

Enhancing sustainability of the Transboundary Cambodia - Mekong River Delta Aquifer

Review CEO Endorsement and Make a recommendation

Basic project information

GEF ID

10520

Countries

Regional (Cambodia, Viet Nam)

Project Name

Enhancing sustainability of the Transboundary Cambodia - Mekong River
Delta Aquifer

Agencies

FAO

Date received by PM

11/23/2021

Review completed by PM

3/14/2022

Program Manager

Astrid Hillers

Focal Area

International Waters

Project Type

FSP

PIF
CEO Endorsement

Part I ? Project Information

Focal area elements

1. Does the project remain aligned with the relevant GEF focal area elements as presented in PIF (as indicated in table A)?

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

(12/9/2021) Yes, the project is aligned with the focal area as presented at PIF stage.

Cleared

Agency Response N/A

Project description summary

2. Is the project structure/design appropriate to achieve the expected outcomes and outputs as in Table B and described in the project document?

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

(12/9/2021) Overall the project is well conceived, but please address a few comments:

1. PDO: Please change the verb ".. by focussing for the first time on improved governance " to a verb that addressed what the project aims to do. "Focussing" in that context is not expressing this.

2. Please assure that process steps and indicators, e.g. for component 3 (Transboundary cooperation mechanisms) are captured in table B, the results framework (RF) and

component description and the process incl. consultations and meetings are budgeted for.

3. Component 4: on SAP signature: please revise here and elsewhere in the document (incl the RF) to clarify that the SAP needs to be signed by at least one Minister from each country (and not just any level of technical authority in the Ministry).

4. Please include and budget for M&E activities *within* the project components. It for now appears as a another PMC item. Only audit costs are to be budgeted within the PMC.

5. Editorial comment: Please reread the wording of outcome 3 which seems unclear as written: "Agreed upon arrangements for transboundary cooperation improve aquifer transboundary governance" . Aren't these arrangements *governance* arrangements and therefore there is redundancy in this?

(3/8/2021)

Re 1. Please double check the ER. Somehow the change does not show in table B there.

Re. 2. Comment addressed.

Re. 3 Comment addressed.

Re. 4 Comment addressed.

Re. 5 Comment addressed.

(3/14/2022) All comments addressed. Cleared.

Agency Response

FAO Responses (11Mar22)

The project objective at the beginning of Table B of the ER has been fixed to include the verb ?by investing? instead of ?by focusing?.

FAO Responses (24Feb22)

Re 1: Thanks for point this out. We replaced it by ?investing in?.

Re 2: Thanks for pointing this out. We rectified these inconsistencies of indicators between Table B, Component descriptions, and the Results Framework. We also revised some indicators to be clearer about the process, e.g. component 3. Furthermore, we also clarified the processes in the component descriptions.

The meetings have been clearly captured for component 3 in the budget breakdown of UNESCO that has dedicated 213,599 USD for ?Accommodation costs per training/workshop and/or meeting? and 80,000 USD for the travel alone.

Re 3: We replaced ?ministerial level? by ?SAP approved/signed by the relevant Minister(s) in each country.?

Re 4: Revised. The M&E activities have been budgeted within the project component 5.

Re 5: Agreed arrangements could be of technical nature, protocols data etc. However, we replaced it by ?Agreed improvements of transboundary cooperation to improve aquifer transboundary governance?

3. If this is a non-grant instrument, has a reflow calendar been presented in Annex D?

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request N/A

Agency Response N/A

Co-financing

4. Are the confirmed expected amounts, sources and types of co-financing adequately documented, with supporting evidence and a description on how the breakdown of co-financing was identified and meets the definition of investment mobilized, and a description of any major changes from PIF, consistent with the requirements of the Co-Financing Policy and Guidelines?

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

(12/9/2021)

1. Please explain the discrepancy between the endorsement request (all -in kind) and the prodoc that states that some part of the co-finance is now being identified as investment mobilized. Also, the text under table C is meant to explain how the "investment mobilized" portion was identified. Right now it seems it explains the in-kind more than anything. This is confusing and would need to be made clearer.

2. Please clarify that the country itself is chosen as financiers as these 'source of co-finance' though loans are from development banks as source of the loan, yet this money is therefore now in the government's budget. Please confirm.

3. MERFI co-finance: please delete the past investments from the co-finance as past investment cannot be called co-finance.
4. UNESCO IHP and WWAP - please attach an additional email to explain the nature of the in-kind co-finance.
5. Vietnam: Please attach an email indicating the type of co-finance (grant/investment mobilized versus in-kind/recurring). Right now the letter is not very clear but lists a total of USD 3 million as grant while the ER classifies the Vietnam co-finance as all in-kind. In addition, the prodoc in the table on page 75 mentions that USD 15 million of the co-finance from Vietnam in fact is now confirmed as investment mobilized. Please clarify this and please clear up the discrepancies.
6. Cambodia - the conservative approach to reducing the listed co-finance in the letters to only the relevant location is appreciated and the list of what projects/project amounts are deemed to support the specific project components is noted. It is though not clear why these grants and loans are all classified as recurrent expenditures. Please explain.
7. FAO - you seem to have forgotten to attach the FAO letter of in-kind co-finance. Please point us to the document or attach when resubmitting.

