



AFB/B.46-47/5
13 July 2026

Adaptation Fund Board

**REQUEST FOR EXTENSION OF PROJECT INCEPTION DATE
(SIGNIFICANT DELAY): UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION (CAMBODIA,
LAO PDR, THAILAND, VIETNAM)**

Background

1. The Adaptation Fund Board (the Board) during its intersessional period between its thirty-eight and thirty-ninth meetings approved a four year project titled “*Groundwater Resources in the Greater Mekong Subregion: Collaborative Management to Increase Climate Change Resilience*”, submitted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), for a total amount of US\$ 4,898,775 (Decision B.38-39/12).
2. The project objective is to establish effective regional capacities, partnerships and network in the Greater Mekong Subregion (Vietnam, Lao PDR, Cambodia, Thailand) for the sustainable management and utilization of groundwater resources as an adaptation response to protect people, livelihoods and ecosystems from climate change impacts.
3. As mandated by the Decision, an agreement was prepared and signed between the Board and UNESCO on 7 December 2022, and the first cash transfer took place on 2 February 2023, setting an original inception target date of 2 August 2023.
4. As part of its regular portfolio monitoring, the secretariat has regularly follow-up with UNESCO on the estimated project inception date, guiding UNESCO on compliance with the Fund's Policy for Project/Programme delays (amended in April 2025). On 9 June 2026, UNESCO submitted a request for extension of project inception date from 2 August 2023 to 20 May 2026.
5. According to UNESCO, the original inception workshop, originally planned for 2023, was repeatedly postponed due to logistical constraints and coordination challenges across the four project countries. In addition, a major government restructuring in Vietnam during 2024-2025 significantly affected the inception phase, requiring additional inter-ministerial and provincial consultations to ensure compliance with new security and financial regulations.
6. UNESCO conducted a series of regional and national consultations to address these delays, in July 2023, January and February 2024, and June and July 2024, with follow-up engagements through October 2025. Regional consultations with the Executing Entities focused on institutional roles, Executing Entity agreements, and inception workshop planning. National consultations engaged the relevant government counterparts in each country, including Viet Nam's Ministry of Agriculture and Environment (MAE) and its agency NAWAPI, Cambodia's Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology, and National Mekong Committee, Thailand's Department of Groundwater Resources, and Lao PDR's climate and water agencies. Outcomes of these consultations included an agreement on 20 May 2026 as the revised inception workshop date, commitment by Vietnam to advance ODA approval, and recognition of diplomatic sensitivities requiring neutral venue options.

Secretariat's review of the request

7. Following a review of the request by the secretariat and considering the explanation provided by UNESCO, the secretariat is of the view that the request for extension of project inception date (significant delay) is justified.
8. The Secretariat acknowledges that the Designated Authorities have been notified, in accordance with the amended Policy for Project/Programme Delays, as specified in Annex 1.

Recommendation

9. The Board may consider and decide to approve the request for extension of project inception date (significant delay) from 2 August 2023 to 20 May 2026 for the project “*Groundwater Resources in the Greater Mekong Subregion: Collaborative Management to Increase Climate Change Resilience*” as requested by UNESCO.

Annex

1. Request for extension of project inception date from UNESCO

Annex 1: Request for extension of the project inception date from UNESCO**D. REQUEST FOR DELAY OF PROJECT/PROGRAMME INCEPTION**

Implementing Entity Name: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)			
AF Project/programme ID: AF00000091			
Project/programme Title: Groundwater Resources in the Greater Mekong Subregion: Collaborative Management to Increase Climate Change Resilience			
Country(ies): Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand, Viet Nam			
Project/Programme Approval (date)	28 July 2022		
Expected Project/programme Start (date)	2 August 2023	Proposed Revised Inception (date):	20 May 2026

Reasons/ justification for delay in the project's/programme's inception and the number of months of delay from the project approval date

Delay from project approval date: Approximately 33 months (project approved August 2023).

Regional Inception Meeting postponements: The meeting originally planned for 2023, has undergone repeated postponements due to logistical constraints and coordination challenges among the four project countries. Cambodia initially proposed hosting it in mid-2024, before the venue was later shifted to Bangkok. Ultimately, it was held on 20 May 2026.

