

**FINAL REPORT:
BIO-BRIDGE INITIATIVE ON URBAN NATURE – GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE IN ASEAN CITIES**

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FINAL REPORT

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The small-scale funding agreement on Urban Nature - Green Infrastructure in ASEAN Cities (the Project) was signed on 18 March 2019 between the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the National Parks Board of Singapore (NParks, as National Focal Point of Singapore to the CBD). The agreed period of implementation is for four months, commencing 1 April 2019 and ending on 31 July 2019.
2. The long-term Project objective is to foster cooperation among the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) cities to integrate green infrastructure/ urban biodiversity in their planning and/or development. The immediate Project objective is to develop an ASEAN work programme from 2019-2025 on green infrastructure/ urban biodiversity.
3. The key outputs are two meeting reports and a final report that will include the developed ASEAN work programme on green infrastructure/ urban biodiversity.
4. The Project is led by Singapore (NParks) and Thailand (Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE)), which are the lead countries on promoting and implementing urban biodiversity initiatives for the ASEAN Action Plan on Environmentally Sustainable Cities under the draft ASEAN Strategic Plan on the Environment 2016-2025 (ASPEN). The ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability's Cities Biodiversity Centre (ICLEI CBC) and the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) are key collaborators of the Project.

II. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

First Bio-Bridge Initiative (BBI) Meeting, 29 - 30 April 2019, Singapore

5. The First Meeting of the BBI on Urban Nature - Green Infrastructure in ASEAN Cities was held from 29 - 30 April 2019 in Singapore. The report of the First Meeting is in **ANNEX 1**. The meeting allowed the lead countries and the Project's collaborators to meet for the first time to discuss the implementation of the Project. Foremost on the agenda were to arrive at a common understanding of the term green infrastructure; and to develop three draft questionnaires: one for gathering feedback from ASEAN cities and the other two for gathering feedback from the national focal points (NFPs) of the ASEAN Working Group on Nature Conservation and Biodiversity (AWGNCB) and the ASEAN Working Group on Environmentally Sustainable Cities (AWGESC). The questionnaires were important means of obtaining feedback on their views on green infrastructure and as a basis for the development of the ASEAN work programme on green infrastructure/ urban biodiversity.

Gathering of Feedback

6. Singapore finalised the questionnaires with the comments from its co-lead and collaborators bearing in mind that they needed to be simple, easily understood and involve minimal qualitative responses. Singapore also explored various ways to implement the questionnaires, for example, emailing soft copies vs online survey platforms such as Google Forms and Survey Monkey. We subsequently elected to use both methods, and Survey monkey was selected as it provided better flexibility on the format for the proposed questions and allowed user-friendly selection of the answers. Three separate questionnaires were prepared and disseminated to the respective respondents:

- (i) Questionnaire for the AWGNCB National Focal Points
- (ii) Questionnaire for the AWGESC National Focal Points
- (iii) Questionnaire for ASEAN Cities

7. Singapore emailed the AWGNCB and AWGESC on 27 May 2019 to invite them to complete the questionnaire by 28 June 2019. We additionally requested the AWGESC to assist to disseminate the questionnaire for ASEAN cities to their cities involved in AWGESC's initiatives and projects (such as the ASEAN Initiative on Environmentally Sustainable Cities, Environmentally Sustainable Cities Awards and Certificates of Recognition, Model Cities and Sustainable Development Goals Frontrunner Cities). Singapore also sought ICLEI-Southeast Asia Secretariat's help to disseminate the cities' questionnaire to their network of cities involved in biodiversity related initiatives.

8. On 27 June 2019, we sent reminders and extended the deadline further to 5 July 2019 for the questionnaires. The extended deadline of early July was to ensure there was sufficient time for analysing the responses. The results of the questionnaires were discussed in the Second Meeting of the BBI in late July 2019.

