



ASEM SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT DIALOGUE

Concept paper of the 8th ASEM Sustainable Development Dialogue (ASEM-SDD) on Enhancing Water Partnership towards the Sustainable Development and Inclusive Growth 19-20 September 2019 (Venue: Siem Reap City, Kingdom of Cambodia)

Background

The Asian and European political dialogue was officially launched in March 1996, when the leaders of EU countries, European Commission, and the ASEAN countries and three other Asian countries¹ met in Bangkok, Thailand for an inaugural Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). To date this unique, informal platform for dialogue and cooperation between Asia and Europe brings together 53 partners from across Europe and Asia.² ASEM is the main multilateral platform linking Europe and Asia with significant global weight: ASEM partners represent around 65% of global Economy, 60% of global population, 55% of global trade, and 75% of global tourism.

ASEM main purpose is to provide a platform to foster political dialogue, strengthen economic cooperation and tackle global challenges of a fast-changing world, such as connectivity, trade and investment, climate change, and broad security challenges such as counter-terrorism, migration, maritime security and cyber issues.³ In many respects, recent developments in the international landscape have increased the value of ASEM as a key building block for an open, cooperative and rules-based international system.

The 12th ASEM Summit in Brussels, Belgium on 18-19 October 2018 was held under the theme “Global Partner for Global Challenges”. It brought together the leaders of 51 European and Asian countries, European Commission and ASEAN Secretariat. The ASEM leaders handed over the ASEM chairmanship to Cambodia. **Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen**, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia has announced that Cambodia commits to ensure the success of 13th ASEM Summit to be held in Cambodia in 2020.

The first ASEM Sustainable Development Dialogue (SDD) was hosted by Hungary in 2012 in Budapest, focusing on the ‘Role of Water in Sustainable Regional Development Strategies’. The SDD is for sharing experience and best practices between macro-regional development strategies such as the Danube Region Strategy or the Mekong Region to provide additional benefits for the subregional initiatives by significantly strengthening interregional co-operation capacities.⁴

8th ASEM Sustainable Development Dialogue

Building on the success of the previous Seven ASEM SD Dialogues

Seven Sustainable Development Dialogues (SDD) were organized successfully to date in both Europe and Asia. The recent 7th ASEM SDD was held successfully in Budapest, Hungary on 11-12 September 2018, on the sustainable and integrated water resources management in the 21st Century: addressing Imminent Challenges.

¹ China, Japan, and South Korea.

² 28 Member States of the European Union plus Norway and Switzerland and the 10 ASEAN countries plus Australia, Bangladesh, China, India, Japan, Kazakhstan, the Republic of Korea, Mongolia, New Zealand, Pakistan and Russia on the Asian side. It also includes: the **European Union** and the **ASEAN Secretariat**.

³ https://eeas.europa.eu/diplomatic-network/asia-europe-meeting-asem/2051/asia-europe-meeting-asem_en

The 8th ASEM SDD will be held in Siem Reap City, Kingdom of Cambodia on 19-20 September 2019. It will be hosted by Cambodia National Mekong Committee (CNMC) – an Inter-Ministerial Institution of the Royal Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia for coordinating the sustainable management and development of the Mekong River Basin, in cooperation with its key member Line Agencies.

Introducing to Asia and Mekong Region – Challenges and Opportunities

The Asia Pacific region is becoming increasingly important due to the rising economic power-houses among the Asian nations. Global economy is now debatably driven by Asia namely China, India, Japan, South Korea, Singapore and other growing Asian economies. The majority of the world population resides within this vast region and it contributes more than half of world GDP, with nearly half of world trade passing through the region as well.

The Mekong Region (MR) presents itself as part of the Asia Pacific. The MR is much broader than just the Mekong River Basin (MRB). It incorporates several large river basins – Irrawaddy, Salween, Chao Phraya, Mekong, Red, and 06 National States – People Republic of China (PRC), Union of Myanmar, Lao PDR, Kingdom of Thailand, Kingdom of Cambodia and Socialist Republic of Viet Nam with a total population of over 326 million (GMS Secretariat, 2018). All these rivers are critical to social and economic development, providing both opportunities and challenges. For example, The Mekong River is the twelfth longest river in the world and supports a basin of over 795,000 km². It is a home to over 70 million people that is projected to increase rapidly. In the region, series of large-scale development projects are at different stages of planning and implementation. Millions of people depend on the river and its tributaries for food, water, energy, transport and many other aspects of their daily lives. The river supports one of the world’s most diverse fisheries, second only to Brazil’s Amazon River.

