

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION REPORT

Project ID:	10520
Project Name:	Enhancing sustainability of the Transboundary Cambodia - Mekong River Delta Aquifer
Countr(ies):	Regional, Cambodia, Viet Nam
Implementing Agency:	FAO

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I. Overview

A. Description

Project name

Enhancing sustainability of the Transboundary Cambodia - Mekong River Delta Aquifer

Country

Regional, Cambodia, Viet Nam

GEF ID

10520

Implementing Agency

FAO

Executing Entity

IUCN, UNESCO, Cambodia Ministry of Environment (MOE),
Viet Nam Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment
(MONRE).

Trust Fund

GET

Project Type

FSP

PIR Submission

9/15/2025

Fiscal Year , PIR Number

FY 2025 , 1st PIR

Objective

To strengthen environmental sustainability and water security in the Lower Mekong Basin by investing, for the first time, in improved governance and sustainable utilization of the Cambodia-Mekong River Delta Transboundary Aquifer.

B. Ratings and Disbursements

Implementation Progress

Unsatisfactory

Development Objective

Unsatisfactory

Overall risk

Moderate Risk

Project Financing

16,350,000.00

Cumulative Disbursement

4,014,198.00

C. Key Dates

CEO Endorsement/Approval

4/19/2022

Agency Approval

11/23/2021

Implementation Start 11/20/2023	First Disbursement 2/29/2024
Expected MTR 2/28/2026	Actual MTR
Expected Completion 11/19/2028	Actual Completion

II. PROGRESS STATUS AND ISSUES

A. Progress: Information on progress and outcomes of project implementation activities

From Q3 2024 to Q2 2025, the CMDA project made progress despite the delayed start of the Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA). UNESCO developed a Detailed Technical Work Plan (DTWP) tailored to the Cambodia-Mekong Aquifer, focusing on Components 1, 3, and 5. The DTWP was prepared with input from Cambodia and Viet Nam, detailing objectives, methodology, and recruitment strategies. It emphasized national expert engagement in TDA activities under international guidance. The UNESCO and MERFI DTWPs were merged by MERFI and jointly presented to the governments in May 2025.

MERFI finalized its national consultant recruitments after government-requested replacements in Q2 2025. TDA Stage 1 assessments began for all four MERFI-led disciplines, with findings presented and refined during a multi-purpose workshop (30 June–1 July 2025). Stage 2 methodology design followed. However, the household survey was delayed due to extended JTC and NPMU review and pending government no-objection on ToRs for the service provider. Despite this, Stage 1 reports remain on track for submission in early August.

Following no-objection from the NPMUs, UNESCO initiated recruitment of national experts in hydrogeology, groundwater-dependent ecosystems, governance, law, socioeconomics, and gender, with candidates expected to begin in July 2025. Three field missions were conducted in Cambodia to assess groundwater conditions and improve governance. Stakeholder engagement was strengthened through national and international workshops and collaboration with IUCN, MERFI, and UNESCO.

IUCN, as lead agency, took a proactive role in stakeholder engagement and technical coordination. It supported foundational work—data availability, governance assessments, and stakeholder mapping—with two national experts assessing groundwater data systems. Their findings were presented in a Q2 2025 workshop coordinated with MERFI’s TDA team. Joint Technical Committees (JTCs), initially planned for the SAP phase, were established early in the TDA phase by IUCN, with ToRs, contracting, and facilitation led by IUCN.

Regular coordination was maintained via monthly NPMU, Executing Partner, and All-Partner meetings, as well as ad-hoc sessions. IUCN and MERFI co-led capacity-building events, including the MAR Workshop in Can Tho (Q1 2025), technical site visits, and the Cambodia Groundwater Framework Workshop (Q2 2025). In Q4 2025, IUCN led a delegation to the IW:LEARN International Waters Conference in Uruguay, hosted a TDA planning session, and launched the CMDA IW:LEARN website. A communications working group and outreach materials were developed.

Priorities for the next period include completing TDA Stage 1, launching Stage 2 assessments, finalizing the household surveys, and accelerating the SAP and pilot design activities to meet project objectives and timeline.

B. Challenges: Information on challenges of project implementation activities

The project faced significant implementation challenges over the past 12 months, beginning with the delayed inception meeting in Q2 2024, which created at least a six-month misalignment with the original workplan.

Although UNESCO had been requested to contribute to a Detailed Technical Work Plan (DTWP) in March/April 2024 for endorsement by June, the request was only formally actioned in June, and UNESCO's DTWP was finalised and presented to the government partners in December 2024. In Q1 2025, the NPMUs requested that the UNESCO and MERFI DTWPs be reviewed and merged into a single TDA DTWP, which was completed in Q2 2025. Combined with delays in NPMU approval of ToRs and recruitment of national expert teams, this has resulted in a 12–18 month delay in starting the TDA.

