

Fourth Meeting of the Working Group on Environment

Introduction

The Fourth Meeting of the Working Group on the Environment (WGE) for the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) was sponsored by Asian Development Bank (the Bank) and hosted by the Viet Nam National Environment Agency. The Meeting was held on 5-6 March 1998 at Hanoi Horizon Hotel in Hanoi, Viet Nam.

Meeting Participants included official Government representatives from the host nation Viet Nam, Cambodia, People's Republic of China (PRC), Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), Myanmar and Thailand; Bank staff and Consultants; representatives from international organizations (Mekong River Commission, UNDP, UNEP and World Bank), bilateral donor agencies (International Development Research Centre, JICA, German Agency for Technical Cooperation), and non-governmental organizations (Center for the Environment, Culture and Environment Preservation Association, Conservation International, Organization for Industrial Spiritual and Cultural Advancement International, Viet Nam Association for Conservation of Nature and Environment, Wetlands International, World Conservation Union (IUCN) and World Wide Fund for Nature); and observers from the embassies of Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Norway and Switzerland in Hanoi. The Steering Committee for GMS environmental projects also comprises the official Government representatives to the WGE Meeting, as well as representatives of the Bank, UNEP and the MRC. The full list of attendees is attached as [Appendix 1](#).

Objectives

The meeting was organized with the following objectives:

- To report on recent environmental developments in each GMS country;
- To assess the progress of the two ongoing regional technical assistance projects (RETAs);
- To report the status of a newly ADB-approved RETA and the progress of two proposed RETAs;
- To have a three-way dialogue among the GMS-WGE, the donor community, and NGOs;
- To formulate future course of action for the environmental program of the GMS; and
- To discuss issues that may be brought to the attention of the Ministers during the Eighth Conference on Subregional Economic Cooperation in June 1998.

The Agenda and Program for the Fourth Meeting of the Working Group on Environment is attached as [Appendix 2](#).

Opening Session

The welcome address was delivered by H.E. Minister Chu Tuan Nha, Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment of Viet Nam. The Minister expressed his appreciation for the opportunity of being the host country of the meeting. He reported the comprehensive attention accorded by the Government of Viet Nam in pursuit of sustainable development. He emphasized the need to "join hands in the struggle to sustain today's development while preparing for a safer and better life for the Mekong region of tomorrow."

The Meeting was formally opened with a statement from the Dr. Bindu Lohani, Manager, Environment Division, Office of Environment and Social Development of ADB. Dr. Lohani welcomed the participants and expressed appreciation to the Government of Viet Nam, especially the National Environment Agency, for the excellent preparation of the meeting. He outlined the meeting's objectives as follows: country reporting on environment sector update; discussion of two newly ADB-approved projects on environment; dialogue with other donors and the NGOs; and mapping out of future activities. He encouraged the Meeting to exercise flexibility and focus on the group's outputs during the discussions. Dr. Lohani also made a presentation on the GMS Environment Program of ADB where the current status of the environment of the GMS countries was reported. Given the continued change in the environmental resources of the subregion, Dr. Lohani underscored the need to sustain subregional cooperation efforts to address cross-boundary and overlapping environmental concerns. More importantly, Dr. Lohani stressed that subregional participation can facilitate the establishment of a common policy and institutional framework to ensure environmentally sound activities in the region while project-specific issues and country concerns are addressed by the WGE and the national governments, respectively.. Dr. Lohani further reported the positive response of ADB to this challenge and the possible future undertakings in support of the Bank's commitment to the sector in consideration of the emerging concerns in the region.

Adoption of the Agenda

The country representatives unanimously approved and agreed to adopt the agenda.

GMS Environment Sector Country Updates

As the Session Co-Chair, Mr. Nguyen Ngoc Sinh, Director General of the Viet Nam Environment Agency, invited the representatives of the Royal Government of Cambodia to start off the presentations. Subsequent reports were presented in the following order: People's Republic of China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Viet Nam and Thailand.

Royal Government of Cambodia

Mr. Ung Phyrun, Deputy Director General of the Ministry of Environment, presented the Country Report for Cambodia. Mr. Phyrun reported the environmental problems facing Cambodia today, namely, urbanization, population increase, industrialization, resource-depletion, lack of adequately-trained professionals, inadequate legislation and standards, weak enforcement capability of regulations and inappropriate institutional arrangements. Despite these numerous problems, Mr. Phyrun expressed the commitment of the Royal Government of Cambodia to contribute to the strategic plans of the GMS in the spirit of sustainable development. To address the problems earlier identified, the Government has given high priority on human resources development to ensure sustainable economic development and wise use of resources for future generations.

