



# MEKONG-BRAHMAPUTRA CONVERSATION: Learning Opportunities for Eastern South Asia from the Mekong Experience

Supported by  
 **HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG**  
**INDIA**

**OUTCOME REPORT**



**THE INTELLIGENT THIRD SPACE**  
**FOR VIBRANT MEANS AND ENDS**

# OUTCOME REPORT

Mekong-Brahmaputra Conversation

Produced & Distributed by: Divya Jeevan Foundation 2019

#### DISCLAIMER:

This document has been produced by Asian Confluence, a unit of Divya Jeevan Foundation with the financial assistance of The Heinrich Böll Stiftung, India. The views expressed here are those of the authors and can therefore in no way be taken to reflect the positions of The Heinrich Böll Stiftung, India.

*No part of this publication may be used for sale or for any other commercial purpose whatsoever without prior permission in writing from Divya Jeevan Foundation. The designation of geographical entities, and the presentation of the material herein, do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the publisher or the participating organizations concerning the legal status of any country, territory or area, or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. Trademark names and symbols are used in an editorial fashion with no intention on infringement on trademark or copyright laws.*



*Asian Confluence* initiates, stimulates and accelerates revival of the shared civilizational values between the peoples of India and her immediate and extended neighbourhood in order to strengthen our intellectual, economic, technological, political and security ties, and thus ensure that we become dependable and involved partners for the growth of all countries in emerging Asia.

The organisation is headquartered in Shillong, Meghalaya, India, as an initiative of Divya Jeevan Foundation which works through research, training, advocacy and exchange programs to empower the ‘Third Space’ towards creating better understanding of the Eastern South Asian region. It promotes an open “Third space” beyond government and industry for cultural, economic and intellectual exchanges towards creating better understanding of the North Eastern and Eastern region of India in the larger context of India as an emerging player in East Asian geopolitics and stable partner in the prosperity of the Indo Pacific Region. The organisation operates using the lens of the following two main viewpoints:

- *The region as a confluence of geographies connected by the rivers and shared waters;*
- *The region as a confluence of ideas, identities, cultures and civilisations*

Through its activities and initiatives, the organisation aims to provide an opportunity for civil society to enhance people to people contact between India and her immediate and extended neighbours in Asia and also encourage a better understanding of the cultural and socio-political issues of the region that actually are the driving force behind India’s “Act East Policy”. It aims to do this by promoting research and interest in the region facilitating economic and intellectual exchanges, educational tourism, cultural tourism, creation of “out of the box” livelihood generation by promoting eco-friendly products and services, impetus to green industries aimed at economic development by forging a network of civil society organizations working on similar objectives. The overall aim is to empower the ‘Third Space’ to convert opportunities into collaborations and conflicts into confluence.

 **HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG**  
**INDIA**

The **Heinrich Böll Stiftung, India** is a German foundation and part of the Green political movement that has developed worldwide as a response to the traditional politics of socialism, liberalism, and conservatism. We are a green think-tank and an international policy network, our main tenets are ecology and sustainability, democracy and human rights, self-determination and justice. We place particular emphasis on gender democracy, meaning social emancipation and equal rights for women and men. We are also committed to equal rights for cultural and ethnic minorities. Finally, we promote non-violence and proactive peace policies. To achieve our goals, we seek strategic partnerships with others who share our values.

Our namesake, Heinrich Böll, personifies the values we stand for: protection of freedom, civic courage, tolerance, open debate, and the valuation of art and culture as independent spheres of thought and action.

Our India Liaison Office was established in 2002 in New Delhi. Working with governmental and non-governmental local project partners we support India's democratic governance through informed national and international dialogue processes with a view to enhance the diversity of green thinking.

**For more information please contact us:**

*Heinrich Böll Stiftung, India Office*  
*C-20, 1st floor, Qutub Institutional Area*  
*New Delhi 110016, India*

**Phone:** +91-11-2685 4405, +91-11-2651 6695

**Fax:** +91-11-2696 2840

**Mail:** [info@in.boell.org](mailto:info@in.boell.org)

**Web:** [www.in.boell.org](http://www.in.boell.org)

## CONTENTS

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT	-	8
PROJECT DETAILS AND OBJECTIVES	-	9
APPROACH	-	10
OUTCOME OF CONVERSATIONS		
<i>I. Possible Sectors and Spaces of Engagement Identified</i>	-	11
<i>II. Idea Matrix</i>	-	12
RECOMMENDATIONS	-	17
ANNEXURE: <i>Network Created</i>	-	21

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT:

Lack of connectivity initiatives has long frustrated regional trade in South Asia. Of late, nation states in this region are seen to intensify and harmonise their efforts in deriving mileage out of the complementarities that perpetuate the geo-economic landscape of the region. In order to ensure improved livelihood opportunities for the people and to achieve Sustainable Development Goals the concerned countries also appreciate the urgency of better water resource management in the region. To that end the need to harness the biodiversity of the river basins beyond political boundaries can hardly be exaggerated. The Brahmaputra (Jamuna) river flowing through India and Bangladesh (part of the Brahmaputra Meghna Basin) and the Mekong river in Myanmar, Lao PDR, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam, both originate in China. They are transboundary rivers that shape the lives and livelihoods of millions of people in the respective countries. The Mekong region has a history of regional cooperation amongst the nation states though frameworks such as ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) and MRC (Mekong regional Cooperation).. As a part of the MRC framework, regional cooperation over the Mekong river has made further progress.

While significant developmental activities have happened around the Mekong river, challenges persist. The more recent Mekong Council Study is an initiative towards an integrated, cross-sectoral, comprehensive and state-of-the-art study bent on ensuring sustainable development in the Mekong Basin and focusing on cooperation among the MRC Member Countries – Thailand, Lao PDR, Cambodia and Vietnam, to that end. The North Eastern region of India comprises a substantial part of the Brahmaputra basin, and is presently evolving strategies of regional cooperation. The Act East Policy of the government of India is an overarching policy framework aspiring to enhance connectivity of the north - east of India to the South East Asian and Bay of Bengal region while at the same time developing the region itself by putting into optimum use its rich water and biodiversity and human resource potential. Developments of the National Waterway 2 on Brahmaputra and Meghna Basin and the India Bangladesh Protocol route seek to connect the land locked states in north east India to the Bay of Bengal. Multimodal connectivity projects under initiatives such as BIMSTEC, India Myanmar Thailand Trilateral highway (IMT), BBIN are also underway as game changing initiatives. The other sub-regional initiative, Bangladesh China India Myanmar (BCIM) Forum for Regional Cooperation, is yet to gather much traction on the ground. Such initiatives will need to address multiple issues such as flood control, challenges of agriculture, aquaculture, horticulture practices, watershed/springshed rejuvenation, forestry management and their effects on riverine communities.

