CSO-LA online Consultation on the

Regional Multi-annual Indicative Programme for Asia and the Pacific (2021-2027)

TEMPLATE FOR WRITTEN CONTRIBUTIONS

As part of ongoing consultations to gather partner and stakeholder views on the 2021-2027 EU Programming, a virtual discussion took place on the 6th March 2023 to follow up on the implementation of the multi-annual indicative Programme for Asia and the Pacific. In the event that your comments were not fully covered in the meeting, or if you want to provide comments regarding the two topics that were not discussed in groups in the meeting (promoting jobs and skills, support to SMEs, connectivity, and migration and forced displacement), we invite you to please send your contributions to: INTPA-G2@ec.europa.eu by **15th March COB.**

Your response should not exceed one page per topic (4 pages maximum in total).

Please fill in the following details:

Full organisation name (no abbreviations, please): **Wetlands International Europe**

Country / Region / Affiliation: Representing Asia Pacific Wetlands International offices

Type of organisation: ☐ Local Authorities X NGO ☐ Trade Union ☐ Cooperative

☐ Foundation ☐ Professional or business association ☐ Diaspora group

☐ Women's group ☐ Other (please indicate): _____

Wetlands International Europe on behalf of Wetlands International Asia-Pacific regional offices would like to thank you for the opportunity to participate in the informative session on the implementation of the EU regional multi-annual indicative programme (RMIP) for Asia and the Pacific (2021-27) on 6 March 2023 and to share our written recommendations.

Wetlands International has a long-term presence in the Asia-Pacific region, through regional offices (South Asia), national offices (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, and Japan) and project offices (Brunei), but also via International Programmes (such as Partners for Resilience, Watershed), national government members, and a network of partner organizations and networks. During the last 25 years, our projects and partnerships have focused on a wide range of themes ranging from wetlands restoration, river basin and coastal zone scale integrated management planning, wetlands ecosystem services mainstreaming in developmental planning to communication, education and capacity development for wetlands conservation and wise use.

Wetlands International acts as a trusted advisor for national governments, business platforms and civil society on policy, investment and practice issues related to wetlands. Working along with our extensive partner network, we have played a catalytic role in 1. shaping practices such as peatlands rewetting and integrating wetlands as disaster risk reduction, 2. providing policy-relevant knowledge-base, for example on the contribution of tropical peatlands conservation to climate mitigation goals, and 3. ensuring that regional dimensions of wetlands conservation are brought to fore in international environmental conventions and agreements such as the Ramsar Convention, the Convention on Biological Diversity the Convention of Migratory Species, the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

We recognize that upscaling and accelerating wetlands conservation within the complex development dynamics of Asia-Pacific requires a mix of approaches, ranging from strengthening conventional conservation efforts to blending wetlands conservation with development outcomes.

Wetlands International network can play a catalytic role in this endeavour by:

- providing critical knowledge and demonstrating practical wetland solutions which can inspire others to act;

- Forging partnerships, building capacities and addressing governance gaps for mobilizing support for replication of wetland solutions;
- enabling others to upscale impact by implementing wetlands solutions at a large scale.

1. Climate change, energy, environment

- What should be the key priorities in the development of the water–energy nexus in the region? How could CSOs be better involved in the decision and implementation process?

The South Asia's alarming water security situation call for reframing wetland conservation from a water and climate security perspective.

South Asia is home to nearly one-fourth of the world's population with just 3% of the world's land area and 5% of the world's renewable freshwater resources. Nearly three-fifths of the region's irrigation water are sourced from groundwater tapped from its 25-27 million shallow tube wells. Water once considered abundant is becoming increasingly scarce, with a rapid decline in per capita availability. Unsustainable extraction of groundwater has led to falling water tables in several regions. As per the Global Risk Analysis Report, 49.43% of the total South Asian population are at 'relatively high mortality risk' from natural disasters. A majority of the most devastating water-related disasters in the South Asian region have had their genesis in mismanaged wetlands wherein lopsided development has adversely impacted the inherent buffering capacity of these ecosystems. Infrastructure led planning, historically adopted for agriculture development in the region has proven counterproductive for natural ecosystems such as wetlands. In a sectoral policy making environment, ecosystem water requirements are seen as a competing demand in an ever-increasing gap in meeting human demands for water. Continued degradation of wetlands makes the region more vulnerable to the aforementioned trends.