People's Republic of China

Mr. Liu Chunyu, Director, Foreign Economic Cooperation Office, China National Environmental Protection Agency made the presentation for PRC. Mr. Chunyu reported two strategic policies on economic growth and social development that

PRC has adopted which have a direct bearing on the environment as follows: strategy for sustainable development and strategy for country development based on science and technology progress. Mr. Chunyu reported the country's progress so far in environment protection work since 1993 which has been greatly reformed in terms of management strategies - scope, philosophy and methodologies. PRC has targeted the year 2000 for the country to have established a fairly perfect environment management system and an environment legal system that conforms to the socialist market economy. The country will continue to adopt the policy of prevention first combined with control, as well as the policy that "polluter pays" and the policy of intensifying environmental management.

Lao People's Democratic Republic

Mr. P. Nonthaxay, Deputy Director of Cabinet for the Science, Technology and Environment Organization (STENO) presented the Country Report for Lao PDR. Mr. Nonthaxay reported the continued environmental issues that beset the country, namely, deforestation, encroachment and shifting cultivation, forest fires, soil erosion, misuse of water resources, and industrial, mining and transport development. Due to the cross-sectoral nature of environmental issues in Lao, various ministries and agencies are involved in environmental affairs resulting in ill-defined work responsibilities, duplication of efforts and coordination problems. However, the Government has created the Science and Technology and Environment Organization within the Prime Minister's Office in 1993 to provide overall coordination and oversight of environmental affairs. Some local environmental offices have just been recently established and therefore have yet to enhance their capability to support the central agency. The country's environmental law is being drafted for submission to the National Assembly for adoption during the year. The law will require developers, both private and public, to assess the social and environmental impacts of their proposed projects. The law will also provide the framework for conducting the environmental impact assessment (EIA). Pending the adoption of the Environmental Law, Lao has been adopting a National Environment Action Plan since 1994 which focuses on a project-oriented planning and management framework that provides the umbrella for specific sector interventions. A National Environmental Strategy to the year 2010 has been adopted by the country to guide environmental planning and management in the country with an emphasis on preventive measures.

Myanmar

Mr. Phae Thann Oo, Director/Joint Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Commission for Environmental Affairs (NCEA), presented the Country Report for Myanmar. Mr. Thann reported that the environmental management pattern in Myanmar is largely sectoral with existing policies and regulations relating to environmental management being formulated and administered by the sectoral ministries and departments concerned. The country has 56 legal instruments in the context of the environment, some of which were enacted before independence and are more prevention-oriented with the more recent ones focused on conservation and sustainable use. While the country continues to address its environmental problems (deforestation, biodiversity loss and habitat destruction, wildlife conservation, water pollution, mangroves depletion, climate change and natural disasters), the Government of Myanmar has acceded to several environment-related international agreements and has participated in several regional and subregional programmes and projects on the environment. The management capacity of the NCEA, the national institution entrusted with the

responsibility for overall environment management in the country, still needs to be strengthened.

Thailand

Dr. Monthip Sriratana Tabucanon, Director of the Environmental Research and Training Center, Department of Environment Quality Promotion (DEQP), Ministry of Science and Technology and Environment, presented the Country Report for Thailand. Dr. Tabucanon reported that Thailand continues to battle with major environmental problems such as air pollution which prompted the Government to switch from leaded to unleaded petrol; insufficient public drainage and waste treatment systems; water pollution; and increasing production of toxic and hazardous wastes. The 7th National Plan emphasized the equal importance of resource and environment conservation with economic growth and brought about a change in the legal and institutional arrangements governing resource and environmental protection. Parliament passed a new law that, among others, requires the preparation of a 20-year Environmental Quality Promotion Policy with 5-year action plans. The 8th Plan includes human resource development as the fundamental objective and introduces 5 levels of monitoring and evaluation of development. Thailand will continue its national efforts and join international pursuits toward sustainable development.

Viet Nam

Mrs. Nguyen Thi Tho, Deputy Director, Planning and International Relations Division presented the country update for Viet Nam. Mrs. Tho briefly reported the environment-related concerns of Viet Nam such as urban and industrial development which has aggravated the pollution and waste problems; energy development which has taken its toll on air and water quality; and deforestation which has caused biodiversity loss. The Government has institutionally strengthened the environment activities in the country following the Rio Summit with the establishment of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment in 1992. A system of environmental management has been set up in the national and local levels. NGOs have been enjoined to be involved in the country's efforts towards sustainable development; particular mention was made to the Viet Nam Association for Conservation of Nature and Environment. A series of statutory instruments and regulations have been elaborated and promulgated over the past years following the passage of the Law on Environment Protection in 1993. The country's efforts have been exerted on the basis of the National Plan for Environment and Sustainable Development 1991-2000.