Thus, drawing on the experiences of the Mekong region which has had a history of transboundary institutional and community cooperation and where the local communities and the civil society have found a greater voice, the Brahmaputra region can draw strength towards formulating a

more inclusive people friendly mechanism in managing water resources effectively. Drawn from the recommendations of the first Mekong Brahmaputra Conversation held in 2017, the next Mekong Brahmaputra Conversation aims at sharing community centric knowledge systems on both sides in respect of three issues :

- a) Better understanding of best practices and challenges in the communities and arriving at **a common institutional framework for effective transboundary water management** mechanisms in the Brahmaputra and Mekong regions.
- b) This may be attempted through: **Learning and sharing through case studies and good practices to help design tangible demonstrations and Creating a discourse around sustainable livelihood systems circumscribing the rivers** . This is possible without large interventions from man or machines.
- c) **Highlighting the deep civilizational connect between the regions**, creating a joint narrative on Celebrating Riverine culture, recounting the traditional reverence for nature and associated value systems which was once a vital ingredient in maintaining the balance in the environment.

## PROJECT DETAILS AND OBJECTIVES

The project aims at facilitating an interaction and knowledge exchange between civil society and experts of the two regions with the goals of :

- understanding the MRC mechanism,
- identifying best practices of the community in the Mekong context
- enhanced knowledge exchange and experience sharing on common challenges
- develop recommendations and an action agenda that can be used by stakeholders at various levels (community, academia, civil society and policy makers) in the Brahmaputra region
- develop institutional contacts that can potentially lead to a network of like minded stakeholders/actors/organisations/ across both regions

### **The project envisages a three-phase implementation plan.**

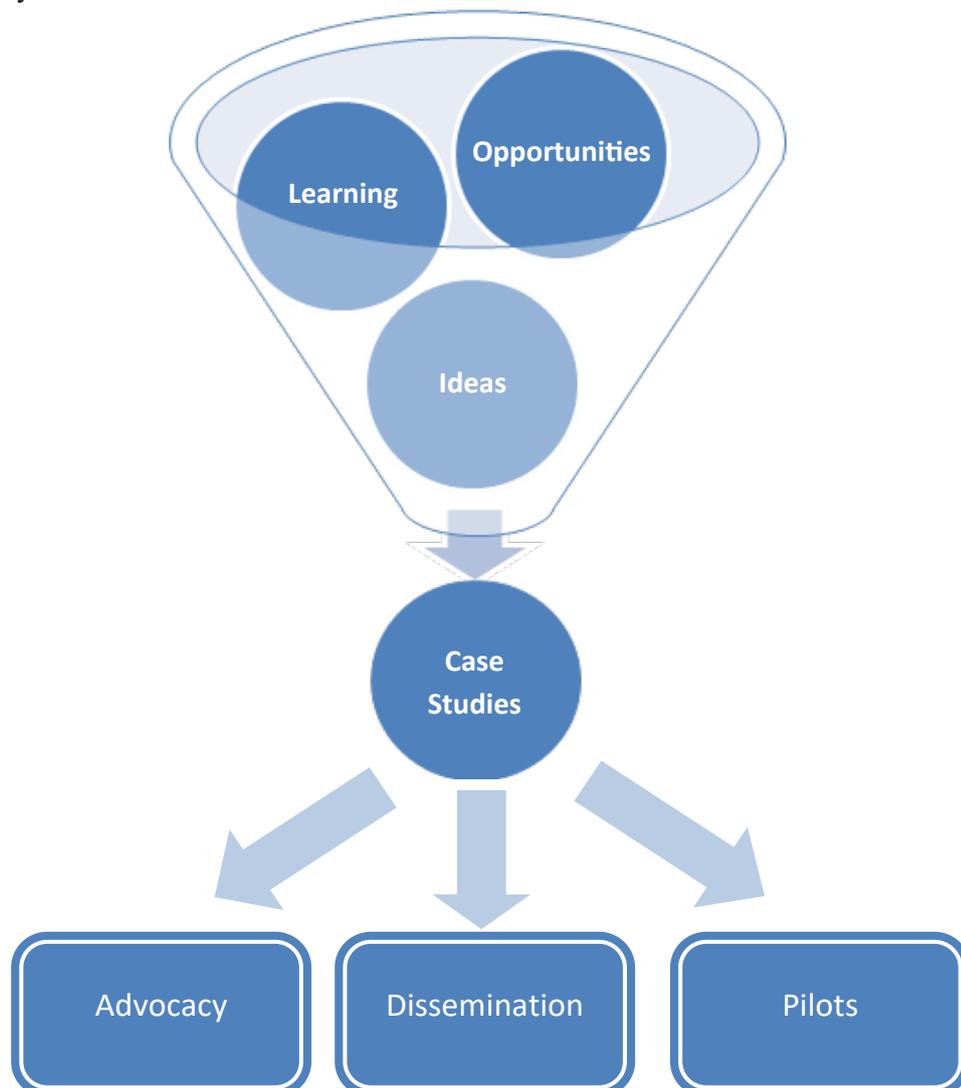
The Phase I, titled ‘Flowing Boundaries and Mekong Brahmaputra Conversation 1 focused on spot surveys of some riverine communities in the border regions of India and Bangladesh, following the first round of Mekong-Brahmaputra Conversation’ which sought to create a network of institutions working on rivers and water bodies in these two basins, based on which the second phase was undertaken. Phase I has been completed.

The present Phase-II will focus on Primary Data Collection, Research, Study, Documentation, Knowledge Exchange.

Phase-III will concentrate on preparing targeted Advocacy/Policy Briefs, organising Seminars and Dialogues for Advocacy on the basis of knowledge gathered in Phases I and II. The Target groups and Activities described in this document are relevant to Phase II. While Phase-III will tentatively have activities related to preparation and dissemination of focused advocacy/policy briefs and organise advocacy seminars and dialogues, the specific content of these will be worked out on the basis of results and experience of Phases I & II

## APPROACH

The report prepared for Mekong-Brahmaputra Conversations Phase II was envisaged as an Outcome Report and not an Activity Report. The idea was to pull together all the learning, opportunities and ideas gathered to suggest concrete ways for the Mekong and Brahmaputra-Meghna basin entities to collaborate. The idea was also to come up with Knowledge Products that are action oriented and can act as tools for dissemination, advocacy and further conversation. Also a Case Study approach was adopted to ensure that the products are compact, informative and easy-to use tools.