(3/8/2022)

Re. 1 Comment addressed

Re. 2 Response noted. Addressed.

Re. 3 Revised MERFI letter noted. Comment addressed.

Re. 4 UNESCO IHP and WWAP clarification on the nature of their co-finance has been submitted and is filed in the portal.

Re. 5 Noted and addressed.

Re. 6. Noted and addressed.

Re. 7 FAO letter of co-finances is filed in the portal.

(3/23/2022)

1. All recipient country governments? co-financing (5 entries): please report as ?Public investment? and ?Investment mobilized?, not as recurring

expenditures (unless you want to split it into partly 'Investment mobilized' and partly as 'recurring').

2. For IUCN Viet Nam: change 'Other' to 'Donor Agency'.

3. MERFI: please spell out the full name

4. Description of Investment Mobilized:

- remove the wording 'All co-finance is recurrent expenditure'.

- please explain the investment mobilized investment under the table, including to please move the text that is now in parenthesis (only a part of the amount?..) in the "Name of co-finance" column

(4/11/2022)

Re. 2. This must be a simple oversight: Please address this comment in the portal.

Re. 4 The explanation of the co-finance is understood and consistent with the GEF co-finance definition of serving a common overall objective while these projects and activities are strictly taking place on national levels.

(4/12/2022)

Comment addressed. Cleared.

Agency Response

FAO Responses (12Apr22)

Re. 2. The label has been changed to "Donor Agency". Kindly note we did also change it in the previous submission but something went wrong. In case the label is still "other" we will have to ask IT support to fix the issue.

FAO Responses (29Mar22)

1. As requested, public investments of the beneficiaries countries are reported as investment mobilized. However, a detailed description is included under Table C to

explain the nature of these investments and how they were mobilized and identified by the countries themselves.

2. Done.

3. Done.

4. Done.

FAO Responses (24Feb22)

Re 1: As all investment is recurrent expenditure, we deleted the entire text under table C to avoid any confusion.

Re 2: These loans have already been secured. However, they are not loans specifically secured for the project. For this reason, we changed the type of financing to public investment.

Re 3: We deleted the reference to past investments.

Re 4: Clarifications have been provided, with new letters of co-financing letters attached.

Re 5: Clarifications email by Vietnam and Cambodia uploaded in the roadmap of the submission.

Re 6: We changed the classification to public investment, as these loans and grants were not secured to support only the GEF investments, but instead are secured funding for several baseline projects.

Re 7: The FAO co-financing letter is uploaded in the portal.

In general terms, kindly note that the time required to get the updated letters of co-financing is the main reason why we could resubmit sooner the project after addressing the useful comments received with the RS on December '21.

GEF Resource Availability

5. Is the financing presented in Table D adequate and does the project demonstrate a cost-effective approach to meet the project objectives?

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

(12/13/2021) Yes, table D is adequate. The aquifer is spanning a large area and coordination with partners and other GEF and non-GEF investments creates complementarities which promises accelerated impacts.

Cleared.

Agency Response N/A
Project Preparation Grant

6. Is the status and utilization of the PPG reported in Annex C in the document?

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request
(12/13/2021) Yes.

(3/23/2022) Please explain two types of expenditures to verify eligibility:

(i) Please explain what "Country Office Support" entails.

(ii) Please explain what "GOE" means and what this expenditure entails

(4/11/2022) The revisions are noted and clarified in our call today that the admin support costs listed are NOT FAO admin costs (which are covered by the agency fee) but are consultant costs for supporting the PPPG execution (PMC equivalent of PMC). Cleared.

Agency Response

FAO Responses (29Mar22)

i. Country Office Support entails administrative support and liaison with country counterparts.

ii. GOE was used to described costs related to the organization of meetings during the PPG phase, including communication material, etc.

An update version of the PPG report has been uploaded.

Core indicators

**7. Are there changes/adjustments made in the core indicator targets indicated in Table E?
Do they remain realistic?**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

(12/13/2021) Yes. The core indicators align with the PIF values and are for now seen as realistic (and keeping in mind that the estimation of direct beneficiaries in this kind of project is not easy to estimate at the onset of a project and should be updated at MTR stage).

(3/23/22)

1. GEF Core Indicators should be explicitly mentioned in the Results Framework in Annex A.
2. Please explain or revise the 2.5 million DIRECT beneficiaries (core indicator 11)

(4/11/2022)

Noted - and clarified in calls that the core indicator 11 in the last submission covered both indirect and direct beneficiaries which was not correct and needed revision. The direct beneficiaries are now entered in the core indicator table and also reflected in the results framework. Cleared.

Agency Response

FAO Responses (29Mar22)

1. The GEF Core Indicators were added to the Results Framework.
2. The number of direct beneficiaries was revised and changed to 120,000 people who will be directly and positively impacted by the project outcomes.

Part II ? Project Justification

1. Is there a sufficient elaboration on how the global environmental/adaptation problems, including the root causes and barriers, are going to be addressed?

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request
(12/13/2021) Yes.

Cleared

Agency Response N/A

2. Is there an elaboration on how the baseline scenario or any associated baseline projects were derived?

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request
(12/13/2021) Yes, the baseline scenario and projects have been elaborated on.

