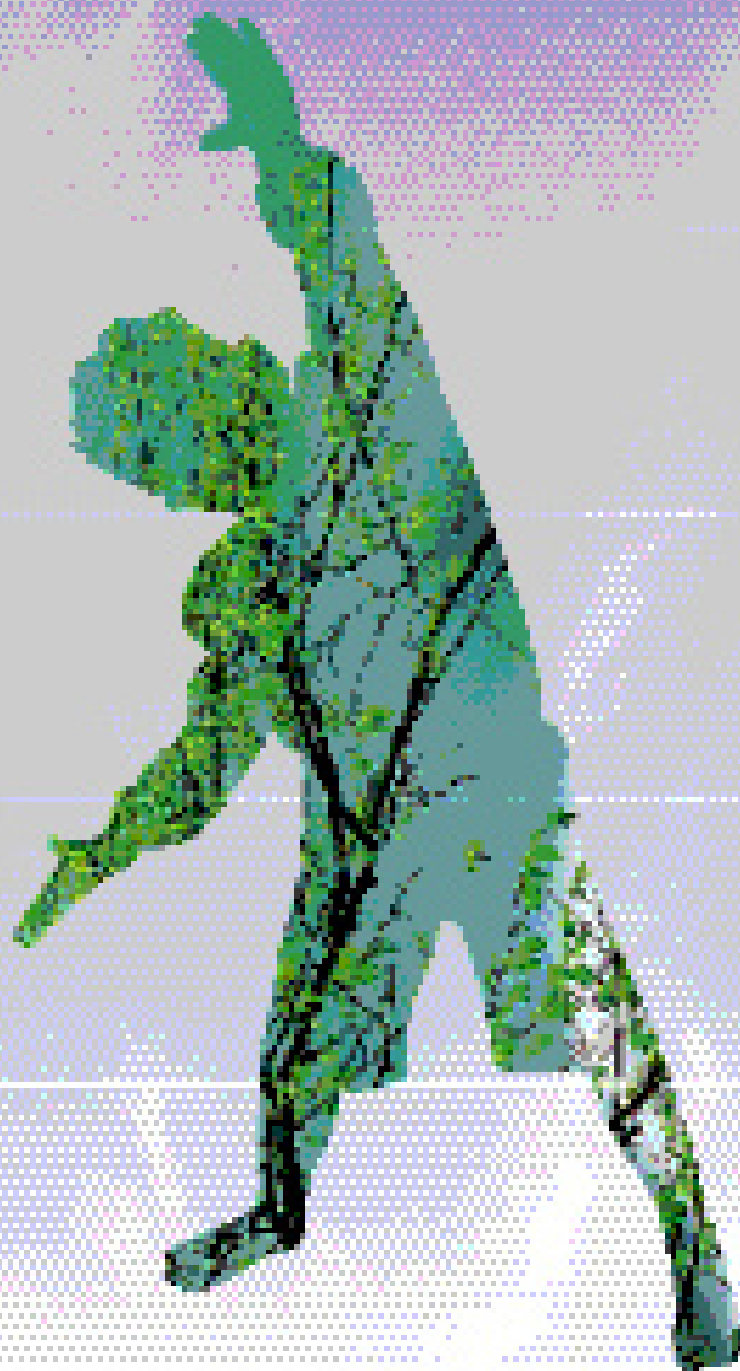


Regional Initiative on Environment and Health in Southeast and East Asian Countries



PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES

Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, The Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam

BACKGROUND

Every year, an estimated 6.6 million deaths in Asia are attributable to various modifiable environmental health risks, accounting for one quarter of all deaths in the region. Despite the magnitude of this health problem, the capacities of countries, especially in developing countries, to deal with environmental health problems are limited and require strengthening. In addition, better coordination between health and environment agencies is needed to develop and implement effective environmental health programmes. Some environmental health issues are transboundary and require concerted policies and approaches by countries to address them. For other issues, effective policies and approaches can be shared among countries facing similar threats.



PROCESS

2004

The regional initiative began in 2004, through a High-Level meeting in Manila in November 2004, involving Director and Director General level officials of the Southeast and East Asian countries. The meeting recommended that a Ministerial Regional Forum be convened.

2005

The second High-Level meeting was conducted in December 2005 in Bangkok, Thailand, to discuss a Charter of the Regional Forum, and resulted in a draft charter. It was also decided to convene the first Ministerial Regional Forum on Environment and Health in Bangkok, Thailand, where the Charter of the Regional Forum would be endorsed, and to agree on work plans to address priority environmental health issues.



