**Sustainability Plan for the post-YSLME phase II Project**

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**Table of Content**

**I. Background …………………………………………………………………………………………………………..… 2**

**ii. YSLME story, gaining momentum from both countries ………………………………… 2**

**iii. Regional Mechanism ……………………………………………………………………………………………. 3**

**IV. SAP 2020-2030 .………………………………………………………………………………………………………… 4**

**V. Partnership ……………………………………………………………………………………………………………. 5**

**VI. maintenance of the yslme website …………………….……………………………….….....……. 6**

**VII. mechanism operationalization ……………………………………………………………………….. 7**

**VIII. Operationalization of the plan …………………………………………………….………………… 7**

**I. Background**

The Yellow Sea Large Marine Ecosystem (YSLME) project was designed to build upon the regional cooperation for the sustainable use of the YSLME put in place by People’s Republic of China (PR China) and the Republic of Korea (RO Korea), supported by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPR Korea), the Yellow Sea Partnership, and the Global Environment Facility (GEF). The project objective was to foster long-term sustainable institutional, policy and financial arrangements for effective ecosystem-based management of the YSLME. To achieve this objective, the project strategy included supporting the formation of the YSLME Commission that will oversee the implementation of the SAP (2020-2030), reduce the decline in biological resources and to restore depleted fish stocks in the Yellow Sea.

The sustainability is assessed taking into account the risks related to financial, sociopolitical, institutional, and environmental sustainability of the project outcomes. The sustainability plan is a reference document of the post-YSLME phase II project in the UNDP management cycle and was advised in the Terminal Evaluation (TE) report to be prepared as a result of the outlined follow-up actions including endorsement of the SAP (2020-2030), approval of the MOU on regional ocean governance currently under discussion, mechanism operationalization, adoption of joint programs and strategies. More specific details about each of the task remaining are described.

**ii. YSLME story, gaining momentum from both countries**

Among the 66 LMEs around the world, the Yellow Sea LME has been one of the richest in terms of biological characteristics, but is also one of the most highly affected by human development. Significance of the Project was stressed by Dr. Kenneth Sherman at the Launch of YSME Phase-I project, by stating “As has been made abundantly clear during this launching of the YSLME project, and the first deliberations of the Steering Committee, that the leaders of Stewardship Agencies from both countries have come together to turn-the-corner, from degradation to sustainability of the shared-goods and sources of the ecosystem. The tasks to be undertaken will require a sharp focus to close the gap between science-based assessments and ecosystem-based management actions. The challenge is large. The science, technology and management experience you bring to the task is equally formidable. And it is in this spirit of meeting-the-challenge of ecosystem productivity and sustainability that United States’ National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is pleased and honored to support the YSLME project.” Additional remarks were delivered through congratulatory address by Mr. Zhihui Sun, Deputy Administrator, State Oceanic Administration (SOA), PR China at the YSLME Phase-I project Inception Ceremony by stating “Through the joint efforts of the surrounding countries, the Yellow Sea, although a geographical barrier separating the countries on both sides, will become a sea of peace, a sea of friendship, and a sea of cooperation.”

In achieving the targets of the YSLME SAP (2009-2020) throughout the YSLME Phase II project period, several key transformations were attempted to be made by covering (1) Ocean governance through institutional restructuring; (2) Technical advancement guided by stronger scientific information and evidence; (3) Behavioral and awareness change as well as building of networks; (4) Capacity enhancement with more stakeholders engaged; (5) Socioeconomic transformation; and (6) Environmental change with a number of regional trends.

In line with the approach, *the YSLME Story was attempted to be developed by showing the need for sustained actions with persistent and emerging challenges still facing in the region*. Environmental changes, in particular, take some time but good building blocks are already in place. The YSLME Story is also attempted to be developed for serving as an information and inspiration for continued regional action for One Yellow Sea, One Vision, and A Shared Future.

*Reflected comments and suggestions made by both countries, the YSLME Story is close to the final stage and is expected to be printed before the end of year 2020*. With the final version, reviewed and approved by both countries, *the YSLME Story is expected to be launched for the public before the end of year 2020.*

**iii. Regional Mechanism**

As indicated in the outcome of Component 1 of the Phase II project, sustainable national and regional cooperation for ecosystem-based management, which is the establishment of a *self-sustaining cooperative mechanism for ecosystem-based management*, both countries agreed to prepare a series of documents in support of the establishment of the regional ocean governance mechanism at the 2nd Meeting of the Management, Science and Technical Panel (MSTP)/Interim Commission Council (ICC).

At the 3rd Meeting of the MSTP/ICC, both countries underscored the need for flexibility and innovation in arriving at a regional ocean governance for the YSLME, and consequently decided to continue discussions for a mutually agreed interpretation of the YSLME Commission serving as the regional ocean governance mechanism for the YSLME. Following the 3rd Meeting of the MSTP/ICC, both countries continued to discuss on a mutually agreed interpretation of the YSLME governance mechanism, based on information and analysis conducted by the consulting firm. The meeting emphasized the need to simplify the project arrangement in line with the project document by involving PR China and RO Korea only.

