



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

Online introduction and next steps to the further development of project activities

10.00 – 12.00 Bangkok Time, Thursday 30th July 2020

Draft Report of the Meeting

Introduction and Attendance

At the invitation of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) the first introductory meeting of the Inception Phase of the UNEP GEF Implementing the Strategic Action Programme for the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand (SCS SAP) Project was held via videoconference (using Zoom) on the 30th July 2020 from 10.00-12.00 Bangkok time.

Five of the six participating countries of the SCS SAP project attended the meeting, with representatives from Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. China was unable to participate due to technological issues. UNEP as Implementing Agency was represented along with one of the executing agencies - United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS). The Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC) UNEP/GEF Fisheries Refugia Project also participated. A complete list of participants is set out in Annex 3 to the present report.

Welcome statements

The meeting began with welcome statements from the UNEP GEF Implementing the Strategic Action Programme for the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand (SCS SAP) project main partners, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS).

Ms. Isabelle Vanderbeck, the UNEP Task Manager of the project welcomed and thanked the countries for their participation in the meeting, as a step towards ensuring the execution of the SCS SAP project to implement the Strategic Action Programme (SAP) with the countries. In terms of overall execution, she informed participants that UNOPS will be responsible with country liaising and coordination, national contracting and recruitment of project staff, while SEAFDEC will be the coordinating office for regional activities including the hosting of the Project Implementation Unit. She presented briefly the history of the initial UNEP/GEF South China Sea project that resulted to the development and adoption of the Strategic Action Programme (SAP) in 2008, which was then followed by three GEF medium size projects

implemented between 2007 and 2014 to support the SAP, and then in 2018, the Fisheries Refugia project to implement the fisheries component of the SAP. In 2016, UNEP at the request of the GEF Secretariat, secured from the six participating countries the signed Memorandum of Understanding reaffirming the countries commitment to implement the SAP. Participants were reminded that the SAP is a strategic document that provides priorities for the reversing of environmental degradation in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand, and its scientific foundation was the Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA) which analyzed the key priorities and their root causes. It was noted that these priorities are still valid today and the SCS SAP is considered one of the most well prepared and robust within the global GEF portfolio.

The project has faced some challenges since its approval in November 2016. The execution modality was finessed and fine-tuned now including UNOPS and SEAFDEC, as COBSEA is considered part of UNEP and GEF rules do not allow the same organization to be implementing and executing agency for a project. The project will however continue to report on progress and achievements at each COBSEA Intergovernmental meeting. Also, the project manager departed in 2019 and COVID-19 caused delays in recruiting project staff. As such, an interim project team was recruited from April 2020 to help the inception phase of the project. She introduced the two SCS SAP inception phase consultants, Ms. Virginie Hart and Mr. Reynaldo Molina who are committed to support participating countries in preparing the detailed inception phase documents for adoption and subsequent implementation. In spite of these challenges, this was also an opportunity to now strengthen the project during this inception phase, to elaborate activities in line with new national, regional, and global initiatives and integrate good practices and experiences from similar initiatives. The inception team, together with UNEP, UNOPS and SEAFDEC are fully dedicated to support countries in the execution of the project. This refinement of the project will ensure that the project achieves real impact and matches the realities on the ground. She wished all participants that the project's long journey to implement the SAP will be successful.

Ms. Katrin Lichtenberg, the UNOPS Vienna Representative and Head of Programme thanked participants for their strong participation in the meeting, which shows the importance and commitment given by countries to the project. She emphasized the relevance of the SCS SAP project and UNOPS's pride to be associated to the project as executing agency. She committed UNOPS support through its project management excellence and related tailored operational tools and mechanism to ensure speed, adaptability and maximum in activity implementation. Ms. Lichtenberg pointed out the importance of diligent and systematic stakeholder participation as a key perspective of the UNOPS management approach. She commended the work of the project team for their work to facilitate country engagement in the project.

Mr. Somboon Siriraksophon, the Project Director of the GEF/UNEP/SEAFDEC Project on the Establishment and Operation of a Regional System of Fisheries Refugia, provided his welcome remark. He informed the meeting that as the executing agency of this project, SEAFDEC is hosting the SCS SAP Project Implementation Unit as well as provide support to the administration and financial matters of regional activities, ensuring smooth operation of the project. He stressed the importance of the meeting to discuss the steps ahead in the implementation of the project.