Following the DTWPs' completion, both beneficiary countries requested to review and approve all Terms of Reference (ToRs) and recruitment processes—requirements not foreseen in the project design—which led to substantial delays in starting technical TDA activities. In Viet Nam, internal restructuring within key ministries further slowed document review and validation, compounded by requests to scrutinise concept notes and budgets in detail at the activity/output level, raising concerns about scope creep.

To minimize further delays, UNESCO shortened Component 1's TDA timeline from 18 to 11 months without compromising quality, while IUCN and MERFI redirected efforts to foundational work (data assessments and stakeholder mapping). National experts were contracted to assess groundwater data systems, and their findings informed regional coordination. IUCN had to assume full responsibility for establishing and managing the Joint Technical Committees (JTCs), originally assigned to governments, which added further administrative burden. While the JTCs have become central to reviewing the DTWPs and partner deliverables, their operations remain slow, often requiring weeks for member responses.

Coordination between partners has been a persistent challenge. While MERFI and IUCN eventually aligned, coordination with UNESCO remained difficult. UNESCO's preference for direct government engagement—combined with unclear guidance from the former CTA—led to fragmentation, mixed messages, and inconsistent government feedback. UNESCO's shift from Jakarta to Bangkok HQ, limited regional staffing, and absence of a dedicated coordinator in the project countries hindered timely action early on.

Finally, in preparation for a July 2025 RPSC meeting, IUCN failed to submit workplans and budgets to FAO for clearance or share them properly with government partners. UNESCO also failed to share budget details to IUCN in time because of a differing budget reporting format. This resulted in circulation of inaccurate documents and led the Steering Committee to withhold endorsement due to confusion and non-compliance with GEF/FAO formats.