At the 1st a*d hoc* ICC, both countries agreed to establish a post-YSLME mechanism participated by various stakeholders with the mechanism to play the central coordinating roles. The meeting supports to use the updated SAP (2020-2030) as the guidance document to the operation of the mechanism. *The meeting agreed to develop and implement cooperation projects under the mechanism, with resources mobilized and made available through various sources by following their respective procedures. The meeting also agreed to have an office as a Secretariat to serve the mechanism and settle the details within the remaining months of the project which will be the end of year 2020.*

During the 5th ICC, both countries have reached an agreement on the final text which entails objectives, scope, cooperative activities, partnership, and governance mechanism and agreed to discuss and finalize through bilateral negotiations for detailed YSLME regional governance mechanism.

To proceed the remaining procedures together with the MOU between two parties, the legal or political documents implying with structure of the secretariat and financing, simple and easy-to-operate approaches were suggested to be pursued in making the final arrangements. In this regard, *a separate and supporting document in line with the approaches addressed in the MOU needs to be developed through bilateral communication.*

**IV. SAP (2020-2030)**

Together with the updated TDA endorsed in June 2020, SAP (2020-2030) is being developed at the time of the developing sustainability plan in December 2020. The analyses undertaken on the issues being occurred in the Yellow Sea since the phase I project attracted the concerns, in particular, with the emerging issues, including air pollution, marine plastics including microplastics, and contaminants of emerging concern.

During the phase II project, the two countries have made significant investments in line with the ecosystem-based management priorities outlined in the SAP (2009-2020), including control of fisheries operations, buy-back of fishing vessels, improving mariculture operations, expanded monitoring of sources of pollution, development and operation of environmental information systems, collection and control of marine litter, restoration of degraded coastal ecosystems, MPAs management, etc.

At present, both countries being led by experts of NWGs and members of the IMCC put their utmost efforts to finalize the YSLME SAP (2020-2030), however, are still at the internal consultation prior to the signing stage. Since the 5th ICC organized in October 2020, additional steps leading to signing off were turned out to be finalizing monitoring and evaluation (M&E) indicators and translation into two national languages for internal signing process of both countries. In brief, remaining tasks leading to signing off the SAP (2020-2030) will be *(1) finalizing M&E indicators by RWGs;* (2) *translation of the text into national languages*; (3) *reviewing by the IMCC members*; (4) *finalizing the SAP (2020-2030) after consolidating comments;* (5) *conducting internal review by both countries prior to signing process*. To expedite the process, close collaboration through frequent communication between two countries will be imperative step for *signing off before the end of the year 2020.*

**V. Partnership**

Established in 2006, the Yellow Sea Partnership (YSP) shares the following agreed common goals: (a) Reduction of the adverse environmental threats and impacts of development activities on the marine environment in the Yellow Sea; (b) Promotion of environmentally-sustainable management and use of the marine and coastal resources in the Yellow Sea; and (c) Fostering mutual knowledge and understanding between our people and environment. Existing and potential partners of the YSP was listed in the stakeholder groups at the initial stage of the phase II project, simply maintaining with lack of engagement. Three major recommendations to broaden stakeholder engagement were suggested in the TE report as follows:

1. Broaden stakeholder engagement among the agriculture and water resources management sectors;
2. Promote development of a regional integrated coastal management (ICM) strategy that consolidates or clusters local level ICM plans; and
3. Strengthen regional NGOs collaboration on innovative approaches, training, and public awareness.

Significance of engagement of stakeholders including NGOs through cross-sectoral and regional collaboration was reiterated to bring knowledges and tools for addressing challenges facing in the YSLME. The approach towards strengthening public awareness on the emerging issues could be more explored among regional NGOs, and developing more effective ways to share knowledge under relevant domestic circumstances in both countries.

To engage the stakeholders effectively, *mapping on the programs, plans and projects of partners converging with management actions in the SAP (2020-2030) is expected to be implemented*. In addition, the identification of contacts and list of events aligned with management actions by stakeholders needs to be completed possibly by the Q2 of year 2021.

**VI. maintenance of the yslme website**

A company named CGTAE Technology Inc. has been engaged for the services of design, hosting and maintaining the website “yslmep.org” from October 4, 2018 until November 30, 2019.The contract with CGTAE was then extended until December 31 2020 after official approval of the project extension to December 31, 2020 by UNDP.

The service is being provided satisfactorily in accordance with the contract agreements and the extension of services is needed as a part of the implementation of the communication strategy of the YSLME Phase II project. Until now, the website has been used as a key platform for dissemination of project results as well as project updates and events. Some of the key functionalities the service included are (1) Communication products; (2) Factsheets; (3) Videos; (4) Brochures; (5) Training modules; and (6) Awareness raising activities. By playing a role as a legal clearing house, the web-service has been provided by uploading over 50 laws and regulations at global level in relation to the areas of concerns of the YSLME, including fisheries and mariculture, habitat, pollution, biodiversity, adaptation to climate change, etc.