Meeting objectives and inception phase update

Ms. Virginie Hart started with a brief presentation of the meeting objectives, and inception phase update including deliverables and timeline. She informed the meeting that the main objectives of the meeting are to ensure the full engagement and exchange on the most efficient and effective steps to implement the SCS SAP project, considering new national, regional and global priorities and processes and challenges

of working due to COVID 19. She stressed that the meeting is the first of several meetings planned over the next months with bilateral discussions in between to: (1) ensure national teams of focal points are updated, and overall roles of national working groups are discussed; (2) discuss any comments, challenges and recommendations to strengthen activities in line with new priorities; and (3) agree on the next steps for the further elaboration of national activities in preparation of the 1st Steering Committee/Inception Meeting of the SCS SAP project. Ms. Hart summarized the links between the SAP priority targets and the SCS SAP project through three major components – Component 1 which focuses predominantly on national level site specific actions to address mangroves, coral reef, seagrass and wetlands; Component 2 which is a combination of national and regional activities covering various knowledge strengthening and capacity building tools and best practices, including updating the NAPs, SAP and TDA, and the further work on economic valuation; Component 3 which is mainly on coordination, stakeholder involvement, communication and outreach particularly strengthening private sector and civil society engagement.

Ms. Hart presented the draft project organogram which is in line with the project document and follows the same approach as the previous SCS project. She explained briefly the various regional working bodies, their composition and function, which are all linked to the various national level working bodies. She stressed that each country will have to identify and organize their Specialized Executing Agencies (SEAs) and focal points who will ensure coordination and execution of national activities related to mangrove, coral reef, seagrass, wetland, land-based pollution and economic valuation. These focal points will be part of National Technical Working Group (NTWG) who will provide scientific guidance and support and coordination between the different national activities. The main oversight of the project at national level is the Inter-Ministry Committee. These chairpersons of the national bodies will then be members of the regional bodies to provide guidance and coordination at the regional level.

Ms. Hart presented the inception phase deliverables consisting of the Regional Implementation Report, the National Implementation Reports (NIRs), and the revised detailed budget. She explained that draft National Implementation Reports prepared by the inception team will be shared to the countries for further inputs, taking into consideration new and emerging issues such as SDGs, CBD Post 2020 framework, climate change, blue/green growth and circular economy, technology in monitoring and assessments, and regional and national strategic priorities and initiatives, among others. Finally the next steps and timeline of inception phase were summarized concluding with the organization of the Inception Meeting / First Steering Committee Meeting, provisionally planned for late 2020, to adopt the regional and national implementation reports and budgets.

Country statements

The participating countries were invited to make a brief introduction regarding their expectations from the project, status of SAP implementation (if information is available), main national priorities that have evolved since the SAP adoption in 2008 and any general comments or questions.

Mr. Thay Chantha of the Ministry of Environment (MoE) of Cambodia, on behalf of the Cambodian participants informed the meeting that many reforms have been made in Cambodia particularly in the Ministry of Environment. Some of the previous nominations will need updating due to their promotion and transfer to other positions, while others are no longer relevant to the project. The National Technical Working Group members will be also discussed further with their Director General, Mr. Kim Nong, who will be responsible for this group. Mr. Chantha clarified that a letter will be sent with the nomination of the national focal and contact points once they received approval from the Minister. They will ensure that this project will be closely coordinated through their department which is responsible for all activities

related to marine and coastal conservation. Mr. Thay Chantha requested further information on the project to facilitate this process.

Mr. Dida Migfar Ridha of the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MoEF) of Indonesia thanked the project inception team for organizing the meeting despite of the COVID-19 situation. He informed the meeting of staffing changes in the Ministry and requested that these persons be included in future communications. He recognized that to effectively address and reverse environmental degradation trends, collective and collaborative measures at the regional level are essential. He noted that since adoption of the SAP in 2008, actions have already taken place at national, regional and global levels and should be considered and if possible integrated into the project and SAP revision. Various relevant actions have been implemented in Indonesia such as the issuance in 2017 of a Presidential Decree providing a comprehensive guidelines on maritime policy; support and hosting of the 4th Intergovernmental Review Meeting of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-Based Activities in 2018; support to the 4th UNEA resolution on the protection of marine environment from land-based activities; and establishment of the Regional Capacity Center for Clean Seas in Bali, a hub for strengthening capacity building in the field of protecting the marine environment from land-based activities. He requested further clarification in terms of the mechanism and procedure of this project, and to take into consideration the regulations in all participating countries. He also requested to include the GEF National Focal Points in project coordination at national level. He said that the results of the meeting including their nominations will be reported back to the Minister.