Statement of Observers

Mekong River Commission (MRC)

Mr. P. Mortensen, Chief of Environment Unit, MRC expressed his appreciation for having been invited to the meeting and stressed MRC's keen interest in supporting subregional cooperation. The observer noted the massive inputs required to come up and implement subregional programs and the need to closely coordinate activities between and among implementing agencies. The observer emphasized that MRC would be willing to fulfill an active, as well as a coordinating role in these types of projects. Reference is made to the enclosed written statement in [Appendix 3](#).

World Conservation Union (IUCN)

Mr. A. Ingles, Sr. Programme Officer, Forestry Programme, IUCN Bangkok briefly reported the activities of the IUCN, in general and in the subregion, and expressed their willingness to assist in subregional activities, where feasible. As a relatively new professional in IUCN, the observer expressed his interest of learning more of the operations of ADB, especially in the GMS. He was also interested in what impact the size and tight timetable of RETAs have on the chances for meaningful public participation during their execution. The observer pointed out his concern in ensuring that environment, although being tackled by a separate working group, be incorporated in the activities of the other ADB working groups in view of its intrinsic link to the other sectors of the economy. The observer also noted that public participation can be encouraged not only in the implementation stage of projects but also during design and withdrawal stages.

International Development Research Centre (IDRC)

Mr. Stephen Tyler, Senior Program Specialist from IDRC reported the long association of IDRC in the subregion and briefly explained the Centre's objectives. He was pleased to interact with the participants of the meeting and expressed willingness to collaborate with ADB and other agencies on GMS undertakings.

Danish Embassy

Mr. K.E. Christensen, the observer from the Danish Embassy in Hanoi reported the embassy's priority activities in South Asia to include regional and transboundary activities; management of natural resources and renewable energy development. He expressed support to the activities of the WGE.

World Wide Fund of Nature (WWF)

WWF is committed to the GMS, according to Mr. D. Hulse, the observer from WWF. This NGO upholds integrated environmental management, transboundary conservation, research and capacity building in the central and local levels in collaboration with donor agencies like UNDP and the World Bank.

German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ)

Mr. A. Steiner, Chief Technical Advisor, Sustainable Resource Management Project for the Mekong Region, GTZ made two specific comments relating to the need to establish linkages between various processes being undertaken in the region, and the importance of relating the activities of the WGE with other sectoral initiatives under the GMS framework - in particular transport and energy.

Italian Embassy

The Italian Government, as reported by Dr. P. Sequi, the observer from its embassy in Hanoi, is inclined towards financing environment-related projects and is therefore waiting for good proposals that can be considered for assistance.

UNDP in Cambodia

Ms. M. Omura, Program Officer, UNDP, Cambodia briefly reported the undertakings of UNDP in the GMS area with particular emphasis on Tonle Sap which is considered a very essential natural endowment of Cambodia where people derive significant economic benefits.

Swiss Embassy

The commitment of the Swiss Government to the GMS program was reiterated by Mr. C. Georges, Counsellor, Development Cooperation, Swiss Embassy in Hanoi. He stressed the importance of working together towards a common goal. The observer cited the interest of the Swiss Government in providing support to the proposed GMS RETA on Strategic Environmental Framework but deferred his comments until discussion of the subject RETA later in the meeting.

Conservation International (CI)

Ms. F. Fukuoka, Japan Program Director commended the synergistic manner of implementing the GMS program and encouraged continued partnership and cooperation toward environmental conservation in the biodiversity "hotspots" in GMS member countries.

Overview of ADB's Environment and Natural Resources Program

Mr. Toru Shibuichi, Manager, Forestry and Natural Resources Division (AWFN), Agriculture and Social Sectors Department, ADB gave a brief introduction of the type and extent of work conducted by the AWFN in the GMS countries for the promotion of sustained management of natural resources; identification and implementation of investment projects in close coordination with other ADB offices, and support for social and economic progress. Mr. Shibuichi stressed the need to adopt a proactive approach in addressing the challenges of the sector through constant interaction with executing agencies and the donor community, and close monitoring of the projects' activities.

