

## Evaluation Approach Paper

# Technical Assistance Performance Evaluation Report for the Core Environment Program and Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative in the Greater Mekong Subregion

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## A. Introduction

1. The Independent Evaluation Department (IED) of Asian Development Bank (ADB) undertakes evaluations to assess the performance of a cluster of technical assistance (TA) activities to contribute to learning and accountability, and the improvement of project design and effectiveness in country and sector operations within ADB.

2. The proposed technical assistance performance evaluation report (TPER) will evaluate ADB's TA support to the Core Environment Program (CEP) and Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative (BCI) in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS). This includes (i) Greater Mekong Subregion Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative (TA 6213), (ii) Core Environment Program and Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative in the Greater Mekong Subregion (Phase 1, TA 6289), and (iii) Core Environment Program and Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative in the Greater Mekong Subregion (Phase 2, TA 7987).<sup>1</sup> The three TA activities were approved and implemented over the period 2004–2018. The findings and lessons of TPER will feed into the IED's sector-wide evaluation study on ADB's support for the agriculture, natural resources, and rural development sector.

3. This evaluation approach paper (EAP) sets out the background, details of the selected TA projects including evaluation findings and lessons, evaluation scope and approach, requisite data sources, and tentative resource and schedule requirements of this evaluation.

## B. Background

4. **Strategic context.** ADB's long-term strategic framework 2001–2015 recognized that the challenge for the region is not only to protect the environment but to reverse environmental degradation while maintaining robust economic growth in the region.<sup>2</sup> Under the framework, addressing environmental sustainability emerged as one of the three crosscutting themes to broaden and deepen the impact of the core strategic areas of intervention (sustainable economic growth, inclusive social development, and governance for effective policies and institutions).

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<sup>1</sup> ADB. 2004. *Technical Assistance for the Greater Mekong Subregion Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative*. Manila; ADB. 2005. *Technical Assistance to Core Environment Program and Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative in the Greater Mekong Subregion*. Manila; and ADB. 2011. *Technical Assistance for Core Environment Program and Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative in the Greater Mekong Subregion, Phase 2*. Manila.

<sup>2</sup> ADB. 2001. *Moving the Poverty Reduction Agenda Forward. Long-Term Strategic Framework of the Asian Development Bank 2001–2015*. Manila

Consistent with the framework, ADB adopted an Environment Policy<sup>3</sup> that addresses (i) environmental interventions, (ii) mainstreaming of environmental issues in economic growth, (iii) maintenance of global and regional life support systems, (iv) fostering effective partnerships, and (v) integrating environmental considerations across all ADB operations. The pro-poor and sustainable economic growth pillar of the 2004 poverty reduction strategy framework recognized that a better understanding is needed on the impacts of environmental policies for inclusive development, particularly on the poor.<sup>4</sup> Presently, environmentally sustainable growth is one of the three strategic agendas of ADB's Strategy 2020, along with inclusive economic growth and regional integration.<sup>5</sup> The Midterm Review of Strategy 2020 reaffirmed that environmental sustainability and resilience to climate change impacts are major challenges, especially for middle-income countries.<sup>6</sup>

5. **Regional context.** As a natural economic area bound together by the Mekong River, the GMS comprises Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand, Viet Nam, and the People's Republic of China, specifically Yunnan Province and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Building on the region's shared histories and cultures, ADB supported the six countries to launch the GMS Program in 1992, to maximize the benefit of regional cooperation and integration within the broad sector focus.<sup>7</sup> As one of the world's most rapidly growing regions, the GMS people have enjoyed the development benefits over the 2 decades. It did not pay due attention to spillover environmental effects as a result of economic development policies.<sup>8</sup> The GMS is endowed with rich biodiversity ecosystems sustained by its diverse climates and landscape. The natural capital contributes a significant proportion of the economic wealth of GMS countries, particularly for energy, food, and water security.<sup>9</sup> However, natural capital in the GMS is under increasing pressure from rapid development which often poorly planned development. This poses a need of establishing solid system of environmental assessment and management, to be integrated into national legal frameworks and to influence on other sector strategies. Well-balanced environmental sustainability and climate risk mitigation are needed toward genuine inclusive and sustainable development to enjoy natural resources to underpin regional economies.<sup>10</sup>

6. The GMS Beyond Borders Regional Cooperation Strategy and Program (RCSP) for 2004–2008 stipulates that ADB's overarching objective of poverty reduction in the GMS was to be achieved through implementing the GMS vision for enhanced connectivity, increased competitiveness, and a greater sense of community.<sup>11</sup> One of the thrusts in RCSP focused on managing the environment and shared natural resources. Hence, the RCSP was to be bolstered by safeguards that provide greater community participation in project planning and implementation. The focus on economic corridors was further recognized in the succeeding RCSP

<sup>3</sup> ADB. 2002. *Environment Policy*. Manila.

<sup>4</sup> ADB. 2004. *Enhancing the Fight Against Poverty in Asia and the Pacific: The Poverty Reduction Strategy of the Asian Development Bank*. Manila.

<sup>5</sup> ADB. 2008. *Strategy 2020: The Long Term Strategic Framework of the Asian Development Bank, 2008–2020*. Manila.

<sup>6</sup> ADB. 2014. *Midterm Review of Strategy 2020: Meeting the Challenges of a Transforming Asia and the Pacific*. Manila.

<sup>7</sup> The program initially covered the nine priority sectors: agriculture, energy, environment, human resource development, investment, telecommunications, tourism, transport and trade facilitation.

<sup>8</sup> Environmental degradation constrains agricultural productivity, causes mismanagement of waters and more frequent floods and landslides, and poses a threat to the region's prospects for poverty reduction.

<sup>9</sup> ADB. 2015. *Investing in Natural Capital for a Sustainable Future in the Greater Mekong Subregion*. Manila.

