The CIDA-funded Canadian Universities Consortium Urban Environmental Management (CUC UEM) Project was established to work with the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), regional institutions of higher learning, government officials, and communities to ensure the development of sustainable and high-quality urban environments in Southeast Asia. The consortium is made up of the Universities of British Columbia, Waterloo, York, and Montreal, with the University of Calgary acting as the executing agency.

Project funds are used to support research assistantships for Southeast Asian graduate students in AIT’s newly created Urban Environmental Management program. Forty Canadian graduate students have also received scholarships to work and study in Southeast Asia for periods of at least four months.

The project’s field manager serves as a full-time faculty member in the Urban Environmental Management field of study. During the life of the project a number of Canadian faculty members and senior practitioners have spent time at AIT, teaching courses in emerging areas of urban environmental management.

The project’s Training and Technology Transfer Program (TTTP) is an ambitious demonstration and capacity-building initiative in several countries in Southeast Asia. Canadian academics, practitioners, public officials, and graduate students, working with Southeast Asian partners and colleagues, have participated in the demonstration and training activities, producing briefing notes, technical manuals, occasional papers, videos, and monographs. The project is focused on four areas: transportation planning, tourism destination management, cumulative impact assessment, and cleaner production.

Transportation
Professors from the University of British Columbia led initiatives in this focus area. With the support of the Canadian experts, an experiment in assessing different methods of managing traffic at a major intersection in Bangkok was conducted in collaboration with the local government and AIT’s Environmental Engineering and Transportation Engineering programs. The results made local government aware that minimal investment and small changes in traffic management could improve traffic flow and air quality.

Four training courses on issues such as urban road safety, financing urban transport, and air-quality and traffic management, were organized for both transportation and environmental professionals in Southeast Asia. These courses explored how successful Canadian practices could be transferred to Southeast Asia.

Tourism
The University of Calgary led a demonstration project on community-based tourism in the village of Klong Khwang, Thailand, with the purpose of enhancing the capability of local government, developing community awareness of sustainable tourism planning and management practices, and encouraging people’s participation in the tourism planning process.

The Canadian contribution was aimed at developing the planning process, mainly by transferring knowledge about tourism issues (such as carrying capacity assessment) and the production of promotional materials.
Another demonstration project in Phnom Penh, a historical town in Kakhon Ratchasima province of Thailand, focused on how to increase the time and money spent by tourists in the community, and how to balance the concerns of economic development, environmental quality, and the preservation of culture and heritage. Using virtual-reality technology, the CUC UEM Project created a video for the town’s heritage by digitally reconstructing the town as it looked and functioned a thousand years ago.

The Agency for Coordinating Mekong Tourism Activities (AMTA) asked the CUC UEM Project to provide technical assistance in village-based tourism in four countries: Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Vietnam. In response, the project produced a situational analysis and specific planning recommendations for the selected sites.

Cleaner Production

Led by the University of Waterloo in partnership with the Thailand Environment Institute (TEI), a project on “Cleaner Production for Hotels” in the resort areas of Hua Hin and Cha Am, Thailand, was initiated to address increasing concern about the impact of hotels on local communities and environments. With organic waste accounting for over half of a typical hotel’s solid waste, this project focused on converting the organic waste stream into compost to be used for improving soil quality.

After conducting environmental audits in five member hotels in Hua Hin and Cha Am, TEI and the CUC UEM Project Field Office in Bangkok identified areas for improvement. Valuable experience gained through this process will no doubt be applied to yet another collaboration.

Cumulative impact assessment

The CUC UEM Project and the Cambodian Environment Ministry entered into a “memorandum of understanding” to cooperate on cumulative impact assessment of hotel development in Siem Reap. Cambodia’s environment and tourism officials identified a range of environmental issues that face the Siem Reap community as it further develops its tourism potential—issues of sanitation, sewage, water quality, and increasing amounts of solid waste, among others.

The TTTP carried out an assessment of the impacts of the growing hotel industry in Siem Reap, accounting for existing hotels as well as hotels slated for construction over the next decade. Canadian students conducted extensive research and, based on their work, specific measures were undertaken.

Valuable experience

This project has interacted with as many stakeholders as possible, recognizing that limits on time and budget prevented a response to the full range of issues facing the communities. The invaluable experience gained through this process will no doubt be applied to yet another collaboration between Canadian universities and CIDA, on the development of another project which will work on the themes of urban finance, regulation, technology, project management, and urban organization.

Summary

The Canadian University Consortium Urban Environmental Management (CUC UEM) project has been funded by CIDA to work with the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) in Southeast Asia. Participants include the Universities of British Columbia, Calgary, Montreal, Waterloo and York. The projects have three main aims: to provide financial aid to Southeast Asian and Canadian graduate students; to provide Canadian teaching assistance; and to demonstrate capacity-building and information dissemination. Projects have involved transportation studies, tourism development, waste management plans, and impact assessment. Students and faculty from the Canadian partners have worked in Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, and Laos. The project has its headquarters in Bangkok.

Walter Jamieson, Pallavi Mandke and Pawinee Sunalai are members of the Canadian University Consortium’s Urban Environmental Management Project Team in Bangkok, Thailand. Walter Jamieson is Professor of Urban Environmental Management at the Asian Institute of Technology, and Professor of Planning in the Faculty of Environmental Design at the University of Calgary. Pallavi Mandke and Pawinee Sunalai are graduates of the master’s program in Urban Environmental Management at the Asian Institute of Technology. The three authors are working together on a number of urban environment issues in Southeast Asia.