Status of Subregional Environmental Projects

As the session Co-Chair, Dr. Lohani made a short introduction to each of the following projects, and enjoined the delegates to give their comments and suggestions after each progress report. Responses were solicited from the presenters thereafter.

Subregional Environmental Monitoring and Information System (SEMIS)

The SEMIS project was endorsed by the six GMS countries during the Fourth GMS Ministerial Conference. The project is funded and administered in parallel by the Bank and UNEP, in close collaboration with the Mekong River Commission, and is executed by the environmental agencies in the six GMS countries. Roche International is the consulting firm commissioned by the Bank to conduct the information-sharing related activities of the project. UNEP is primarily responsible for the capacity-building activities of the project.

Dr. Ian Crain, a consultant with Roche International, presented the SEMIS status report. Following a brief history of the SEMIS project, Dr. Crain reported that the project is expected to be completed in April 1998. He outlined the outputs of the project, as follows: (a) Core Dataset Definition, (b) Conceptual Spatial Database Design, (c) Data Standards, (d) Metadata Standards, (e) Conduct of Pilot Data Transfer, (f) International Workshop on Data and Metadata Standards, (g) Study Tour to Existing Data Exchange Networks (in Australia), (h) Training in the Use of Data Exchanges and Database Standards, (i) Hardware and Software Supplement to Allow Participation, (j) Catalogue of Commercial Support Available. Through

the SEMIS project, information highways and "bridges" have been built between DMCs and among agencies in each DMC. After the project, the following concerns need to be addressed: human resource development, information technology infrastructure development, institutional strengthening and subregional cooperation to continue the ideals of the SEMIS project.

Mr. Nokeo Ratanavong of the Technical Support Unit of the Mekong River Commission (MRC) presented the outputs of the MRC component of the SEMIS project. The MRC has completed the linkage of the Mekong GIS with the LMB hydrological and water quality databases. Basinwide thematic data layers to characterize the sub-basins have been developed. A catalog of data sets is developed, to be included in the SEMIS catalog of data holdings.

Dr. Surendra Shrestha, Director, UNEP-Environment Assessment Program for Asia and the Pacific, presented the progress of SEMIS outputs. The progress report included the following outputs: (a) Catalogue of Existing Data Holdings; (b) Development of In-Country Training Capacity on GIS and Database Management; (c) Agreements on Data Sharing and Access; (d) Development of Core Dataset; (e) Provision of Hardware and Software for Participation in the Network; and (f) Development of SoE Databases and Reports. UNEP, as technical coordinator of SEMIS project made the following comments on the project: (a) technical review of outputs submitted has been completed, (b) monthly progress reports have prepared, (c) technical review of remaining outputs needs to be completed, and (d) an evaluation of the report was requested.

Comments

The following comments were given by the Steering Committee members and the other delegates to the Meeting:

- Dr. Tabucanon, the representative from Thailand expressed appreciation of the project which was deemed to be very useful and unique being the first regional undertaking of the GMS. It was further reported that the ASEAN has agreed in principle to adopt the standards and format that have been established in SEMIS. The need for enhanced capacity of the Government was noted.
- Ms. Omura and Mr. Tyler, the observers from UNDP, Cambodia and IDRC, respectively, queried on the accessibility of the SEMIS outputs. The project team of SEMIS cited that information of public domain can be accessed through the homepage of UNEP-EAP-AP while other information are available with the national environment agencies of the DMCs based on signed agreements with the Governments. Dr. Lohani and Mr. Tucker further emphasized the need to widely disseminate the SEMIS outputs through more innovative means. A suggestion made was to reproduce the SEMIS outputs in CD-ROMs and to utilize telemarketing techniques in disseminating the SEMIS product.
- Dr. Shrestha proposed that all projects and loans might include a small component for environment information to be implemented by national environment agencies. It is proposed that this capacity building assistance would include assistance for data collection, monitoring and analysis.

Response

- To address the above concerns, it was suggested that Roche International, UNEP-EAP/AP and MRC package a Phase II of the SEMIS in close consultation with the GMS governments. It was agreed that UNEP will take

the lead in securing funding for the project but Bank staff expressed willingness to support UNEP in this regard. Dr. Lohani enjoined other donors to support the extension of the SEMIS project through cofinancing or sharing of expertise. The meeting agreed that consultants are not expected to approach donor agencies in the spirit of professional courtesy unless they deem appropriate. Dr. Lohani stressed the common concern of insufficient dissemination of projects' outputs and encouraged the meeting to take conscious efforts at extensive dissemination of useful outputs.