<sup>10</sup> Aggregate growth in the 10 ASEAN economies is forecast to accelerate steadily from 4.4% in 2015 to 4.5% in 2016 and 4.8% in 2017. ADB. 2016. *Asian Development Outlook 2016 Asia's potential growth. Highlight*. Manila.

<sup>11</sup> ADB. 2004. *GMS Beyond Borders Regional Cooperation Strategy and Program (RCSP) for 2004–2008*. Manila.

Update (2006–2008) which noted the need for improved capacity for addressing shared environmental and social issues.<sup>12</sup>

### C. Description of the Technical Assistance Projects

7. The TPER will assess the performance of the three TA projects financed by ADB to support the CEP-BCI. TA 6213 was approved in 2004, followed by TA 6289 approved in 2005, and the ongoing TA 7987. The total financing for the three TA projects amounted to \$59.55 million, of which \$4.90 million was co-financed by ADB (Table 1). Alongside TA 6289, ADB is also supporting a loan and four grants.<sup>13</sup> These, however, are still largely ongoing and are not directly covered under the scope of this evaluation.

**Table 1: Technical Assistance Projects Covered by the Evaluation**

TA No.	Title	ADB Financing (\$ million)	Co-financing Amount (\$ million)	Co-financing Source	Total Financing (\$ million)	Total Disbursement	Approval Date	Completion Date (Closing Date) <sup>a</sup>
6213	GMS-BCI	0.37 <sup>b</sup>			0.37	0.37	17 Dec 2004	31 Jul 2006 (30 Mar 2007)
6289	CEP and BCI in the GMS (Phase 1)	3.73 <sup>c</sup>	10.14 <sup>c</sup> 4.90 <sup>c</sup> 11.09 <sup>c</sup>	Government of Netherlands Government of Finland Government of Sweden	29.86	28.69	16 Dec 2005	31 Dec 2012  (31 Jan 2016)
7987	CEP and BCI in the GMS (Phase 2)	0.80	14.00 8.30 5.30 0.92	Government of Finland Government of Sweden Nordic Development Fund GEF	29.32	17.38 <sup>d</sup>	12 Dec 2011	Ongoing (30 Jun 2018)
<b>Total</b>		<b>4.90</b>	<b>54.65</b>		<b>59.55</b>	<b>46.44</b>		

ADB = Asian Development Bank, BCI = Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative, CEP = Core Environment Program, GEF = Global Environment Facility, GMS = Greater Mekong Subregion, TA = technical assistance.

<sup>a</sup> Refers to financial closing

<sup>b</sup> Based on actual utilization from the TA Completion report.

<sup>c</sup> Based on actual utilization from the TA Completion Report. The total amount comprised ADB Technical Assistance Special Fund other sources (TASF-OTH)—\$1.68 million, Climate Change Fund (CCF)—\$1.00 million, Regional Cooperation and Poverty Reduction Fund (RCPRF)—\$0.5 million and Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF)—\$0.55 million.

<sup>d</sup> As of 31 January 2017.

Source: ADB. 2004. *Technical Assistance for the Greater Mekong Subregion Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative*. Manila; ADB. 2005. *Technical Assistance to Core Environment Program and Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative in the Greater Mekong Subregion*. Manila; and ADB. 2011. *Technical Assistance for Core Environment Program and Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative in the Greater Mekong Subregion, Phase 2*. Manila.

<sup>12</sup> ADB. 2005. *Greater Mekong Subregion: Regional Cooperation Strategy and Program Update (2006–2008)*. Manila

<sup>13</sup> Loan 2721-REG: Greater Mekong Subregion Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Project (Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, and Viet Nam); Grant 0241-REG: GMS-CAM Biodiversity Conservation Corridor (\$19.00 million); Grant 0242-REG: GMS-LAO Biodiversity Conservation Corridor (\$20.00 million); Grant 0426-REG: GMS Biodiversity Conservation Corridor (\$7.40 million), and Grant 0433-VIE: Greater Mekong Subregion Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Project-Additional Financing (\$3.79 million).

**8. Greater Mekong Subregion Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative (TA 6213).**

This TA envisaged to support the enhancement of sustainable development in the GMS as a long-term impact. The expected outcome was to prepare a GMS Biodiversity Conservation Corridor Development Strategic Framework (2005–2014) and Action Plan (2005–2008). This TA was implemented from 2005 to 2006 and it provided the basis to launch the ensuing CEP-BCI.

**9. Core Environment Program and Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative in the Greater Mekong Subregion (Phase 1).**

This TA was implemented from 2006 to 2012 as the first phase of a 15-year program. Under the long-term vision of BCI, i.e., a poverty-free and ecologically rich GMS, the expected impact for TA was to contribute to promoting sustainable and equitable development in the region. The expected outcome was to establish sound environmental management systems and develop capacity for enhancing the development potential, performance, and impact of the GMS Economic Cooperation Program (ECP). The TA focused on (i) assessment of the environmental sustainability of priority development strategies and investment plans for GMS economic sectors and corridors, (ii) implementation of biodiversity corridor activities in pilot sites, and (iii) institutionalization of environmental performance assessment (EPA) procedures and systems in the GMS countries.

**10. Core Environment Program and Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative in the Greater Mekong Subregion (Phase 2).**

This TA was built on the achievement of Phase 1, particularly on a network hub for the transfer of environmental data, knowledge, and expertise across the region. The expected impact of Phase 2 was to improve biodiversity conservation and climate resilience across the region by integrating sound environmental management, biodiversity conservation, and climate resilience measures into the ECP. The expected outcome was environment friendly and climate-resilient GMS ECP. The intended impacts, outcomes, and outputs of the three TA projects (TA 6213, TA 6289, and TA 7987) are presented in Attachment 1.

11. During phases 1 and 2 of CEP-BCI, the implementation has been led by GMS Working Group on Environment (WGE), comprising of representatives from the environment ministries of the six GMS countries. It has been assisted by national support units (NSUs) institutionalized under the WGE focal agencies and supported by the administered Environment Operations Center (EOC), acting as the WGE's Secretariat.