From the Philippines, Assistant Secretary Ricardo Calderon of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), on behalf of the Philippine participants, expressed appreciation to the project inception team as well as with the implementing and executing agencies in the organization of the meeting. The Philippines is pleased that the project inception has begun and looks forward to the forthcoming implementation of the project. It was stressed that the SCS project will help all participating countries elevate its initiative in coastal and marine protection including improving collaboration and relationship with all participating countries. Since the formulation of the SAP and the corresponding NAPs in 2008, several initiatives in support to achieving the SAP objectives have been implemented. He hoped that the project team will lead the reassessment of project design and accommodate necessary adjustment to meet the current needs of the countries and the region especially with the current national programs on seagrass, mangroves, and environmental marine protection. He stressed that the NAP and its components and national baselines need to be updated as part of the project implementation.

Mr. Ukkrit Satapoomon of Thailand's Department of Marine and Coastal Resources (DMCR), on behalf of Thailand participants, expressed appreciation to the project inception team for organizing the virtual meeting to discuss the next steps for further development of the SCS SAP activities. The SAP is a key output of the UNEP/GEF project on reversing environmental degradation trends in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand, and that after its adoption in 2008, Thailand participated in this GEF-5 project in order to implement the SAP. Since the submission of endorsement letter in 2016, the structure and persons that will be involved in the project will need revision. It was stressed that the delay in project implementation should be reflected in the workplan and new timeframe should be developed to ensure activities are achievable. Thailand will reconsider and adjust national activities including the formulation of teams and focal points for this project and looked forward to working with the project team and wish the project great success.

On behalf of Vietnam participants, Mr. Nguyen Kien of the Vietnam Administration of Seas and Islands (VASI) noted that the nominations of focal points will be changed as some of the members have been

promoted or retired, and that they are currently proposing to the Minister for their replacement. He reaffirmed that the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment would be the Specialized Executing Agency for this project. As to national and regional plans, Mr. Kien informed the meeting that they have a National Action Plan on marine plastic waste management, where they plan to receive more support for the establishment of an international marine plastic waste research center in Vietnam where regional and international organizations could come together to do research, develop plans and mobilize resources for relevant projects like the SCS SAP. It was stressed that Vietnam is opening to more international cooperation in marine economy and sustainable development. He hoped that they could decide new members and new focal points to be more effective and looked forward to working together with UNEP and SCS SAP project

China was unable to participate in the meeting, and the Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Ecology and Environment of China provided their initial thoughts on the Inception Phase via email and will follow up with further national consultations and exchange with the Inception Phase team and agencies.

Responses and clarifications

Following all presentations, further clarifications were made by the inception team on the statements and concerns raised by countries.

Ms. Hart observed that a common concern raised by all countries is the need to change focal points and experts that countries will have to engage with the project. She noted that some replacements may not have the knowledge and history of the project, and inquired whether countries, given the complexity of the project, would require assistance such as a summary document of project history and SAP that will be useful for new focal points and experts to make sure that the information is clearly presented and understood.

Ms. Vanderbeck thanked the countries for their interventions and support for the project and is reassured to hear from countries that the SAP priorities are still considered important and valid. Regarding the project timeline, she clarified that the project is to be implemented over a five year duration. Whilst the project was endorsed by the GEF in November 2016, the project only started with the signing of the agreement by UNEP with UNOPS and SEAFDEC in 2018, and as per these agreements, the project timeline will be compressed to four years (until June 2023). Ms. Vanderbeck explained that given the signed agreement and the current COVID 19 situation, the project may have to be extended, without any cost repercussion.

Ms. Lichtenberg noted the concerns on project timeframe and resources which from a management perspective will be a challenge, and assured countries that this has always been in the minds and agenda of the project inception team, who will have to rationalize the implementation timeframe. She explained that this is an important topic that will be considered and reviewed during project implementation to keep track on the progress. She noted the expectation and commitment from countries to engage with the project and move it forward as schedule. She reiterated again that stakeholder engagement is an important part of the project's management approach and will continue to engage with countries and stakeholders regularly.

Ms. Vanderbeck inquired on the establishment of the international marine plastic waste research center in Vietnam, as to whether it falls under a particular framework such as the Indonesian Regional Capacity

Center for Clean Seas which was established and now being considered as a COBSEA Regional Activity Center, or another framework like the Global Partnership on Marine Litter? Mr. Kien clarified that they are still in the concept stage, but the scientific basis and foundation of the center has been approved by the government and currently there is no particular framework or platform and they are looking for projects and organizations that could provide support and resources in this area. The establishment of this center is one of their national goals of providing cooperation and capacity to other countries.

