its Theory of Change well-aligned with the project goals. Seven out of nine indicators in the Project Results Framework are on track indicating good progress, with specific areas identified for accelerated improvement.

Led by international environmental consultant Dr. Brent Tegler, the MTR adopted a participatory and gender-responsive approach and conducted from February to May 2025. Stakeholders from all six participating AMS were engaged through field missions to the Philippines, Cambodia, and Lao PDR and virtual consultations with Indonesia, Malaysia, Viet Nam, and regional partners.



Field visit with the Provincial Government Environment and Natural Resources Office of Pampanga and local partners at the Sasmuan Pampanga Coastal Wetlands. (Photo by OOmengan/PEMSEA)



Interview with representatives from the Provincial Office of Natural Resources and Environment (PONRE) of Luang Namtha Province and Thongdee Village. (Photo courtesy of Keoduangchai Keokhamphui)

The MTR highlighted key successes, including an important foundational step with the adoption of the Guidebook on the State of River Basin Reporting. The project is also developing generic solutions templates and tools to assess priority issues and create issue-driven solutions for the priority river basins. Working with national and local government partners and river basin management committees, the IRBM Project will be testing these templates to develop one priority project for each river basin in the participating countries. Integrated into the process is capacity development that calls for gender-responsive assessment of IRBM issues and gender-responsive approaches to solutions which will be implemented in the river basins.

The MTR also pointed out areas requiring expedited action, specifically delays in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Viet Nam, stemming from late or pending memoranda of agreement. The MTR's findings provide essential direction as the project moves into its remaining implementation period through 2027, with renewed emphasis on accelerating progress, mitigating risks, and sustaining momentum across all components.



Dr. Brent Tegler interviewed Ms. Anabelle Cayabyab, Department Head of the Office of the Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Officer, Cavite Province, at the Provincial Capitol during the mid-term review visit. (Photo by OOmengan/PEMSEA)



Interview with Mr. Phin Rady, Director of the Department of Water Quality Management, Ministry of Environment in Cambodia. (Photo courtesy of the Ministry of Environment, Cambodia)

Reaffirmed Commitment to Regional Cooperation

The RSC meeting concluded with a reaffirmed commitment to regional cooperation and timely delivery of project outputs and outcomes, especially in view of the remaining timeframe of the project until 2027. This collaborative spirit was further underscored by the meeting's convening in conjunction with the 25th Annual Meeting of AWGWRM, a key regional platform for collaboration and knowledge exchange among ASEAN Member States and partners.

During this forum, agreements and next steps from the RSC Meeting were presented, including IRBM Project initiatives supporting the ASEAN Strategic Action Plan on Water Resources Management.

This collaborative approach highlights the project's commitment to strengthening transboundary water management and contributing to reducing pollution and sustaining freshwater environmental flows in the region.



Participants of the Third Regional Steering Committee Meeting of the IRBM Project on 4 June 2025 in Bali, Indonesia. (Photo by OOmengan/PEMSEA)

IRBM Project Hosts ASEAN Workshop to Introduce the REWEFe Toolkit



Mr. Brecht D'Haeyer of FutureWater with national and local government representatives from Indonesia and the Philippines during the workshop. (Photo by OOmengan/PEMSEA)

Kuta, Bali - The IRBM Project convened a regional orientation workshop on the development of the Rapid Evaluation of the Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystems (REWEFe) Toolkit for river basins in Southeast Asia on 3 June 2025. The event brought together members of the ASEAN Working Group on Water Resources Management (AWGWRM) – comprising of National Focal Agencies from Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam – as well as representatives from the ASEAN Secretariat, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP),

national implementing partners, local governments, university partners, and national coordinators of the IRBM Project.

PEMSEA Resource Facility and the Ministry of Environment Indonesia organized the event and served as Secretariat. The workshop introduced and demonstrated the application of the REWEFe Toolkit in selected river basins of the IRBM Project. It also provided an opportunity for the participants to further explore the toolkit's potential for application in their respective river basins.



Dr. Oudomsack Philavong, Chair of the AWGWRM, provided the opening message.