**12. Changes during implementation.** There were major changes in TA activities and financing during the implementation of phases 1 and 2:

- (i) Under Phase 1, the program added climate change as a cross-cutting issue to all its components.<sup>14</sup> This required additional funding to extend the pilot phase until 2011. Needs of additional activities emerged due to increasing demand in the areas of transport, tourism, and energy. The approved TA amount of \$25.6 million was stated to be \$32.8 million.<sup>15</sup>
- (ii) Phase 2 experienced two major changes: (a) additional financing from the Government of Sweden and extension of implementation period by 1 year from 2015

<sup>14</sup> GMS Environment Operations Center. 2013. Phase I completion report. Bangkok.

<sup>15</sup> By October 2007, the People's Republic of China Poverty Reduction Fund agreed to contribute the equivalent of \$0.5 million, the Government of Finland \$4.9 million, and the Government of the Netherlands \$0.8 million in supplementary financing. ADB approved to (i) provide supplementary financing of \$0.4 million from its TA funding program, (ii) extend its completion date from 2009 to 2011 to allow time for proposed activities to be completed. ADB. 2013. *Major Change in Scope and Amount Core Environment Program and Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative in the Greater Mekong Subregion (Supplementary)*. The estimate of TA amount is at variance with TCR. This discrepancy needs to be examined in the future work.

to 2016, and (b) another additional financing from the Nordic Development Fund.<sup>16</sup> These changes responded to scaling up climate change adaptation activities.<sup>17</sup> Additional financing from the Government of Sweden were \$8.3 million equivalent and the original approved TA amount of \$14.8 million in 2011 was increased to \$23.1 million in 2012.<sup>18</sup> The Nordic Development Fund also added \$5.3 million equivalent on a grant basis in 2013. This further increased the total TA amount to \$29.3 million.<sup>19</sup>

#### D. Major Findings from Completion Reports and Related Evaluations

13. Technical assistance completion reports (TCRs) were prepared for the first two TA activities which were completed in 2006 (TA 6213) and 2012 (TA 6289). TA 7987 is set to close in June 2016 but was extended to 2018. ADB conducted a midterm review (MTR) in 2015. In addition, two evaluations were also made by the program co-financiers—the Government of Finland and the Swedish International Development Assistance (SIDA). Further details on the self-evaluations undertaken by ADB are summarized in Attachment 2.

14. The TCR for TA 6213 assessed the TA highly successful.<sup>20</sup> In particular, the TA assisted in (i) securing a recommendation of implementation of the Biodiversity Corridors Initiative Strategic Framework and Action Plan from the GMS Environment Ministers Meeting and an endorsement from the Second GMS Summit, both held in 2005; (ii) leveraging over \$14 million for implementing the BCI component; and (iii) the implementation of six pilot site BCI interventions in five GMS countries and coordination and monitoring.

15. The TCR for Phase 1 (TA 6289) assessed the project to be highly relevant, effective, efficient, and likely sustainable.<sup>21</sup> It established and supported the GMS WGE, which served as a firm foundation for scaling up to consolidate a wide range of achievements. The WGE was recognized as a key partner to enhance sustainable development among the GMS economic development sectors and ADB country program. The TA undertook strategic environmental assessments (SEAs) in power and tourism sectors, cross-border transport corridors, and provincial land use plans. It also strengthened regional cooperation around the shared vision of preserving the GMS biodiversity landscapes and established seven biodiversity conservation corridor pilot sites. The TCR noted that the CEP-BCI's achievements in developing and applying

<sup>16</sup> There was also a minor change to add Global Environment Fund and several minor changes to revise consultancy inputs and implementing arrangements.

<sup>17</sup> In response to growing needs of GMS countries by 2008, CEP-BCI became to focus on climate change and capacity building. Additional activities included under output 1: (i) applying ecosystem assessments and valuation in the context of at least one additional subregional and/or national sector strategy; (ii) applying multi-sector spatial planning in at least one additional transboundary economic corridors; (iii) scaling up safeguard applications and training programs; under output 2: (i) scaling up technical and financial viability assessments of products and services (e.g., eco-tourism, agro-biodiversity products, non-timber forest products) to improve local livelihoods in at least one additional biodiversity conservation landscape; and (ii) pilot testing deployment of sustainable livelihood options in agrarian communities in at least three landscapes; under output 4: (i) strengthening NSU capacity as a focal in-country coordination and technical node for the CEP-BCI in an additional country; and (ii) supporting new efforts to secure sustainable financing for environmental management and investment in natural capital, e.g., at least one additional payment for ecosystem services mechanism and one additional public-private partnership arrangement.

<sup>18</sup> ADB. 2012. *Major Change in Technical Assistance. Core Environment Program and Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative in the Greater Mekong Subregion, Phase 2*. November 2012.

<sup>19</sup> ADB. 2013. *Major Change in Technical Assistance Core Environment Program and Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative in the Greater Mekong Subregion, Phase 2*. April 2013.

<sup>20</sup> ADB. 2007. Technical Assistance Completion Report: TA No. 6213–REG: Greater Mekong Subregion Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative.

<sup>21</sup> ADB. 2016. Technical Assistance Completion Report: TA 6289–REG: Core Environment Program and Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative in the Greater Mekong Subregion.

tools and approaches and building awareness and capacity to mainstream environmental, biodiversity, and climate change considerations within the GMS ECP. Strong country support for EOC as a knowledge hub and the WGE's active participation are continuously needed for its sustainability.