Cleared

Agency Response N/A

3. Is the proposed alternative scenario as described in PIF/PFD sound and adequate? Is there sufficient clarity on the expected outcomes and components of the project and a description on the project is aiming to achieve them?

Secretariat Comment at PIF/Work Program Inclusion
(12/13/2021) Overall yes, but please address the following comments:

1. Please explain the process and criteria of selecting the executing partners. Have any partners within the region be considered in this process?
2. Component 3 - will the project design or also install equipment for groundwater monitoring ? If the latter, (i) where is this in the budget and (ii) will there be a request for letters of commitment by countries to cover O&M costs during and after the project to assure these networks are sustainably managed and used by both countries in the future.

3. Please provide clarity on what is funded under PMC which is USD 714 286.- including which staff and where in the prodoc or annexes this partial or full time project management roles are reflected in staff TORs. In the prodoc (pg. 99) the technical and management roles are not separated and therefore this split is not apparent. Also, please use the GEF standard budget template in the endorsement request.

(3/8/2022)

Re. 1 Addressed. Thank you for the outline of the competitive selection of partners, including regional and national entities, and the specification of their roles with regards to the components/sub-components.

Re. 2 Partially addressed. Please clarify if written commitment by the countries for the maintenance of the stations will be requested and donation of equipment be conditional of assuring the integration of the stations into the national network and provision of O&M costs.

Re. 3 (1) Please indicate the % time allocated to Project Management Tasks vs. Technical Tasks for all positions that are partially funded out of PMC and partially responsible for technical tasks under one or more components. This will then make it easier to correlate this split with the budget (e.g. the CTA is allocated with 100/450 = 22% to PMC, etc.). (2)

(3/23/2022)

Re. 2: Comments 2 addressed. Cleared.

Re. 3:

i.) The costs of the Chief technical advisor, national coordinators, technical support officers, and several technical advisors/technical officers (i.e. project staff) are charged either totally or partially to projects components. Only the admin person is charged fully to PMC. Per Guidelines, the costs associated with the project's execution have to be covered by the GEF portion and the co-financing portion allocated to PMC.

- please include TORs for all project staff listed in the budget which (i) include their qualification in order to justify the budgeted salary levels (e.g. for the CTA and other quite highly paid posts), and (ii) assure that the TORs reflect the indicated percentage split into technical and administrative tasks. For example, reading the TORs of the CTA his duties appear mostly administrative (even under the "technical support tasks"), do not relate to the

technical components, and as new qualifications are provided it is not clear that this position is intended to be filled with a technical expert or merely a coordination function.

- please explain why none of the co-finance can cover parts of any of the project staff on regional and/or at least on national levels.

(4/11/2022)

i. the revised TORs are noted which are now explicitly define the technical tasks of all staff and lists their qualifications to support the respective salary levels.

ii. The sustainable management of the shared aquifer is expected to result in national benefits - else counties would not engage in it - yet, agree, that these benefits do not accrue in initial projects such as this which still have to assess the extend of the aquifer and transboundary impacts of current and future uses. We agree that experience across the International Waters field of practice - including the GEF portfolio - has shown that direct country contributions to transboundary efforts and especially the regional PMUs and institutions are not common at this stage of yet to emerge cooperation. At present no transboundary coordination arrangement of any sort exists for the shared aquifer and this will only emerge through the duration of project interventions. The project will facilitate the technical work and processes for establishing regional opportunities and identifying threats and their root causes as well as priority actions to address them. As such it is understandable that no national cash co-finance is leveraged at this early stage to pay for regional project staff.

Cleared.

Agency Response

FAO Responses (29Mar22)

1. The TORs of the key project staff have been revised to include the qualifications and accurately reflect the technical and administrative tasks and where these are duly charged in the budget. The annex R - ToR is available in the roadmap of the submission

in both the revised Agency Project Document and as stand-alone document for ease reference.

2. The Co-Financing listed in table C cannot support any staff cost because it is either In-kind or public investments in the two recipient countries. As explain at the end of table C, the national public investments listed exist independently of the GEF project. For this reason, they all have pre-defined-closed budget which cannot support staff costs. This is also related to the transboundary nature of this IW project. The lack of an existing supranational institution/agreement to managing the entire Mekong River Delta Aquifer, makes it impossible to identify direct financial support to the Project Staff. The same happens to the national coordinator in each country because the two governments cannot justify any allocation of funds to a project that does not produce direct national benefit rather than regional environmental benefits.

FAO Responses (11Mar22)

Re. 2 An official written request will be made to the benefiting countries asking them to overtake the ownership of the equipment, their operation and maintenance and to integrate them to the national network. The executing agency, UNESCO, is confident, based on past and recent (2021) experience, on the acceptance of the governments to overtake the ownership of the monitoring stations and their integration of the in the national network. In our experience, working together with the appropriate governmental authorities and with their active involvement in the process (defining the purpose of the monitoring, agreeing with the location of the stations etc.) facilitates their overtaking the ownership of the stations at the end of the project's life time.

A relevant reference has been made in the description of Output 3.2 in the project document.

Re. 3 Percentages for the portion allocated on PMC and project's funds have been included in Annex R. Terms of Reference for key staff.

FAO Responses (24Feb22)

Re 1: A description of the selection process and the criteria has been added. Several regional organizations and entities were invited to submit their execution proposal as described in the newly added section.

