



Implementing the Strategic Action Programme for the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand (SCS SAP Project)

Third Meeting of the SCS SAP Steering Committee

7-8 May 2025, Manila, Philippines

REPORT ON THE STATUS AND PROGRESS OF THE SCS SAP PROJECT



INTRODUCTION

The SCS SAP project was endorsed by the GEF in November 2016 and began implementation in April 2018 with the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC) as executing agencies for national and regional activities, respectively. Due to some initial delays on the execution and implementation arrangements of the project, and in spite of the challenges of COVID-19, the Inception Phase was implemented with the engagement of the Project Inception Team in April 2020, which collectively reviewed, discussed and elaborated, in close consultation with national and regional partners, the national and regional activities, partnerships and co-execution arrangements, workplans and budgets. The Inception Phase ensured that the project is fully in line with recent and current national initiatives and priorities, given the period of time between the SAP adoption in 2008, the GEF endorsement in 2016 and the project inception startup in 2020.

In June 2021, the First Project Steering Committee (PSC) Meeting was held to present, discuss and adopt the inception phase regional report, the revised work plan and budget and no-cost project extension until 2024. Following the PSC meeting, the SCS SAP Project Inception Workshop was held in July 2021 to present and launch the project and discuss key partnerships with participating country national teams and relevant national stakeholders, key regional and global partners and projects. This signals the end of the inception phase and start of the implementation phase.

Since 2021, the SCS SAP Project has implemented its activities at regional and national level, with the support of participating countries, implementing and executing agencies. The implementation phase progress is regularly presented in PSC meetings. This document reports the status and progress of the SCS SAP Project since the last PSC meeting in January 2024 to present.

Required Actions by the SCS SAP Project Steering Committee

The members of the Project Steering Committee are requested to review and provide comments, and consider the activities reported for the period.

STATUS AND PROGRESS OF SCS-SAP PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AT REGIONAL AND NATIONAL LEVEL

Since the Second PSC meeting in January 2024, the following activities and events were undertaken and achieved at regional and national level, in collaboration and cooperation with national implementing partners and regional organizations.

Cooperation Agreements

The second amendment of the Project Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) with Cambodia, China and Thailand have been signed in June 2024 with Cambodia and China adjusting the agreement to include the implementation of Components 2 and 3, and extending the agreement duration and activity timelines for two years until June 2026. Thailand opted for an extension of one year until June 2025 to complete all the activities of Component 1 with a plan to extend the agreement for another year to cover the implementation of some selected activities of Components 2.

Activities implemented include the review and assessment of policies and regulations including public hearings and consultations, surveys and mapping including collection of data and baseline information, information, education and awareness campaign including signboards installation and waste collection, habitat management including management plan development, enrichment planting and replanting and working group establishment, training workshops and capacity building activities, coastal cleanups and patrolling, aside from the regular coordination and consultations by implementing partners with stakeholders.

The Philippines through the Society for the Conservation of Philippine Wetlands (SCPW) as implementing partner has signed the Grant Support Agreement (GSA) in November 2024. Immediate activities undertaken includes the organization and conduct of the first project team meeting with the implementing partners and focal points to discuss and clarify the implementation and execution arrangements and requirements, engagement of project staff and consultants, courtesy calls and meetings at project sites with local partners, and organization of the national inception workshop and first project steering committee meeting in March 2025.

The cooperation agreements with Indonesia and Vietnam have been delayed due to national events resulting to government restructuring, change of leaderships and mandates of agencies that would execute the project, and the internal consultation, coordination and approval process have caused significant delays in the finalization and signing of agreements.

The Indonesia Grant Support Agreement (GSA) with the Bogor Agricultural University-Center for Coastal and Marine Resources Studies has already been finalized and awaiting the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between UNOPS and Ministry of Environment (MOE), which will serve as umbrella agreement. The MOU signing was delayed due to the national election resulting to restructuring and reorganization of the MOE (formerly Ministry of Environment and Forestry) and changes/appointments of ministry officials who will sign the MOU. On 2 May 2025, the MOU and GSA have been signed by MOE and CCMRS.

In the case of Vietnam, the project has been approved for implementation by the government through the Prime Minister. The Project Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with the Vietnam Environment and Marine Science Institute (VEMSI) has been finalized and awaiting signing after approval of the project document by the new Ministry of Agriculture and Environment (formerly Ministry of Natural Resources and

Environment), which undergone restructuring and reorganization and changes of ministry officials. VEMSI committed to sign the cooperation agreement in May 2025.

