

Action Plan for “A Decade toward the Green Mekong” Initiative

The 1st Mekong-Japan Summit Meeting held in November 2009 adopted the Tokyo Declaration announcing the start of “A Decade toward the Green Mekong” Initiative, which aims at creating a “Green Mekong” rich in biodiversity, resilient to natural disasters, blessed with sustainable water and forest resources, and achieving both environmental protection and economic growth. This Action Plan is based on concepts approved in the 3rd Mekong-Japan Foreign Ministers’ Meeting held in July 2010 and was formulated to outline specific areas of cooperation between the Mekong region countries and Japan.

1. Challenges Facing the Mekong Region

The achievement of sustainable growth in the Mekong region is of vital importance to both Japan and the Mekong region countries. In light of the richness of nature that characterizes this region, development must proceed with due attention to the environmental protection and effects of the climate change.

1.1 Importance of Addressing Environment / Climate Change in the Mekong Region

Supported by its wealth of natural resources and abundant labor, the Mekong region has achieved remarkable economic growth in recent years and holds the promise of continued development in the future. Japan and the Mekong region countries share the recognition that achieving sustainable economic growth in the Mekong region, which will lead to its continued stability and development, is of vital importance to the stability and development of Japan as well as all Asian countries. Moreover, Japan and the Mekong region countries recognize the important role that the achievement of sustainable development in this region will have in narrowing gaps in the ASEAN region, thereby promoting regional integration and contributing to the building of the East Asian Community.

The Mekong region’s abundant forest resources and river’s ecosystems support a rich biodiversity. However, the region is also recognized globally as an area threatened by degradation of ecosystems. Pollution and the degradation of the natural environment

caused by such factors as rapid economic growth and lingering poverty have come to a point where they could pose a serious threat to the Mekong inhabitants, rendering the harmonization of economic growth and environmental protection an absolute requirement. With its large population, rapid pace of economic development, and expansive forest areas, the region can potentially make a valuable contribution to global environmental problems by appropriately addressing environment and climate change issues.

1.2 Defining the Challenges

Based on the recognition described above, earnest action must be taken in the Mekong region to address especially the following problems: (1) deforestation and forest degradation, (2) adverse impacts on biodiversity, (3) increasing severity of natural disasters (super-large typhoons, droughts, floods, etc.), (4) drop in the Mekong River's water level, and (5) water and air pollution in urban areas. To meet these challenges, the Mekong region countries recognize environmental and climate change issues as common regional concerns and will actively cooperate in responding to them. Japan will utilize its knowledge and experience to support the efforts of the Mekong region countries.

2. New Approach for Cooperation

To overcome the above problems and challenges, and to achieve development in balance with the environment, it is vitally important to enhance wide-ranging cooperation among Japan, the Mekong region countries, and other development partners. For this purpose, Japan and the Mekong region countries will strengthen the following approaches:

2.1 Strengthening a "Region-wide Approach"

In many cases, tackling environment and climate change must involve cross-border efforts. Hence, it is necessary to encourage greater cooperation and efforts among the Mekong region countries and Japan in addressing the cross-border environmental issues. Since the Mekong region shares the Mekong River as a valuable natural asset, programs for balancing environmental and development demands in this area can serve as a pilot project for sustainable development for the entire world. With this in mind, Japan and the Mekong region countries will strengthen Region-wide approaches.

2.2 Strengthening a “Public-Private Cooperative Approach”

Addressing environmental and climate change issues requires advanced technologies and knowledge covering a diverse range of fields. Therefore, it is essential to utilize the technologies and knowledge of both the public and private sectors and to respond effectively and accurately to a broad scope of needs.

Japan possesses advanced technologies and knowledge in the fields of the environment and climate change and will actively utilize these capabilities for the realization of a “Green Mekong”. For this purpose, Japan will strengthen the cooperative ties between the public and private sectors. While mobilizing the knowledge available from both sectors, Japan will promote more effective cooperation through the use of public financial resources such as official development assistance (ODA) and other official flows (OOF), as well as private financial resources to the Mekong region.

2.3 Strengthening an “Open Approach”

Many external development partners have participated in the development of the Mekong region and responded to a wide range of development needs. In promoting Japan-Mekong cooperation, efforts will be made to keep information sharing and maintain dialogues with related partners and to strengthen an open approach.