Re 2: Yes, the project will pilot two telemetric stations (one on each country) to test the proposed network. There is a UNESCO budget allocation for items 3.1 and 3.2 under budget line 6100 non-expendable procurement for a total of 204,001 USD (160,000 for component 3.1 and 44,001 for component 3.2). The equipments will be donated to the countries who will assume the ownership of the telemetric stations and benefit from the

continuous flow of data at transboundary level. Official letters will be drafted and submitted to the governments of the two countries in this sense.

Re 3: The budget was revised to better reflect the synthesis of the Project Management Unit. This comprises: the Chief Technical Advisor (CTA), 2 National Coordinators, one in each country. These 3 staff hold both project management and technical roles; a team of Technical Support Officers, who share administrative, financial and technical support roles. Admin support also for UNESCO is included. The detailed TORs are presented in the revised Annex R in the Agency ProDoc (uploaded in the roadmap of the submission) and respective split between managerial and technical roles are reflected in the revised budget. For ease of reference, Annex R has also been uploaded as a standalone document in the roadmap.

4. Is there further elaboration on how the project is aligned with focal area/impact program strategies?

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request
(12/13/2021) Yes.

Cleared

Agency Response N/A

5. Is the incremental reasoning, contribution from the baseline, and co-financing clearly elaborated?

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request
(12/13/2021) Yes, this is clear and is basis of the intervention logic of the project.

Cleared

Agency Response N/A

6. Is there further and better elaboration on the project's expected contribution to global environmental benefits or adaptation benefits?

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request
(12/13/2021) Yes, there is a additional information provided throughout the document.

Cleared

Agency Response N/A

7. Is there further and better elaboration to show that the project is innovative and sustainable including the potential for scaling up?

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

(12/13/2021) Yes. The prodoc - compared to the PIF - is e.g. now elaborating the type of innovative pilot measures to be implemented.

Cleared

Agency Response N/A

Project Map and Coordinates

Is there an accurate and confirmed geo-referenced information where the project intervention will take place?

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

(4-7-2020) Yes.

Cleared.

Agency Response N/A

Child Project

If this is a child project, is there an adequate reflection of how it contributes to the overall program impact?

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

N/A

Agency Response N/A

Stakeholders

**Does the project include detailed report on stakeholders engaged during the design phase?
Is there an adequate stakeholder engagement plan or equivalent documentation for the
implementation phase, with information on Stakeholders who will be engaged, the means of
engagement, and dissemination of information?**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

(12/13/2021) There is sufficient information provided on a range of main stakeholders and means of engagement.

Please note the comments below though on the results framework and need for better measuring engagement of stakeholders in processes leading e.g. to the TDA, SAP and governance arrangements.

(3/8/2022) Thank you. Cleared.

Agency Response
FAO Responses (24Feb22)

Addressed by adding throughout the Results Framework (RF) specific indicators for participation and engagement of stakeholders in processes, including considerations of gender, age, locality and ethnicity balance. See also Agency Response in comment below.

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Has the gender analysis been completed? Did the gender analysis identify any gender differences, gaps or opportunities linked to project/program objectives and activities? If so, does the project/program include gender-responsive activities, gender-sensitive indicators and expected results?

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

(12/13/2021)

1. Please expand the attention to gender disaggregated indicators in the project results framework (RF). Both gender and overall participation in processes are not well accounted for in the RF and only components 3.3 and 5.1 appear to mention gender balanced representation. While the gender action plan provides details this has not been mainstreamed and reflected in the overall project RF. Please address and aim for better integration of gender and stakeholder participation in the RF.

(3/8/2022) Comment addressed.

(3/23/2022) It is well noted that that the project has a adopted a Gender Integration and Equality Approach. Please, however, provide some details/references to the key findings of the gender analysis carried out during PPG in the gender portal section.

(4/11/2022) Comment addressed. Cleared.

Agency Response

FAO Responses (29Mar22)

A description of the findings of the gender analysis and key findings was added to section 3. Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment.

FAO Responses (24Feb22)

Addressed by adding in the Results Framework (RF) relevant indicators to (a) better reflect the overall gender and ethnicity integration in processes in line with the Gender Integration and Equality Approach and Action Plan (Annex N2), and (b) for the collection of sex-disaggregated data based on WWAP gender-responsive indicators and methodological approach (described in Annex N2). Specific language adjustments were made to better mainstream gender and ethnic minority, and to strengthen stakeholder participation in the RF.

Private Sector Engagement

If there is a private sector engagement, is there an elaboration of its role as a financier and/or as a stakeholder?

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

(12/13/2021) Overall there is an outline of the private sector as a stakeholder in groundwater uses. Please explain why the farmers union mentioned is not listed under the private sector representation. In the end would it not be many of the small scale farmers that need to be engaged and adopt some of the innovation being piloted?

(3/8/2022) Comment addressed - cleared.

Agency Response

FAO Responses (24Feb22)

We shifted the VNFU from category ?Provincial Stakeholders? to ?Private Sector?.

Risks to Achieving Project Objectives

Has the project elaborated on indicated risks, including climate change, potential social and environmental risks that might prevent the project objectives from being achieved? Were there proposed measures that address these risks at the time of project implementation?

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

(12/13/2021) Risks have been outlined.