16. The MTR of Phase 2 (TA 7987) assessed the CEP potentially highly relevant and valued by the GMS countries.<sup>22</sup> Given the program had limited engagement at strategic and policy levels to achieve outcomes, it assessed the CEP less effective. Effectiveness was hampered primarily by (i) the slow start up of activities, (ii) fragmented activities due to weak linkages across the four components under outputs, (iii) the absence of strong country presence by EOCs staff, and (iv) the corresponding lack of engagement at strategic and policy levels within countries. A series of scope changes with increased financing and corresponding procedural issues within ADB were also cited as a contributing factor of inefficiency. While the scope changes and additional financing contributed to enhancing relevance and effectiveness, they came at the cost of reduced efficiency under One ADB.<sup>23</sup> The MTR assessed the CEP less than efficient in achieving the outputs produced compared with the level of inputs provided.<sup>24</sup> Weak support and delayed response in processing affected smooth implementation and institutional strengthening of work plans and programs. As a result, WGE and NSUs viewed EOC management being slow in making decisions and taking actions. Engagements with co-financing partners also contributed to some inefficiencies. The MTR assessed the TA likely to be sustainable. More commitment and/or full engagement from the national governments are needed to ensure effectiveness and sustainability of the national programs. The report highlighted the need to improve weak supporting systems including management information systems and a lack of leadership in EOC in managing CEP.<sup>25</sup>

17. **Midterm review of GMS Core Environment Program/Biodiversity Corridors Initiative 2009 by Swedish International Development Assistance (SIDA).** The review assessed the TA highly relevant, effective, relatively efficient, but sustainability was uncertain. While expected outputs were largely delivered, it was hard to assess outcome and impact levels, due to weaknesses in the design and monitoring framework (DMF), i.e., the lack of distinction between outputs and outcome, and some absent targets and/or indicators (e.g., to measure capacity building activities). Sustainability ultimately depended upon governments' commitment. EOC had evolved one of its roles as a regional knowledge hub and increased efforts to engage in the GMS Regional Investment Framework process.<sup>26</sup> Consequently, however, EOC was reported to have gradually failed to play a balanced role as project implementation unit. In terms of implementation, EOC lacked a sound integrated system for work planning, financial planning, and contract management, and was viewed as being distant and slow in responding by WGE and NSUs. The report noted that institutional arrangement within EOC needed to improve, with stronger

<sup>22</sup> TA (Phase 2) was to be completed in 2016, but was extended to end by June 2018, hence it is ongoing toward completion. ADB (Southeast Asia Department). 2015. Aide Memoire, TA 7987-REG: Core Environment Program (CEP) and Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative in the Greater Mekong Subregion, Phase II, Mid-Term Review, 10–31 March 2015 (Internal).

<sup>23</sup> The EOC adopted simplified procedures from ADB's Southeast Asia Department (SERD) in order to increase administrative efficiency. The simplified procedures, however, were effective only within SERD but not in other relevant departments of ADB (footnote 22).

<sup>24</sup> Significant number (totaling 84 at the time of the MTR) of consultants were engaged and the cost effectiveness of fund utilization is questionable, while coordination efficiency with development partner is assessed as efficient.

<sup>25</sup> It reported that the EOC "issues were identified in post-evaluation of Phase 1 and known at the appraisal of Phase 2 design. Consequently, EOC resources were diverted from technical service delivery to support administration compromising the effectiveness of technical support and regional stakeholder engagement programs. The technical program effectiveness is further limited by fragmentation, a lack of focus on change management, and weak engagement with potential partners, national government and existing programs."

<sup>26</sup> A pipeline of investments and technical assistance supporting the GMS Strategic Framework (2012–2022).

engagement by WGE and NSUs. The report also recommended that excessive involvement of ADB in regulating EOC should be loosened to promote genuinely locally-owned and sustainable program in the longer term.

**18. Evaluation of the ADB Core Environmental Program (Phase 1) by the government of Finland.**<sup>27</sup> The evaluation assessed the Phase 1 highly relevant to the GMS context and its strategic and legal framework. However, the evaluation noted that Phase 1 missed to mainstream environment within the GMS ECP, which was a core business of the program.<sup>28</sup> To rectify the situation, a clear shift in focus is needed in Phase 2 including: (i) mainstreaming environment in other GMS sectors through other GMS working groups and ADB's other programs, (ii) mainstreaming environment in GMS countries' planning processes and work of the sector line ministries; and (iii) addressing key development pressures such as land concession, roads, and mining. The report did not provide effectiveness assessment as the DMF did not include explicit indicators to measure impact or outcome and the DMF was inadequate for tracking progress in a quantifiable manner. It reported that Phase 1 can be characterized by output rather than outcome and impact orientation. Tangible results and outputs achieved, and some remaining issues were identified as follows:

- (i) **Strategic environmental assessments.** In order to influence upstream planning, tools for carrying out SEAs were developed on a pilot basis but demonstrated in a limited scale and sector.<sup>29</sup> Deficiencies in the methodology were related to building dialogue amongst the stakeholders, cross-sector coordination, and institutionalization and process development for SEA. Challenges however remain: how to institutionalize SEA in national legal framework, policies and strategies, mainstream into the sectoral planning process, and develop capacity to carry out SEAs independently.<sup>30</sup>
- (ii) **Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative.** The BCI was a flagship component of CEP. Eight pilot sites of biodiversity conservation corridor were developed in five countries except Myanmar.<sup>31</sup> Developing the concept for establishment of biodiversity corridors was an achievement. However, the concepts, tools and methodologies for establishment of biodiversity corridors are not yet finalized, and thus their institutionalization in the legal and policy frameworks required further assistance.
- (iii) **Environmental performance assessment.** As a monitoring and information tool to promote environmental protection and mobilize policy intervention, EPA exercise was well accepted by the governments. Also, EPA is the only component that could integrate Myanmar in the CEP-BCI. As a source of monitoring for checking the effectiveness of the decision taken at national level regarding sector

<sup>27</sup> Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Finland. 2011. *Evaluation of the ADB Core Environmental Program Phase I and Appraisal of Phase II*

<sup>28</sup> The report indicated that developing the environmental policy and legal framework has progressed in many countries including Viet Nam and Thailand, and thus, is not the biggest challenge. It stated the biggest challenge in mainstreaming environment in other sector strategies, together with enforcement of environmental policies and laws.