- In summary, WGE-4 discussed the need for SEMIS Phase II. WGE-4 decided to request the Bank and UNEP to assist with preparation of a proposal and secure funding for SEMIS Phase II. WGE-4 decided to request UNEP to coordinate and implement SEMIS Phase II with ADB assistance.

Subregional Environmental Training and Institutional Strengthening (SETIS)

The SETIS project was endorsed by the GMS Ministers at the Third Conference on Subregional Economic Cooperation in 1994, together with the SEMIS project, and was formally approved by the Bank in May 1996.

Dr. Gary Vigers of EVS Consultants of Canada first presented a brief overview of the SETIS Project, its objectives and tasks, as well as the roles of the cooperating Government agencies. In terms of achievements, the following are credited to the SETIS project: 15 training programs, 11 environmental topics, 40 case studies, over 300 participants and a cadre of domestic consultants and trainers.

Comments

- Dr. Tabucanon and Mr. Chanrithy, the representatives of Thailand and Cambodia, respectively, questioned the postponement of the scheduled training in Taiwan involving three courses condensed into one and requested that they be advised in advance of similar incidents in the future.
- Dr. Tabucanon, the representative of Thailand suggested that Governments be advised of the required qualifications of each training module so that trainees can be selected according to need and background. She further suggested that course modules be translated in the local languages.

Response

- Bank staff reported that the training course, originally planned in Taipei, China, is currently planned in Manila in response to the requests made by the Governments to push through with the training. He enjoined the country representatives to bear with the occasional changes in project implementation to take into account of other emerging concerns.
- The meeting supported Thailand's suggestion for Governments to be advised in advance of trainees' qualifications. He advised that the representative agencies may have to prepare the translation using their own resources since translation costs are not included in the budget of the project.

ADB-Approved RETA 5771: Poverty Reduction and Environmental Improvements in Remote Watershed Areas

Mr. H. Tucker, Project Specialist, AWFN, ADB reported that the project has been approved by the Bank, and is to be implemented in two phases. Phase I, with parallel cofinancing from Finland, is expected to commence in May/June 1998 and will involve consultants who will prepare the required outputs including the ranking of watersheds for prioritization for which the SEMIS database will be utilized. The Government of Lao PDR has kindly offered to provide host facilities for the RETA activities. The terms of reference of Phase II which, primarily involves feasibility studies on investment projects, will be defined further according to the results of Phase I. Consultants for the two phases will overlap to ensure continuity of the project. The involvement of the WGE as steering committee members will provide the opportunity for communication between meetings with this RETA.

Comments

- Mr. Mortensen, MRC reported that they have three current projects in watershed management and expressed willingness to contribute to the RETA.
- Dr. Tabucanon and Mr. Liu Chunyu, representatives of Thailand and PRC, respectively, observed that the implementing arrangements specified in the RETA paper are rather complicated and may raise some difficulties.
- Mr. Steiner, the observer from the GTZ, noted that two programmes being implemented through the MRC addressed very similar issues. Close coordination between ADB and such programmes should be emphasized.

Response

Given the common view on the complexity of the current implementation arrangements contained in the TA paper, Mr. Tucker prepared a revised paragraph on implementing arrangements which was agreed to by the countries. The revised paragraph is attached as [Appendix 4](#).

Proposed RETA: Environmental Strategy for the Greater Mekong Subregion

Mr. Robert Dobias, Environment Specialist from ADB, presented the revised proposal to the Meeting which is currently under consideration by ADB's management. The RETA's goal is to improve environmental protection by helping ensure environment sustainability within the context of GMS program and within the GMS. The scope of the RETA is divided into three phases, namely: inception (to be devoted to establishing the RETA's institutional framework, participation arrangements, coordination mechanisms and data collection and collation), analysis (to be devoted to data analysis to identify major environmental trends and their interrelationships with socioeconomic trends) and the development of a strategic environmental framework.

Comments

- Dr. Tabucanon, the representative from Thailand remarked that the project can tap NGO cooperation and suggested that an inventory list of all NGOs working in the GMS be prepared for reference.
- Dr. Sinh, the representative from Viet Nam found the project useful and suggested that the implementation arrangements be flexible to take into account of the countries' varied system of coordination.
- The representative from PRC, Mr. Chunyu, suggested that the project utilize existing information and materials.

- The representative from Cambodia, Mr. Chanrithy expressed his support for the project but noted the budgetary constraint faced by their country.
- MRC's comment for this RETA is given in MRC's Statement in [Appendix 3](#).