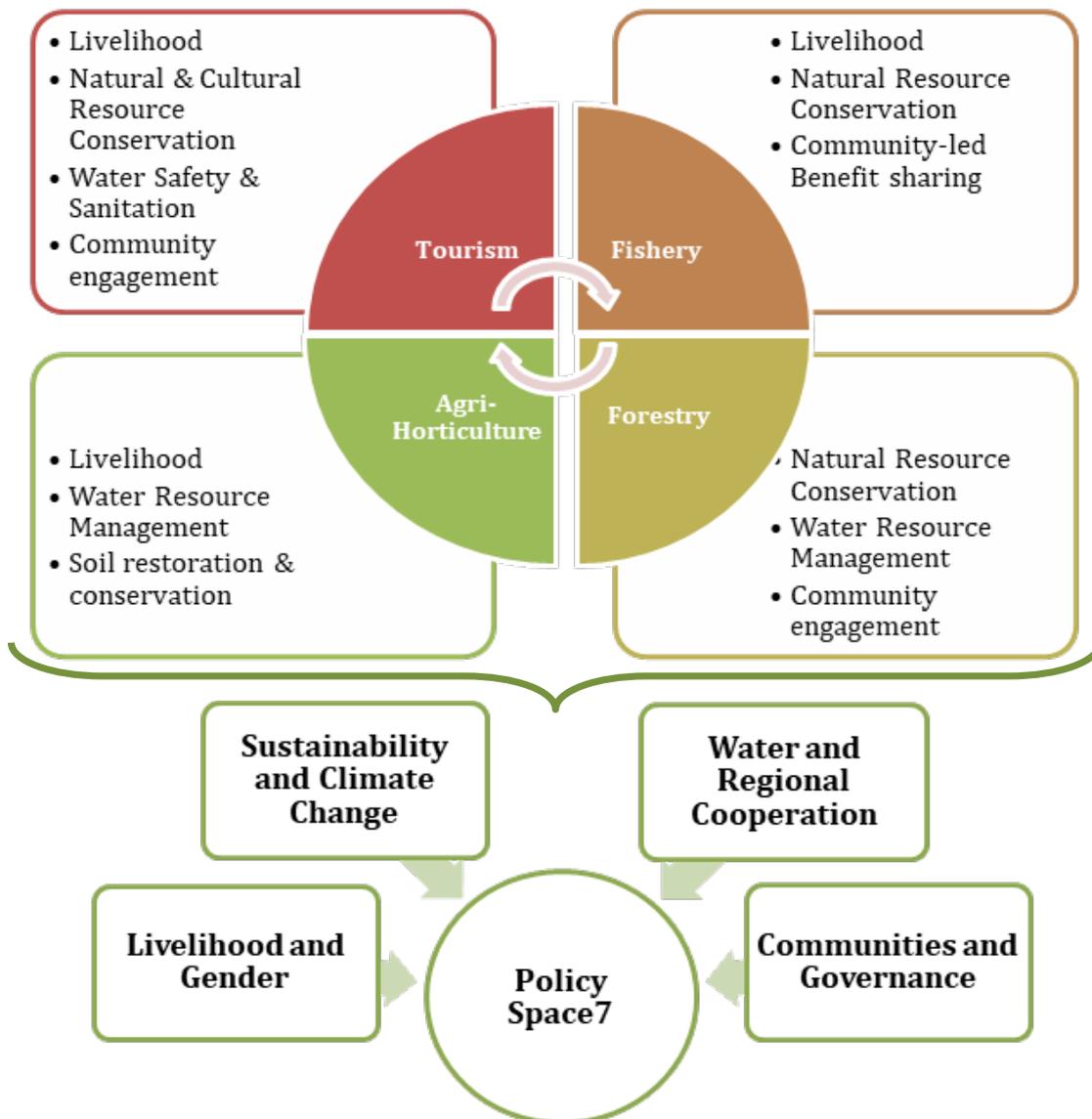


**OUTCOME OF CONVERSATIONS**

**I. Possible Sectors and Spaces of Engagement Identified**

The Mekong-Brahmaputra conversation series identified several learning opportunities and spaces at several levels: community level learning, institutional learning and also policy level learning. The key sectors where possibilities for cross-learning and collaboration between the Mekong and Brahmaputra-Meghna basins are the strongest are **Tourism, Fishery, Agri-Horticulture and Forestry**.

The figure below depicts the sectors (in circle) and the respective spaces (in rectangles) for cross-learning and collaborations at the community and institutional levels followed by a depiction of the key Policy Spaces (circles and rectangles below) that emerged.



## II. Idea Matrix

Conversations in course of the visit at various levels, viz. community, institutional and policy levels helped in the identification of several ideas, both specific and broad, for learning, collaborations and further action. The table below lists them in a matrix form. The idea is to briefly explain the ideas with a list of possible entities/players who may be involved or engaged and a possible action plan for their implementation.

<b>Specific Ideas on Tourism, Fishery, Forestry and Agri-horticulture</b>		
<b>Ideas for Collaborations</b>	<b>Possible Entities</b>	<b>Possible Action Agenda</b>
<p>Kulen-Kaziranga Conversations - Kulen is facing challenges in terms of joint working and management of the cultural and natural resources involving government, private entities and communities. It can learn from the experience in Kaziranga National Park in Assam, India on forest and wildlife management with the participation of local communities and private entities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kulen and Kaziranga Park Authorities</li> <li>• Forest Ministry/ Departments in Siem Reap and Assam</li> <li>• Scientific and Academic Institutions (IIT Guwahati)</li> <li>• Forest Communities</li> <li>• Thinktanks and CSOs</li> <li>• Private Players- Tourism and Forest-related resources</li> <li>• Media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment of Park Management institutions and frameworks for both parks – gaps, concerns, opportunities and roles of authorities, communities, private sector, CSOs</li> <li>• Track 2 Conversations – sharing of assessment results and deliberating on concrete action agenda</li> <li>• Track 1 conversation – sharing action agenda and finalising outline of collaboration</li> <li>• Implementation of collaboration</li> <li>• Media Outreach</li> </ul>
<p>Souvenir Plantation Park -Kulen has introduced an interesting idea and campaign on Tree Plantation, which is also an attraction for tourists visiting the park. It not only addresses the conservation and reforestation efforts, but also leads to strengthening the public discourse on the importance of natural resource management and conservation in the wake of climate change. The idea of a “Souvenir Park” where visitors plant saplings as their contribution to this effort is an idea that can be adopted in the Brahmaputra-Meghna basin parks and forests (e.g. Sacred Groves in Meghalaya) to build ownership and awareness around conservation themes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevant National Park Authorities</li> <li>• Relevant government departments in Siem Reap and Indian states</li> <li>• Forest Communities</li> <li>• Thinktanks and CSOs</li> <li>• Private Players- Tourism and Forest - related resources</li> <li>• Media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification of iconic and significant plant varieties that can have positive environmental and cultural implications through consultations with experts, forest communities, private sector and CSOs</li> <li>• Assessment of roles of authorities, communities, private sector, CSOs</li> <li>• Drawing up campaign idea and sustainability plan with emphasis on private sector and community involvement</li> <li>• Track 1.5 Conversations to validate and confirm idea and plant names</li> <li>• Implementation of collaboration including exchange visits and symbolic plantation</li> <li>• Media campaign for larger publicity and dissemination</li> </ul>