The region faces both the opportunities and challenges including the rapid population growth and migration, trends in development with limited coordination and assessment, climate variability and climate change that will further affect the social natural environment. A landmark report highlights the threats of glacier retreat in the Hindu Kush Himalayan region (ICIMOD, 2019) which is known as Asia’s water tower. It is the source of ten major rivers, including the Brahmaputra, Ganges, Indus, Mekong, Yellow River and Yangtze. The Himalayan and Tibetan Plateau is already warming higher than the global average and would result in dire Impacts of climate change on people in the region will range from worsened air pollution to an increase in extreme weather events. Increased climate variability is already affecting water availability, ecosystem services, and agricultural production, and extreme weather is causing flash floods, landslides, and debris flow. Because many of the disasters and sudden changes will play out across country borders, conflict among the region’s countries and communities could easily flare up. What does that mean to ten major rivers in Asia, including the Mekong Basin in which 86% of Cambodia territory is located.

Cambodia plays an active role in several global and regional organizations and institutions in the South East Asia and Mekong region that has contributed to the regional confidence and trust building, such as ASEAN, ASEAN Regional Forum, Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), Greater Mekong Sub-Region (GMS), Asian Development Bank (ADB), Mekong River Commission (MRC), Mekong Lancang Cooperation (MLC), and Japan Mekong Cooperation etc.

In April 2018, Cambodia hosted the 3rd MRC Summit in Siem Reap City, under the theme “Enhancing Joint Efforts and Partnerships towards Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Mekong River Basin” where the leaders from the MRC member countries, and our key dialogue partners – China and Myanmar – have pledged to enhance stronger partnership and commitment for the MRB’s sustainable development and management of vital natural resources such as water resources, fisheries,

healthy watersheds, navigation, tourism and environment. The leaders of the Mekong Region also acknowledged the need to collaboratively address the increased demand for water, food and energy, urbanisation, industrialisation, flood and drought disasters, degradation of environmental assets such as forest, wetlands and natural fisheries, by applying the IWRM approach.

Cambodia plays an active role in the adoption and implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to promote inclusive prosperity while protecting the environment and has volunteered to be among the member states for conducting a national voluntary review Reports in 2019. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – Cambodia 18th SDG for demining, are the world's best plan to build a better world for people and our planet by 2030.

Cambodia and her partners countries highly value a strong and effective partnership to respond to the current and emerging regional and global situations through building a vibrant and effective connectivity, people-centered society and inclusive development, and realization of a green Mekong, including countermeasures against climate change and pollution, water resources management and disaster risk reduction to create a resilient and environmentally friendly society.

Water Resources – Challenges and Opportunity in Cambodia

The Kingdom of Cambodia covers an area of 181,035 km², and is in the rapidly changing Asia-Pacific, Southeast Asia and Mekong Region. It is an active member of the regional and global communities. The total population of Cambodia is over 16 million in 2017, with an average annual growth of 1.36 per cent since 2013. A high percentage of Cambodia's population is aged from 15 to 65 years old, with only around 5 per cent of the population over 65 years old. This demography creates both opportunities - "demographic dividends" such as labour supply - and challenges including growing demand for jobs, food, land, water and energy, and education and training.

The waters – both surface and ground water - and related resources are central to the economic development in Cambodia, namely the energy sector; agricultural development (irrigation, fisheries, and forest); construction (e.g. sand and gravel); water-way and transport; urbanization and water supply; and, tourism and recreation. Cambodia's rivers, lakes, and other water bodies support exceptionally rich and diverse animals and plants. However, these rich water resources are not evenly distributed both in time (wet and dry seasons) and location. The abnormal floods and drought cause severe damages to economy, people's lives, and property.

