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Regional Conference on Parliamentary Environment and Sustainable Use of Marine Resources in the Yellow Sea



Abstract: Attracting high-level political commitment is an ongoing process that many GEF projects must address during implementation. To use these important roles wisely, a mechanism was required to involve the members of the parliamentary organizations. More than 50 persons from the participating countries of the Yellow Sea Project attended a conference, including 14 members from the parliamentary bodies. As a result, the parliamentary members deepened their understanding about the environmental problems in the Yellow Sea, exchanged opinions about how to address its problems, and established a mechanism to advance dialogue and cooperation between the two countries at the parliamentary level. The Yellow Sea parliamentary conference was the first time a Global Environment Facility-funded project has organised such an event with participants from parliamentary bodies participating in the project.

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Regional Conference on Parliamentary Roles in Protection of Marine Environment and Sustainable Use of Marine Resources in the Yellow Sea

Experience of the GEF sponsored

Reducing Environmental Stress in the Yellow Sea Large Marine Ecosystem (UNDP/GEF Yellow Sea Project)

GEF Project ID: 790, UNDP PMIS ID: 994

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The objective of the Yellow Sea LME (YSLME) Project is: ecosystem-based, environmentally-sustainable management and use of the Yellow Sea and its watershed by reducing development stress and promoting sustainable development of the ecosystem from a densely populated, heavily urbanized, and industrialized semi-enclosed shelf sea.

To achieve this objective, the Yellow Sea Project will:

- 1) Prepare a Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA);
- 2) Prepare a regional Strategic Action Programme (SAP) and National Yellow Sea Action Plans (NYSAPs); and
- 3) Initiate demonstration and/or pilot activities under the SAP.

The TDA identifies the priority transboundary problems, the underlying sectoral causes, and the root causes of the problems. The SAP outlines the actions needed to resolve the priority problems and must be agreed before technical assistance, capacity-building, or investment projects can be developed.

Representatives of numerous institutions from People's Republic of China (PRC) and Republic of Korea (ROK) are actively participating in and contributing to the TDA, SAP, and NYSAP development.

The expected outputs of the Yellow Sea Project include:

- Regional strategies for sustainable management of fisheries and mariculture;
- Regional initiatives for biodiversity protection;

- Actions to reduce stress to the ecosystem;
- Actions to improve water quality and protect human health; and
- Regional institutional and capacity building initiatives.

The Yellow Sea Project started in 2005, will be completed in 2009.

THE EXPERIENCE

(a) Transboundary Water Management (TWM) Issue: Multilateral Stakeholder Involvement - Parliamentarians

A common issue facing GEF project remains how to draw the attention of key decision-makers at the country-level. Moreover, attracting high-level political commitment is an ongoing process that many GEF projects must address during implementation. The Yellow Sea Project decided to address this issue in an innovative way.

There has been much effort put forth by the governments of the coastal countries of the Yellow Sea to protect its marine environment and to use its marine and coastal resources in a sustainable manner. It is widely recognised by the governments of these countries that the reduction of environmental stresses is a long term task, and requires a wider participation of all stakeholders to ensure that their efforts are meaningful and successful.

As one of the key stakeholders, the National Assembly in the Republic of Korea (R. Korea) and the National People's Congress in China play an important role in deciding national regulations, national infrastructure and national budget. The parliamentary roles are very important in particular, for the preparation and approval of the Strategic Action Programme

(SAP) and the National Yellow Sea Action Plans (NYSAPs). Furthermore, parliamentary participation and involvement also enhance national coordination and regional cooperation. To use these important roles wisely, a mechanism was required to involve the members of the parliamentary organisations in the protection of marine environment and sustainable use of marine resources in the Yellow Sea.

(b) How was issue addressed

The Yellow Sea project organized an event, the “Regional Conference on Parliamentary Roles in Protection of Marine Environment and Sustainable Use of Marine Resources in the Yellow Sea” in Qingdao, China, from the 28th to 30th of March 2006, as one of its public awareness activities.