<sup>29</sup> SEA is a recent and innovative tool for policy making. While it can be used for mainstreaming environment in policy, long term strategies and regular planning exercise, its success depends on its usability. SEA can generate an actual impact for improving the legal instruments in SEA tourism (Cambodia), support long term strategy development in tourism sector through Mekong tourism program (Cambodia), and be included, step by step, in the planning process of energy sector through SEA hydropower (Viet Nam). As such, there was concern that SEAs were utilized only for assessing low profile and neutral sectors. Sensitive and high impact sectors, causing major development pressures, of transport, land concession and mining were not addressed.

<sup>30</sup> Largely, SEA exercises were consultant driven (with delivery of turn-key report) than government driven.

<sup>31</sup> Due to political reasons, ADB could not directly work with Myanmar. This affected addressing trans-boundary issues and thereby decreased relevance (footnote 27).

policies, EPA needs to be regularly updated. It demonstrated high potential to function as a decision support tool for national and sub-national socioeconomic, environmental, and sector assessments. Under insufficient budget and human resources for EPA, it is not clear how to mainstream and institutionalize EPA into the sectoral planning processes.

- (iv) **Institutional capacity development.** Output was to build the capacity to carry out the SEA and EPA exercises and to establish EOC. During the Phase 1, institutional capacity development had limited emphasis. Greater focus should be placed on (a) institutional capacity development such as leadership, accountability, planning, and management, and (b) facilitation of processes rather than technical skills only. Clear institutional arrangements, roles and responsibilities, particularly decision-making are important to strengthen efficiency and maximize capacity functions of EOC and WGE. The importance of institutional capacity development of NSUs and WGE is increasing for the next phase. A systematic approach and methodology for capacity development should be established.
19. The report made recommendations in terms of approach, organization, and management.
- (i) **Approach.** The recommendations included (a) addressing the key emerging development pressures (transportation, land concession, and mining) and initiating an action-oriented dialogue on trade-offs at the GMS country level; (b) mainstreaming environment as the core business; (c) supporting institutionalization of the initiated interventions under Phase 1 as a priority; (d) targeting outcomes rather than outputs and activities; and (e) prioritizing institutional capacity development and facilitation of processes to technical skills.
  - (ii) **Organization.** The recommendations included (a) strengthening the steering function of the WGE, and (b) defining the country-specific institutional framework for NSUs to enable mainstreaming environment in the other sectors and establish a country-specific multi-sectoral working groups chaired by the ministry.
  - (iii) **Management.** The recommendations included (a) defining clear institutional arrangements, roles and responsibilities, particularly decision-making roles of EOC and NSU, (b) improving transparency of country-specific budgets to allow each country to plan and develop methodologies, and (c) developing a functioning CEP-BCI specific mechanism of monitoring and evaluation and management information system.

## E. Evaluation Scope and Approach

20. **Objective.** The TPER will assess to what extent the overall objective of integrating sound environmental system, biodiversity conservation, and climate resilient measures into the GMS ECP has been achieved. The TPER will review the achievements reported in the TCR of Phase 1 and the expected achievements of Phase 2. More specifically, it will examine the progress on several issues including the extent and sustainability of outcomes, ownership, institutional capacity development, and reforming institutional arrangement of EOC for better function and accrued impact and outputs. The governance mechanism of donors as well as impact of the scope changes will be examined.

21. The TPER will also assess how the TA activities contributed to enhancing the environmental sustainability of the ECP through testing a model for regional collaboration, knowledge sharing, and institution capacity building for mainstreaming environment. Key issues are impact of the mainstreaming in key development sectors, cross-sector coordination, and effectiveness of cluster approach for transboundary issues involving biodiversity conservation and

protected areas. Country ownership emerges as a crucial factor for sustainability and impact.<sup>32</sup> The evaluation will look closely at what drives country ownership and continued support to the program. In addition, the evaluation will endeavor to address (i) implementation arrangements including cross-sector coordination arrangements that have been put in place after project completion; and (ii) the success of regional approaches over national approaches, including the effectiveness of the regional approach to biodiversity corridors across border landscapes.

22. **Overarching question.** To what extent has ADB added value to the program in promoting and integrating environmental considerations into national and regional decisions and investments in GMS?

23. **Sub-questions:**

- (i) To what extent, has the program empowered and strengthened the institutional capacity of Ministry of Environment in each country to deliver key outputs and outcomes (including EPA, safeguards, and SEA) that would contribute to mainstreaming the environment? How has country ownership played a role in this regard and how has ADB contributed to enhance ownership?
- (ii) In what ways has the cluster (landscape) approach demonstrated to be effective in addressing transboundary issues such as biodiversity conservation and protected areas?
- (iii) To what extent coordination mechanism among development partners was working effectively and what has been ADB's added value?

24. **Methodology.** The TPER will evaluate the TA in accordance with the Guidelines for the Evaluation of Public Sector Operations using the evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability.<sup>33</sup> The main evaluation questions to be considered under each criterion are provided in Attachment 3. The TPER will make use of primary and secondary data and will encompass (i) a desk review of relevant project information; (ii) discussions with project staff from Southeast Asia Department (SERD) and the relevant resident missions, development partners and other stakeholders; and (iii) consultations with government and implementing agencies.

## F. Data Sources

25. **Secondary data through desk review.** Secondary data sources include, among others, (i) ADB and GMS policies and strategies (e.g., Strategy 2020, Midterm review of Strategy 2020, GMS Beyond Borders Regional Cooperation Strategy and Program for 2004–2008, GMS Biodiversity Conservation Corridor Development Strategic Framework (2005–2014), GMS Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative Strategic Framework and Technical Assessment (2005), Greater Mekong Subregion Core Environment Program Strategic Framework and Action Plan (2018–2022), Environment Operational Directions of 2013–2020, Safeguard Policy Statement; (ii) ADB analytical reports; (iii) project documents (e.g., TA report, back-to-office reports, midterm review reports, TCRs, and other partners' reports); (iv) EOC repository website; and (v) IED evaluation studies (e.g., country program, special/thematic, and corporate evaluations).