C. Stakeholder Engagement

Profile	Stakeholder name	Type of partnership	Progress, results & Challenges on Stakeholder's Engagement
CAMBODIA			
Government Institutions	Ministry of Environment, Cambodia General Directorate of Environmental Protection (GDEP) Department of Water Quality Management	CMDA Focal Point (C-NPMU and C-PSC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > UNESCO - Regular communication and consultation are conducted with the C-NPMU and C-PSC, as they are serving as the focal point > IUCN - on 01 August 2024 collaborated with GDEP/MoE to establish Cambodia National Project Management Unit (C-NPMU), nominated by the Ministry of Environment. > IUCN - on 21-26 September 2024 coordinated with the C-NPMU leadership team, Dr. Chou Monidarin and Mr. Phin Rady in attending the 10th GEF International Conference in Uruguay. > IUCN - on 13 November 2024 collaborated with C-NPMU to establish the Cambodia Joint Technical Committee (JTC) members, nominated by the Ministry of Environment. > IUCN - on 15 November 2024 collaborated with ITC and C-NPMU to identify the list of national experts for sharing with UNESCO and MERFI. > IUCN - starting in October 2024, collaborated with C-NPMU to organize regular the NPMU monthly meeting to ensure effective and timely organization, coordination, and implementation of the project. Agenda items and other pre-circulated documents for the meetings will be shared one week in advance, including project updates, key milestones, risks and issues, resource allocation, and any other relevant topics. > IUCN - on 25-26 November 2024, collaborated with C-NPMU organized a two-day field visit in Prey Veng and Svay Rieng provinces to collect initial information on groundwater monitoring wells and resource utilization for the CMDA project. > IUCN - on 29 November 2024, CMDA Project Support for Policy Events: Collaborated with Cambodia's General Directorate of Environmental Protection to finalize the Environmental Protection Strategic Plan (EPSP) 2024-2028 through a consultation workshop. > IUCN - on 17-18 February 2025, collaborated with C-NPMU organized a field visit in Boeung Prek Lapov Protected Landscape to visit the existing groundwater monitoring wells and wetlands conservation initiatives. > IUCN - on February 20, 2025, collaborated with C-NPMU organized the initial face-to-face NPMU-JTC-IUCN meeting to discuss important CMDA updates, government responses to DTWPs of UNESCO and MERFI, and upcoming action plans related to the CMDA initiative. > IUCN - on 05 March 2025, the monthly C-NPMU meeting, organized by CMDA IUCN and NPMU Cambodia, focused on key updates regarding CMDA progress, CTA technical advice for supporting the FAO-GDEP/NPMU OPA development, and upcoming action plans. > IUCN - on 02 April 2025, IUCN and C-NPMU organized the Monthly C-NPMU Meeting to share the CMDA Progress and discuss on the OPA documents and CMDA 2025 Annual Workplan. Overall, NPMU has improved their coordination role and made a good progress on their coordination with CMDA Partners.
Government Institutions	Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology, Cambodia Department of Water Supply and Sanitation	Main national counterpart in Cambodia for Output 1.1, 1.2, 3.1 and 3.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > IUCN - on 25-26 November 2024, IUCN Cambodia organized a two-day field visit in Prey Veng and Svay Rieng provinces to collect initial information on groundwater monitoring wells and resource utilization for the CMDA project. The visit involved stakeholder meetings and site visits to groundwater monitoring wells, with H.E. Dr. Oeung Chantha, Undersecretary of State of the Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology (MoWRAM), and Dr. Chou Monidarin, the CMDA Project Director of Cambodia National Project Management Unit (C-NPMU) leading the delegation. The visit was attended by 20 participants from organizations such as GDEP, MoE, Provincial Department of Water Resources and Meteorology (PDWRAM), UNESCO, and ITC. Dr. Chantha discussed the CMDA project and expressed interest in the GEF-IW-funded project, while Dr. Chou Monidarin provided updates on the project's status. PDWRAM of Prey Veng and Svay Rieng shared their progress on groundwater monitoring wells and facilitated visits to existing monitoring wells. > IUCN - on 11 June 2025 - Cambodia hosted a National Consultation on Groundwater Governance Policy Dialogue in Siem Reap, marking a major milestone in sustainable groundwater resource management. The event was jointly organized by the Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology (MoWRAM), SEI Asia, and the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), with support from SUMERNET (funded by Sida) and the Mekong Thought Leadership and Think Tanks Network (MTT) funded by DFAT. Representing the Cambodia Mekong Delta Aquifer (CMDA) project, the Chief Technical Adviser (CTA), and the Cambodian National Coordinator, participated in the consultation. The CTA presented the project's progress, including the Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA), pilot Managed Aquifer Recharge (MAR) activities, and the Strategic Action Program (SAP). Their contribution highlighted CMDA's alignment with Cambodia's Draft Groundwater Governance Framework by offering practical, science-based tools, field-tested solutions, and capacity-building efforts to support sustainable and climate-resilient groundwater management. > C-NPMU - on 18 March 2025, MoE sent a request letter to MoWRAM for nomination a representative to join a member of Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) for the CMDA Project. > C-NPMU - on 26 March 2025, MoE received a nomination letter from MoWRAM for nomination a representative to join a member of Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) for the CMDA Project. From August 28-30, 2024, two officials from the Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology joined a trip to the GEF-target provinces. The purpose of the trip was to introduce the project concept, discuss potential collaboration, and gather information on groundwater, water resources, and the socio-economic conditions in the area. On November 25-26, 2024, UNESCO PNP Office joined a trip with MoWRAM to the CMDA target provinces. The trip included high-level participation from the Under Secretary of State and two technical officers. The purpose was to gather relevant groundwater data and assess existing groundwater works. On December 2, a consultation meeting was held with MoWRAM, presided over by H.E. Dr. Oeun Chantha, Under Secretary of State in charge of groundwater resources, to discuss the progress and planned activities of the CMDA Project. February 17-18, 2025: Conducted a field visit to Takeo Province, a CMDA target area, to assess wetland resources and monitoring wells. March 2025: Held a consultation with MoWRAM to explore potential collaboration opportunities for the Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA).
Government Institutions	Cambodia National Mekong Committee (CNMC)	National counterpart for Output 3.3	> IUCN - on 29 March 2024, IUCN CMDA Team met with Groundwater Focal Point at CNMC (H.E. Sok Sokhorn and Mr. Cheang Hong) to discuss on CMDA Project Overview and planning for collaboration.
Government Institutions	Department of Geology and Minerals, Ministry of Mines and Energy, Cambodia	National counterpart for Output 1.1 and 1.2	> UNESCO - Department of Geology from Ministry of Mines and Energy, Cambodia, participated to pilot project by COOP-KIGAM to establish the joint groundwater monitoring network project.
Government Institutions	Ministry of Rural Development, Cambodia	National counterpart for 1.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > UNESCO - Monitoring of water quality and supply water in rural areas through the use of dug wells. Consultation with the Ministry in March 2025. > C-NPMU - on 18 March 2025, MoE sent a request letter to MRD for nomination a representative to join a member of Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) for the CMDA Project. > C-NPMU - on 21 March 2025, MoE received a nomination letter from MRD for nomination a representative to join a member of Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) for the CMDA Project.
Government Institutions	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF), Cambodia	National counterpart for 1.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > C-NPMU - on 18 March 2025, MoE sent a request letter to MAFF for nomination a representative to join a member of Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) for the CMDA Project. > C-NPMU - on 01 April 2025, MoE received a nomination letter from MAFF for nomination a representative to join a member of Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) for the CMDA Project.
Government Institutions	Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology & Innovation (MISTI), Cambodia	National counterpart for Output 1.1	> UNESCO - Regular communication with MISTI, which is responsible for water and sanitation supplies in urban areas.
Others	Institute of Technology of Cambodia (ITC)	NA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > IUCN - On 15 November 2024 collaborated with ITC and C-NPMU to identify the list of national experts for sharing with UNESCO and MERFI. > IUCN - On 25-26 November 2024, IUCN Cambodia organized field visit in Prey Veng and Svay Rieng provinces to collect initial information on groundwater monitoring wells and resource utilization for the CMDA project. The visit involved stakeholder meetings and site visits to groundwater monitoring wells, with H.E. Dr. Oeung Chantha, Undersecretary of State of the Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology (MoWRAM), and Dr. Chou Monidarin, the CMDA Project Director of Cambodia National Project Management Unit (C-NPMU) leading the delegation. The visit was attended by 20 participants from organizations such as GDEP, MoE, Provincial Department of Water Resources and Meteorology (PDWRAM), UNESCO, and ITC. Dr. Chantha discussed the CMDA project and expressed interest in the GEF-IW-funded project, while Dr. Chou Monidarin provided updates on the project's status. PDWRAM of Prey Veng and Svay Rieng shared their progress on groundwater monitoring wells and facilitated visits to existing monitoring wells. > IUCN - On 17-18 February 2025, collaborated with C-NPMU and ITC organized a field visit in Boeung Prek Lapov Protected Landscape to visit the existing groundwater monitoring wells and wetlands conservation initiatives. > UNESCO - Consultation and exchange knowledge in March 2025 and, May and June 2025.
Government Institutions	Prey Veng Province (Provincial administration), Cambodia		
Government Institutions	Provincial Department of Water Resources and Meteorology	All outputs	
Government Institutions	Provincial Department of Environment	All outputs	
Government Institutions	Provincial Department of		