1. Please expand on how the project is implementing the One Health approach and creating resilience as listed under d.) under the COVID mitigation actions (pg 91 of prodoc).
2. Please expand on mitigation measures to address risks of limited interest of target stakeholders. Right now the main measures listed are "communication with local communities and other stakeholders" and their involvement in Annual Stocktaking meetings. What do you see as their roles e.g. in implementing the pilots and also learning from these demonstrations?

(3/8/2022) Comments 1. and 2. addressed. Cleared.

Agency Response

FAO Responses (24Feb22)

Re 1: We added the following text: ?The project will increase communication and collaboration between human, animal, and environmental health professionals. The project will ensure that all project team members are aware of the zoonotic risks and minimize these in field trip approval protocols. The project will monitor where possible zoonosis related risks, report on them to the SC and implement rapid risk mitigation measures where necessary.?

Re 2: We added ?To further reduce this risk, a highly participatory approach will be used to design, evaluate and upscale pilots with communities, CSOs and other relevant stakeholders on the ground.

Based on our experience working in the CMDA area, farmers are willing to invest in flood friendly crops and other NBS when there are clear economic benefits. Accordingly, we will organize experiential study visits, and farmer to farmer exchanges to further minimize engagement related risks.

These measures will not only increase the real-world impacts of this project, but also create meaningful ownership among relevant stakeholders, which from experience creates substantial interest in engaging with the project.?

Coordination

Is the institutional arrangement for project implementation fully described? Is there an elaboration on possible coordination with relevant GEF-financed projects and other bilateral/multilateral initiatives in the project area?

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request
(12/13/2021)

1. The institutional arrangements are well laid out. Please see the earlier comment on explaining the selection of executing partners.
2. Please lay out/summarize here also coordination with key non-GEF investments.
3. Please point me to any section on collaboration with BGR (Germany). There had been discussions on synergies at PIF stage but I do not see mention in the prodoc.

(3/8/2022)

Re. 1. discussed under question 3 above. Addressed.

Re. 2. Comment addressed and please report on such collaborations and synergies in the MTR.

Re. 3. Good to hear. Comment addressed.

Cleared.

Agency Response

FAO Responses (24Feb22)

Re 1: A description on the process of the selection of partners has been added as mentioned above.

Re 2: We added the following text:

In Vietnam, the PMU will work primarily, but not exclusively, through the Mekong Delta Development Partners Working Group (MDWG) to share information and to coordinate the project with the baseline projects. IUCN is a founding member of the (MDWG) and an active member of the group. The MDWG is currently co-chaired by the World Bank and the Netherlands. As stated in its ToR, the stated objective of the MDWG is to ? ? enhance the coordination, complementarity and coherence of the efforts by the Government of Vietnam and Development Partners to improve the climate resilience of the Mekong Delta.? (MDWG Terms of Reference, 17 Dec 2015).

In Cambodia, IUCN will seek to establish a similar development partners working group for the Cambodian Mekong Delta amongst development partners in Cambodia. The initiative is currently being discussed with the ADB.?

Re 3: Many thanks for pointing out this gap. When splitting up the initial table into multiple tales, one for each component, the BMZ entry must have dropped out, our apologies. We added the BMZ activities back into the table (page 46) and added as text on page 44-45 the following:

?Since 2009 the German Ministry BMZ is funding the groundwater focused project ?Improvement of Groundwater Protection in Vietnam? (IGPVN), which is being implemented in a partnership between the German BGR and Viet Nam?s NAWAPI/MoNRE. This study aims to improve the protection and sustainable management of groundwater resources in Viet Nam?s Mekong Delta assessing recharge, salinization, pollution, and land subsidence. It has been recently extended until 2022 under the title ?Climate-resilient management of groundwater and geohazards?. The project provides excellent data for two provinces in the Mekong Delta, Soc Trang and Ca Mau. During the PPG phase of this project, the team already collaborated with NAWAPI and build on updated data and updated modelling provided by this BMZ project. This partnership will be continued during the TDA phase. ?

Consistency with National Priorities

Has the project described the alignment of the project with identified national strategies and plans or reports and assessments under the relevant conventions?

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

(12/13/2021)

1. Please reference *relevant* national policies, strategies, and plans/priorities with regard to freshwater fisheries, aquaculture and wetlands protection in the area of the aquifer (as relevant to the project).

(3/8/2022) The additional review of relevant policies and strategies across related key sectors is appreciated and will hopefully aid the project to maintain and operationalize such cross-sector linkages.

Cleared.

Agency Response

FAO Responses (24Feb22)

Re 1: We added for Viet Nam: ?The project is also consistent with the Mekong Delta Integrated Regional Planning in period 2021-2030 and its vision to the year 2050 (MDIRP), which integrates a range of national priorities including freshwater fisheries, aquaculture and wetlands protection. The MDIRP constitutes the planning framework for Viet Nam?s Mekong Delta. Re to fisheries, the MDIRP specifies that areas suitable for aquaculture will be prioritized for conversion to aquaculture, particularly focusing on the sustainable production of shrimp and pangasius. The MDIRP emphasizes the need to identify new aquaculture options to further diversify livelihoods and to promote biodiversity, and to limit extensive shrimp farming in coastal mangrove forests where it seriously affects the protection value and biodiversity and ecosystem of mangroves. The MDIRP highlights that the protection and regeneration of aquatic resources and restoration of habitats of native aquatic species is paramount. The MDIRP also defines critical strategies for wetlands, as it requires local governments to restore biodiversity of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems by establishing important wetlands and other areas of high biodiversity. The project will support the MDIRP?s fisheries and wetlands focused strategies by assessing groundwater related implications.?