2nd High-Level Meeting on Environment and Health, December 2005, Bangkok

VISION

Sustainable development encompasses nurturing the environment, enhancing economic growth and social equity to reduce poverty, promoting the health and well-being of people, and encouraging partnerships and cooperation among various stakeholders and across countries in the region.

Without environmental and health protection, development is undermined. Without economic growth, which is essential to poverty reduction and improving the quality of life, protection of the environment and the promotion of health will fail.

Thus, our vision is to safeguard and enhance health and the environment and thereby promote development which reduces poverty.



GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The general objective of this regional initiative is to build the capacity to deal with environmental health problems among Southeast and East Asian countries.

The initiative aims to strengthen the cooperation of the ministries responsible for environment and health within countries and across the region by providing a mechanism for sharing knowledge and experiences, improving policy and regulatory frameworks at both national and regional levels, and promoting the implementation of integrated environmental health strategies and regulations.

This initiative aims to assist countries to:

- (1) Effectively and efficiently achieve their targets on health, environmental sustainability, poverty, and global partnership for development under the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.
- (2) Institutionalize the integrated management of environmental health at all levels within each participating country and among Southeast and East Asian countries, by establishing a coordinative institutional mechanism.
- (3) Assess priority environmental health risks, develop and implement cost-effective National Environmental Health Action Plans (NEHAP), and disseminate such plans to various stakeholders.

STRATEGIES

Policies which protect and enhance health and the environment and improve living conditions and quality of life need to be put in place through enforceable legislation and other legal instruments. Standards should be based on the best available scientific information and be regularly reviewed to account for new knowledge and emerging technologies.

The transboundary nature of some environment and health issues should be addressed through minimizing the dumping and transferring of health and environmentally damaging technologies and products from one country to another and promoting the harmonization of standards and policies.

Priority should be given to preventive rather than curative approaches through the promotion of healthy behaviour and cleaner, appropriate, and cost-effective technologies, as well as the adoption of environmental management systems supportive of health and the promotion of sustainable production and consumption.

Public-private sector partnerships, such as investment in the provision of essential infrastructure, should be promoted to build on the strengths of each sector and more effectively deal with environmental health issues.

Environmentally friendly and health-protective technologies and products should be encouraged while promoting the reduction, reuse, and recycling of waste materials.

The importance of a healthy lifestyle and personal hygiene should be promoted through effective risk communication, education, and other interventions.

Risks and impacts on health should be made an integral part of the environmental impact assessment system.

More studies showing links between the environment and health should be undertaken at both the national and regional levels, as a basis for policy and action.

Regulatory tools should be complemented with the use of economic instruments and social networks. User fees, pollution charges, and other market-based instruments should be adopted to provide an economic incentive for reducing pollution and risks to public health.

More work should be done on the economic valuation of the adverse impacts of environmental degradation on health as well as the valuation of the benefits of actions or measures to be undertaken to give decision-makers and the public a better understanding of the real impacts of damaging the environment and health.

Public disclosure of environmental and health performance will pressure polluters to comply and governments to enforce existing laws and regulations, while encouraging performance-improving measures should be more widely explored.

The existing information systems should be strengthened and outputs made more readily accessible and shared among countries. For this, an effective monitoring and evaluation system should be set up that provides information on such matters as environmental quality, health impacts, standards, and the effectiveness of policies and measures adopted.

It should be recognized that successful and effective environmental health management requires the involvement of a large number of government departments, organizations from the private sector, civil society, academia, labour, and media. All stakeholders should be actively engaged in identifying problems and finding solutions, and in the process, building ownership and commitment.

Capacity-building in countries, including the use of lessons learned and best-available knowledge, should be pursued.

Special attention should be given to contingency planning and disaster preparedness and response, with priority given to setting up early warning systems.

Technical cooperation should be promoted at every level to support the implementation of national and international environmental health guidelines, to better cope with national and global issues and local concerns.

THE WAY FORWARD

Member countries of the Southeast and East Asian Region should:

- Undertake the best possible actions available to address and eventually reverse the trend of environmental degradation and its negative impact on health to ensure the implementation of global and regional agreements such as the Millennium Development Goals;
- Establish and/or strengthen existing interagency and multisectoral technical working groups and national coordination mechanisms/processes and link these with other countries in the region to facilitate capacity-building, the exchange of information, technology, resources and learning;
- Prepare and regularly update the NEHAP, or equivalent plans, and ensure implementation so that priority environmental health issues in the country are effectively addressed;
- Build the capacity of various stakeholders so that they can be mobilized to support the implementation of the NEHAP;
- Strengthen collaboration among themselves and with other regional and global intergovernmental bodies on transboundary, regional, and global environmental health issues, including attendance at the Regional Forum;
- Strongly advocate for adequate budgets and resources for the environment and health sectors within their countries;
- Ensure that the Charter is widely disseminated within each country and across the region in the languages of the region.