TDA and SAP Updating Process

Development and updating of the Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis and the Strategic Action Programme (TDA/SAP), a key output of the project is ongoing. Regional and National TDA/SAP Teams have been established to work on the TDA/SAP updating process. Dr. Liana Talaue-McManus is the overall lead and socio-economic and climate thematic consultant, together with the other TDA/SAP thematic consultants: Dr. Gil Jacinto (Pollution), Dr. Somboon Sriraksophon (Fisheries), Dr. Megan Knight (Governance) with support from Dr. Vo Si Tuan (Ecosystems). National consultations and follow-up meetings were organized in February and April 2025 to guide the national teams in developing their national TDA updating.

Small Grants Programme Initiative

The SCS-SAP Small Grants Programme or Seas of East Asia Grants (SEA:GRANTS) has been launched in March 2025 with the call for proposals on Innovation and Management Efforts for Marine and Coastal Ecosystems in the Seas of East Asia. Open to all SCS-SAP participating countries, this initiative is a 12-18 months period of implementation with funding support ranging from 5,000-50,000 USD, focusing on community-based conservation initiatives and research. Submission of call for proposals is ongoing.

Knowledge Management Initiative

Initiated the Seas of East Asia: Learning Exchange and Resource Network (SEA:LEARN), a regional knowledge management platform and gateway to authoritative resources on coastal and marine management in the region. This platform aims to address current gaps in data sharing, integration, and collaboration across countries and stakeholders by providing streamlined access to vital marine conservation data, best practices, and knowledge, drawing inspiration from the long-running Global Environment Facility's International Waters Learning Exchange and Resource Network (GEF IW:LEARN) platform. A Communication and Knowledge Management Consultant has been engaged to support this initiative, which will be carried out in collaboration with the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA), which is set to integrate and sustain the platform.

Meetings and Events

The Second Meeting of the Project Steering Committee was organized from 30-31 January 2024 in Bangkok, Thailand to discuss and approve the project's revised workplan and budget, the new execution arrangements with UNOPS as the sole executing agency, and the project extension until end of 2026.

Following the PSC2 meeting, the First Project Team Retreat was organized on 1-2 February 2024 in Bangkok, Thailand to discuss in detail the approved PSC workplan and arrangements including strengthening and building capacity of the project team. The project team retreat was participated in by UNEP, UNOPS and SCS-SAP Project Coordination Unit and National Coordinators.

As a regional science conference event, co-organized with UNESCO/IOC Sub-Commission for the Western Pacific (WESTPAC) the 2nd UN Ocean Decade Regional Conference and 11th WESTPAC International Marine Science Conference from 22-24 April 2024 in Bangkok, Thailand where a SCS SAP special forum and roundtable discussion focusing on science-driven strategies for managing and preserving the rich ecosystems of the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand were organized and participated in by more than 100 participants from the region.

Participated at the 23rd Annual Consultative Meeting on Large Marine Ecosystems and Coastal Partners (LME23) from 3-5 June 2024 in Paris, France which brought together more than 60 leading partners and experts in marine science, coastal management, biodiversity conservation, and climate change adaptation to foster collaboration and share knowledge to improve the management of large marine ecosystems, in support of effective ocean governance. The LME23 meeting emphasized the importance of delivering transformative actions, continued collaboration, and innovation in marine ecosystem management for long-lasting impacts.

Organized and conducted virtually the First Regional Task Force on Economic Valuation on 26 June 2024 to establish the task force and review its terms of reference including the outputs of the first SCS Project and targets and activities of the current SCS SAP Project on economic valuation and blue economy.

Organized and conducted the Second Meeting of the Regional Scientific and Technical Committee in Bangkok, Thailand from 23-25 July 2024 where it discussed the status and progress of the project including the process for the development and updating of the TDA and SAP, the potentials for a regional data and knowledge management system, and the finalization for publication the SAP implementation achievements and good practices. The meeting was followed by a site visit to Don Hoi Lot Wetland in Samut Songkhram Province where participants met and discussed with local authorities and communities the activities of the project including visiting the mangrove areas and mudflats for razor clam harvesting.

Participated at the 10th GEF Biennial International Waters Conference (IWC10) in Montevideo and Punta del Este, Uruguay from 21-26 September 2024 where the project participated in pre-conference and conference sessions and workshops on various topics such as project management, communications, sustainable funding and financing, source-to-sea approach, regional ocean governance, MPA networking, transboundary MSP, tourism and SDG reporting. At the sideline, the project participated at the first UNOPS Interproject meeting where three UNOPS GEF IW projects – SCS-SAP, Gulf of Mexico and PROCARIBE+, gathered to share and learn about the projects on knowledge management, regional governance, and TDA/SAP process including best practices and efforts for collaboration.