The objectives of the regional conference were:

- (i) to enhance stakeholders’ participation in the activities of protecting the marine environment and sustainable use of marine and coastal resources, in particular the participation of parliaments in the participating countries;
- (ii) to facilitate better understanding of the requirements for harmonising national legislation and reform, based on the knowledge and information obtained from the Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA) of the Yellow Sea Project;
- (iii) to identify appropriate mechanisms to ensure and/or enhance integrated management for protection of marine environment, and enhance national co-ordination of all stakeholders, including governmental agencies; and,
- (iv) to assist in mobilising necessary financial support for the integrated management of the marine and coastal resources.

The three-day conference consisted of keynote speeches, invited reports, panel discussions, and a site visit. Presentation and discussion topics included current marine environmental status, the need for environment protection, legislation related to marine environmental protection, and the economics of conserving marine resources. It was successfully organised

with contributing efforts from the Ocean Forum of the National Assembly of the R. Korea, the Committee of Environment and Resources under the National People’s Congress of China, the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries of the R. Korea, the State Oceanic Administration of China, and the China Ocean News.

More than 50 persons from the participating countries of the Yellow Sea Project attended the conference, including 14 members from the parliamentary bodies. High-level members from the parliaments attended the conference, including a member of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress of China, and the Chairman of the National Defense Committee of the National Assembly of the R. Korea.

RESULTS AND LEARNING

As a result of the conference, the parliamentary members deepened their understanding about the environmental problems in the Yellow Sea, exchanged opinions about how to address its problems, and established a mechanism to advance dialogue and cooperation between the two countries at the parliamentary level. The following text summarises the major outcomes of the conference, the understandings and goals shared by the parliamentary bodies, and the agreed setup for future cooperation.

(a) Major outcomes of the conference

- (i) Parliamentary members from the participating countries had a good chance to **exchange their views** on marine environmental issues, and communicated face-to-face with counterparts in another country. A member of the National Assembly of the R. Korea indicated that the conference provided a good chance for the parliamentary members to get together, to better understand the Yellow Sea marine environment’s problems;
- (ii) The parliamentary members, in particular those not familiar with marine environmental problems, have a **better understanding** of the problems, including legislative and economic considerations and implications. As the parliamentary organisations in the participating countries have the

responsibility to review and approve legislation, budgets and institutional arrangements, it was crucial to have better understanding of the parliamentary member on the relevant issues. These new circumstances will also **ease the preparation and approval of the SAP**, to be prepared at a later stage;

- (iii) With a better understanding of marine environmental problems, the parliamentary members also realised that it is important to set-up appropriate **dialogues between the politicians and scientists**. The conference provided good model for this kind of dialogues. Therefore, the conference agreed to establish certain mechanisms to sustain the momentum generated by the conference. It was agreed that the next conference will be organised in the R. Korea, with the project management office (PMO) acting as its secretariat; and
- (iv) As a number of parliamentary members attended the conference, **public awareness was raised** during the conference. The participants from local governments, research institutes and media also actively participated in the conference.

(b) Common understandings and goals

The conference confirmed the following common understandings and goals of mitigating environmental problems in the Yellow Sea:

- Successful co-operation in protection of marine environment and sustainable use of marine and coastal resources in the Yellow Sea requires the active participation of all stakeholders who are utilising resources, and/or have responsibilities in managing the marine environment in the Yellow Sea;
- The National People's Congress of China and the National Assembly of Republic of R. Korea, as one of the key stakeholders of the Yellow Sea, play important roles in exercising their authority in approving national and international regulations, national infrastructure, and budget;
- It is essential to strengthen closer co-operation between the parliaments in order

to protect the marine environment and promote the sustainable use of marine resources in the Yellow Sea, for the mutual benefits of our people and for long-term friendly relations amongst the countries in the region; and

- It is vital to involve and encourage the participation of a broader range of stakeholder groups so that all their expertise and experiences will be effectively utilised to design and formulate appropriate policies and programmes for conservation of the Yellow Sea's ecosystem.