International partner organizations are encouraged to:

- Support this regional initiative by providing needed technical and financial assistance and sharing information and expertise;
- Support the development and implementation of NEHAP and equivalent plans;
- Intensify coordination and cooperation among themselves to build synergies, prevent duplication, and optimize the use of resources;
- Ensure proper coordination with existing intergovernmental processes.

Countries and partner organizations should work for the widest possible endorsement of the Charter to ensure the attainment of its objectives.

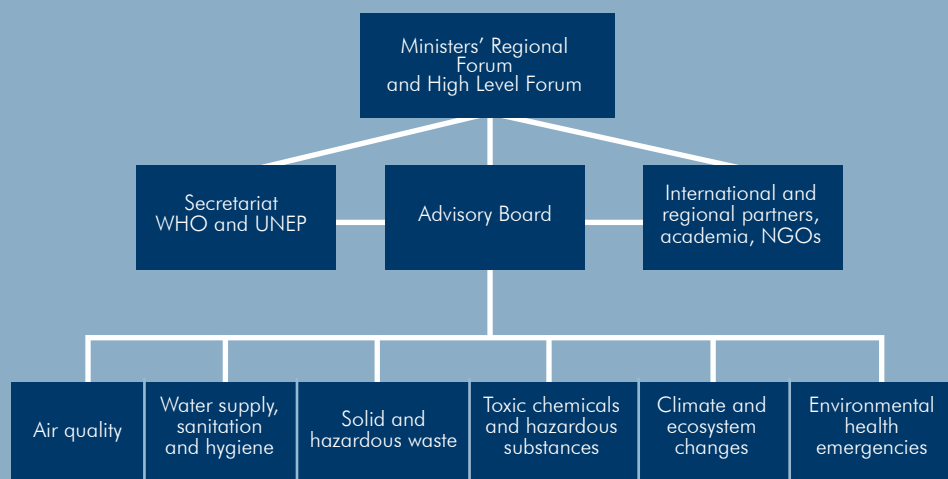
Ministers responsible for the Environment and Health of Southeast and East Asian countries should meet again within three years to assess both national and regional progress and to agree on specific actions to reduce significant environmental threats to health as swiftly as possible.

PRIORITIES FOR 2007-2010

The health impacts and implications of the following priority areas of environmental concern will be addressed at the local, national, regional and global levels:

- (1) Air quality
- (2) Water supply, hygiene, and sanitation
- (3) Solid and hazardous waste
- (4) Toxic chemicals and hazardous substances
- (5) Climate change, ozone depletion and ecosystem changes
- (6) Contingency planning, preparedness and response in environmental health emergencies

STRUCTURE



MINISTERIAL REGIONAL FORUM

The Ministers of the Environment and Health agencies of the member countries will meet in a Regional Forum which is held every three years. The Forum shall provide overall guidance for strategic directions and supervision of the initiative.

INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

International partners will be invited to serve as resource persons to the Regional Forum.

THEMATIC WORKING GROUPS

Thematic Working Groups (TWG) will be created to deal with the priorities identified. These regional priorities and associated TWGs will be discussed and approved by the Ministerial Regional Forum.

ADVISORY BOARD

An Advisory Board, composed of the Chairs of TWGs and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Regional Forum will be established. The Advisory Board will meet regularly to ensure better coordination among the TWGs in addressing the priorities identified by the Regional Forum and cooperate with the Secretariat in fulfilling its responsibilities for, among other things, preparing for the next Regional Forum.

SECRETARIAT

The WHO and UNEP will serve as the joint Secretariat to support the operations of the Regional Forum and the Advisory Board, and collaborate with the Chairs of the Thematic Working Groups in supporting their operations. The Secretariat will provide day to day management of the regional initiative.

SECRETARIAT



United Nations Environment Programme
Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
Contact: Surendra Shrestha
Fax: +66 2 524 6233



World Health Organization
Regional Offices for South-East Asia
and the Western Pacific
Contact: Hisashi Ogawa
Fax: +63 (2) 521 1036

Project websites : <http://www.rrcap.unep.org/envhealth>
http://www.wpro.who.int/sites/rf__hse/home.htm