<p>Community Conversations between Tonle Sap (Siem reap, Cambodia) and Majuli (Assam, India), Ratergul (Sylhet, Bangladesh)-Strong possibilities (to learn from the example of the Tonle Sap)for the Barhmaputra-Meghna basin, particularly around livelihoods and sustainability through community tourism and community fishery (emphasis on community-led equitable benefit sharing mechanisms)and also the adaptation around flood waters to turn it into an opportunity. Given that climate change is expected to lead to higher inundation in the future, with much higher instances of flooding, the Tonle Sap communities offer an excellent case to learn from in this regard.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevant government departments in Siem Reap and Indian states</li> <li>• Flood Plain &amp; Forest Communities</li> <li>• Thinktanks and CSOs</li> <li>• Private Players- Tourism and Water Resource Management related</li> <li>• Media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Track 1.5 Conversations in Majuli and Ratergul to share the Tonle Sap experience and Case Study</li> <li>• Identifying private sector, community and civil society partners and leaders</li> <li>• Exchange visits by identified private sector, community and civil society leaders to Tonle Sap, Majuli and Ratergul</li> <li>• Drawing up concrete pilot ideas and plans with participation from private sector, communities, CSOs and experts (tourism, water resource management and livelihoods) with emphasis on specific themes to be adopted in the local context (community tourism, community fishery, etc.) and also on sustainable destination management for tourism</li> <li>• Piloting idea in Majuli and Ratergul</li> <li>• Exploring certification for sustainable tourism management</li> <li>• Media reachout</li> </ul>
<p>Community Conversations between Tonle Sap (Siem reap, Cambodia) and Dawki (Meghalaya, India-Bangladesh Border) - Strong possibilities to learn from the Kampong Plouk (Tonle Sap)about the community led management of tourism, particularly around boating services offered to tourists as a specific case. There has been a recent growth in tourism activity at Dawki, which is on the India-Bangladesh border in the Indian state of Meghalaya. The local entities who engage with tourism are not organized, regulated or well-structured. This results in less-than-optimum tourist satisfaction, revenues, and benefit sharing. Tourism entities can gain a lot by learning from the Kampong Plouk community tourism initiative.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevant government departments in Siem Reap and Meghalaya</li> <li>• Communities in Dawki and Tonle Sap</li> <li>• Thinktanks and CSOs</li> <li>• Private Players- Tourism and Water Resource Management related</li> <li>• Media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Track 1.5 Conversations in Dawki to share the Tonle Sap experience and Case Study</li> <li>• Identifying private sector, community and civil society partners and leaders</li> <li>• Exchange visits by identified private sector, community and civil society leaders to Tonle Sap</li> <li>• Drawing up concrete pilot ideas and plans with participation from private sector, communities, CSOs and experts (tourism, water resource management and livelihoods) with emphasis on specific themes to be adapted in the local context and also on sustainable destination management</li> <li>• Piloting idea in Dawki</li> <li>• Exploring certification for sustainable tourism management</li> <li>• Media dissemination</li> </ul>

<p>Research and Exchange on Solid and Water Waste management- Given the unique natural phenomenon of flooding for 6 months in an year, Tonle Sap communities face challenges in the domains of waste disposal and water quality management. There could be cross-learning from cases such as community level grey water disposal models from Meghalaya and also collaborative research on better management and quality monitoring of wastes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevant government departments in Siem Reap and Meghalaya (Meghalaya Basin Development Authority)</li> <li>• Communities in Meghalaya and Tonle Sap</li> <li>• Thinktanks and CSOs</li> <li>• Scientific Institutions (sanitation, water monitoring and management)</li> <li>• Private Players- Sanitation and Water Resource Management related</li> <li>• Media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Track 1.5 Conversations in Tonle Sap to share the Meghalaya experience</li> <li>• Identifying private sector, community and civil society partners and leaders</li> <li>• Exchange visits and training of identified private sector, community and civil society leaders on sanitation, water resource management &amp; monitoring and working models in Meghalaya</li> <li>• Drawing up concrete pilot ideas and plans with participation from private sector, communities, CSOs and experts</li> <li>• Piloting idea in Tonle Sap</li> <li>• Media dissemination</li> </ul>
<p>Vetiver for soil restoration: The idea of Vetiver cultivation to arrest erosion and restore soil quality can be adopted in some parts of the North Eastern hills, particularly in Meghalaya where deforestation is leading to soil erosion and degradation. Interventions for specific learning and replication can be initiated.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Authorities from Royal Study Centres in Thailand and relevant Institutions in Indian states (Meghalaya, Tripura, Assam)</li> <li>• Forest and Land Affairs Ministry/Departments in Indian states</li> <li>• Scientific and Academic Institutions (IIT Guwahati)</li> <li>• Communities</li> <li>• Thinktanks and CSOs</li> <li>• Private Players- Tourism and Forest related resources</li> <li>• Media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Track 1.5 Conversations in Indian states to share the Thailand experience and Case Study</li> <li>• Assessment of specific restoration and conservation needs in Indian states – gaps, concerns, opportunities and roles of authorities, communities, private sector, CSOs</li> <li>• Track 2 Conversations – sharing of assessment results and deliberating on concrete cross learning action agenda</li> <li>• Track 1 conversation – sharing action agenda and finalising outline of collaboration</li> <li>• Implementation of collaboration</li> <li>• Media Outreach</li> </ul>

<p>Resource, Demonstration and Training Centre in the form of a Friendship Park at India-Bangladesh Border: The royal study centres are worthy examples of curating and convergence of various disciplines, departments, activities and knowledge resources (training) at one place for demonstration and also building capacity of communities on various pertinent issues, leading to sustainability and income generation. A similar initiative could be thought of around the India-Bangladesh border with agriculture, forest conservation, tourism and commerce forming the pillars of engagement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Authorities from Royal Study Centres in Thailand and relevant Institutions in India and Bangladesh states/provinces</li> <li>• External Affairs, Agriculture and Land Affairs Ministry/ Departments in India and Bangladesh</li> <li>• Scientific and Agri-Research Institutions</li> <li>• Communities</li> <li>• Thinktanks and CSOs</li> <li>• Private Players- agri-horticulture related</li> <li>• Media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Track 1.5 Conversations involving Indian and Bangladeshi stakeholders to share the Thailand experience and Case Study</li> <li>• Examining possible locations and the specific needs along identified border regions– gaps, concerns, opportunities, sustainability plans and roles of authorities, communities, private sector, CSOs</li> <li>• Track 2 Conversations – sharing of assessment results and deliberating on project design and implementation</li> <li>• Track 1 conversation – sharing project design and action agenda and finalising outline of collaboration</li> <li>• Piloting of idea in one border location</li> <li>• Media Outreach</li> </ul>
--	---	--

Broad Ideas on Water Cooperation, Sustainable Hydropower Management, Tourism and Climate Change