For Cambodia, we added:

Re to fisheries focused policies, the policy is fully supportive and consistent with Cambodia?s priorities. The enactment of the 2006 Fisheries Law represented a positive step towards better fisheries' management, including the conservation of fish and their natural habitats. The new 125-article law replaces the outdated 1987 Fisheries Law. The 2006 Fisheries Law encourages the creation and proper maintenance of conservation area and promotes the development of aquaculture. It also aims to ensure long-term conservation and sustainable management of fishery resources considering social, economic and environmental factors.

The promotion of aquaculture is outlined in the National Aquaculture Development Strategy (NADS). The goal of NADS is a commercially viable and environmentally sustainable aquaculture sector contributing to food security and nutrition, socioeconomic development, GDP and export earnings. NADS strategies include the ?increase access to sufficient and consistent supplies of high-quality water, and to reduce flood risks? and to ?maintain environmental quality?, which are both aligned with the project?s goals.

The strategic planning framework for fisheries (2015-2024) defines the better management of fish stocks and aquaculture as an overarching national priority. The earlier Strategic Planning Framework for Fisheries (2010-2019) was fully adopted by the Royal Government of Cambodia, and subsequently integrated into the ?Rectangular Strategy? for Growth, Employment, Equity and Efficiency Phase III(RS III) and the National Strategic Development Plan 2014-2018 (NSDP). Further, the Strategic Planning Framework for Fisheries is closely linked to the Agriculture Sector Strategic Development Plan (ASDP), of which the fisheries programme represents the National Fisheries Management Plan.

Re to wetland management in Cambodia, the National Protected Area Strategic Management Plan (NPASMP) 2017-2031 is the first comprehensive strategy document for protected areas in Cambodia and aims for improving the nation?s climate-resilience. Also, relevant for wetland management is the Law on Environmental

Protection and Management of Natural Resources (LEPMNR) (1996) to influence the management of Cambodia's protected areas. The project is fully consistent with the NPASMP and the LEPMNR.

Knowledge Management

Is the proposed Knowledge Management Approach for the project adequately elaborated with a timeline and a set of deliverables?

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request
(12/13/2021) Yes.

Cleared

Agency Response N/A
Environmental and Social Safeguard (ESS)

Are environmental and social risks, impacts and management measures adequately documented at this stage and consistent with requirements set out in SD/PL/03?

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request
(12/13/2021) yes, the project is rated as low impact.

Cleared

Agency Response N/A
Monitoring and Evaluation

Does the project include a budgeted M&E Plan that monitors and measures results with indicators and targets?

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request
(12/13/2021) Yes, it does but

1. Please note the discrepancy between the M&E table and responsible agency/budget holder in table 18 in the prodoc (pg. 111), the same and related M&E tables in the endorsement request (pgs. 75 and 77), and the project budget.

2. Please note that the project budget shows USD 436 050.- being of the GEF grant (i.e. beyond the agency fees) as executed by FAO. This includes spot checks in the field (?) and travel all of which seem to be standard implementing agency roles and as such to be covered by agency fees. As you are aware GEF agency execution of GEF grants is not permitted and exceptions have to be justified and presented to GEFSEC and to be explicitly approved by GEF managers. Please explain which of the items listed warrants such an exception (if any) and why and revise accordingly.

(3/8/2022)

Re. 1: Comment addressed.

Re. 2: Thank you for explaining the independent spot checks and explaining why these are not standard agency tasks. Comments to move M&E as sub-components while audit costs re PMC are addressed. FAO retaining for now the funds to hire an independent entity/ies to perform the audits, MTR and TE as per FAO requirements is noted and has been approved by the GEF GPU manager (email field in the portal).

Cleared

Agency Response

FAO Responses (24Feb22)

Re 1: Discrepancies have been revisited to ensure consistency.

Re 2: All audit costs, including spot checks, as integral part of the monitoring and evaluation process of the Implementing agency were shifted to PMC. FAO as IA retains only the audits, mid term and terminal evaluation costs, according to GEF policy. Travel cost for M&E was mistakenly marked as FAO, as this budget is allocated to IUCN as lead Executing Agency. FAO does not bear any execution role in the project.

For ease of reference, the objective of the audits is to obtain reasonable assurance as to whether the financial statements are free from material misstatement, whether due to

fraud or error, thereby enabling the auditor to express an opinion on whether the financial statements are prepared, in all material respects, in accordance with an applicable financial reporting framework. Spot checks are performed to assess the accuracy of financial records for cash transfers to OPs and whether there have been any significant changes to applicable internal controls.

Both audit and spot checks are conducted independently of FAO, this is as per FAO and Operational Partner Agreement requirements. The funds cannot be outsourced before project start, and therefore are retained by FAO until the services are hired.

Benefits

Are the socioeconomic benefits at the national and local levels sufficiently described resulting from the project? Is there an elaboration on how these benefits translate in supporting the achievement of GEBs or adaptation benefits?