In collaboration with COBSEA, participated at the 2nd meeting of the Working Group on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems and the 26th Intergovernmental Meeting from 21-25 October 2024 in Siem Reap, Cambodia. This is to ensure the integration and long-term sustainability of project activities after project completion such as the development and updating of TDA and SAP, development of knowledge management and regional cooperation mechanism, and linkages of regional working groups.

Organized and conducted the Second SCS-SAP Project Team Retreat from 26-27 October 2024 in Siem Reap, Cambodia to discuss and assess project progress and performance and challenges including planning for next Project Steering Committee in May 2025. The project team retreat was participated in by colleagues from UNEP, UNOPS, COBSEA and SCS-SAP PCU and National Coordinators to ensure alignment and integration of project activities with global and regional commitments. The project team agreed to deliver key milestones and outcomes such as SEA-LEARN (knowledge management platform), the SEA-STAR (updated TDA and SAP), SEA-PUFFER (grants mechanism) and SAP implementation (the PCAs/GSAs).

Participated at the PEMSEA East Asian Seas (EAS) Congress 2024 from 6-8 November 2024 in Xiamen, China, where the SCS-SAP Project and COBSEA co-organized a session on “Tackling the Triple Planetary Crises in the East Asian Seas Region - Climate Change Impacts; Nature and Marine Biodiversity Loss; Marine Pollution” on 7 November 2024. The objective of the session is to encourage collaborative efforts amongst regional marine organizations in the East Asian Seas (COBSEA, PEMSEA, ACB, IUCN, IOC/WESTPAC) to address the triple planetary crises, resulting to a roadmap and working paper on potential collaborative effort, complete with objectives, activities and timelines.

Organized and conducted the Second Meeting of the Regional Working Group on Land-Based Pollution in Shenzhen, China from 11-12 November 2024 where it discussed the status and progress of the preparation and implementation of land-based pollution activities at national level, including the targets and activities and execution arrangements, and the requirements for the development and updating the LbP component of the TDA and SAP. The meeting was followed by a site visit to Shenzhen's Maozhou River Biodiversity Section and Yang Chong River where participants met and discussed with local authorities the activities and achievements to improve the river. Also visited the Belt and Road Environmental Technology Exchange and Transfer Center, a green innovation platform for the development of green and low-carbon technology innovation where it presented the Shenzhen Land Pollution Control Best Practices.

Participated at the 10th Asian Wetland Symposium from 25-28 November 2024 in Manila, Philippines, which was co-organized by the Society for the Conservation of the Philippine Wetlands (SCPW). The symposium served as a platform for wetland stakeholders to share knowledge and experience on wetland conservation and management which contributes to a project output on the documentation of best practices on wetlands management in the region. At the symposium, PCU and SCPW discussed and clarified the activities and execution arrangements and requirements of the Philippine component of the project.

A SCS-SAP Project and Kasetsart University Day was organized on 17 January 2025 at the Faculty of Fisheries to discuss and identify opportunities for collaboration between the project and university stakeholders and students including developing collaboration plan for implementation. The event brought together over 70 participants, including undergraduate and PhD students, faculty members, and professionals from key environmental organizations.

Participated at the National Green Fins Workshop on 18-19 February 2025 in Jakarta, Indonesia organized by the Reef World Foundation and COBSEA which brings together stakeholders from Indonesian government agencies and the global Green Fins network to create a roadmap for Green Fins implementation in Indonesia based on experiences in sustaining the Green Fins initiative at regional and global level.

Co-organized the First Asian Regional Dialogue on Seagrass and Dugong Conservation: From Gaps to Impactful Action from 20-21 February 2025 in Bangkok, Thailand, in collaboration with the Convention of Migratory Species (CMS), COBSEA and H.R.H. Sirivannavari Thai Coral Reef and Marine Life Conservation Foundation. The dialogue convened government representatives, policymakers, technical experts, and conservation practitioners from over ten countries in Asia to share knowledge, build capacity, and explore actionable strategies for seagrass conservation, restoration, and ecosystem services. It showcased recent achievements from the Seagrass Ecosystem Service and the SCS SAP Projects while fostering international cooperation among governments, NGOs, and local communities.