The Royal Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia (Rectangular Strategy IV 2019-2023) focuses on inclusive and sustainable development by promoting the sustainable water, natural and cultural resources management especially the ecosystems of Tonle Sap Lake, Mekong River and the coastline areas; and urbanization and land use management, and environmental sustainability and readiness for climate change.

The Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology (MOWRAM) and other key Ministries have been implementing series of measures for achieving a sustainable development of Cambodia including environment, water resources, agriculture and rural development etc. These measures include water storage and flood management infrastructure and strengthening technical and management capacity; promoting an integrated water resources management, climate change adaptation, green economy and disaster risk reduction; and improving early flood warning and promoting long and medium-term forecasting and dissemination.

The MOWRAM is currently working with key Ministries and development partners on the irrigation and water resources strategy and investment program for 2019 to 2033 by considering the constraints and opportunities. This multi-year program is to achieve a sustainable development of Cambodia's water resources by developing a National Hydro-Meteorological Monitoring System and a modern National

Water Resources Information Centre, fully functioning National Climate and Flood Forecasting Systems, River Basin Planning and Management in key river basins and catchments and promoting modern and fully functioning and sustainable irrigation schemes.

Hence, all the key challenges and opportunities identified above should be considered by key topics and sub-topics for our 8th ASEM Sustainable Development Dialogue.

OVERALL OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES of 8th ASEM SDD

The Theme is “Enhancing Water Partnership towards the Sustainable Development and Inclusive Growth”. Our overall objectives include:

1. exchanging knowledge, experiences and best practices within the ASEM framework on key policy areas such as population dynamics, water, food, energy security and climate change;
2. enhancing continued engagement in the bi-regional cooperation between the Danube and Mekong regions, especially in transforming shared challenges related to transboundary water management into opportunities for inclusive growth and sustainable development; and
3. Strengthening opportunities for public and private partnership, North-South and South-South Partnership for sustainable and inclusive development and achieving related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The 8th ASEM Sustainable Development Dialogue, to be held in Siem Reap City, on 19-20 September 2019, will be structured around the following thematic areas:

- 1) Topic 1: Key drivers and stress on the river basins’ natural and social systems – e.g. population growth, urbanization, water, food, energy, climate change and governance;
- 2) Topic 2: Transboundary River Basin Management: e.g. Cases of flood, water scarcity and drought management, monitoring quality and quantity of surface and groundwaters due to demand changes and climate conditions.
- 3) Topic 3: Public and private partnership, North-South and South-South Partnership for sustainable and inclusive development and achieving related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- 4) Topic 4: Science and Technology for Water Resources Management and Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation.

The expected outcomes from the Dialogue are as follows

1. knowledge, experiences and best practices within the ASEM framework on key policy areas such as population dynamics, water, food, energy security and climate change are openly and constructively discussed and key areas for further exchange are identified and promoted;
2. continued engagement in the bi-regional cooperation between the Danube and Mekong regions, especially in transforming shared challenges related to transboundary water management into opportunities for inclusive growth and sustainable development, are openly and constructively discussed and key areas for further exchange are identified and enhanced; and
3. Opportunities for public and private partnership, North-South and South-South Partnership for sustainable and inclusive development and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are identified and promoted.

ARRANGEMENT

Approximately 150 participants from Asia and Europe are expected to attend. We expect also representatives from Development Partners and other key stakeholders from Asia and Europe - such as key regional organizations, government officials, scholars, and researchers, national and international non-governmental and business sectors. The organization of the two-day Dialogue is financed by the Royal Government of Cambodia and hosted by Cambodia National Mekong Committee (CNMC) in cooperation with its key line agencies concerned.

The Dialogue will be supported by key partners such as the Mekong River Commission (MRC), ASEAN and other partner organizations and individuals (To be confirmed).

The participants from ASEM partners are kindly asked to cover their travel and accommodation expenses. ASEM partners will be requested to provide speakers to the Dialogue and contribute comments and suggestions to the provisional agenda of the event as well as the final document.

Language to be used in the Dialogue

The working language of the Dialogue will be conducted in English.