Idea	Factors to be Examined	Possible Action Agenda
<p>Learning from the Council Study and exploring possibilities of convening a similar study in the Brahmaputra-Meghna basin</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examining the Council Study and its process- what worked and what did not, how can it be looked at as an example of riparian countries coming together to jointly work on this study</li> <li>• Examining the Mekong experience on advocacy around the key messages from the Council Study, approaches and platforms being used</li> <li>• How much of this can be adapted to the Brahmaputra-Meghna basin</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focused and quick research on the Council Study to understand various aspects including convening the study, agreeing on approach, methodology, timelines, challenges faced, etc to explore the possibility of putting together a similar exercise for this region.</li> <li>• Producing Policy and Advocacy Briefs to advocate with relevant entities in the Brahmaputra-Meghna basin</li> <li>• Track 1.5 Conversation to deliberate on how best to adapt the idea of such a study</li> <li>• Creating a Champions Group to push the idea at various levels</li> <li>• Publishing Op-Eds and Articles in leading media of all relevant countries</li> <li>• Explore synergies with large regional programmes on water cooperation in the region of multilateral agencies and development partners</li> <li>• Undertake advocacy and lobbying at various levels and platforms (Nadi Festival) to explore possibilities of a similar collaborative study</li> </ul>

<p>Learning about sustainable hydro-power from Mekong</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examining the entire hydropower experience</li> <li>• Negotiations and hydro-diplomacy between riparian countries</li> <li>• Examining trends in technology and plant size and recent shifts if any</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secondary Research on the Mekong hydropower experience</li> <li>• Track 1.5 Conversation to deliberate on how best to adapt the Mekong experience to the Brahmaputra-Meghna basin countries</li> <li>• Publishing Op-Eds and Articles in leading media of all relevant countries</li> <li>• Explore synergies of multilateral agencies and development partners with large regional programmes on energy cooperation and renewable energy in the region</li> <li>• Producing Policy Papers to highlight learning points from the Mekong experience</li> <li>• Identifying relevant scientific and policy institutions for research collaborations</li> <li>• Identifying private sector players in the energy sector to partner and collaborate</li> <li>• MoU between relevant institutions for research, technical collaborations and lobbying</li> </ul>
<p>Tourism as a tool for conservation - There are possibilities for culture and heritage linked exchange, research and collaborations (e.g. Kbal Spean River has a carved river bed with thousand lingas and there are similar natural formations in Assam, India) Collaborative research and exchange can look at how tourism can be leveraged as a tool to boost conservation and consensus on adoption of relevant means to deal with threats imposed by climate change on heritage and natural resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• History, Heritage and Cultural Institutions in Cambodia and India</li> <li>• Universities and Scientific Institutions in Cambodia and India</li> <li>• Communities</li> <li>• Thinktanks and CSOs</li> <li>• Private Players- Tourism related</li> <li>• Media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification of research ideas and themes on cultural and historical linkages between the nations, particularly around heritage structures and architecture</li> <li>• Track 2 dialogues between cultural, scientific and academic institutions based on identified ideas and themes resulting in validation and finalisation of ideas and themes</li> <li>• MoU between relevant institutions of the concerned countries for collaborative research and scholar exchange on identified themes</li> <li>• Undertaking Research</li> <li>• Disseminating research outcomes through media</li> <li>• Advocacy of research outcomes with policymakers for necessary and concrete action</li> </ul>

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

The recommendations are divided into two sections, the first deals with those that are overarching and broad and the second talks about specific recommendations that are action oriented. In view of the fact that this is an Outcome Report, the recommendations in the second section are tagged to certain envisioned and desired outcomes.

Overall, the project learning recommends that a multidisciplinary approach be adopted towards understanding and engaging with water, involving a combination of several aspects: technology, management and governance (ecology and other resources).

The overarching recommendations are as follows:

- **Institutionalising the idea of cross-basin conversations on communities and livelihoods.** While there are several for a talking about trade and transit related exchange and collaborations between South and South East Asia, few focus on livelihood and community centric collaborations. The Mekong –Brahmaputra Conversations have been a pioneering and seminal effort in this direction and ushers in a fresh dimension in the existing narratives on regional collaborations and dialogues. This idea and dialogue process needs to be institutionalised, with common ecological concerns underlying its base. Civil Society partners and institutions in the respective basins can strengthen this approach through further conversations and collaborations between and among themselves.
- **Using ground level evidence and learning captured through Case Studies as an input for Policy making.** In the macro discourse on Regional Cooperation, many a time the small, micro level experiences and learning are lost. It is important to feed this micro level learning meaningfully into the larger scheme of things for them. For e.g. the Thailand Case success story on vetiver grass for soil and natural resource conservation can be adopted in the context of the geography of Meghalaya-Bangladesh leading not only to conservation and engagement at the micro level, but also building trust and cooperation between the two nations, aided of course by other complementary factors.
- **Germinating the relationships and networks** built over the two iterations of the Mekong-Brahmaputra Conversations in order to pave the way to collaborative research projects.
- **Assessing the legal and governance frameworks and institutions in the Brahmaputra-Meghna basin** to understand how specific learning from the Mekong basin can be adopted in this region. The idea is to come up with a Power Map capturing the flow of power and authority and also identifying the change agents within the existing frameworks.

The specific recommendations that have emerged are tagged to three broad outcomes which are highlighted below:

**I. Using the knowledge products to initiate discussions, influence discourses and possible incorporation of ideas at various levels including policy, research and practice**

This is meant as an immediate outcome and follow-up action on phase II of Mekong Brahmaputra Conversation series. The following are recommended:

- Publishing the Case Studies prepared during Phase II
- Using them as Dissemination and Conversation products to initiate discussions and create discourse around issues and themes
- Organise a Dissemination event at Shillong to share the learning and possibilities from the exchange visit, particularly hinging on the Knowledge Products created
- Explore collaborations at policy, institutional and community levels to have ‘Conversation events’ using these knowledge products to help identify further spaces and spheres of use for the products, with particular emphasis on sub-national and regional leaders who can initiate action around the ideas shared. For e.g. the idea of establishing a “Friendship Park” along the Bangladesh-India (Meghalaya) borders on the same lines as the Royal Study Centres of Thailand will need planning, discussions and dialogues with stakeholders and leaders at sub-national, national and regional levels.

**II. Charting a roadmap to further the learning and collaboration opportunities identified under this phase of the Mekong-Brahmaputra Conversations series**

The aim is to create an Action Plan for further pursuing the ideas generated during this phase. To this end, the following are recommended:

- **Identifying and Prioritising workable Ideas from the Idea matrix:** This will comprise of a closed door brainstorming roundtable involving HBF and Asian Confluence to identify those ideas that seem the most potential and low hanging. The other factor that needs consideration is whether the ideas harmonise with the focus and themes of HBF and/or Asian Confluence. The outcome of this exercise will be a document with a prioritised list of ideas (5 to start with) along with inputs for possible plan of action on them, tentative names of possible partners and allies (which is to be validated and confirmed later), a tentative timeline for action on the idea and the envisaged outcome. This document will then help to animate and inform the plan ahead, which could include new projects as well as involve the incorporation and/or alignment of the identified ideas in/with existing projects and initiatives.