To achieve the common goals, the conference agreed to seek closer regional co-operation to:

- Encourage wider and more active participation of all stakeholders in the protection of marine environment and sustainable use of marine and coastal resources, and enhance national co-ordination amongst all relevant ministries, local governments, research institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs);
- Harmonise, as necessary and appropriate, the relevant national legislations concerning protection of marine environment, and consider strengthening national institutional arrangements to meet the requirements of marine environment protection and sustainable use of marine resources, following the recommendations in the TDA and SAP that will be prepared by the Yellow Sea Project;
- Suggest to consider initiating preparation, negotiation and finally, approval, by the legislative bodies in the participating countries, a regional agreement for protecting the marine environment in the Yellow Sea;
- Initiate and maintain regional mechanisms to ensure and enhance effective dialogue and co-operation for protecting the marine environment and sustainable use of marine and coastal resources in the Yellow Sea; and
- Secure finances for sustainable protection of the marine environment and managing the marine and coastal resources in the Yellow Sea.

(c) Mechanism for future dialogue and co-operation

The conference agreed on a method for holding regular meetings of the parliamentary members to advance dialogue and co-operation in the region, such that:

- The parliamentary conference should be organised annually, with certain flexibilities, on a rotating basis for the venue;
- The host country will cover the local costs to organise such meetings. The visiting parliamentarians will cover their own travel costs. Partial financial support will be provided by the Yellow Sea Project; and
- The Project Management Office (PMO) of the Yellow Sea Project will provide secretariat support to the conference.

The official Meeting Report captured both the impacts of the experience and bilateral agreement on what the participants have learned. The report included a summary of meeting outcomes, including common understandings, common goals and a framework for regional cooperation. The Meeting Report is available at <http://www.yslme.org>.

REPLICATION

Although holding a meeting is an effective way to involve parliamentary members into a GEF project, it is a challenge to attract their strong attention and commitment to a planned meeting. This is because most parliamentary members are busy and because they might not be familiar with issues that the project addresses. The experience of the Yellow Sea Project suggests the following three points in the meeting preparation and implementation stage as important factors to secure active involvement of the parliaments:

(i) **Informal, continuous consultation with parliamentary organisations:** From the early stage of the preparation, the PMO conducted a series of extensive consultations with key parliamentary bodies and government agencies (e.g., the Ocean Forum of the National Assembly of the R. Korea and the Committee of Environment and Resources under the National People's Congress of China). These continuous consultations greatly contributed to the development of the meeting programme and to identification of speakers and participants.

(ii) **Flexible conduct of the meeting programme:** To accommodate the tight,

changeable schedule of each participant, the meeting was organised flexibly. The sequence of presentations was revised depending on the speakers' schedule unless rescheduling did not harm the integrity of the meeting.

(iii) **Internal meeting to develop a mechanism for securing commitment of parliaments:** To secure and maintain the strong commitment from the parliamentary bodies, a possible mechanism for future dialogue and co-operation was discussed through the informal meeting which was held during the conference period. Key participants from relevant parliamentary organisations as well as government ones attended this informal meeting and prepared a proposal for making conferences a regular activity. The proposal, drafted originally by the PMO, describes the rational and objective of organising such regular conferences, suggests possible topics for the next conference, and specifies necessary administrative and financial arrangements. The proposal was then discussed and agreed during the formal session of the conference.

Creating the mechanism for continuing interactions and dialogues with the parliamentarians will enable the project to maintain their commitment and support. The internal meeting provided an opportunity to develop such mechanism. It is therefore highly recommended for similar GEF projects to arrange this kind of a meeting so that a proposed mechanism is presented and discussed during the subsequent parliamentary conferences.

SIGNIFICANCE

First and foremost, the Yellow Sea parliamentary conference was the first time a Global Environment Facility-funded project has organised such an event with participants from parliamentary bodies participating in the project. As such, it presents a model for other projects in terms of achieving stakeholder buy-in at high political levels. It also presents a good model for blending the political and technical sides of a GEF project.

REFERENCES

Website and conference DVD, <http://www.yslme.org/> (publications available online)

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KEYWORDS

- ◆ Stakeholder involvement
- ◆ Public awareness
- ◆ Political will
- ◆ Parliament

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