

# RESILIENT URBAN CENTRES AND SURROUNDS

Nature-based Solutions for climate resilient communities, environments and economies in the Greater Mekong region



## KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE AND TECHNICAL TRAINING – LAO PDR (27–28 AUGUST 2024)

### Background

RUCaS aims to improve the value generated by investment in urban infrastructure by better integrating conventional large 'grey' infrastructure (e.g. levee banks, pipelines, treatment plants, roads, railways) with nature-based solutions (e.g. wetlands, mangroves, catchment protection, green walls, multifunctional parks and transport corridors). RUCaS program outputs include case studies demonstrating application in different urban contexts and scales, as well as training in the tools and principles applied, and strategies to upscale nature-based solutions (NbS). RUCaS is being implemented across the 4 countries of the Lower Mekong sub-region and is supported by the Australian Government through the Mekong Australia Partnership regional program.

### Purpose

The Knowledge Exchange convened stakeholders and experts from throughout Lao PDR and from overseas to engage in a dialogue about using nature-based solutions to manage the impacts of urban development and climate change.

Running over 2 days, the event included the following activities:

- Review of NbS case studies, considering lessons learned on potential for application, and opportunities and challenges in upscaling
- Workshop to develop upscaling strategies and identify priorities and next steps for generating enabling conditions for NbS implementation
- Technical workshop and training on draft guidelines for urban streams and wetlands. The RUCaS case studies and other examples will be used to review the guidelines and consider how they could be applied.

Guests included:

- Mr Amphayvanh Oudomdeth, Deputy Director General, Department of Climate Change
- Ms Benita Sommerville, Deputy Ambassador, Australian Embassy in Lao PDR
- Ms Eva Diaz Ugena, Deputy Country Representative, GGGI
- Mr Arnaud Vontobel, Country Representative, GRET.

The event attracted 40 participants from organisations across government, education, civil society organisations (CSOs) and intergovernmental organisations (IGOs):

- 23 participants identified as female (58%), with 1 participant identified as other.
- 20 participants were from the government sector (50%), 8 from the education sector (20%), 6 from CSOs (15%) and 6 from IGOs (15%).
- None of the participants required accessibility assistance.

## Outcomes

The knowledge exchange workshop discussed challenges and opportunities for implementing NbS.

Key challenges included the following:

- Government agencies and local authorities may have limited technical expertise and resources needed to design, implement, and maintain NbS projects effectively.
- Securing long-term and sustainable funding for NbS initiatives is a significant challenge, particularly as they compete with traditional infrastructure projects for financial resources.
- Effective NbS implementation requires coordination between multiple stakeholders, including government agencies, local communities, and international organisations. In Lao PDR, fragmented governance and communication barriers can hinder collaboration.
- There is a need for greater awareness and understanding of the benefits of NbS, particularly among policy makers and local communities.
- In some areas, unclear land tenure and ownership rights can complicate the implementation of NbS, especially in regions where land is shared between communities or where land use is disputed.
- Rapid urbanisation and economic development may prioritise traditional 'grey' infrastructure over more sustainable, nature-based approaches, limiting the scope for NbS implementation.
- NbS projects often require long-term monitoring and evaluation to measure their impact, which can be challenging due to limited data collection systems, technical capacity and funding for sustained assessment.

Participants identified the following key enabling factors as opportunities and necessary predeterminants to advance NbS implementation:

### Visioning

- Visioning should focus on restoring and managing wetlands to address environmental issues such as flooding, air pollution and water quality degradation.
- NbS projects can help improve urban resilience, while promoting community involvement in sustainable wetland development.
- Existing policies such as the National Adaptation Plan (NAP) can be used to develop NbS visions.
- Identifying different champions and focal points within ministries will be beneficial.
- Ongoing engagement with communities is crucial.

### Laws and regulations

- The discussion highlighted the lack of proper governance, regulatory framework and enforcement mechanisms for wetland and stream management. Challenges include weak oversight in solid waste disposal, untreated industrial discharges and unregulated construction.
- There are no specific regulations in place for maintaining urban wetlands, and efforts to address these gaps include working with government bodies such as the Department of Natural Resources and Environment (DONRE) to enhance compliance and introduce legal measures to support sustainable wetland practices.

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## Choosing options

- Setting up committees for wetland management, and promoting community involvement in cleaning litter and invasive species
- Prioritising technical interventions, such as canal cleaning and land use planning, to mitigate flooding and improve drainage
- Integrating green infrastructure and low-maintenance solutions that respond to community needs, to achieve sustainability by leveraging existing resources
- Using the vast local knowledge held by communities to maximise the full potential of NbS
- Providing a sense of community responsibility to maintain and successfully operate NbS interventions.

## Implementation and operation

- Implementation focuses on practical actions like establishing village-level committees, raising awareness about the importance of wetlands and collaborating with universities for technical research
- Training is crucial for successful implementation of NbS.
- Research requires a clear and well-defined problem identification.
- Tools and instruments should be designed to the local context.
- Long-term management plans should be developed for NbS.

## Scaling Strategy (Laos) priorities arising from Knowledge Exchange discussion included:





## Next steps in Lao PDR

The next steps are summarised below:

Action	Timing
RUCaS team to complete and publish the Nong Loup lan marsh and Ban Mano case studies	October 2024
RUCaS team to prepare the upscaling strategy to be shared with Vietnamese stakeholders	November 2024
Upscaling strategies to be shared and discussed at the Regional Conference	March 2025

## Photos



*Participants at the Lao event*



*Day 1 Knowledge Exchange*



*Day 1 Knowledge Exchange*



*Day 2 Training*