In his opening message, Dr. Oudomsack Philavong, Chair of the AWGWRM, emphasized the importance of the workshop. *“This initiative aims to provide a better understanding of conflicts in water resources management that occur in the priority river basins and their adjacent coastal areas as a consequence of existing and future water uses, and the implications on the applicable WEFE Security Nexus.”* He added, *“A better understanding of the linkages and interdependence of these four sectors – water, energy, food security, and ecosystem health – is of particular importance in Southeast Asia since water security strongly impacts the region’s economy.”*

Agriculture and food security in Southeast Asia are closely tied to water availability. According to a 2021 report by the Food and Agriculture Organization, over 90 per cent of total water use in some ASEAN countries is allocated to agriculture, highlighting the critical link between water resources and food security.

In addition, Southeast Asia is one of the most vulnerable regions to climate change. Extreme weather events are projected to continue exacerbating floods and droughts, further decreasing freshwater availability in the region.



(Top-Bottom) Representatives from Malaysia, Cambodia, and Indonesia during the open-forum.

Photos by OOmengan/PEMSEA

Applying the REWEFe Toolkit for Integrated River Basin Management



Mr. Brecht D'Haeyer of FutureWater facilitated the workshop.

The workshop gathered 57 participants – 51 per cent of whom were women – and was facilitated by Mr. Brecht D'Haeyer, a hydrologist from FutureWater. He demonstrated the practical application of the REWEFe Toolkit using the Pasac Guagua Watershed as an example, explaining how increased agricultural production necessitates greater land and water use, which in turn affects energy production and freshwater availability for domestic, industrial, and environmental needs.

The REWEFe Toolkit is designed to help policymakers balance competing resource demands and improve climate resilience through informed and evidence-based decisions. Findings from its application will be incorporated into the State of River Basin baseline reports that are being prepared for the seven river basins covered by the IRBM Project.



(Top Left - Bottom Right): Participants from Cambodia, Viet Nam, Philippines, and Lao PDR during the hands-on application of the toolkit.

Country Perspectives and Next Steps

Participants from Cambodia acknowledged the toolkit's usefulness in facilitating the identification of potential policy interventions and evaluating their impacts. However, they emphasized the importance of accurate datasets to ensure the reliability of results.

Representatives from Lao PDR also recognized the value of the toolkit but expressed concern about data limitations in basins beyond Nam Tha River. They suggested configuring the required data inputs based on the river basin context and conducting training to support toolkit application.

While this was an orientation workshop, participants shared recommendations to refine the toolkit for better alignment with the region's specific needs. Targeted basin-level training will be pursued following the refinement of the toolkit.

The workshop and the REWEFe Toolkit collectively advance the IRBM Project's broader mission: reducing pollution, sustaining vital freshwater flows, and enhancing climate resilience in seven priority river basins across the region.



Participants of the regional consultation workshop. (Photo by OOmengan/PEMSEA)

IRBM Project Completes Mission for River Basin Pilot Project Development and Implementation



Discussion with the Office of the Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Officer and DENR-Environmental Management Bureau Region IV-A on priority issues, existing management programs and financing mechanisms for environmental programs and investments in the Imus-Ylang Ylang-Rio Grande Rivers in Cavite, Philippines.

The IRBM Regional Project Management Unit, in collaboration with EnviroStrat, recently completed a visit to the priority river basins including Pasac-Guagua Watershed, Imus-Ylang Ylang-Rio Grande Rivers in the Philippines; Kampong Bay River Basin in Cambodia; and Nam Tha River Basin in Lao PDR on 6-15 May 2025.

The mission aimed to understand local contexts, including priority environmental issues, existing management programs, governance structures, and financing mechanisms, to support the development of solution templates for IRBM pilot project development and implementation.



Site visit along the Sasmuan Pampanga Coastal Wetland in the Philippines together with the representatives of the Provincial Government-Environmental and Natural Resources Office of Pampanga.



Interaction with the national and local government partners in Kampong Bay River Basin in Kampot City, Cambodia.



