

Development Partners' Joint Statement

GMS WGE meeting, 21st Annual Meeting

23 June 2015 - Bangkok, Thailand

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Dear Partners,

We are very pleased to be here today, extending our appreciation to the organizers and to the host for inviting us to this meeting to discuss the progress of the Core Environment Program.

Since the last WGE meeting in Myanmar in November, the program's mid-term review (MTR) has been conducted and a draft report, including an MTR mission aide memoire, has been circulated for comments. In light of the MTR, this Development Partners' Joint Statement will focus on the findings of the mid-term review and the follow-up process. We see this the MTR process as a positive exercise that now provides a great opportunity to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme.

First, the DPs would like to take this opportunity thank the MTR team, as well as everyone involved in providing input for the MTR, for their contribution. It has been encouraging to read such a comprehensive and constructive review of this large programme, including many specific recommendations of actions for improvement.

The MTR brings to surface many of the challenges facing CEP and in that regard we wish to raise the following key points:

1. We all have to take responsibility and build on the important work done by the MTR team. The DPs strongly encourage ADB, EOC and the GMS WGE to engage in a thorough follow-up process. To get a better overview of the steps and actions to be taken as a response to the MTR, we propose a roadmap be developed after this meeting, which should include the actions to be taken based on the recommendations, including timelines and responsibilities. This will help ensure that everyone has a clear understanding of what needs to be done, by whom and when.
2. **Enhancing the efficiency of the CEP** while also importantly increasing the national level ownership and EOC presence will demand strong programme management and oversight by the ADB. Notably, the recent shifts in Project Officers for the CEP and its sister programme CASP (the Core Agriculture Support Program) do not seem to have increased ADB staff resources for CEP or clarified division of roles and responsibilities. **Strong ADB leadership is now needed** to carry out the refocusing and restructuring of the programme. It is crucial that ADB ensures adequate management support to the EOC consultants, who have limited access to the ADB systems. In light of the findings of the MTR, the DPs would like to get a better understanding of what type of ADB support and staff resources will be available to the CEP in the future, both in Bangkok and in Manila.
3. **A clear vision for the WGE and EOC is needed:** With the GMS cooperation approaching a quarter century, it seems timely to establish a clear vision for the institutional future of the cooperation in the environment sector. The DPs strongly support the MTR proposal to start the discussions within the GMS

countries on this, including the future role of EOC. We look forward to hearing the GMS WGE's thoughts about this and what role they see the WGE and EOC having.

4. The MTR proposes to relocate technical staff from EOC to the NSU offices. The DPs acknowledges the benefits of **decentralizing**, but wish to emphasis that systematic support from ADB is needed to get the CEP embedded in the country systems.
5. The recommendation of a sharper focus on the **RIF Implementation Plan process** is encouraged. The DPs see this as strategic area for potential leverage. While at the same time being a complex and challenging task, we recommend that the CEP produces a specific work plan for this work stream, outlining a theory of change for timely influence on the RIF process.
6. With the focus on administrative and programme set-up issues that will come after the MTR, it is important that we still safeguard and enhance the programme's efforts for poverty reduction, social inclusion and gender equality.

Finally, we should keep in mind that the MTR does conclude that the CEP is relevant for the GMS and could be considered highly relevant if we now use this MTR constructively to reform the programme so that the intended impacts are achieved and final outputs sustainable.

As has become practice, we would invite you now to discuss the points raised above. In addition, we would also like to follow the practice of receiving a written management response to this statement within a month.

Trusting that this collaboration will help us move towards a more sustainable future in the GMS, we thank you for your kind attention.

Embassies of Finland and Sweden in Bangkok and the Nordic Development Fund