D. Gender Equality

Category	Yes/No	Briefly describe progress and results achieved during this reporting period.
<p>Indicate in which results area(s) the project is expected to contribute to gender equality (as identified at project design stage):</p>		
<p>a. Closing gender gaps in access to and control overall natural resources</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>The project has designed specific activities for ensuring gender equality considerations are integrated across the project components. During the reporting period, the project has pursued a gender-inclusive recruitment of short- and long-term positions (staff and consultants) within the project, such as appropriate advertisement and balanced shortlisted of qualified women and men. The JTCs include at least one member per country that is experienced on gender issues. The project has started to draft gender mainstreaming guidelines that will be validated and socialised with relevant project participants.</p>
<p>b. Improving women's participation and decision making</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>RPMU has worked with WWAP in the development of communications and TORs as part of the overall CMDA Gender Action Plan. This resulted in a Gender Expert being appointed to the Cambodia and Vietnam National Joint Technical committees to ensure gender remains a key part of the overall project outcomes. Gender inclusive recruitment has been ensured; the JTC includes one gender focal person per country, who have provided revision and feedback to the gender TWP aspects. . Women's participation under Component 1 (TDA) was highly prioritized and actively implemented. The gender integration approach that UNESCO (WWAP) designed for the project has ensured gender considerations are mainstreamed across project components. For example, efforts have been made to ensure the recruitment of a balanced number of women and men as staff and national experts. Other TDA-related activities, including field missions and consultations with high-level decision-makers—such as deputy provincial governors and women's water user groups—were conducted to gather input. These contributions were integrated into the planning and implementation of TDA activities.</p>
<p>c. generating socio-economic benefits or services for women</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Considerations for ensuring women's benefits from the project results have been included in the Detailed Technical Work Plan (DTWP). These will be mostly reflected during the implementation of pilot demonstrations (by ensuring an equitable participation and share of project benefits of women and minority groups) and during SAP development (ensuring equal participation and share of project benefits).</p>
<p>Any other good practices on gender</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>A key innovative aspect of CMDA is the integration and budgeting of a comprehensive gender equality and ethnic minority approach from the project design phase through the development of the DTWP. A gender integration guideline for the CMDA is under development. Inclusive and gender-sensitive language is being considered in the development of the project communication strategy. A gender team is in process of recruitment consisting on an international senior gender expert to support the overall project implementation, and a senior national water and gender expert and a national gender and data management expert per country. The Gender Team will also form a Gender Focal Points system (conformed by experts and relevant stakeholders from each country) that will serve as advisory mechanisms and will help monitor the progress on gender integration across the project-related activities. For the TDA phase, water, gender and livelihood studies in both countries will inform the integrative TDA project analyses. During the TDA phase, trainings on gender integration and the collection of sex-disaggregated water data and the use of gender responsive indicators (following the UNESCO WWAP approach "Toolkit on Water and Gender" - which has been also integrated into the IW Learn recommended resources) will be design and implemented addressing technical project personnel.</p>