Consultation meeting with the Department of Water Resources in Vientiane, Lao PDR. (Photo by DPadayao/PEMSEA)

Observations from the four river basins across three countries consistently highlighted the need for comprehensive solutions and integrated management. High priorities include integrated water and waste management, covering water supply, sanitation, and efficient waste management, including enhanced water quality monitoring and early warning systems for floods and droughts. Nature-based solutions (NBS), such as mangrove rehabilitation and nursery establishment, upper catchment afforestation, river bank stabilization,

ecotourism, and carbon afforestation, were also recognized as potential solutions for IRBM pilot project development.

Looking ahead, the IRBM Project, through EnviroStrat and in consultation with national and local governments, will design a generic solutions template that will be tested and implemented later this 2025. This undertaking is part of the ongoing implementation of the IRBM Project on improving integrated river basin governance and management.

Integrated River Basin Management Project Launched Successfully in Viet Nam



Participants at the IRBM Project launching ceremony on 18 April 2025 in Da Nang, Viet Nam. (Photo by OOmengan/PEMSEA)

Da Nang City, Viet Nam – The Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia Resource Facility (PRF) in coordination with Viet Nam Environment Agency (VEA) of the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment (MAE) and Departments of Agriculture and Environment of Da Nang City and Quang Nam Province, officially launched the IRBM Project on 18 April 2025 in Da Nang City which signaled the start of implementation of the IRBM Project in Viet Nam.

In her online remarks, Ms. Aimee Gonzales, Executive Director of PRF, highlighted the project's core approach.

“We are applying the Source-to-Sea framework to link actions across the entire water system, from the river’s headwaters to the coast. This integrated approach recognizes the connections between land, freshwater, coastal, and marine ecosystems and promotes cooperation among diverse stakeholders at all levels.”

Ms. Aimee Gonzales
Executive Director
PEMSEA Resource Facility



At the project launch ceremony, Ms. Nguyen Thi Thien Phuong, Deputy Director General of the Viet Nam Environment Agency under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, stated that the project's objective is to establish sustainable and effective management mechanisms for the Vu Gia–Thu Bon River Basin and the coastal areas of Da Nang and Quang Nam. These mechanisms will be developed through interdisciplinary approaches, including efforts to improve water quality, reduce pollution, manage solid waste, and maintain environmental flows.

According to Mr. Dang Quang Vinh, Deputy Director of the Da Nang Department of Agriculture and Environment, the project has potential in strengthening environmental management through cross-sectoral and inter-regional collaboration.

“This initiative will foster closer cooperation between localities, government agencies, the private sector, and communities to address shared environmental challenges.”

Mr. Vo Nhu Toan, Deputy Director of the Quang Nam Department of Natural Resources and Environment, stated that the Vu Gia - Thu Bon river system plays a key role in providing domestic water for millions of people in Quang Nam and Da Nang.

“This project is a good opportunity for stakeholders to assess the current situation, strengthen interdisciplinary governance mechanisms, and gradually develop a more effective integrated river basin management strategy for the Vu Gia - Thu Bon River Basin and the coastal areas of Da Nang - Quang Nam.”



Ms. Nguyen Thi Thien Phuong, Deputy Director General of Viet Nam Environment Agency, delivered the welcome message at the project launch.



Ms. Nancy Bermas, the IRBM Regional Project Manager, co-chaired the open discussion with Ms. Nguyen Thi Thien Phuong, Deputy Director General of Vietnam Environment Agency.

The Vu Gia – Thu Bon River Basin faces mounting pressures from hydropower development, rapid urbanization, and growing industrial demand. These trends have altered natural water flows and increased the discharge of untreated wastewater, resulting in degraded water quality and adverse impacts on ecosystems, including saltwater intrusion in coastal areas of Da Nang and Quang Nam.

The IRBM Project will implement targeted interventions to be identified in consultation with the local governments and stakeholders with the aim of improving water quality, reducing pollution sources, managing solid waste, and maintaining essential environmental flows. These efforts are expected to contribute to the development of a more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable governance and management system for the Vu Gia – Thu Bon River Basin and its adjacent coastal areas.