- **Validating tentatively identified partners and allies and initiating discussions with them:** This will take on from the previous step and involve initiation of discussions with prospective partners and allies to understand the possible contours of collaboration that can happen over specific ideas. The partnerships could be in the form of technical assistance, funding support, networking support, community reachout, policy reachout, media reachout, etc.
- **Piloting selected ideas at various levels, viz. community, institutional, sub-regional and regional:** This will be done after the prioritised ideas have been worked upon to finalise the contours of specific interventions, the partners are in place and the ground has been prepared for the pilot to take place. More details about this stage will evolve only after the prioritised ideas are listed indicating the possibilities, challenges, partners and hence the design of the pilot intervention.

### III. Linking ideas, initiatives and discourses at the ground level with the larger discourse around water and rivers at the policy level, with particular emphasis on regional cooperation and also leveraging the linkages between South and South East Asia

The idea is to be able to contribute to policy and frameworks at the macro level from the experience and learning gained on the ground, and also to contribute in a way that aligns with the geo-political realities and trends.

- Preparing a Sustainable Tourism Policy Design for the flood plain and hills of North East India drawing on the learning from Siem Reap province of Cambodia
- Initiate a policy level discourse on adopting from the Mekong River Commission, particularly around the MRC Council Study as a starting point. This could possibly involve North Eastern states, their neighbouring countries and their respective institutions. The intended outcome is to come up with a Framework and Institutional Mechanism to collaborate on water. The idea will be to organise a series of brainstorming and ideating exercises at state, national and regional levels to discover ways to initiate a similar study in South Asia in a phased manner:
  - o The first phase could look at bringing the states in North Eastern Region (NER) together to understand how they can talk to each other and collaborate on shared rivers
  - o In the next phase, bilateral ideation and dialogues can follow, viz. between NER and Bangladesh and NER and Myanmar
  - o The subsequent phase(s) could look at sub-regional or littoral (BIMSTEC) dialogues

- o This could be a pillar for NADI 2019:
  - Developing a Framework and Institutional Mechanism (in BIMSTEC) to collaborate on Water, drawing from the South East Asia (Mekong) experience.
  - A good way could be to do an initial set of sessions/dialogues in the NER in the run up to the Asian Confluence Flagship Initiative NADI and present an early outline of the thinking on this.
  - Given the multiple layers, sectors and aspects of water and rivers, the AsCon initiative could prioritise 3-4 areas. They could be Livelihoods (emphasis on tourism), Cultural & Spiritual Goods, Connectivity and Hydropower.
  - Other partners may look at issues like disaster management, water resource management, sediment management, forest resources, biodiversity preservation, etc.
- Identifying platforms and forums to push forth the ideas, research outcomes and advocacy messages. This will include exploring regional platforms (BIMSTEC, IORA) and also various regional programmes on water by development partners to see how networks and platforms under these programmes can be leveraged to put key advocacy messages across to relevant stakeholders. It will also be useful to understand how results, outcomes and messages can be used to influence and contribute to the design and execution of regional programmes on water. The outcome is an Advocacy Strategy at meso and macro levels.

As a collaboration between Heinrich Böll Stiftung (HBF) and Asian Confluence (AsCon) the Mekong-Brahmaputra Conversations, in its two iterations, have been a seminal initiative pregnant with the promise of germination of several collaborative projects spanning a large array of stakeholders including governments, communities, civil society and industries. The initiative and its scope needs to be both deepened and expanded. The relationships forged under the initiative need to be nurtured through a structured and time-bound programme of further interactions backed by research. HBF and AsCon should also collaborate to showcase and share the initiative and its outcomes with a larger audience so as to inspire similar endeavours and initiatives in other spaces and contexts.

## ANNEXURE: NETWORK CREATED

Sr. No.	Name	Designation	Organisation	Brief	Country
1	Mr. Sheikh Rokonzaman	Secretary General	Riverine People	<p>Founded in July 2008, Riverine People voluntarily works on rivers, efficient water resources and management and community development with intense passion and firm perceptions and convictions.</p> <p>More information on: <a href="http://www.riverinepeople.net">www.riverinepeople.net</a></p>	Dhaka, Bangladesh
2	Dr. Abul Kalam Enamul Haque	Professor	East West University	<p>One of the Bangladesh's great intellectual destinations, the East-West University empowers and encourages scholars, students and academicians to propagate independent thinking, across disciplinary boundaries, and challenges conventional thinking with a mission to enrich human life around Bangladesh.</p> <p>More information on: <a href="http://www.ewubd.edu/">http://www.ewubd.edu/</a></p>	Dhaka, Bangladesh
3	Mr. Namgyal Wangchuk	Head of Operations	River Guides of Panbang	<p>Founded in 2012, River Guides of Panbang is Bhutan's first community initiated pro-conservation oriented group that specializes in Rafting, Eco-camps, Bird Watching, Eco-lodge, Kayaking and other environmentally responsible eco-tourism packages.</p> <p>More information on: <a href="https://www.facebook.com/RiverGuidesOfPanbang/">https://www.facebook.com/RiverGuidesOfPanbang/</a></p>	Panbang, Bhutan
4	Mr. Jyotiraj Patra	Project Manager	Oxfam Novib	<p>Oxfam is a confederation of 20 independent charitable organizations focusing on the alleviation of global poverty. The confederation was founded in 1942 and is led by Oxfam International.</p> <p>More info on: <a href="https://www.oxfamnovib.nl/">https://www.oxfamnovib.nl/</a></p>	Cambodia
5	Mr. Senglong Youk	Deputy Executive Director	Fisheries Action Coalition Team	<p>The Fisheries Action Coalition Team (FACT) is a Cambodian coalition of Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) working on fisheries and environmental issues around the Tonle Sap, Coastal and Mekong provinces. FACT mobilizes provincial NGOs and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) to effectively conduct advocacy programs in response to national policies and development programs.</p> <p>More information on: <a href="http://www.fact.org.kh/">http://www.fact.org.kh/</a></p>	Cambodia
6	Prof. Chandan Mahanta	Professor and Head, Department of Civil Engineering	Indian Institute of Technology (IIT)	<p>Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Guwahati, the 60<sup>th</sup> member of the IIT fraternity, was established in 1994. IIT Guwahati has been successful in building up world class infrastructure for carrying out advanced research and has been equipped with state-of-the-art scientific and engineering instruments.</p> <p>More information on: <a href="http://www.iitg.ac.in">http://www.iitg.ac.in</a></p>	Guwahati, India

