

# REVIEW ON ACCOUNTABILITY GREATER MEKONG SUBREGION: MEKONG TOURISM DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

By Katherine Conchada

The AM supposedly provides people affected by the bank's funded projects a venue to voice and seek solutions to their problems, and report non-compliance with ADB's operational policies and procedures by Bank staff and the government-implementing agency. In Vietnam, one complaint was filed in December 2006 involving the GMS Mekong Tourism Development Project, which was declared as not eligible by the Office of the Special Project Facilitator (OSPF). Project Description and Area The objectives of the GMS Mekong Tourism Development Project are to "reduce poverty through increasing economic growth and employment opportunities, increasing foreign exchange earnings, and promoting the conservation of the natural and cultural heritage."<sup>[1]</sup> It was proposed that these objectives could be reached by promoting sustainable tourism in the lower Mekong River basin by integrating all tourist destinations into a single package, which could be accessed by a circuit throughout the region.<sup>[2]</sup> The Project would consist of four components: "(i) tourism-related infrastructure improvements; (ii) pro-poor, community-based tourism development; (iii) sub regional cooperation for sustainable tourism; and (iv) implementation assistance and institutional strengthening."<sup>[3]</sup> In order to accomplish this plan for increased tourism, there would need to be improvements to "tourism-related infrastructure" in "nine provinces in the Lao PDR (Bokeo, Champassak, Houaphanh, Luang Namtha, Oudomxay, Saravanh, Savannakhet, Vientiane, and Xayaboury) and five in Viet Nam (Bac Kan, Cao Bang, Quang Binh, Quang Tri, and Thua Tien Hue), which were selected for their tourism potential, poverty rates, and inclusion in a GMS-TSS priority zone."<sup>[4]</sup> Areas in Cambodia that would be affected by the Project are Siem Reap, Rattanak Kiri, Stung Treng, and the road to the Genocide Memorial in Phnom Penh.<sup>[5]</sup> Project Dates Regarding the status of the Project, the ADB website states, "The Loan became effective on 30 March 2009, but has experienced delay in the recruitment of consultant. The Consultant will assist PCU and PIUs in project management and the detailed design of tourism-related infrastructure. The consultant is expected to be mobilized in September 2010."<sup>[6]</sup> The website also reports that the last review mission on this Project was conducted on 25 May 2010. The Complaint Complaints were received by the OSPF on three separate dates. The first letter was received on 13 December 2006. The next complaint consisted of three letters and was received on 19 December 2006. The final letter was received on 4 January 2007. The complaints were acknowledged on the dates of 18 December 2006, and 10 and 12 January 2007, respectively.<sup>[7]</sup> Complainant issues regarding the Project included concern about compensation and consultation, lack of information, and loss of property and business.<sup>[8]</sup> Response of ADB On 6 February 2007, it was determined by the SPF that the complaints were not eligible for the reason that the issues were not first addressed to the Operations Department of the Project. However, the SPF indicated that the complainants might present their complaints to the SPF at a later date, "if there are valid grounds."<sup>[9]</sup> Forum members have been using the AM to register complaints about the Bank's lapses in terms of its policies, programs and projects. While there was not a single complaint filed in 2008, out of the 13 cases in 2009, four of which were filed by Forum members. In 2010, two more cases are filed and out of which, one case was deemed eligible from Tajikistan last August. More complaints are on their way to the AM. Approved in 2003, the ADB--through a joint Management-Board Working Group--has started a review of the policy in July 2010. As part of the review process, the ADB is inviting comments from the public on the current policy until September 15, 2010. A series of regional consultations will be held in six countries, which include site visits, by the ADB. The consultation in Manila will be held in November.

## Endnotes

- 1 ADB. [Project Administration Memorandum \(PAM\)](#). Rep. Manila: Asian Development Bank, 2003. Project Administration Memorandum (PAM). Asian Development Bank. Web.
- 2 ADB. Project Administration Memorandum (PAM). 2003.
- 3 These four components may be read in detail at Appendix 3 of ADB. Project Administration Memorandum