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Governments and Business Leaders Push for Green Economy in the Greater Mekong Subregion

17 June 2013, Bangkok: Government officials and private sector representatives from the six Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) countries began discussions today on green economy initiatives in the GMS region and actions to bring GMS economies onto a greener path. During the meeting, they explored opportunities in natural wealth management, looked at ways to foster greater investments in sustainable land management and scale up green economic development.

“Integrated solutions for more inclusive, environmentally sustainable development pathways in the GMS require multi-disciplinary networks of collaboration that bring together partners from governments, civil society and the private sector. Forums such as today’s workshop are key if we are to transition to more resource-efficient, resilient forms of growth that bring multiple social, economic, and environmental benefits, especially for the poor and vulnerable,” said Tim Scott, Environmental Mainstreaming Team, Bureau of Development Policy, United Nations Development Programme.

A [WWF report](#) released last month warned that without green growth development, the GMS faces grave threats to critical natural resources, including potentially losing more than a third of its remaining forest cover during the next two decades, and the possible collapse of Mekong river ecosystems.

“Land, forests, rivers and other natural resources underpin economic growth in the GMS countries, yet are in rapid decline due to overexploitation. A low carbon and socially inclusive development future is essential to protect the subregion’s natural resources and ultimately to sustain long-term economic growth.

“However this requires regulatory reforms and must be driven by effective partnerships between the private and public sectors. This conference will provide GMS stakeholders with a shared understanding of green economy benefits, challenges and opportunities”, said Mr. Javed Mir, Director, Environment and Natural Resources Division for Southeast Asia at ADB.

While GMS countries - Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Myanmar, Vietnam, and China’s Yunnan province and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region - have nearly unrivalled levels of biodiversity and natural wealth, strong economic growth and the accompanying industrialization is putting unprecedented pressures on the regions’ ecosystems. These pressures put current responses at risk, deplete natural resources and threaten long term economic growth and prosperity in the region.



“The pressures are a reality with significant implications for achieving the Millennium Development Goals in the GMS countries, but also challenging future opportunities and potentials of the more than 260 million people of the subregion,” said Dr. Young-Woo Park, UNEP Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific. “We are happy to see that a transition to green economy is happening in the region, as concluded by UNEP’s flagship report, Global Environment Outlook 5. If scaled-up and accelerated, such measures could assist in a transition to a Green Economy in the GMS.”

GEO-5 was released in June 2012 prior to Rio+20 Summit, and identified many countries in Asia-Pacific adopting innovative policies, including balancing water management through quotas and pricing in China and the introduction of payments for ecosystem services in Vietnam.

Around 100 participants attended the meeting, including senior officials from planning and investment, finance, environment and agriculture ministries as well as representatives from companies.

This GMS conference continues global momentum for green economy approaches, with a green growth event at the GMS Environment Ministers Meeting in late 2011 as well as being the a key topic of last year’s United Nation’s Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20).

The event is an initiative of the Offering Sustainable Land-use Options Consortium and is jointly organized by the Asian Development Bank’s GMS Core Environment Program, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the Global Mechanism of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the Poverty Environment Initiative of the United Nations Environment and Development programs, and WWF-Greater Mekong, with support from the Government of Norway and the Economics of Land Degradation Initiative.

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