7	Mrs. Rose Christine Mawlot Kharsyntiew	Assistant Manager	Institute of Natural Resource Management (INRM), Meghalaya Basin Development Authority	The Institute of Natural Resources Management (INRM) is one of the three Institutes established under the overall umbrella of the Meghalaya Basin Development Authority (MBDA). The main objective of the institution is to manage and strengthen knowledge for natural resources and sustainable livelihoods. More information on: <a href="http://www.mbda.gov.in/">http://www.mbda.gov.in/</a>	Meghalaya, India
8	Dr. Veena Vidyadharan	Fellow and Centre Head, Centre for International Trade, Economics and Environment	CUTS International	Established in 1983-84, as a rural development communication initiative, CUTS has become a leading Southern voice on international trade and connectivity, rule based trade mechanisms, effective regulation and good governance. More information on: <a href="http://www.cuts-international.org/">http://www.cuts-international.org/</a>	India
9	Mr. Fransiskus Tarmedj	Research Manager	Heinrich Boll Stiftung, India	The Heinrich Böll Stiftung, India is a Germany based independent political foundation, affiliated to the German Green Party and founded in 1997. It describes itself as an agency for green visions and projects, a think tank for policy reforms, and an international network. More information on: <a href="https://www.boell.de/en">https://www.boell.de/en</a>	Thailand
10	Ms. Chamaporn Paiboonvorachat	Specialist	Agriculture and Irrigation Program (AIP), Mekong River Mission (MRC)	Under the Strategic Plan 2011-2015, the Mekong River Mission's Agriculture and Irrigation Programme (AIP) aimed at managing the sustainable development of water resources in agriculture, because the sector is one of the first points of intervention in order to raise living standards, improve livelihoods and mitigate poverty. More information on <a href="http://www.mrcmekong.org">http://www.mrcmekong.org</a>	Lao PDR
11	Mrs. Sadiya Sohail	Programme Coordinator	Heinrich Boll Stiftung, India	The Heinrich Böll Stiftung, India is a Germany based independent political foundation, affiliated to the German Green Party and founded in 1997. It describes itself as an agency for green visions and projects, a think tank for policy reforms, and an international network. More info on: <a href="https://www.boell.de/en">https://www.boell.de/en</a>	India
12	Mr. Raphael Glemet	Senior Programme Officer	Water and Wetlands, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)	The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) provides public, private and non-governmental organisations with the knowledge and tools that enable human progress, economic development and nature conservation to take place together. IUCN Water and Wetlands Program is directed towards developing grassroot communities and river basin agencies as a part of its water management work. More information on: <a href="https://www.iucn.org">https://www.iucn.org</a>	Thailand

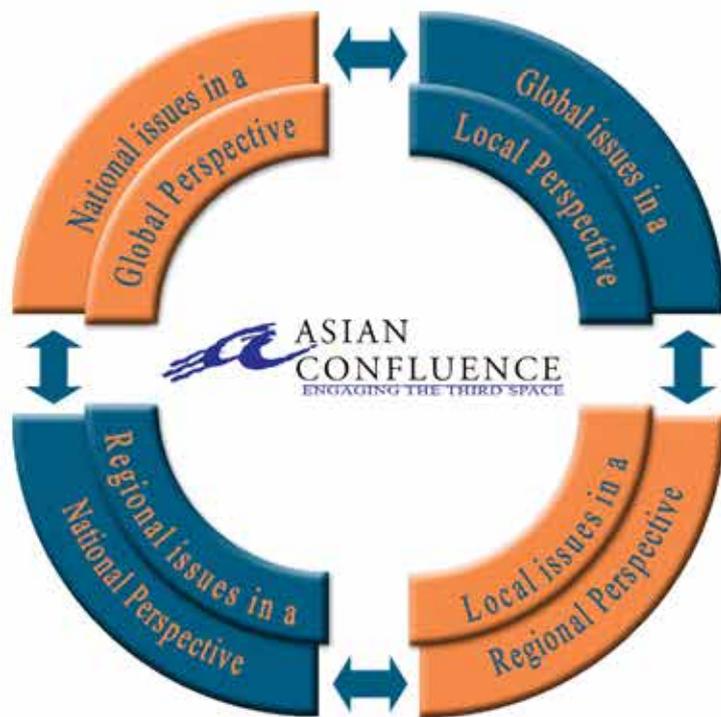
13	Mr. Vishwa Ranjan	Programme Officer	Natural Resources Group, IUCN	<p>The Natural Resource Governance Framework (NRGF) is an IUCN initiative created for the purpose of providing a robust, inclusive, and credible approach to assessing and strengthening natural resource governance at multiple levels and in diverse contexts.</p> <p>More information on: <a href="https://www.iucn.org/commissions/commission-environmental-economic-and-social-policy/our-work/knowledge-baskets/natural-resource-governance">https://www.iucn.org/commissions/commission-environmental-economic-and-social-policy/our-work/knowledge-baskets/natural-resource-governance</a></p>	Thailand
14	Mr. Gary Lee	Policy Advisor	Mekong Water Governance Programme, Oxfam	<p>Oxfam’s Mekong Water Governance Program works with communities across the Mekong and Salween river basins, who are affected by the increase in water and land grabbing, outright denial of human rights, and rising threats to food security (impact on fish, rice cultivation, and riverbank gardens).</p> <p>More information on: <a href="https://asia.oxfam.org/what-we-do/mekong-water-governance">https://asia.oxfam.org/what-we-do/mekong-water-governance</a></p>	Lao PDR
15	Dr. Nguyen Dinh Dat	OIC-Modelling Team, Information Knowledge Management Programme	Vietnam National Mekong Committee	<p>OIC Modelling Team promotes and coordinates management and development of water resources and related resources in a sustainable way for the common good of nations and the well-being of the community by implementing activities and chapters.</p> <p>More information on: <a href="http://vnmc.gov.vn/">http://vnmc.gov.vn/</a></p>	Vietnam
16	Mr. Ratana Pen		Heinrich Boll Stiftung, India	<p>The Heinrich Böll Stiftung, India is a Germany based independent political foundation, affiliated to the German Green Party and founded in 1997. It describes itself as an agency for green visions and projects, a think tank for policy reforms, and an international network.</p> <p>More information on: <a href="https://www.boell.de/en">https://www.boell.de/en</a></p>	Cambodia
17	Mr. Hok Menghoin	Environment Program Manager	The NGO Forum on Cambodia	<p>The mission of the NGO Forum on Cambodia is to coordinate and equip network/members and other civil society organizations to actively engage in policy dialogues, debates and advocacy for the poor and vulnerable people in Cambodia.</p> <p>More information on: <a href="http://www.ngoforum.org.kh">http://www.ngoforum.org.kh</a></p>	Cambodia
18	Mr. Sour Hay	Deputy Chief of SR	FA Cantonment - Siem Reap	<p>FA Cantonment – Siem Reap has the unique mission to upscale and update community Forestry Programs in order to reach out to maximum numbers of grassroot communities.</p> <p>More information on: <a href="http://www.cdc-crdb.gov.kh/cdc/gdcc/twelfth/report_twg/forestry.htm">http://www.cdc-crdb.gov.kh/cdc/gdcc/twelfth/report_twg/forestry.htm</a></p>	Cambodia