Second Bio-Bridge Initiative (BBI) Meeting, 25-26 July 2019, Manila, Philippines

9. The Second (and final) Meeting of the BBI on Urban Nature - Green Infrastructure in ASEAN Cities was held from 25 - 26 July 2019 in Manila, Philippines. The report of the Second Meeting is in **ANNEX 2**. The main issues on the agenda were sharing the results of the questionnaires and commenting on the draft ASEAN Work Programme on Green Infrastructure/ Urban Biodiversity.

10. The Second Meeting involved more participants than the first, in particular, the CBD NFPs of Lao PDR and Philippines; and Philippines' local associations of landscape architects (PALA – Philippines Association of Landscape Architects), environmental planners (PIEP – Philippines Institute of Environmental Planners) and green building council (PHILGBC – Philippines Green Building Council). The CBD NFPs of Lao PDR and Philippines were invited as they were the only two ASEAN countries that reflected urban biodiversity as an area of work under their respective National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans. They shared their respective plans/ progress on implementing urban biodiversity.

11. PALA, PIEP and PHILGBC representatives were invited to share their work, provide their views on the ASEAN Work Programme on Green Infrastructure/ Urban Biodiversity, and how they could potentially contribute to the implementation of the Work Programme.

Brief Analysis of the Questionnaires

12. Seven out of nine AWGNCB NFPs responded to the questionnaire as opposed to three out of nine AWGESC NFPs. In general, green infrastructure is not a foreign term to most NFPs, but when asked about the use of green infrastructure terms in either their infrastructure or environmental plans, urban farming appears to be a foreign term while climate change-related terms are prioritised by the NFPs. It was also highlighted that AWGNCB NFPs and AWGESC NFPs have very different perspectives on the same issues, with results revealing that AWGESC NFPs have more extensive knowledge about cities and the relevant national plans.

13. There were 21 responses to the cities' questionnaire, with 13 respondents from Thailand. In the analysis, the cities were arbitrarily divided into three broad categories based on land area, to avoid city size as a confounding factor. Despite the small number of responses for the cities' questionnaire, general takeaways from survey results include the following:

- a. climate change and waste management are the main priorities for ASEAN cities and NFPs. The next most commonly stated priority for cities is the provision of green spaces, parks and reserves.
- b. cities of different sizes appear to have different priorities, with different landscapes that they already have and/or that can be developed into green infrastructure. Smaller cities appear to be more aware of "nature-based solutions" compared to medium- and large-sized cities. However, when asked for examples of each term, "green infrastructure" was better understood compared to "nature-based solutions".
- c. large cities do not have a corresponding increase in the number of staff who work on biodiversity.
- d. pollution-related issues are the greatest challenge for cities (e.g. waste management, air pollution), followed by green issues (e.g. mitigating climate change).
- e. cities also mainly face capacity problems (e.g. limited funding, implementation capacity) for the implementation of green infrastructure.

14. There was consensus that we should extend the duration of the survey in order to collect more responses for a more robust regional analysis. Singapore has since informed the AWGNCB and AWGESC NFPs; and sought the help of the latter to inform cities of the extended deadline to 14 December 2019 and encourage them to submit their responses.

Draft ASEAN Work Programme on Green Infrastructure/ Urban Biodiversity

15. It was agreed that the term urban green infrastructure (UGI) is not interchangeable with nature-based solutions, the latter being a broader concept. The following are the eight elements of the draft ASEAN Work Programme on UGI and Urban Biodiversity:

- (i) awareness
- (ii) planning
- (iii) governance
- (iv) valuation
- (v) financing
- (vi) interventions
- (vii) knowledge sharing and management
- (viii) monitoring and evaluation

16. The updated draft Key Elements of the ASEAN Work Programme on Urban Green Infrastructure/ Urban Biodiversity (AWP-UGI/UB), which is based on comments received at and after the meeting, is in **ANNEX 3**.

