

**Preparation of a Strategic Action Programme (SAP) for the Tumen River Coastal Area and related Northeast Asian Environs.** Proposed UNDP/GEF Biodiversity/International Waters project

*STAP-Roster Independent Technical Review undertaken by*

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## **1. Overall impressions**

The overall impressions of the project are very positive. The area is in the early stages of a large-scale development that will pose severe threats on the environment, its unique biodiversity, including several endangered species, both in terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems and its transboundary river basin area and the nearby coastal and marine areas. As is stated in the documentation this gives a unique possibility as the SAP therefore can be design to prevent rather than cure the area, which would in the long-run mean a less costly procedure.

As the project also to a large extent will take advantage of an existing institutional structure the provisions for a less costly and more efficient structure are good. This will also imply a good basis for co-operation between participating governments and other stake-holders.

A SAP for the area should give the means for future interventions to be undertaken within a more integrated framework, which is necessary in obtaining global benefits.

## **2. Relevance and priority**

The project would be of great importance as it relates to the  
a/i/ *International Waters Operational Strategy* as the SAP clearly would increase the possibilities to prevent the area from degradation of the quality of the transboundary water resources; as well as prevent from physical habitat degradation of coastal and near-shore marine areas and watercourses;

a/ii/ *Biologic Diversity Operational Strategy* as the SAP would increase awareness of the ecosystems including the unique species and the possibilities to protect them. With a carefully developed SAP, any project undertaken within its framework would also contribute to the sustainable use of biodiversity. The project description emphasizes biodiversity conservation but according to the GEF Operational Strategy and the CBD, sustainable use is as important. It is important that the SAP also includes options for the sustainable use of the biodiversity, not least to convince local people that this would imply protecting ecosystems including their endangered species, while serving human interests.

b/ The main relevant international environmental convention is the *Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)*, and as the GEF operational strategy in biological diversity incorporates the policy guidance of the COP to the CBD (a/ii/) is relevant also under this item.

Another international environmental convention of relevance for this project is the *Ramsar Convention on Wetlands*, that has initiated collaboration with the CBD in the implementation of

CBD activities related to wetlands. As wetlands are important parts of the downstream area of the Tumen catchment area it is important to relate to that convention in undertaking the project.

c/ *National/regional priorities* are likely to be appropriately regarded in the TDA and SAP processes as the national governments as well as local representation will be actively participating. It is important that national as well as local representatives are also actively participating both in designing and implementing the SAP.

### 3. Project approach

The approach of the project is in general appropriate, taking advantage of the ongoing UNDP project and to a large extent emphasising capacity building among the people involved by conducting several workshops. It is important that the procedure strives at involving national and local representatives in every step, as they are the ones, who will implement the strategy.

The approach to collect relevant information on sectors of society, on economic sectors and on different aspects of the environment, different aspects of water management (water availability and use for different sectors, water demand and demand forecast of unsustainable use, water quantity and water quality) and on different ecosystem is valuable. It is however important to clearly define the purposes of the data collection. A distinct plan ("road map") for the data needed and the purpose should be drawn. This plan would be the framework for the SAP. The project brief is somewhat unclear on the criteria to be used to specify the data needed, both when describing the "Area-based" studies and the "sector" studies. This needs to be specified both in the project document and in the SAP.

Nowhere in the project brief is any cross-sectoral analysis described as part of the SAP. The SAP need to include a discussion, analysis and conclusion on the inter-linkages between water-related environmental issues and the root causes behind different concerns. This might be included in the "causal chain analysis" but needs to be emphasized as key part of the approach of the SAP. If an integrated approach to the concerns caused by different sectors is not applied a full analysis of the causal chain is not possible and the Strategic Action Programme might lose part of the long-term strategic approach.

### 4. Objectives

a/ The objectives, to reinforce capacity to prepare a SAP, to prepare a TDA and a SAP, to design and implement an awareness raising programme, and to strengthen national and regional capacities to jointly implement the SAP, are very relevant, particularly as they are addressing the national capacities.

b and c/ The objectives are focused and would be able to achieve given the outlined activities even though the time indicated looks too short, particularly as it is somewhat unclear to what extent relevant and compatible data can be obtained.

d/ See partly above. I also have difficulties in seeing the relevance of study tours to the projects in the Danube River Basin etc. even though TDA:s and SAP:s are prepared for those project areas. A thoroughly prepared training programme is of more relevance.

## 5. Background and justification

The background and justification for the project is part of the ongoing UNDP Tumen River Area Development Programme and otherwise well provided in the documentation. Nothing of great importance for the justification has been omitted and it is most certainly more detailed in the actual project proposal. The presentation of the current situation, threats, global environmental benefits, incremental costs, degree of threat, likelihood of success, cost-effectiveness, existing institutional capacity and needs are all clearly and compellingly presented. To this is also added terms for Monitoring and Evaluation, which is a necessary part of a project. The presentation is partly short, due to the nature of the document, but anyhow compelling.

## 6. Critical analysis of the situation

The situation has been analyzed, although some of the details are most probably contained in the existing results of the ongoing UNDP programme and therefor just briefly stated in this document. This include the analysis of the system effects and externalities. Root causes and symptoms are addresses but not in any detail.

## 7. Activities

As commented above I do question the relevance for the study tours to European project sites. Otherwise the activities seems relevant to achieve the objectives, which are in a logic sequence.

I am, however, missing an important activity. When preparing a TDA and an SAP it is important not just to hold workshops with local participation on transboundary and sector studies with reference to environment and to the impact of different sectors (as specified) on the environment and natural resources. It is as important to address the cross-sectoral approach, both at local and national/regional level. The people concerned need to be aware of the causal chain behind different concerns to act accordingly. This needs to be emphasized in the document.

Also, of course a more detailed analysis on how to obtain relevant and compatible data needs to be presented.

## 8. National priorities and community participation

To the extent it is possible to see from existing documentation the activity is consistent with existing national environmental strategies. The countries proposed for participation are the relevant ones. The social, cultural and community livelihood concerns need to be taken into account in establishing the SAP. The population concerned will according to the description be involved to a large extent.

## 9. Institutional arrangements

The institutional arrangements to be used to undertake the project would initially be the ones used for the UNDP project, which would ensure a continuity and efficiency. The institutional arrangements will evolve with the project.

#### **10. Time frame**

The time frame for the project seems to be too short, in particularly as a stepwise approach including capacity building is presented. To be able to achieve the objectives in such a short time assume that capacity building for the project is already a part of the ongoing UNDP project.

#### **11. Funding**

The proposed GEF funding level seems to be appropriate but might need to give flexibility for some reallocation among the different items. The proposed co-financing contributions would be realistic.

#### **12. Innovative features/replicability**

As the project is aiming at establishing a SAP in order to *prevent* environmental stress in areas at a beginning of an industrial and economic expansion the project will have unique opportunities and would thus likely be useful as a demonstration project. This is a further reason that an integrated approach of the SAP is absolutely necessary.

#### **13. Sustainability**

If the awareness-raising and capacity building objectives of the project are fully achieved the project would certainly provide for sustainability after completion as it should then be able to demonstrate the need for the approach taken for the SAP and for its implementation.

#### **14. Development dimensions and rationale for GEF Support**

A SAP in a region at a beginning of an industrial and economic expansion, with unique terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems and a threatened transboundary river/coastal zone system has important development dimensions as well as an important rationale for GEF involvement. For the GEF to be able to prevent threats to exclusive biodiversity and international waters, along the lines described in the document, with some modifications, merits for funding, undertaking and implementation of the project.

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