Institutional restructuring in Viet Nam: The approval authority for ODA projects shifted from the Prime Minister's Office to the newly created Ministry of Agriculture and Environment (MAE) in March 2025, following a major government restructuring that merged the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD). This change had a significant impact on the inception phase, requiring additional inter-ministerial and provincial consultations, dossier revisions, and compliance with new security and financial regulations.

Approaches/ mitigation measures to ensure the start of project/programme implementation

UNESCO held the Regional Inception Meeting on 20 May 2026. UNESCO will now implement the workplan with clear milestones, including signing of Implementation Partner Agreements immediately after. Internal clearance will be secured, and beneficiary governments engaged. Roles of the Coordinating Committee for Geoscience Programmes in East and Southeast Asia (CCOP-TS), International Water Management Institute (IWMI), and International Groundwater Resources Assessment Centre (IGRAC) will be confirmed, and governance mechanisms established. Compliance will be strengthened through timely reporting, safeguards, and gender mainstreaming, while contingency measures will address procurement delays. Visibility actions, such as launch events, press releases, and donor branding, along with co-financing and regional partnerships, will support timely implementation.

Challenges (in addition to those mentioned in section 1) that may extend the project/programme completion date)

The project may continue to face delays due to the complex ODA approval process in Viet Nam, which requires detailed technical clarifications, formal clearance, and inter-ministerial consultations. Implementation Partner Agreements with the CCOP-TS, IWMI, and IGRAC remain pending, affecting procurement and technical backstopping. Additionally, differing national preferences regarding hosting arrangements have required additional regional coordination, contributing to delays in reaching agreement on the Regional Inception Meeting, a critical milestone for harmonizing approaches and enabling government approvals. UNESCO will address these issues through adaptive planning, strengthened coordination and accelerated inception-phase clearances to ensure the project can formally begin without further delay.

Please confirm whether the Environmental and Social Policy related risks screening presented in Part II.K of the project document and the associated mitigation measures presented in Part III.C and related Environmental and Social Management Plan are still valid, or provide a revised fully-developed project/programme document in track changes highlighting the revised elements if necessary.

UNESCO confirms that the Environmental and Social Risk Screening (Part II.K) and the Environmental and Social Management Plan (Part III.C) remain valid and in compliance with the Adaptation Fund's Environmental and Social Policy. In line with AF requirements and good practice, these safeguards will be reviewed and updated after the inception phase to incorporate any new information from stakeholder consultations and finalized workplans. To ensure full compliance, UNESCO will submit a revised project document in track changes, including an updated ESMP and GAP within one month after the Regional Inception Meeting, by 20 June 2026 at the latest. No activities with potential environmental or social risk will commence until the updated safeguards have been reviewed and cleared by the Adaptation Fund Board. UNESCO will provide interim progress updates and will draw on technical expertise from regional partners to ensure quality and timeliness of these revisions.

Please describe the consultative process carried out, including the list of stakeholders consulted and the consultation outcomes, in the context of the request for delay in project/programme inception.

UNESCO held regional and national consultations in Jul 2023, Jan-Feb 2024, and Jun-Jul 2024, with follow-up engagements through Oct 2025, to address delays and agree on next steps. Regionally, meetings with CCOP-TS, IWMI, and IGRAC focused on roles, Executing Entity agreements, and planning for the Regional Inception Meeting. Nationally, Viet Nam's Ministry of Agriculture and Environment (MAE) and its executing agency NAWAPI were consulted on ODA approval and technical clarifications, while Cambodia engaged its Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology, and National Mekong Committee on hosting arrangements. Thailand's Department of Groundwater Resources and Lao PDR's climate and water agencies were involved to align priorities. Outcomes included agreement on the inception meeting, commitment to advance ODA approval, and recognition of diplomatic sensitivities requiring neutral venue options.

Implementing Entity certification

This request for delay of project/programme inception has been prepared in accordance with Adaptation Fund policies and procedures, and delay on project/programme start has been agreed by participating executing entities and has been notified to the designated authority(ies) (DA).	
Name & Signature Tarik Hassan 	
Project/programme contact person Tarik Hassan	
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