3. Action Plans to achieve a “Green Mekong”

3.1 New Projects

Following the 1st Mekong-Japan Summit Meeting held in November 2009, Japan and the Mekong region countries launched a number of projects and cooperative actions in the area of the environment and climate change. In order to further advance “Green Mekong” initiative, Japan has taken the opportunity presented by the 2nd Mekong-Japan Summit Meeting to announce its plans to implement the following assistance projects.

- (1) This year, Japan decided to provide assistance on forest conservation to Cambodia, Laos, and Viet Nam to realize rich forests and achieve the sustainable utilization of forest resources. In addition to this, Japan decided to provide assistance to Thailand in the same area.

- (2) To improve the water resource management of the Mekong River, which constitutes the common asset of the region, Japan will assist the Mekong River Commission (MRC) to support projects to take countermeasures against drought and floods. Japan will also provide assistance to Viet Nam and Laos for development of irrigation system and capacity building in management of the system. In addition, in the area of capacity development in disaster prevention and response to disaster, Japan decided to dispatch an advisor to Myanmar for capacity building in Forecast and Warning Systems.
- (3) To achieve clean urban environments, Japan will provide 3R-related assistance to Viet Nam to build recycle-oriented society.
- (4) As part of an initiative to conserve biodiversity in the Mekong River, Japan will provide assistance to protection and surveillance activities of Irrawaddy dolphins in the Mekong River in Cambodia and Laos, and will assist in the development of alternative means of livelihood for fishermen in the area. Working in cooperation with the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), Japan will provide assistance for capacity development of the local administration and livelihood improvement of the local people in forest areas of Cambodia and Thailand. In order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through utilization of Japan's low-carbon technologies and products, feasibility studies assisted by Japan will be undertaken in Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam for developing bilateral offset mechanisms.

3.2 Actions to be Taken in Each Area

In launching "A Decade toward the Green Mekong" Initiative, Japan and the Mekong region countries will implement the following actions covering six areas, while taking into consideration the need to reduce disparities among the countries of the region.

(1) Sustainable Forest Management

Cooperation will be strengthened for developing necessary hard-ware and improving capacity on data collection and analysis to proceed with data collection and develop monitoring system on forest resources. Assistance will be provided for development of forest related laws and legislation as well as capacity building of government officials to decrease deforestation and promote comprehensive forest management system. Promote sustainable forest management with participation of local people by proceeding with such measures as enhancement of awareness of the local people on forest conservation and development of alternative livelihood.

Recognizing that measures for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) in developing countries have a highly significant role to play in forest management in developing countries, assistance will be provided for the measures to improve the environment for the implementation of REDD+, such as formulation of national strategies, development of legal systems, capacity building, establishment of monitoring systems and promotion of community forests managed by local population. In response to the progress of improvement of the environment, further assistance will be provided for implementation of national strategies, operation of monitoring systems and implementation of pilot projects for REDD+. While continuing to monitor the progress made in negotiations in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, cooperative actions will be undertaken for the full implementation of REDD+, while keeping in mind opportunities for increased future utilization of private-sector funds.

Mekong region countries will continue to engage in forest management for the achievement of forest cover ratios and other related goals.

(2) Water Resource Management

Cooperation for capacity building in policy making and development of institutional framework of water resource management in the Mekong region countries will be further promoted. Cooperation will be strengthened for data collection and improving monitoring systems for water resources management, which also support countermeasures against flood and drought efficiently in the region. Hardware-oriented assistance will be provided for the repair and improvement of existing irrigation facilities as well as the development of new ones. Parallel to this, assistance will be provided for capacity-building to improve and develop the institutional framework, promote human resources development (eg. training of water resource engineers), and establish and manage irrigation cooperative. Efforts will be made to promote introduction of participatory irrigation management to develop systems for the maintenance of irrigation facilities with an aim to achieving stable food supplies and poverty reduction. Efforts will also be made to promote the Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) approach through the MRC.

(3) Disaster Prevention and Response to Disasters

Hardware-oriented assistance will be provided for riverbank reinforcement and prevention of erosion, and for prevention of floods in urban areas by developing sewerage systems. Assistance will also be provided for capacity development such as observation and data-analysis systems as well as personnel training for enhancing meteorological forecast and warning capabilities. At the same time, efforts will be made

for development of related administrative institutions and capacity in the community to respond to disasters.