17. The original objective was to develop an ASEAN Work Programme for 2019 -2025 (5 years). However, the meeting agreed that we need to take a long-term view of promoting UGI in ASEAN as it is in its infancy stage in the region. As such, the draft AWP-UGI/UB is likely to be a longer-term plan, perhaps 10-15 years. However, we can prioritise activities for the initial three to five years of the programme and the meeting agreed that this phase should initially focus on the following three areas:

- (i) awareness
- (ii) planning and governance
- (iii) demonstration projects

III. LESSONS LEARNT

Stakeholder Engagement and Technical and Scientific Cooperation

18. In addition to the co-leads and collaborators of the project, we have sought to include other stakeholders where possible. In this project, we managed to involve WWF-Indonesia, CBD NFPs and local associations such as PALA, PIEP and PHILGBC. Their participation provided different perspectives that were valuable to the project. The participation of the local associations in particular brought insights from the ground level on the planning and governance parameters that are needed to implement UGI/UB at the local level.

19. On hindsight, it may have been useful to invite a few ASEAN cities of varying contexts to the meetings to provide their views on the draft ASEAN WP-UGI/UB in terms of what are the priorities and what would be practicable at the city level. This would supplement and verify the responses we received from the cities' questionnaire.

Gathering of Feedback

20. The questionnaires to the NFPs of AWGNCB and AWGESC, and the cities were the main means of gathering views on UGI/UBI. Due to the limited time and the timing of the questionnaires, we did not receive the responses expected. The AWGESC only met on 13-14 June 2019; which was when the Project was presented for their information. Although the email requesting the support of the AWGESC to disseminate the questionnaires to cities was on 27 May 2019, most of the NFPs only sent the questionnaires to their cities post the AWGESC meeting in mid-June, which left very little time for cities to complete the questionnaires.

21. Some of the comments we had on the low response from cities included:
- (i) the need to translate the questionnaires to the languages of the ASEAN member states (AMS);
 - (ii) more time required for cities to check some information with other departments;
 - (iii) an AMS had local elections and the city office bearers were not in place until July 2019 and as such no responses were received from the cities of that AMS; and
 - (iv) cities from a particular AMS completed the wrong questionnaire meant for the NFP of the AWGESC.

IV. NEXT STEPS

22. The draft key elements of the AWP-UGI/UB may be further updated before it is submitted to the relevant ASEAN bodies for their respective considerations and endorsements in their 2020 cycle of meetings (usually from May to August) – the AWGNCB, the AWGESC and the ASEAN Senior Officials on the Environment (ASOEN). The relevant endorsements are necessary to officially recognise the draft AWP-UGI/UB and allow for Singapore and Thailand as co-leads on urban biodiversity to develop project proposals for funding consideration of ASEAN dialogue partners.

23. At the 17th Meeting of the AWGESC on 13-14 June 2019 in Vientiane, Lao PDR, the EU shared that the project is in line with the EU Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity Strategy. EU requested the AWGESC to “explore potential support for the ASEAN Work Programme on Green Infrastructure/ Urban Biodiversity through E-READI and the proposed EU project on SMART Green ASEAN Cities”. Singapore and Thailand will explore with ASEAN dialogue partners such as the EU to fund the implementation of the key priority areas of AWP-UGI/UB.

24. It is hoped that the implementation of the AWP-UGI/UB by AMS will enhance the understanding, demonstrate the benefits of urban green infrastructure/ urban biodiversity such as improved quality of life (including health) for the residents, and strengthen the cities’ resilience to climate change. In the implementation of the activities of the work programme, we will seek to continue to engage the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity and ICLEI-CBC, in particular ICLEI Southeast Asia Secretariat. We will also seek to engage non-traditional partners in ASEAN such as the local associations including city networks in the region. We will also encourage partners and participants to consider counterpart in-cash or in-kind funding to demonstrate their commitment to the programme and/or activities.

V. CONCLUSION

25. Despite the limited time (four months) and funding (USD 20,000), the BBI funds provided a significant opportunity to gather the key partners to kick start the development of an AWP-UGI/UB, which would otherwise not have been possible. This process of preparation and consultation to develop a work programme or proposal is often absent due to lack of funding to bring together key stakeholders for a preliminary discussion on the issue to be addressed. It is therefore useful for potential donors, to fund a preliminary discussion or consultation on the proposed programme or project activities before they are implemented to facilitate the effective implementation of the programme and/or activities.