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<sup>32</sup> While the three elements (regional collaboration, knowledge sharing, and institution capacity building) are the core of the TA projects, ultimately actions to address the underlying problems should be ensured at the national level implementation. Each country should build sound environmental management system and take actions to mainstream the environment.

<sup>33</sup> ADB. 2016. *Guidelines for the Evaluation of Public Sector Operations*. Manila.

26. Primary data will be gathered during consultations with staff from SERD and through an independent evaluation mission to Thailand and selected countries. Interviews will also be conducted with staff from ADB operations including resident mission; key informants in central government offices; staff of EOC, NSU, and WGE at the national level; co-financiers; and other stakeholders. Field observations and interviews in selected project sites will be conducted to directly discuss with government counterparts and observe the condition of project outputs.

### **G. Tentative Schedule and Resources**

27. The evaluation will be carried out according to the following schedule, subject to approvals:

<b>Activity/Milestone</b>	<b>Target Date</b>
Approval of Evaluation Approach Paper	IV March 2018
Independent Evaluation Mission in Thailand and selected GMS countries	III–IV May 2018
Analysis and Preparation of Draft TPER	V May–III June 2018
Draft TPER for Interdepartmental and Government Review	I–II July 2018
Draft for Editor's Review	III July–I August 2018
Submission to Director, IESP	III August 2018
Approval of Director General, IED	IV August 2018
Circulation	II September 2018

GMS = Greater Mekong Subregion, TPER= technical assistance performance evaluation report.

28. The evaluation team is comprised of the following: Shimako Takahashi (Evaluation Specialist, team leader), Lawrence Nelson Guevara (Evaluation Officer), Elizabeth Li-Mancenido (Evaluation Analyst), and an external consultant with experience in environment/natural resource management in the GMS countries. The evaluation report will be peer reviewed by an external sector expert and commented by an IED evaluation specialist. Overall guidance will be provided by the Director, Sector and Project Division, IED.

### **H. Dissemination of Findings**

29. The TPER will be made available to the public after approval by the Director General, IED. The report will be uploaded on ADB's external and internal websites and will provide inputs to ADB's evaluation information system.

Attachments:

1. Intended Impacts, Outcomes, and Outputs of the Related Technical Assistance Projects
2. Overall Assessment, Lessons and Recommendations from Self-Assessments
3. Evaluation Matrix: Key Evaluation Questions (by criteria)

### INTENDED IMPACTS, OUTCOMES, AND OUTPUTS, OF THE RELATED TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROJECTS

TA 6213: Pilot Phase (2005–2006)	TA 6289: Phase 1 (2006–2012)	TA 7987: Phase 2 (2011–2018)
<p><b>Impact</b></p> <p>Enhance sustainable development in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS)</p>	<p><b>Impact</b></p> <p>Prosperity in the GMS, based on equity and sustainable development</p>	<p><b>Impact</b></p> <p>Improved biodiversity conservation and climate resilience across the GMS</p>
<p><b>Outcome</b></p> <p>Prepare a strategic biodiversity conservation corridors development framework (2005–2014) and action plan (2005–2008) to establish and maintain high-value biodiversity conservation corridors (BCC) in the GMS.</p>	<p><b>Outcome</b></p> <p>Sound environmental management systems and operation capacity for enhancing the development potential, performance, and impact of the GMS Economic Cooperation Program (ECP)</p> <p>Phase I (2006–2008) Updated and upgraded GMS hydropower, roads, and tourism strategies that are environmentally sound and economically efficient, and effective implementation of sustainable management plans for five biodiversity conservation corridors</p>	<p><b>Outcome</b></p> <p>Environment-friendly and climate-resilient GMS ECP</p>
<p><b>Outputs</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. BCC needs assessment report</li> <li>2. BCC feasibility assessment report</li> <li>3. GMS BCC development strategic framework (2005–2014) and action plan (2005–2008)</li> <li>4. Draft GMS summit declaration</li> </ol>	<p><b>Outputs</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Economic corridors and sector environmental assessments</li> <li>2. Biodiversity conservation</li> <li>3. Environmental performance assessments (EPAs) institutionalized and integrated, and sustainable development planning initiated</li> <li>4. Regional environmental management capacity development and institutionalization</li> <li>5. Program development, delivery, and sustainable financing</li> </ol>	<p><b>Outputs</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Environmental planning systems, methods, and safeguards improved</li> <li>2. Management of transboundary biodiversity conservation landscapes and local livelihoods improved</li> <li>3. Climate-resilient and low-carbon strategies developed</li> <li>4. Institutions and financing for sustainable environmental management improved</li> </ol>

ADB = Asian Development Bank, BCC = Biodiversity Conservation Corridors, CEP-BCI = Core Environment Program and Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative, ECP = economic cooperation program, EPA = environmental performance assessment, GMS = Greater Mekong Subregion, TA = technical assistance.  
Sources: ADB Technical Assistance reports.