(4) Improvement of Urban Environment

Seeking to reduce disparities among the countries of the region, Japan and the Mekong region countries will make efforts to promote the development of urban infrastructures (water supply, sewage treatment, waste disposal, etc.) in line with the respective scales and developmental stages of individual cities. Assistance will also be provided for creating environmental impact assessment systems and for facilitating development of transport networks such as urban railways (physical connectivity). From various perspectives, special attention will be paid to pursuing the following initiatives:

- Under the aegis of the “East Asia Smart Community Initiative,” the government and private sector will work together to realize “smart communities” in cities where it is deemed technically feasible from the perspective of the availability and diffusion of technologies. “Smart communities” will feature next-generation energy and social systems formed by combining multiple systems in IT-based networks. The systems to be linked will include environmentally friendly transportation systems and energy management systems that make maximum use of solar power, wind power, and other natural energy sources, as well as unused energy from waste heat and river currents.
- To promote the use of alternative energy sources, initiatives for the “biomass town concept” will be pursued.

(5) Conservation of Biodiversity

Japan and the Mekong region countries will strengthen cooperation for developing data collection systems and monitoring systems for forest management in the Mekong region. Japan and the Mekong region will steadily pursue initiatives to proceed with ongoing activities to conserve biodiversity including the preservation of coastal mangrove ecosystems and supporting the protection of Mekong River Irrawaddy dolphins, for further enhancing the conservation of ecosystems and regional biodiversity.

(6) Controlling and Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Japan and the Mekong region will promote the introduction of renewable energy and development of infrastructures including high-efficient energy generation plants. Capacity building for REDD+-related measures will be promoted and initiatives will be strengthened, while bearing in mind opportunities for increased future utilization of

private-sector funds. The specific actions and measures to be implemented in the immediate future are as follows:

- Individual projects such as those for the conservation of forests, development of low-emission transit networks, and cross-sector measures related to climate change will be further promoted.
- Develop a “REDD+ database” by compiling data collected by REDD+ surveys conducted in developing countries, and transmit information to other stakeholders, including policymakers in the Mekong region.
- Contribute to the global effort to control and reduce greenhouse gas emissions through cooperation in international negotiations for establishment of a fair and effective international framework by all major economies.
- Promote measures to identify and formulate emission-cutting projects featuring the use of Japan’s advanced technologies and products and the utilization of renewable energy sources. By undertaking feasibility studies on greenhouse gas emissions reduction volumes and measurement methods, Japan and the Mekong region will promote the development of bilateral offset mechanisms.
- For countries planning to introduce nuclear power generation, cooperate in the development of a framework to ensure nuclear non-proliferation/ safeguards, safety, security and nuclear liability in compliance with the IAEA standards and relevant international treaties. Undertake feasibility studies on large-capacity power transmission networks made necessary by construction plans for large-scale nuclear and other power generation facilities, and cooperate in the development of stable and efficient power supply systems. It is expected that greenhouse gas emissions will be decreased with the reduction of loss in power transmission.
- Promote systematic environmental measures in the Mekong region countries based on the Japan-ASEAN Action Plan on Environment Improvement in the Transport Sector adopted in December 2009. Furthermore, promote the development of environmentally friendly transit systems based on the initiatives by the Regional Environmentally Sustainable Transport (EST) Forum in Asia.

4. Follow-up Mechanism

To ensure the medium- to long-term implementation of this Action Plan, a Green Mekong Forum will be held to follow up on specific initiatives being undertaken by Japan and the Mekong region countries.

Efforts will be made to harmonize with measures and policies being pursued in the wider geographical region through collaboration with the Japan-ASEAN, ASEAN+3, East Asia Summit (EAS), and other frameworks for dialogue. A continuous follow-up process will be maintained by utilizing the opportunities provided in specific areas of concern by such frameworks as the Asia Pacific Climate Change Adaptation Network (climate change), the Regional 3R Forum in Asia (3R and waste management), the Water Environment Partnership in Asia (water resources management), the Regional Environmentally Sustainable Transport (EST) Forum in Asia, and the soon-to-be-formed ASEAN-Japan Public-Private Joint Forum for the promotion of safer and more environmentally-friendly vehicles (reducing greenhouse gas emissions).

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