Food and energy security in major parts of Asia has been achieved on the basis of the reconfiguration of natural hydrological regimes, through dams, weirs, and barrages. In 2000, of the over 45,000 large dams inventoried by the World Commission on Dams, most existed in Asia, with China and India being two of the three most prolific dam-building countries in the world. Such water resource development pathways have reduced the relevance of inland wetlands, especially small wetlands, such as village ponds and tanks which played an important role in providing local water security. The water technologies were also directed at draining and reclaiming marshes and swamps (including peatlands) for more productive and revenue-generating usages such as agriculture. With lesser freshwater reaching the coastal wetlands, several parts of South Asia are witnessing reduced diversity of mangroves, and estuaries tending towards high salinity conditions, adversely affecting their productivity. Sediments locked up within reservoirs have led to prevent build up, and aggravate subsidence in several major deltas of Asia[1]

As an integral component of hydrological cycle, wetlands are critically important in regulating the quantity, quality and reliability of water as it moves through in its various forms. Wetlands provide vital water-related ecosystem services at different scales (for example clean water provision, wastewater treatment, groundwater replenishment) and thereby offer significant opportunities to address water management objectives with sustainable, and in several instances, cost-effective solutions. **The ecosystem services of wetlands can also complement human-made infrastructure to deliver water supply, sewage treatment and energy, thereby aptly being referred to as 'natural' or 'green infrastructure' or 'nature-based solutions' for water managers**. Changes and degradation of wetlands particularly in their structure and functions can lead to significant changes in their flow pattern and the chemical and microbiological character of water resources. At the same time, wetlands require sufficient water to maintain an optimal level of ecological health. Given the fact that most of the impacts of climate change in the region would be water-mediated, **integrating the role of wetlands in climate change solutions demands urgent attention and integration in mitigation and adaptation strategies.**

In the region key priorities in the development of the water-energy nexus should be:

- **Accelerating adaptation by integrating nature-based solutions into water-related infrastructure** in Asia to build climate resilient landscapes that benefit people and nature, through the initiative Building with Nature Asia (see examples of our work below). Building with Nature solutions can accelerate adaptation, enhance water and food supply, livelihoods, carbon storage, biodiversity conservation and health. It represents a paradigm shift from minimising

[1] James P. M. Syvitski, Albert J. Kettner, Irina Overeem, Eric W. H. Hutton, Mark T. Hannon, G. Robert Brakenridge, John Day, Charles Vörösmarty, Yoshiki Saito, Liviu Giosan & Robert J. Nicholls. Sinking deltas due to human activities. Nature Geoscience, 2009; DOI: 10.1038/ngeo629

negative impacts to maximising positive benefits for society and nature. As a result, there is growing recognition for Building with Nature as a leading climate change adaptation strategy.

- **Restoring and reconnecting wetland systems across all landscape**s is the basis for solving the challenges of water, food, climate, land degradation, human security and sustainable economies.

- **Investing in Blue-Green and Grey-Green Infrastructure** which interconnect networks of natural and semi-natural areas and are vital for building city and landscape resilience in the face of climate threats. As a part of an integrated master plan, nature restoration and Blue-Green and Grey-Green Infrastructure can be combined with traditional engineering measures. If we merge the dynamic and adaptable properties of natural areas (wetlands) with the semi-natural (linear parks with roads), that are interconnected (with drainage systems and green roof corridors), we end up with Blue-Green and Grey-Green Infrastructure. This interconnected networks allows the flow of persons, water and biodiversity. Additionally, the disaster risks related to climate change, such as floods, droughts and landslides could be reduced. At the global level, there is increasing interest in well-managed Blue-Green and Grey-Green Infrastructure which is economical, scalable and sustainable. It could even contribute to the grey infrastructure. For example, **preserving highland wetlands can contribute to the supply of water to a hydropower dam downstream.**

- Pushing for collaborative governance solutions is crucial for addressing challenges associated with building coherent conceptual and methodological narratives (such as wetlands degradation not just seen as tantamount to loss of critical ecosystem services, but reduced landscape resiliency to increasing water risks), and developing approaches for joint working that have potential to transform, rather than simply reaffirm segmented ways of research on natural systems and landscapes.

CSO's like Wetlands International can contribute:

- Helping mobilise partnerships**.** For stakeholders or institutional actors alone, e.g. for different Ministries, it is often challenging to connect across sectors and scales of implementation to integrate solutions. CSO's can act as a facilitator to bring the key players, disciplines and sectors together to create systems that look into landscape scale approaches and put forward landscape propositions with integrated solutions, e.g. that reverse land degradation, coastal security, safeguard biodiversity, and improve water and food security and sustainable income.

- Developing business cases for public-private investments using the above-mentioned propositions.

- Facilitating community-based projects, not only from a consultative angle, but also through engagement in planning, design, and building capacities among stakeholders and institutional actors to implement and monitor.

- Providing science based and best practice restoration guidance, e.g. for mangroves, peatlands and inland waters in different settings, through knowledge sharing and capacity building and uptake in policy guidance.