### OVERALL ASSESSMENT, LESSONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SELF-EVALUATIONS

TA 6213: Pilot Phase (2005–2006)	TA 6289: Phase 1 (2006–2012)	TA 7987: Phase 2 (2011–2018)
<p><b>Overall Assessment</b></p> <p>The technical assistance (TA) was assessed highly successful as it delivered the Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative (BCI) Strategic Framework and Action Plan for consideration to May 2005 Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Environment Ministers Meeting in Shanghai, and to the 2nd GMS Summit in Kunming in July 2005. The Summit Leaders endorsed the EMM's recommendation for Core Environment Program (CEP)/BCI implementation. TA implementation and outputs assisted in (i) securing a recommendation of implementation of the Biodiversity.</p>	<p><b>Overall Assessment</b></p> <p>The TA was assessed successful. It was highly relevant to environmental sustainability and climate change issues. The Working Group on Environment (WGE) has been recognized as a key partner among GMS economic development sectors and ADB country program. The national support unit (NSU) developed under the TA has provided stronger support to the WGE. The TA managed to disburse 96% of its total funding. The sustainability is likely to be high based on strong country support for Environment Operations Center (EOC) as a knowledge hub and the WGE's active participation in the ongoing preparation of post-2017 EOC transition road map.</p>	<p><b>Midterm Review Assessment</b></p> <p>At midterm, the Core Environment Program (CEP) II was assessed relevant but with potential to be highly relevant. The CEP II's relevance has been enhanced by its ability to address environmental sustainability through the GMS Regional Investment Framework (RIF), a pipeline of investments and technical assistance supporting the GMS Strategic Framework (2012–2022).</p> <p>CEP II was assessed as less than effective. Overall effectiveness has been thus far hampered by: (i) the slow start up of activities; (ii) fragmentation of activities due to poor linkages across the four components; (iii) the absence of strong country presence by EOCs staff; and (iv) the corresponding lack of engagement at strategic and policy levels within countries and more broadly with ADB to inform a process of change.</p> <p>The CEP II was less than efficient in achieving the outputs produced compared with the level of inputs provided. Engagements with co-financing partners also introduced certain inefficiencies.</p> <p>However, CEP II was deemed likely sustainable, primarily due to being firmly grounded within the GMS Economic Cooperation Program (ECP). Sustainability of CEP II's technical content</p>

TA 6213: Pilot Phase (2005–2006)	TA 6289: Phase 1 (2006–2012)	TA 7987: Phase 2 (2011–2018)
		<p>was being achieved albeit at a limited scale at this stage.</p> <p>The Mission noted that a consultative process had just commenced and will involve in-country stakeholders and partners to develop and agree on an institutional road map by year end.</p>
<p><b>Major Lessons</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strong country ownership and embedding of subregional initiatives in national priorities and programs facilitate accelerated program processing and adoption;</li> <li>2. TA initiatives should be based on sound scientific and knowledge foundations;</li> <li>3. a subregional and landscape approach to sharing and establishing sustainable use of transboundary natural resources (primarily terrestrial-forests) in the GMS enjoys broad support amongst the GMS countries as long as the conservation of biodiversity is coupled with poverty reduction measures;</li> <li>4. there needs to be a medium-to-long term approach to investments in biodiversity protection, conservation while the link to overall economic development needs are to be explicit and well-articulated;</li> <li>5. the institutional context for sustainable development and subregional cooperation for managing transboundary resources require long-term policy, institutional and technological engagement; and</li> <li>6. A learning-by-doing approach lends well to the design, development and effective implementation of complex subregional cooperation initiatives, as they allow for</li> </ol>	<p><b>Major Lessons</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Solid evidence-based solutions and stronger inter-sectoral collaboration within the framework are needed within the countries (i.e. between GMS working groups) and within ADB (i.e. between sector divisions working on GMS projects and programs) to protect conservation landscapes for their biodiversity and ecosystem services.</li> <li>2. CEP-BCI adopted cluster approach where interventions were consolidated in fewer landscapes, which helped the program assess development impacts on priority landscapes. The cluster approach strengthened program coherence and provided a platform for cross-sectoral and transboundary challenges. It proved to be effective to respond to different needs of countries.</li> <li>3. Large programmatic TAs such as CEP-BCI require considerable flexibility in delivery of inputs which cannot be accommodated under ADB's procedures. The TA managed to adapt by establishing the EOC to support TASU in TA administration. While it eased administrative burden on TASU, it did not help to reduce the corresponding work load imposed on other central processing departments, in particular CTL and OSFMD.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Major Lessons</b></p> <p>Not applicable.</p>

TA 6213: Pilot Phase (2005–2006)	TA 6289: Phase 1 (2006–2012)	TA 7987: Phase 2 (2011–2018)
developing policy as well as on ground trust networks.		
<p><b>Recommendations and Follow-up Actions</b></p> <p>No additional recommendations or follow up actions are needed as the TA has already resulted in a \$25 million CEP/BCI program that is already under implementation.</p>	<p><b>Recommendations and Follow-up Actions</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Stronger integration with other sector working groups with the GMS ECP to ensure more effective development and environmental sustainability outcomes of investments.</li> <li>2. Closer alignment of efforts with ADB's country programming cycles aiming to support the design of future investment pipelines in transport, energy, agriculture and tourism sectors in each country.</li> <li>3. Stronger focus on (a) strengthening the institutional architecture for sustained subregional cooperation on environment; (b) influencing the development of policy and legal frameworks in areas supported by the Program; and (c) making the economic case of the trade-offs due to loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services.</li> <li>4. Thorough assessment of the administrative requirements of implementing large programmatic TAs during the design stage, based on which adequate administrative resources should be provided to TASU and other ADB departments.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Recommendations and Follow-up Actions</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Restructuring the regional technical program,</li> <li>2. Rebalancing the technical program with increased emphasis on delivery of technical support through the national offices,</li> <li>3. Restructuring the EOC to sharpen management focus and accountability while moving towards a management entity for the future regional WGE program,</li> <li>4. Urgent housekeeping to address outstanding administration and financial management issues, and</li> <li>5. Preparations for transitioning for future sustainability.</li> </ol>

ADB = Asian Development Bank, CEP-BCI = Core Environment Program and Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative, CTL = Controllers Department, ECP = economic cooperation program; EOC = Environment Operations Center, EPA = environmental performance assessment, GMS = Greater Mekong Subregion, MTR = midterm review, NSU = national support unit, OSFMD = Operations Services and Financial Management Department, RETA = regional technical assistance, RIF = Regional Investment Framework; TA = technical assistance, TASU = technical assistance supervising unit, WGE = Working Group on Environment.  
 Sources: ADB Technical assistance completion reports.