Participated at the National Inception Workshop and Project Steering Committee Meeting of the Philippine component of the SCS-SAP Project from 27-29 March 2025 in Manila, Philippines. Organized by the Society for the Conservation of Philippine Wetlands, the workshop kickstarts the full implementation of the project where local stakeholders and partners participated to discuss and prepare the detailed work and financial plan of project sites, including partnerships and opportunities for cooperation.

Participated at the Our Ocean Conference from 28-30 April 2025 in Busan, Republic of Korea. The conference aims to make significant progress in the next decade by highlighting the need to transition from an "ocean in crisis" to an "ocean of hope" through the delivery of smart, concrete, and intuitive governance actions. At the conference, the SCS-SAP Project co-organized with COBSEA and PEMSEA the Regional Collaborative Network of MPA Networks for the East Asian Seas, a side event which aims to map regional initiatives in supporting the 30x30 target with the aim of forging MPA and collaborative Networks for collective action. The side event was participated in by representatives from ACB, BNA, COBSEA, CTI, IOC-WESTPAC, IUCN, NEAMPAN, PEMSEA and SCS-SAP Project.

Project Mid-Term Review

As a requirement of GEF and UNEP, a Mid-Term Review was conducted from February/March 2025 by Mr. Peter Whalley, engaged by UNOPS to do the review. The purpose of the review is to enable the members of the Project Steering Committee, the Project Coordination Unit, the Executing Agency (UNOPS) and GEF Implementing Agency (UNEP), and local, national and regional partners to assess the project progress to date and to identify any corrective actions needed including lessons learned for future projects. The final report with the findings and recommendations was submitted and shared with all project partners and stakeholders in April 2025

Project Management

Recruited and engaged project staff and consultants to support the SCS-SAP project and COBSEA activities and integration, the development and updating of TDA/SAP, and the knowledge management and communication activities.

Engagement of National Coordinators for Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, China and Viet Nam have been extended to provide project management and technical support to the project and national teams in development and implementation of national activities. Bi-weekly National Coordinators meetings with UNOPS and PCU teams were organized and regularized to guide and monitor the project progress and concerns at national level.

PCU and National Coordinators have participated and provided presentations and inputs in project coordination and consultation meetings and site visits organized by the project and implementing partners on matters related to execution arrangements and requirements, development and amendment of cooperation framework (MOU) and agreements (PCA and GSA), development and finalization of workplans, activities and budgets for all components, monitoring and tracking implementation progress including reporting, among others. Missions and visits were organized to present and discuss the project, its progress and concerns.

Travel support provided to the National Coordinators to facilitate and speed up project implementation and execution process particularly the review and signing of the project agreements (PCAs and GSAs) including execution arrangements, coordination and consultation meeting with national lead agencies and partners, participation in training workshops and events, and monitoring and visits to project sites.

In consultation with UNEP and UNOPS the project's workplan and budget including the new execution arrangements and project extension to 2026 was presented and approved at the Second Meeting of the Project Steering Committee on 30-31 January 2024 in Bangkok, Thailand. UNOPS is now the sole executing agency responsible to implement the project until end of 2026.

Following the PSC2 meeting, the first Project Team Retreat was organized on 1-2 February 2024 to discuss in detail the approved workplan and arrangements including strengthening and building capacity of the project team. The project team retreat was participated in by UNEP, UNOPS and SCS-SAP Project Coordination Unit and National Coordinators.

With the PSC approval of the project extension, the second amendment of the Letter of Agreement between UNOPS and UNEP has been signed in May 2024 amending the duration of the project until 30 June 2027 for the financial closure and 31 December 2026 for the technical closure.

The Second Project Team Retreat from 26-27 October 2024 in Siem Reap, Cambodia was organized to discuss and assess project progress and performance and challenges including planning for next two years of the project implementation to ensure the delivery of project outputs and outcomes. At the retreat, the project team agreed to deliver the key milestones and outcomes such as SEA-LEARN (knowledge management platform), the SEA-STAR (updated TDA and SAP), SEA-PUFFER (grants mechanism) and SAP implementation (the PCAs/GSAs). The project team retreat was participated in by colleagues from UNEP, UNOPS, COBSEA and SCS-SAP PCU and National Coordinators.

Established the SCS-SAP Project office at the Kasetsart University-Faculty of Fisheries and had its office warming on 4 October 2024. The office houses the Project Coordination Unit and various reports and publications (printed and electronic) produced during the first phase of the project.

Project website (<https://scssap.org/>) and social media accounts ([Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#)) maintained and updated, and contributed news articles for the GEF IW Portfolio Bulletin.