Mr. Molina raised the concern of the Philippines with regards to the signing of the project document. He mentioned that before a project starts its implementation, the agency will have to secure clearance from the Office of the President, and once cleared the project document will have to be signed by the Minister or head of agency. Ms. Vanderbeck clarified that UNEP does not sign any project document unlike UNDP. She noted the case of Vietnam under the Fisheries Refugia project wherein they need to internalize the project in their administration. She stressed that any participating countries with similar concerns have to inform the project inception team because this will affect the implementation timeline, and that support will be provided to countries with any documentation needed to internalize the project or the national implementation report. Dr. Somboon shared his experience with the Fisheries Refugia project. He stated that they have signed a Letter of Agreement with countries at the department level, particularly the agencies responsible for the project.

Ms. Percie Otico of the Philippines Environmental Management Bureau inquired on the identified priority sites particularly on the land-based pollution hotspot areas. She said that there were three hotspot areas identified during the SCS project and would like to be clarified whether they can keep or change the number and location of hotspots. Ms. Vanderbeck clarified that the hotspots may be considered as land-based pollution sites that can be adjusted, provided that the new sites identified will contribute to the implementation of the SAP and the rationale for changes is clearly presented. The inception meeting, which will also be the first steering committee meeting of the project, will be requested to endorse the inception report, which integrates all the adjustments with justifications, and that once endorsed, the project will be executed against all the approved changes in the inception report.

Next steps

The Project Inception Team presented the next steps focusing on the inception phase deliverables and timeline. The first step is for the countries to re-nominate or reconfirm their focal points and experts for the various national bodies, given the staffing changes in the agencies that will be involved, following national consultations. Then these national teams should further develop the National Implementation Reports, which are effectively a national project document, the draft of which will be shared to the countries for review and further elaboration. This includes baseline information on relevant new laws and policies, complimentary initiatives and projects, and key stakeholders to be engaged. Then the NIR should be further developed in terms of national activities, including sites, activities, work-plan, budget, and local stakeholders. As mentioned, national teams should review the priority sites identified in the SAP and listed in the project document in case these sites are not all now valid for interventions and in which case alternatives can be proposed with justification.

In order to complete the NIR it is understood that countries will need adequate time for national consultations and the Inception Team will be available to support and guide the process as needed over the coming months. The next online meeting will be organized in September 2020 to discuss and clarify any concerns the countries may have in relation to the required deliverables. The team emphasized that all inception phase reports should be finalized ideally by October 2020, to be presented for adoption at

the Inception Meeting / 1st Project Steering Committee Meeting scheduled provisionally in December 2020.

Closing statements

Ms. Vanderbeck and Ms. Lichtenberg expressed thanks and appreciation to all the participants for attending the meeting and their positive and constructive interventions and updates, and expressed their confidence that the project inception phase will be successfully completed with the support of all participants and newly nominated teams which will result in project executed fully in line with national priorities. Ms. Vanderbeck reemphasized that the project team will provide help and support to the countries to implement the SAP both at country and regional level. Dr. Somboon said that the meeting provided a good starting point for the implementation of the project. He stressed that the signing of project document or any agreement with countries and the internal procedures that goes prior to signing is important and will have to be considered by the team as it will affect the implementation timeline.

Ms. Hart thanked all the participants and looked forward to working closely with all the countries.

With the no other concerns raised, the meeting adjourned at 12:10 pm.

ANNEXES

Annex 1 Agenda

Annex 2 Meeting and Reference Documents

Annex 3 List of Participants

Annex 1 Agenda

1. Welcome, general update and introduction
 - A general introduction and update from UNEP, UNOPS and SEAFDEC representatives.
2. Meeting objectives and Inception Phase update
 - A brief presentation on the steps needed to further develop the SCSSAP activities in consultation with participating countries, with further clarifications on the nomination process of national experts.
3. Introduction from participating countries
 - Each participating country to provide a brief introduction regarding their expectations from the project, status of SAP implementation (if information is available), main national priorities that have evolved since the SAP adoption in 2008 and any general comments or questions.

 - After introduction, the SCS SAP Team to provide response
4. Next steps and meeting closure
 - Main next steps for the nomination of national experts and further elaboration of activities will be discussed and agreed.

Annex 2 Meeting and Reference Documents

- SCS SAP Online Meeting 30 July 2020 Background Note (sent via email on 17 July 2020)
- SCS SAP Structure and Organogram (attached separately)
- SCS SAP full project document - available on the project website - <https://scssap.org/>
- SCS SAP National Project documents - available on the project website - <https://scssap.org/>
- SCS Strategic Action Programme - available on the project website - <https://scssap.org/>

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