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request
(12/13/2021) Yes, this is elaborated in the prodoc and ER.

Cleared

Agency Response N/A

Annexes

Are all the required annexes attached and adequately responded to?

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request
(12/13/2021) Yes, annexes are attached.

Cleared

Agency Response N/A

Project Results Framework

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request
(12/13/2021)

- Please see earlier comment with regard to better representation and mainstreaming of gender in the RF. This does not need to be repeated here.

- Please also note an earlier comment in the SAP signature by at least one Minister from each country (not any level in the Ministry). Again, no need to repeat your response here again.

1. Please capture processes and process milestones in the RF and capture the level of national and regional participation leading e.g. to the TDA, the SAP and joined governance and data exchange arrangements. The RF in the moment does not measure the quality and extend of engaging various level and type of stakeholders in these processes which are key to guarantee the ownership and robustness of these outputs as well as contributing to building a common knowledge base, trust and interest across borders and sectors in the improved management of the shared groundwater resources.

(3/8/2022) These comments have been addressed (see earlier comments).

Cleared.

Agency Response

FAO Responses (24Feb22)

The gender-focused changes have been implemented as explained under 'gender equality'.

Re 1: For components 3.1 and 3.2 commonly agreed and developed products such as the transboundary groundwater monitoring design and the data sharing protocols respectively will be submitted to the SC for approval. Without the full cooperation and agreement of the JTC members, such products cannot be submitted. The agreement aspect is more clear on the work plan and the described activities. Furthermore, the text describing Output 3.1 and 3.2 details more the cooperation. To strengthen this element of the RF the wording 'Commonly agreed and developed' has been added

GEF Secretariat comments

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

(12/13/2021) Please address comments in the review sheet.

The project is overall very well formulated and an important investment to enhance the sustainable management of groundwater resources and conjunctive management in the delta and upstream areas overlying the aquifer area.

(3/8/2022) Most comments have been addressed. This is an important project and fills a gap in the landscape on ongoing investments in the lower Mekong/Mekong delta.

(3/14/2022) The remaining comments have been addressed and the project is recommended for endorsement.

Agency Response N/A

Council comments

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

(12/13/2021) Please address the council member comments (Germany and France) and list the comments and responses in Annex B of the endorsement request (same as the STAP and GEFSEC comments which are already listed in that Annex).

Council comments can be found under "stakeholder comments" in the portal:

<https://gefportal.worldbank.org/App/#/general/comments/59ec4fa5-d669-ca11-a811-000d3a33706c>

(3/8/2022)

Council comments have been adequately addressed.

Please follow up in the invitation by BGR for dialogue early in the inception phase.

Cleared.

Agency Response

The Council comments and related responses were added in Annex B.

STAP comments

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

(12/13/2021) STAP comments have been addressed and included in Annex B of the ER.

(3/8/2022)

The STAP technical comments have been addressed.

Please note the request by STAP for dialogue during the development phase of the project. Please reach out to STAP and discuss engagement and possibility to include STAP advice in the inception phase or another constructive arrangement in support of the project. Please file communication in the portal.

(3/14/2022) We discussed this and the mistake is obvious when comparing the generic template with the responses. The actual STAP comments provided at PIF stage have been addressed.

Cleared

Agency Response

FAO Responses (11Mar22)

The consultant managing the revision for STAP had wrongfully inserted the generic STAP questionnaire as STAP comment.

This has been rectified and all STAP comments and responses have been addressed in Annex B. There are no further comments from STAP to be addressed.

The revised version of Annex B is attached to the Roadmap for easy reference.

Convention Secretariat comments

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request N/A

Agency Response N/A

Other Agencies comments

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request N/A (none received)

Agency Response N/A

CSOs comments

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request N/A (none received)

Agency Response N/A

Status of PPG utilization

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

(12/13/2021) Yes, a table detailing PPG utilization has been included.

Cleared

Agency Response N/A

Project maps and coordinates

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

(12/13/2021) yes, this has been included.

Cleared.

Agency Response N/A

Does the termsheet in Annex F provide finalized financial terms and conditions? Does the termsheet and financial structure address concerns raised at PIF stage and that were pending to be resolved ahead of CEO endorsement? (For NGI Only)

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

N/A

Agency Response

N/A

Do the Reflow Table Annex G and the Trustee Excel Sheet for reflows provide accurate reflow expectations of the project submitted? Assumptions for Reflows can be submitted to explain expected reflows. (For NGI Only)

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request N/A

Agency Response N/A

Did the agency Annex H provided with information to assess the Agency Capacity to generate and manage reflows? (For NGI Only)

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request N/A

Agency Response N/A

GEFSEC DECISION

RECOMMENDATION

Is CEO endorsement recommended? (applies only to projects and child projects)

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

(12/13/2021) Please address the comments provided and resubmit. Please do not hesitate to contact us for any questions.

(3/8/2022) Most comments have been addressed. The project document is detailed and all stakeholders to be commended for this submission despite the current difficulties during the pandemic. Please let me know if your team would like clarification of the remaining comments to address them swiftly.

(3/23/2022) Kindly address the few comments on co-finance, core indicators, budgets, and gender and resubmit the project.

(4/11/2022) Please address the comment on changing "Other" to "donor agency" in table C. This was done in the FAO project document but is not saved in the portal. Please let us know and contact the GEF portal team if this is due to a portal problem. Please resubmit at your earliest convenience.