Considering their extended contract coming to close at the end of year 2020, *maintenance and management of the project website* *is being considered to transfer to IW:Learn, the GEF International Waters focal area knowledge management platform, where most of the content from the project website will migrate to ensure consistency.*

**VII. mechanism operationalization**

The issue of mechanism operationalization was introduced on the regional ocean mechanism expected to be established. To operate the mechanism for the YSLME, further steps covering detailed information are advised to be considered and discussed between two countries.

As the phase II project nears project closure in operation, there has been accelerated progress with respect to negotiating the terms of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that would reaffirm the commitment of two countries and provide further direction on the agreed next steps.

From the financial perspective, *co-financing allocations were suggested in the TE report with possible extension beyond project closure to cover follow-up actions by 2-3 years, with the cost and oversight for remaining actions including establishment of mechanism after the phase II project*.

As next steps to move forward for the establishment of the YSLME governance mechanism as a post-YSLME phase II project, further discussion on the proposed *roles of the Secretariat, staffing, salary package, financing and location of the Secretariat* should be made and the *financing agreement for sustainable operation of the ocean governance mechanism of the YSLME and the Secretariat should be resolved by two countries*. Detailed plan on securing financial resources and staffing at the Secretariat needs to be established with care.

**VIII. Operationalization of the plan**

The tasks remained for the project were addressed as of December of year 2020 and expected implementation timeframe is also suggested as summarized inthe Table 1.

**Table 1. List of tasks remained, responsible entities and timeframe**

| **Tasks Remained** | | **Responsible Entities** | **Timeframe** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **YSLME story, gaining momentum from both countries**   * 1. Messages from both countries, the GEF, UNDP, UNOPS, and Ken Sherman   2. Finalization   3. Printing   4. Launching | Technical Advisor, Partners  Technical Advisor, IMCC  Administrative assistant  Technical Advisor and UNDP/GEF | 2020 Q4 |
|  | **Regional Mechanism**   * 1. Signing of the MOU   2. Translation   3. Press Release | PR China and RO Korea | 2020 Q4 |
|  | **SAP**   * 1. Finalization of M&E indicators   2. Translation   3. Internal consultation   4. Consolidation of comments and share with countries for endorsement | Technical Adviser, IMCC  IMCC  IMCC  Technical Adviser, IMCC | 2020 Q4 |
|  | **Partnership**   * 1. Mapping on the programs, plans and projects of partners-converging with management actions of SAP (2020-2030)   2. Contacts of partnerships   3. List of events of partners aligned with Management Actions (MAs) (including KOEM, KIOST, FIO, NMEMC and Partners including EAAFP, NOWPAP, etc.) | Institutions designated by PR China and RO Korea | 2021 Q2 |
|  | **Re-establishment of the YSLME Website** | PR China and RO Korea | 2021 Q3 |
|  | **Mechanism operationalization**   * 1. Consensus on steps for negotiating the details of the regional ocean governance mechanism   2. Rules of procedure of the decision-making mechanism, working groups, operationalization of decision-making body and working groups, financial aspects, secretariat (location, staffing, and TORs of the staff) | PR China and RO Korea | 2021 Q3 |

The table 2 presents a list of recommendations made by the technical specialist, which is in line with the ones made by the TE team.

**Table 2. List of key recommendations**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Tasks Remained** | **Key Recommendations to be considered** |
| 1. **YSLME Story, gaining momentum from both countries** | * Reflected comments and suggestions made by both countries, the YSLME Story is expected to be printed before the end of year 2020. * With the final version, reviewed and approved by both countries, the YSLME Story is expected to be launched for the public before the end of year 2020. |
| 1. **Regional Mechanism** | * It is expected to sign the MOU to establish the regional ocean governance mechanism for the YSLME, hopefully with financial agreement as well. * A separate and supporting document in line with the approaches addressed in the MOU needs to be developed through bilateral communication. |
| 1. **SAP (2020-2030)** | * Remaining tasks leading to signing off the SAP (2020-2030) will be (1) finalizing M&E indicators by RWGs; (2) translation of the text into national languages; (3) reviewing by the IMCC members of PR China and RO Korea; (4) finalizing the SAP (2020-2030) after consolidating comments; and (5) conducting internal review by both countries prior to signing process. * To expedite the process, close collaboration through frequent communication between two countries will be imperative step for signing off before the end of the year 2020. |
| 1. **Partnership** | * To engage the stakeholders effectively, mapping on the programs, plans and projects of partners converging with management actions in the SAP (2020-2030) is expected to be implemented. |
| 1. **Maintenance of the YSLME Website** | * Considering the extended contract coming to close at the end of year 2020, the issue of maintenance and management of the project website should be resolved with the suggestion to transfer to the IW:Learn to ensure consistency. |
| 1. **Mechanism operationalization** | * Further discussion on the proposed roles of the Secretariat, staffing, salary package, financing and location of the Secretariat should be made and the financing agreement for sustainable operation of the ocean governance mechanism of the YSLME and the Secretariat should be resolved by two countries. |

* THE END -