19	Mr. Ouk Kongvong		Human Resource and Rural Economic Development Organization (Hurredo)	Hurredo is a non-government, non-profit and non-political organisation working in an economically and socially sustainable manner on a multitude of projects in the fields of agriculture, food security, health, and governance. More info on: <a href="https://www.hurredo.org/">https://www.hurredo.org/</a>	Cambodia
20	Mr. Venerable Loeurm	Executive Director	Life and Hope Association	Life and Hope Association (LHA) is a non-profit, non-governmental and an education-focused organization. It was established in 2005 by the monks of WatDammak in Siem Reap, Cambodia, and is committed to breaking the cycle of poverty by providing compassionate care and access to education to the poorest and the most vulnerable in Cambodia – especially children and disadvantaged young women. More information on: <a href="http://www.lifeandhopeangkor.org/">http://www.lifeandhopeangkor.org/</a>	Cambodia
21	Mr. Oum Sorphorn		Rachna Satrei NGO	RachnaSatrei is a grassroots NGO based in Siem Reap, Cambodia. It strives to reduce violence and discrimination towards women, children and the disabled, by improving their socio-economic situation through education, advocacy and community development projects while promoting their rights in the wider community. More information on: <a href="http://rachnasatrei.wixsite.com/rachnasatrei">http://rachnasatrei.wixsite.com/rachnasatrei</a>	Cambodia
22	Mr. Sous Sakhann	Deputy Director	Kulen National Park	Phnom Kulen National Park, officially known as PreahCheyvaraman-Norodom Phnom Kulen National Park is a National park in Cambodia. It is located in the Phnom Kulen mountain massif in Siem Reap Province. More information on: <a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phnom_Kulen_National_Park">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phnom_Kulen_National_Park</a>	Cambodia
23	Mr. KE Sovann		OSMOSE	OSMOSE initiate novel approaches to environmental protection: advancing conservation objectives through environmental education, community support and alternative income generation from ecotourism. More information on: <a href="https://www.osmose.com">https://www.osmose.com</a>	Cambodia
24	Mr. Keo Sophat	Coordinator	NGO Coordinator Network Siem Reap	Siem Reap has a unique mission to upscale and update community Forestry Programs in order to reach out to a maximum number of grassroot communities. More information on: <a href="http://www.cdc-crdb.gov.kh/cdc/gdcc/twelfth/report_twg/forestry.htm">http://www.cdc-crdb.gov.kh/cdc/gdcc/twelfth/report_twg/forestry.htm</a>	Cambodia

25	Mr.LokChhaingim	Representative	BanteySrei temple	BanteaySrei or BanteaySrey is a 10th-century Cambodian temple dedicated to the Hindu lord Shiva. BanteaySrei is built largely of red sandstone, a medium that lends itself to the elaborate decorative wall carvings which are still discernible today.  More information on: <a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banteay_Srei">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banteay_Srei</a>	Cambodia
26	Mr.Hok Ky	Representative	Kampong Plouk Community	Kampong Plouk is a commune and village in Siem Reap Province in northern-central Cambodia. It is a village built on stilts on the Tonle Sap. The name means “Harbor of the Tusks”.	Cambodia
27	Mr. Mink Bunly	Representative	Fishery Action Collation Team (FACT)	The Fisheries Action Coalition Team (FACT) is a Cambodian coalition of Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) working on fisheries and environmental issues around the Tonle Sap, Coastal and Mekong provinces. FACT mobilizes provincial NGOs and Community-Based Organization (CBOs) to effectively conduct advocacy programs in response to national policies and development programs.  More information on: <a href="http://www.fact.org.kh/">http://www.fact.org.kh/</a>	Cambodia
28	Ms. Kulkanya Hiranyasthiti		International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)	The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) provides public, private and non-governmental organisations with the knowledge and tools that enable human progress, economic development and nature conservation to take place simultaneously. IUCN Water and Wetlands Program is directed towards developing grassroot communities and river basin agencies as a part of its water management work.  More information on: <a href="https://www.iucn.org">https://www.iucn.org</a>	Thailand
29	Mr. Auttanit Phongsai	Officer	HuaiSai Royal Development Study Center	The HuaiSai Royal Development Study Center is situated in Cha-am, Phetchaburi Province. The centre serves as a venue for research and development in reforestation and agricultural production to meet the needs of the local people.  More information on: <a href="http://www.huaysaicenter.org/">http://www.huaysaicenter.org/</a>	Thailand
30	Mr. Tanchanok Namwibul	Officer	HuaiSai Royal Development Study Center	The HuaiSai Royal Development Study Center is situated in Cha-am, Phetchaburi Province. The centre serves as a venue for research and development in reforestation and agricultural production in order to meet the needs of the local people.  More information on: <a href="http://www.huaysaicenter.org/">http://www.huaysaicenter.org/</a>	Thailand

31	Kullawat Kaewtea	Officer	Huai Sai Royal Development Study Center	<p>The HuaiSai Royal Development Study Center is situated in Cha-am, Phetchaburi Province. The centre serves as a venue for research and development in reforestation and agricultural production in order to meet the needs of the local people.</p> <p>More information on: <a href="http://www.huaysaicenter.org/">http://www.huaysaicenter.org/</a></p>	Thailand
32	Ms. Jarunam Srifa	Officer	KhaoHinSorn Royal Development Study Center	<p>KhaoHinSorn Royal Development Study Center is located in the Cha Cheng Sao province (Eastern part of Thailand). His Majesty, the King has established this study center since 1979 as an integrated model to cater to rehabilitation of degraded soil, reforestation, water management and crop improvement.</p> <p>More information on: <a href="http://www.campaignactivity.com/museumthailand">http://www.campaignactivity.com/museumthailand</a></p>	Thailand
33	Ms. Salisa Phanitphon	Officer	KhaoHinSorn Royal Development Study Center	<p>KhaoHinSorn Royal Development Study Center located in Cha Cheng Sao province (Eastern part of Thailand). It covers 303 hectares. His Majesty the King has established this study center in 1979 as an integrated model to cater to: rehabilitation of the degraded soil, reforestation, water management and crop improvement.</p> <p>More information on: <a href="http://www.campaignactivity.com/museumthailand">http://www.campaignactivity.com/museumthailand</a></p>	Thailand
34	Ms.Parida Limrak	Officer	KhaoHinSorn Royal Development Study Center	<p>KhaoHinSorn Royal Development Study Center located in Cha Cheng Sao province (Eastern part of Thailand). It covers 303 hectares. His Majesty the King has established this study center since 1979 as the integrated model to rehabilitate the degraded soil, reforestation, water management and crop improvement.</p> <p>More information on: <a href="http://www.campaignactivity.com/museumthailand">http://www.campaignactivity.com/museumthailand</a></p>	Thailand





Asian Confluence Center, Divya Jeevan Complex,  
Lady Veronica Park, Laitumkhrah,  
Shillong, Meghalaya - 793 003

 [asianconfluence.org](http://asianconfluence.org)