(4/12/2022) Comment addressed.

The project is technically cleared and recommended for endorsement.

Review Dates

**Secretariat Comment at
CEO Endorsement**

**Response to
Secretariat
comments**

First Review

12/13/2021

**Secretariat Comment at
CEO Endorsement**

**Response to
Secretariat
comments**

Additional Review (as necessary)	3/8/2022
Additional Review (as necessary)	3/23/2022
Additional Review (as necessary)	
Additional Review (as necessary)	

CEO Recommendation

Brief reasoning for CEO Recommendations

CEO Recommendation:

Context. The lower section of the Mekong River Basin is underlain by a major transboundary aquifer system shared by Cambodia and Viet Nam: The Cambodia ? Mekong River Delta Aquifer. This transboundary aquifer system connects two ecosystems of global environmental significance and socio-economic importance: the i) Tonle Sap area and the ii) Mekong Delta and includes some major urban areas, including Phnom Penh and Ho Chi Minh. The whole area is approximately 200,000 km² with about 63% lying within Cambodian territory. Tonle Sap, the largest lake in the Peninsular Indochina, is hydraulically connected to the Mekong River and serves as a natural regulating reservoir ensuring adequate groundwater recharge to the aquifer. Groundwater is critical for delta rice production and makes a substantial contribution to the national GDP of Viet Nam, and supports the agricultural sector in Cambodia, accounting for half of the country's GDP and employing 80-85% of its? labor force. For these reasons, the aquifer is heavily exploited for irrigation and water supply. The effects of surface and groundwater interactions nourish large tracts of forests and wetlands, which produce building materials, medicines and food, and provide habitats to thousands of species of plants and animals. Groundwater naturally interacts with areas of low-lying land in the delta region where permanent wetlands tend to develop. These wetlands provide habitat for fish, buffer flood events by absorbing huge quantities of excess water, and offer natural water cleansing functions. In addition, groundwater sustains wetlands during the dry season.

The project. The sustainability of water resources and the health of the delta and Tonle Sap ecosystems cannot be achieved without a proper and shared understanding of the regional groundwater flow regimes, especially with regard to the up-gradient recharge zones within the Cambodian territory. The establishment of cooperative management frameworks for this major transboundary aquifer is needed to avoid over-pumping and pollution of the groundwater resources. Within this context, the proposed foundational IW project seeks to strengthen environmental sustainability and water security in the Lower Mekong Basin by focusing, for the first time in the region, on the totality of the Cambodia-Mekong River Delta transboundary aquifer and understanding of its functioning and interactions with surface waters and ecosystems, and on its national and transboundary governance. The project will place emphasis on the enhancement of aquifer recharge, pollution reduction, and optimization of groundwater withdrawals through and agreement on environmental status indicators (i) strengthening transboundary cooperation including joint fact finding and information exchange; (ii) supporting innovative solutions to strategies for improved groundwater recharge, reduced extraction and mitigated ecosystem/ livelihoods trade-offs; (iii) enhancing data and information exchange and designing a permanent consultation and cooperation body; (iv) agreement on a common vision and prioritization of joint actions; (v) and enhanced stakeholder participation, communication and monitoring of outcomes. GEBs ? as measured by the GEF core indicators - include cooperation and improved governance and management of the shared delta aquifer and connected resources with project interventions indirectly impacting 2.5 million stakeholders in the aquifer area and, beyond the immediate area, the region supporting food supply chains across the globe.

Innovation, sustainability and scale-up. The project is for the first time enabling a transboundary view and management of a shared aquifer system that is key to the sustainability of the lower Mekong region which supports one of the major freshwater fisheries on the planet, several major urban centers as well as sustains half of the national rice production in Viet Nam which stands as the third biggest rice exporter globally. The project addresses, amongst others, a challenge faced by many large transboundary aquifers globally, as demonstrated by the findings of the TWAP project: how to implement an aquifer wide harmonized monitoring and management arrangements being able to address both short-term and long-term needs to sustainably manage the quality and quantity of the water resources of the aquifer, realizing that a transboundary aquifer cooperation mechanism is innovative in itself considering that only a handful of these exist worldwide. Furthermore, the comprehensive understanding of groundwater dependent systems (e.g. incl. food production and wetlands) is still innovative for southeast Asia and even globally. The project will also be testing of innovative nature-based solutions and practices aimed at reversing water table lowering trends, and groundwater contamination. The dissemination of the results of these experiences will foster the scaling up and broader adoption of the successful practices promoted by the project to the level of the whole aquifer, and beyond, to other regions

Provisions to address COVID 19 risks. The project will increase communication and collaboration between human, animal, and environmental health professionals and ensure that all project team members are aware of the zoonotic risks and minimize these in field trip approval protocols. The project will monitor where possible zoonosis related risks, report on them to the SC and implement rapid risk mitigation measures where necessary. The project relies mostly on national experts for its implementation and it is not currently anticipated that the COVID-19 restrictions would affect the availability of national expertise. It is anticipated that, even if face-to-face interactions are reduced, the project would still be able to organize meaningful consultations with local stakeholders through the local representatives. Remote communication via email, online meetings and phone may be used increasingly to adjust to the new situation.