

The Core Environment Program Environmental degradation and its effect on economic development have been recognized by the international community as among the major impediments to sustainable development. Thus, in 2006, the Asian Development Bank supported improved environmental management in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) through its Core Environment Program (CEP). The GMS is composed of the nations of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, People's Republic of China (its southern region), Thailand and Viet Nam. The CEP is also supported by the governments of Finland and Sweden.

The Core Environment Program was officially launched in April 2006 with the establishment of the GMS Environmental Operations Center in Bangkok, Thailand. The CEP aims to mainstream environmental considerations into the transport, energy, tourism and agriculture sectors of the GMS Economic Cooperation Program. It promotes the application of development planning tools that integrate environment into sustainable development.

The Biodiversity Corridors Initiative

The Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative (BCI) is a flagship component of the Core Environment Program in the Greater Mekong Subregion. It is an innovative approach combining poverty reduction with biodiversity conservation. The BCI is a regional technical assistance program for promoting the establishment of sound environmental management systems and institutions. It aims to mainstream environmental management and biodiversity conservation in the GMS Economic Cooperation Program and subregional development. The initiative also aims to prevent the ecosystem fragmentation that could result from pressures in the economic development along the GMS economic corridors.

By 2015, the GMS countries will endeavour to maintain and improve the cover, condition and biodiversity of forestlands and associated ecosystems in priority biodiversity conservation landscapes and corridors by empowering the GMS countries to effectively manage their environment and economic development.

Gaining ground

Greater Mekong Subregion

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As of February 2010, several results have already been achieved by the CEP-BCI. These are, among others, the following:

- Improving the connectivity of ecosystems at greater landscape level and improving its biodiversity vitality and ecosystem functioning: six BCI pilot sites established and functional; forest connectivity maintained (22,900 square kilometers); and forest restoration/enrichment (24.29 square kilometers);
- Capacity-building for over 5,000 direct beneficiaries facilitating a better institutionalization of the local, national and subregional anchoring of natural resources management practices;
- Improved tenure rights amounting to 19,248 hectares by bringing these under a local management regime, including five-square-kilometer forest livelihood plantations promoted for 2,500 beneficiaries;
- Sustainable financing for the upscaling and integration of BCI into other initiatives (e.g., REDD) with public/private sector funding initiated in Thailand (USD13.8 million);
- Upscaling of the successful 'payment for environmental services' (PES) policy to achieve conservation targets in Viet Nam and Cambodia. The work is carried out in collaboration with the USAID, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, and the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity. PES is part of an emerging policy framework that can provide sustained incomes to local communities who protect their watersheds, as well as budgets for responsible government agencies; and
- Passing of the Biodiversity Law of Viet Nam, with support from CEP/BCI, which captures the regional policy dimensions in its Articles 69 and 70. These articles focus on regional cooperation, exchange of information, coordinating management of biodiversity corridors across international borders, and participation in international biodiversity conservation programs. Over two million hectares of protected forest prevent the emission of at least 10 million tons of carbon dioxide.

[See Greater Mekong Subregion Map](#)

Source:

ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity 2010. ASEAN Biodiversity Outlook, pp 123-124. Los Banos Laguna, Philippines 2010.

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