- Providing wetlands expertise for national-level plans connected to global frameworks and beyond.

- For CSOs and LAs engaged at national level in policy areas such as sustainable consumption and production, circular economy practices and decent work: how can CSOs and LAs facilitate the flow of investments or influence the uptake of sustainable consumption and production / circular economy practices by SMEs (beyond the provision of trainings)? Could they provide examples?

First of all **we need to reconcile agriculture, grazing and fishery management with wetland conservation and the maintenance or restoration of the natural water dynamics.**

To do this, CSOs like Wetlands International can:

- Work at river and lakes basins and coastal level to enable inclusive and just governance of water and wetland resources and promote management practices which are harmonised with maintaining the resilience of the water and wetland systems.

- Influence major investors such as development banks to align sustainable development investment and related safeguards to further integrated wetland and water resilience.

- Support the formulation and implementation of master plans for sustainable development at the basin or major wetland system scale.

- Promote Integrated Risk Management approaches to tackle the root causes of rising water risks across whole landscapes and basins, building in wetland nature-based solutions in climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction plans and investments.

- Advocate for sustainable water resources and agricultural management practices in key policy and practice platforms.

Through our advocacy work, Wetlands International engages with EU delegations, EU member states calling to:

- Focus on reducing pressures and mitigating the impacts from infrastructure development, wetland over-exploitation, agricultural development, hydropower and extractive industries, and promoting integrated management plans which are compatible with maintaining wetland ecosystem functioning.

- Increase the support to strengthen and diversify civil-society networks and alliances linking freshwater wetlands with wider socio-economic development dialogues of government, private sector and major investors.

- Support multi-stakeholder participation in water governance and stewardship from basin to wetland landscape scale.

- Increase commitments to invest in more responsible practices by agriculture, hydropower and extractive industry.

Examples of Wetlands International Building with nature initiative:

https://indonesia.wetlands.org/news/un-recognizes-building-with-nature-indonesias-efforts-with-world-restoration-flagship-award/

https://www.wetlands.org/news/the-worlds-biggest-island-country-battles-coastal-erosion/

https://www.wetlands.org/publications/building-with-nature-in-indonesia-restoring-an-eroding-coastline-and-inspiring-action-at-scale-2015-2021/

Examples of Innovative Associated Mangrove Aquaculture (AMA) systems:

https://www.wetlands.org/publications/associated-mangrove-aquaculture-ama-to-buildcoastal-resilience-and-a-blue-economy-in-indonesia/

In the north coast of Manila Bay, Wetlands International Philippines and its local partners are working in Bulacan and Macajalar Bay in Misamis Oriental to identify sites and mangrove suppliers for the piloting of the AMA and Ecological Mangrove Restoration approaches to mangrove reforestation.

With the critical need to sustain essential ecosystem services, Wetlands International Philippines aims to tighten the mangrove reforestation initiatives of well-meaning groups by establishing correct, science-backed mangrove restoration practices in its Wetlands International's' To Plant or Not To Plant (TPNTP)[2] Project pilot sites[3].

As mangrove removal for aquaculture is one of the main causes of coastal erosion, complementary mangrove and brackish water aquaculture land-use systems are an opportunity for Indonesia and other countries to adopt and invest in, particularly in rural settings. The innovative AMA's can restore mangrove greenbelts in the estuary along inland waterways and protect adjoining fishponds. As such AMA's offer a sustainable aquaculture approach and are recommended to be integrated in Indonesia's mangrove restoration programmes and aquaculture management plans to contribute to climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction and the development of a Blue Economy.

Examples of Paludiculture:

https://indonesia.wetlands.org/news/paludiculture-utilizing-peatlands-to-keep-them-wet/

[2] https://www.wetlands.org/publications/mangrove-restoration-to-plant-or-not-to-plant/
[3] https://www.wetlands.org/blog/bluer-forests-for-the-people-of-bulacans-intertidal-zones/

To stop the repeated severe peat damage, a fundamental change in peat management patterns is needed, without involving, or at least minimizing, the drainage process. Paludiculture is one of the recommended management options.

- What are CSO+LA overall views on the needs and priorities in the area of green/sustainable urban development in the region?

- Inspiring urban planners, associations of architects and urban, environmental planners, parks and garden clubs to restore and incorporate wetlands in planning.

- Creating and sustaining partnerships with engineering firms which can support development and implementation of wetlands-solutions.

- Seeking commitments from national governments for Building with Nature Initiative.

- Mobilizing investments into constructed wetlands as storage areas for storm-waters, disaster risk management (to flooding), and recreational/cultural spaces.

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