Photos by OOmengan/PEMSEA

Women of the Wetlands



Along the Mabuanbuan alley, women of all ages gather each morning to untangle crabs from the nets. On average, families harvest around 10 kilos of crabs per day.

This International Day of the Tropics (June 29), we put the spotlight on women who depend on the natural resources of the Pasac-Guagua Watershed in Sasmuan, Pampanga for their livelihoods.

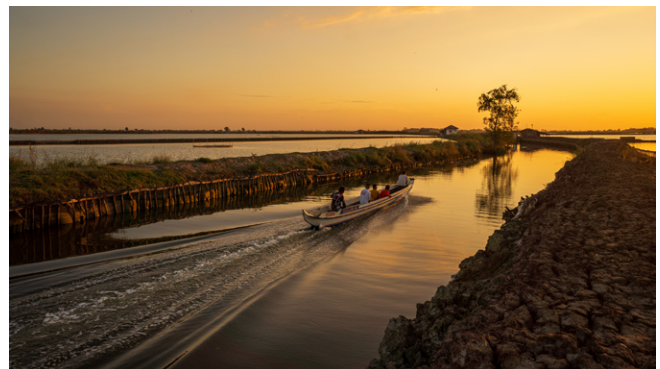
In a region where opportunities are often shaped by the environment, women have become the backbone of the local economy -- harvesting and trading crabs, repairing nets, and building micro-enterprises using resources like crab fat and seapurslane.

The Pasac-Guagua Watershed is more than just a source of income as it is a vital lifeline for surrounding communities. Home to rich biodiversity, including the blue swimming crab, it is protected by mangrove forests that help buffer storm surges and support marine life.

To help preserve this ecosystem and the communities that depend on it, the IRBM Project is working

with local governments to implement a Source-to-Sea approach, connecting upstream watershed management to the health of downstream areas. A State of the River Basin (SORB) Report, based on a 32-indicator framework, is also being developed to guide more effective and sustainable river basin management.

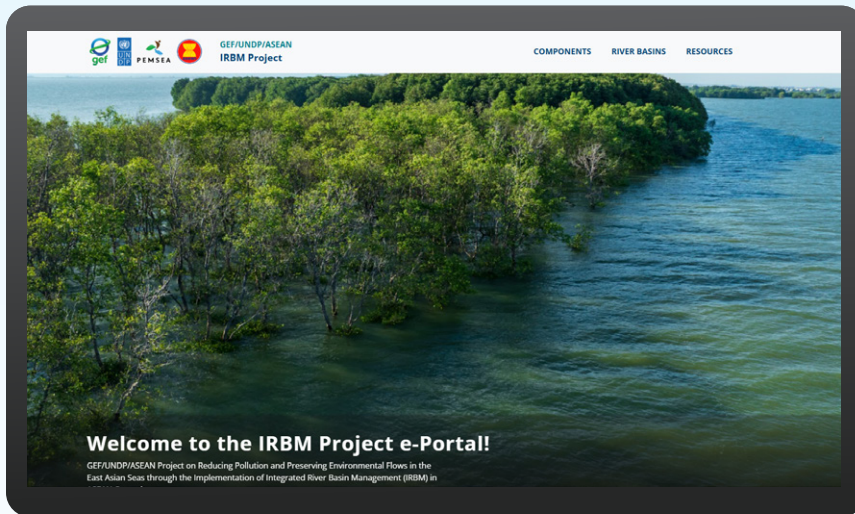
[Read more](#)



The Samsuan Pampanga Coastal Wetlands is located downstream of the Pasac-Guagua Watershed, which drains into Manila Bay.

IRBM Project Launches its e-Portal at PEMSEA's Seaknowledge Bank!

The new 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
- ✓ News updates
- ✓ Featured stories
- ✓ River basin profiles
- ✓ Publications

irbm.seaknowledgebank.net



Upcoming Events



Water-Energy- Food-Ecosystem (WEFE) Consultations:

- Cambodia, Lao PDR, Philippines - July 2025
- Indonesia, Malaysia, Viet Nam - August 2025




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 Asia](#), in collaboration with [ASEAN](#).

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Learn more about
the IRBM Project