E. Knowledge Management

<p>Knowledge management and Learning (KML): Does the project have a KML strategy?</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>If YES, what is the implementation progress? In your answer, please describe how the project is fostering knowledge sharing and learning among stakeholders at national and sub-national level.</p>	
<p>If NO, how does the project identify, collect and document good practices?</p>	<p>A Knowledge Management Plan will be developed as a part of the M&E plan to be finalised in Q1 2026 with the new CTA.</p> <p>During this reporting period, initial KML activities have focused on establishing the foundation for systematic knowledge capture, organisation, and sharing. While early work has included development of the CMDA IW:Learn website to store knowledge products and multilingual outreach materials, the project's core KML approach is tied to the sequencing of technical and capacity-building outputs, most of which will begin in earnest once the TDA and associated training programmes are underway.</p> <p>The KML framework, as outlined in the ProDoc, will use the project's M&E programme to track success and collect structured feedback through surveys, discussions, and post-event evaluations. Feedback from workshops and trainings will be documented and used to adapt implementation and share lessons learned with national and regional stakeholders.</p> <p>Planned knowledge products include TDA and SAP reports, thematic technical briefs, training manuals, and toolkits on groundwater governance and management, as well as guidance on gender and stakeholder engagement. These will be stored in a dedicated knowledge repository linked to the CMDA IW:Learn site and shared through learning exchanges, annual stocktaking workshops, and targeted partner networks.</p> <p>Much of this work will require substantive technical workshops, training sessions, and stakeholder exchanges to be initiated during the next phase, providing the content and lessons that underpin the project's value as a learning and capacity development platform.</p>
<p>Please list good practices, including key-technical and/or institutional innovations, from the project thus far.</p>	<p>Gender equality and social inclusion considerations budgeted and integrating across project components since the project design.</p>
<p>Communication strategy: Does the project have a communication strategy?</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>Please provide a brief overview of the communications successes and challenges this fiscal year.</p>	<p>During this fiscal year, the CMDA project advanced its communications work with the development and review of a draft Communications Strategy with the guidance of the FAO communications specialist. This strategy emphasises producing project materials—print, digital, and web—in Vietnamese and Khmer as well as English, ensuring accessibility for the project's actual audience, including water users, women, and local stakeholders in the CMDA area. A key output has been the creation of dedicated social media fanpages in both national languages, which extend outreach beyond traditional English-only IW:Learn channels and engage directly with communities in the project region.</p>

III: Minor Amendments

CONTEXT	
Result Framework	
Components and Cost	IUCN submitted 2 OPA budget revisions for FAO endorsement in August 2024 and January 2025. These budget revision resulted in a decrease in the PMC and M&E to align to GEF requirements on budget limitations, and re-allocation to component 3 and 4. The justifications provided have been considered appropriate from a technical standpoint by FAO.
Institutional And Implementation Arrangements	RPMU took over funding, development, and management of JTCs, originally assigned to government partners in the PRODOC. USD 120,000 was removed from the MERFI contract and reallocated, approved by FAO BH in October 2024. This shift increased IUCN staff workload as it required additional time with 6 additional consultant contracts to manage, reducing capacity for other CMDA activities.
Financial Management	
Implementation Schedule	Implementation is significantly delayed by 12 to 18 months due to the late start of the TDA. AWP revised.
Executing Entity	
Executing Entity Category	
Minor Project Objective Change	
Safeguards	
Risk Analysis	
Increase of GEF Financing up to 5%	
Co-Financing	Viet Nam Ministry of Agriculture and Environment to provide a revised list of projects eligible for CMDA co-financing as the projects included in the original list at the time of ProDoc approval have now expired
Location of Project Activity	
others	

IV: Geographic Coordinates of Project Activities

V. ANNEX

Uploaded Document

Document Category
M and E Document

Title
GEFID_10520_2025PIR_FAO_Regional