**EVALUATION MATRIX: KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS (BY CRITERIA)**

Criteria	Evaluation Questions	Data Sources
Relevance	<p>Policies and Strategies:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To what extent, was the CEP-BCCI (the program) consistent with regional development strategies, priorities, and objectives?</li> <li>2. Was the program consistent with ADB's GMS regional and sector strategies for GMS at the design, completion and evaluation stages?</li> </ol> <p>Design and Formulation, Beneficiaries:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Was the DMF adequate to capture identified challenges?               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) To what extent, was the linkage between development objectives, intended outputs and outcomes coherent?</li> <li>(ii) Were the targets and indicators measurable and achievable during the TAs timeframe?</li> </ol> </li> <li>4. Were the TA designs based on sound diagnostics of               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) development problems, including analyses of impact on environment and socio-economic issues in GMS context; (ii) risks identified during preparation stage (e.g., institutional arrangement complexity)?</li> </ol> </li> <li>5. What drove the change in DMF? How did the change impact on the outcomes?</li> <li>6. Does the EOC, WGE, NSUs have the appropriate governance structure, procedures, and risk management approaches? What institutional changes occurred during the TAs lifetime?</li> <li>7. What was coordination mechanism among development partners? How was strategic alignment attempted and what were the gaps?</li> <li>8. What were ADB's value additions? Were there any innovations introduced by ADB?</li> <li>9. Were there any best practices that can be replicated in other GMS countries/other regions?</li> <li>10. If the subsequent phase is being planned, how would it be refocused to deliver what outputs and components?</li> </ol> <p>Ownership and Leverage issues:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. Was the program country driven? What is the level of ownership at the national level during implementation and after completion? What drives country ownership to continued support to the program, and what hinders?</li> <li>12. How can the regional and cross-sectoral approaches link to other initiatives in order to leverage the mainstreaming?</li> </ol>	<p>Technical assistance (TA) report, TA Completion Reports (TCRs), Mid-term reviews, and other project documents;</p> <p>Key informant interviews with ADB project officers, staff of government and implementing agencies, donors and other stakeholders;</p> <p>Field observations during IEM</p>
Effectiveness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To what extent have the intended outputs and outcomes attained?           <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) What factors contributed to the achievement (or lack) of the outputs and outcomes?</li> <li>(b) What achievements were made beyond the scope of the interventions?</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. What impact has SEA brought in upstream decision making and/or at an early stage of sector planning? What is the quality of SEA (including best practice)? Has institutional capacity of conducting SEA been developed to be maintained at each country?</li> </ol>	<p>TA reports, TCRs, Mid-term reviews, other project documents; Key informant interviews with ADB project officers, staff of government and implementing agencies, donors,</p>

Criteria	Evaluation Questions	Data Sources
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. To what extent, have the EPA and environmental safeguard systems been improved and institutionalized in national legal framework, policies and strategies?</li> <li>4. In what ways, has the cluster (landscape) approach demonstrated to be effective in addressing transboundary issues, e.g., biodiversity conservation and protected areas? Can it be applicable to other regions?</li> <li>5. How has the knowledge hub function of EOC been effective? To what extent did it reach to WGE of each country to be better customized and effectively utilized?</li> <li>6. Can the regional approach demonstrate to be effective informing prospective environmental impact and integrating in key sector investment planning? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Has the regional approach provided a sound model for management of biodiversity resources?</li> <li>(ii) In what way, is a regional approach more effective than national level approaches to achieve desired results?</li> <li>(iii) What is the incremental value of the regional approach over business-as-usual approaches to environmental and biodiversity approaches which tend to be focused on national project transactions?</li> </ol> </li> <li>7. What institutional factors influence, positively or negatively, the effectiveness of the TA projects? Did EOC, WGE, and NSUs, work complementarily and effectively in terms of implementation and communication?</li> <li>8. What are key reasons for success and innovative or applicable mechanisms to other regions, especially for future mainstreaming environment as a model for other projects and regions?</li> </ol>	<p>and other stakeholders; Field observations during IEM.</p>
Efficiency	<p>How well were resources such as time, financial and other resources used in achieving the expected outcomes?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How efficient were ADB, co-financers, and recipient governments in managing the TA projects?</li> <li>2. How were the mid-course adjustments (design, costs, and timelines) managed? What could have ADB done differently to prevent delays?</li> <li>3. Did the executing and implementing agencies have adequate staff and skills to implement TAs efficiently? Were their responsibilities clear?</li> </ol>	<p>TA reports, TCRs, Mid-term reviews, other project documents; Key informant interviews with ADB project officers, staff of government and implementing agencies, donors and other stakeholders;</p>
Sustainability	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is the likelihood that the results of institutional capacity development of NSUs and WGE will be maintained?</li> <li>2. Were the monitoring and evaluation systems able to track the progress and achievement of the output and outcome indicators? How well were the M&amp;E systems institutionalized in each country? Do the country counterparts have adequate capacity to undertake M&amp;E even after the project is completed?</li> <li>3. Have (i) sufficient legal, regulatory and other policy measures; (ii) human, institutional, and financial capacity and resources; been put into place to sustain achievements made? What sustainability challenges are met in maintaining required resources and how can these be addressed?</li> </ol>	<p>TA reports, TCRs, Mid-term reviews, other project documents; Key informant interviews with ADB project officers, staff of government and implementing agencies, donors</p>

Criteria	Evaluation Questions	Data Sources
	4. What implementation arrangements including cross-sector coordination arrangements have been put in place after project completion?	and other stakeholders; Field observations during IEM.

ADB = Asian Development Bank, CEP-BCI = Core Environment Program and Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative, DMF = design and monitoring framework, ECP = economic cooperation program, EOC = Environment Operations Center, EPA = environmental performance assessment, GMS = Greater Mekong Subregion, IEM = independent evaluation mission, M&E = monitoring and evaluation, NSU = national support unit, SEA = strategic environmental assessment, TA = technical assistance, WGE = Working Group on Environment.

Source: Asian Development Bank (Independent Evaluation Department).