The YSLME and WWF Partnership for Marine Biodiversity Conservation: Scientific, Policy, and Financial Benefits of an Ecosystem Scale Partnership

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The UNDP/GEF Yellow Sea Large Marine Ecosystem (YSLME) project and WWF have been implementing biodiversity conservation actions through a partnership since 2005 in the Yellow Sea. This partnership is at the scale of the Yellow Sea marine ecosystem, and its scope covers the areas of conducting scientific analysis of biodiversity, developing policies for their conservation, and implementing demonstration activities of the policies on the ground. The partnership has brought multiple scientific, policy and financial benefits to planning and implementation of marine and coastal biodiversity policies.

WWF started an ecosystem-scale biodiversity conservation planning project called "the Yellow Sea Ecoregion Planning Programme (YSEPP)" in 2002 with the aim of identifying most important areas for biodiversity conservation in the Yellow Sea Ecoregion, which encompasses the Bohai Sea, Yellow Sea and part of the East China Sea, and developing a conservation strategy and action plan. The YSLME project was initiated in 1990's and it was approved by the GEF Executive Council in 2000 with UNDP as an implementing agency. The partnership formally started in 2005 with signing of a memorandum of understanding on cooperating for marine and coastal biodiversity by four parties, UNDP, WWF, YSLME project, and Yellow Sea Ecoregion project.

The partnership has been operating successfully based on mainly two principles: 1) mutual participation and 2) joint implementation. A combination of these principles was a key to developing an effective cooperation and bringing benefits to biodiversity protection in the region.

In the area of scientific partnership, the mode of partnership was mutual participation. Two projects had already planned and partly started their own plans for scientific analyses of important areas or causes of environmental degradation. Therefore a practical partnership in this

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area was to participate in each project's analysis mutually. Benefits achieve through this partnership were: sharing of scientific data on habitats and species, exchange of scientific experts between two projects, learning approaches and methodologies that were necessary to develop biodiversity policies such as ecoregion planning methodology for identification of priority areas in a large marine ecosystem and trans-boundary diagnostic analysis (TDA) including causal chain analysis. These factors lead to improvement of quality of outputs from both projects, a Potential Priority Map by the YSEPP project and a TDA report by the YSLME project.

In the stage of developing biodiversity policies and its demonstration activities, the partnership took a more advance mode, joint implementation. At the beginning of partnership, it was recognised that two activities shared a common objective of developing policies for biodiversity conservation, for this reason it was decided that a process for policy development should unified. As a result, it achieved an output of a common and single Strategic Action Plan (SAP) for the Yellow Sea with its policy targets and management actions fully shared by both projects. It also brought benefits of using shared approaches to assessing status of sites that are most appropriate as demonstration sites, such as adopting representation system of wetland types for listing candidate sites for demonstration and evaluating management effectiveness of shortlisted sites.

The partnership helped to raise additional funds for implementation of a common strategy A project was newly funded by a business sector, which aims at improving public awareness on important marine and coastal habitats around the Yellow Sea Ecoregion and increasing effectiveness of coastal habitat management. This project, the Yellow Sea Ecoregion Support Project, lasts for 7 years between 2007 and 2014 with a budget of about 170,000,000 Japanese yen (cir. US$1,800,000). The funding comes from a multi-national corporation, Panasonic, and the project is managed by WWF Japan. The partnership between the YSLME project and WWF and its achievements helped to show evidence of good coordination with and a strong support by the governments in the region, namely China and the Republic of Korea. This was one key factor to achieve involvement of the business sector. Actions in the project are part of the Strategic Action Plan for the Yellow Sea, therefore, this funding should be regarded as a new and additional co-financing for the implementation of the SAP.

In future, the YSLME project and WWF plans to apply its achievements and lessons from the partnership to set up a network of MPAs in the Yellow Sea.