Response

Mr. T. Shibuichi advised the meeting that the suggestions made will be incorporated, where possible during TA implementation.

Proposed RETA: Management of Critical Wetlands of the Lower Mekong Basin

Mr. Henry Tucker reported that this RETA has been conditionally approved by ADB in January 1998 subject to confirmation of cofinancing from bilateral donors. The Government of Norway has expressed keen interest to cofinance the project; so with the Governments of Switzerland and Finland. A fact-finding mission will be mounted in the second quarter of 1998 to re-assess the scope of the project. Mr. Tucker suggested the MRC and potential donors involvement in the fact-finding mission.

Comments

- Mr. Shibuichi requested further clarification on the nature of project processing activities.
- The observer from UNDP, Cambodia, Ms. Omura brought to the attention of the meeting that UNDP is supporting several projects in the Tonle Sap area and encouraged close coordination to avoid duplication of efforts.
- MRC's comment for this RETA is given in MRC's Statement in [Appendix 3](#).

Response

- Mr. Tucker noted that it is imperative to re-assess the project's scope and implementation arrangements in the light of new projects in the Tonle Sap area since the project was developed two years ago.
- Bank staff pointed out that Tonle Sap is one area where numerous projects have been and are being undertaken but results remain wanting. More action-oriented strategies should be adopted and indicated that the Bank RETA hopes to be able to achieve this.

GMS Environment Program: A Retrospect and Prospective Look

Dr. Lohani guided the discussions on the review of the WGE's TOR to incorporate the following concerns: (a) the need to work closely with the other working groups of the GMS, (b) the inclusion of the reports of the other sectoral working groups in WGE meetings and (c) the need for WGE to have more focused discussions.

Plans for the Fifth Meeting were discussed and the following points were agreed: (a) representatives from the Subregional Transport Forum and the Subregional Electric Power Forum will be invited to make presentations at WGE-5; (b) a WGE representative will be requested to attend other GMS forums and working groups to present the WGE's views on environmental concerns and report to the next WGE meeting; (c) the theme for WGE-5 will be crossborder environmental issues,

and (d) in addition to the country papers, country representatives and other participating agencies will present specific topics as enumerated below.

The topics of country presentation for the WGE-5 and the lead country/agencies are as follows:

- a. Public Participation and NGOs: Involving Civil Society in Environmental Management (Thailand in collaboration with IUCN/Conservation International)
- b. Compilation of Environmental Standards (PRC)
- c. Environmental Challenges of the Tonle Sap (Cambodia)
- d. Environmental Challenges in the Red River and Lower Mekong Delta (Viet Nam)
- e. Effectiveness of Donor-assisted Environmental Training Programs (Myanmar)
- f. Lessons to be learned from hydropower projects in the GMS (Lao PDR)

ADB will prepare an overview paper presenting the environmental profiles of the GMS countries. The other donors and participating agencies also indicated willingness to present papers as follows:

- a. Environmental Information: Bridging the Accessibility Gap (UNEP)
- b. Experience in River Basin Management (MRC)
- c. Crossborder Trade in Timber and Wildlife (WWF - to be further confirmed)

The Bank will send a letter inviting WWF to make a paper presentation on Crossborder Trade in Timber and Wildlife at WGE-5. IUCN would be willing to assist IUCN members of WGE in working on papers on public participation and NGOs as time and resources permit. Ms. I. Systad, the observer from UNDP, Lao PDR cited that UNDP has a project on public participation in Lao, a paper on which will be presented to an ESCAP meeting. She expressed willingness to share the paper and collaborate with Thailand in the preparation of the paper on public participation and NGOs.

The meeting requested Mr. Nonthaxay, Deputy Director of Cabinet for the Science and Technology and Environment Organization of Lao PDR to represent the WGE in the Fourth Meeting of the Subregional Transport Forum to be held in Vientiane in May 1998.

Date and Venue of the Fifth WGE Meeting

The fifth meeting of the WGE is tentatively scheduled in the second quarter of 1999 to be held in PRC. This will be reconfirmed later.

Closing Session

In closing, the country representatives made their respective remarks followed by brief statements from Mr. Jean-Pierre A. Verbiest, Resident Representative, ADB Viet Nam Resident Mission and Mr. Toru Shibuichi, Manager, AWFN, ADB. On behalf of the host country, Mr. Nguyen Ngoc Sinh, Director-General of the Viet Nam National Environment Agency formally concluded the meeting with his closing remarks.