



World Health Organization

Regional Forum on Environment and Health



United Nations Environment Programme

EH/TWG2/MR

English Only

The Joint Thematic Working Group
Meeting of the Regional Forum on
Environment and Health in Southeast
and East Asian Countries
18 April 2008, Jeju, Republic of Korea

DISCUSSION RECORD

I. Background

1. A Joint Thematic Working Group Meeting of the Regional Forum on Environment and Health in Southeast and East Asian countries was held on 18 April 2008. The Chairs of the Thematic Working Groups (TWGs), Chair of the Ministerial Regional Forum (Thailand), Vice-Chair of the Ministerial Regional Forum (Republic of Korea), Thematic Working Group members, Secretariat (UNEP and WHO), and other experts attended the meeting. The objective of the Joint Thematic Working Group meeting is to discuss on the progress and challenges in the implementation of TWG workplans. A list of participant is provided in the Annex I.

II. Introduction to the meeting and outcome of the first Ministerial Regional Forum

2. Secretariat of the Regional Forum provided a brief introduction to the meeting and outcome of the first Ministerial Regional Forum, which included: (1) Structure of the Regional Forum; (2) Charter of the Regional Forum; (3) Bangkok Declaration; (4) Compositions of TWGs; (5) Workplans of TWGs; (6) Progress made by the Advisory Board and Secretariat since the First Ministerial Regional Forum; and (7) Objectives of the meeting.

III. TWG on Air quality

3. The Co-Chairs of the TWG on air quality (Air TWG) presented the TWG workplan and current status of implementation. The presentation included:
 - a. Background: Deterioration of air quality poses a significant health risk. Urban air pollution, indoor air pollution, and transboundary air pollution are becoming common problems among the countries of the Southeast Asia and East Asia;
 - b. Objective: The workplan has three objectives; (1) reducing health burden imposed by deteriorating air quality; (2) strengthening the cooperation at the national and regional levels; (3) capacity building of researchers and scientists focusing on air quality and health effects;
 - c. Activities: The workplan provides activities for three years based on the major issues and the necessity of the region. The activities are planned by three dimensions: (1) the objectives, (2) types of air pollution (urban, indoor, and transboundary), and (3) categories (knowledge management and technical support, progress reporting to the Regional Forum, and coordination and advocacy);

- d. Outputs: Air TWG will deliver several outputs as outlined in the workplan. Outputs will be monitored through progress reporting on the implementation of the activities and a review of feasibility of implementing activities;
 - e. Monitoring and reporting on the TWG activities: The Co-Chairs will provide an overview to the High-Level meeting and Regional Forum including: (1) activities implemented over the last year; and (2) activities planned for the coming year;
 - f. Transboundary air pollution: The Co-Chairs provided a brief on problems related to Transboundary Air Pollutants (TAP). TAP is a particular problem for pollutants that are not easily destroyed or react in the atmosphere to form secondary pollutants and can survive for a period of days to years and can be transported hundreds or thousands of miles. TAP has negative impacts on children's health;
4. UNEP provided a brief on Regional Air Pollution Networks in Asia and the progress on the health impact assessment of the Atmospheric Brown Clouds (ABC). Dr. Kim, Yoon Shin, Korean Society for Indoor Environment provided a brief on activities of monitoring stations in a mountainous area as part of indoor air pollution researches. Ms. Nyamragchaa Chimedtseren, TWG member from Mongolia, introduced the newly developed national ambient air quality standards in Mongolia.
5. Major discussion on Air TWG activities included:
- a. The meeting discussed a need to identify a mechanism for sharing of the completed outputs from TWGs. Use of the Regional Forum website and special communications to the environment and health agencies with the completed outputs were discussed as the potential mechanism;
 - b. It was suggested that the air quality TWG should include a training programme in the workplan. Secretariat of the Regional Forum recommended that it should be entrusted to each TWG's decision.

IV. TWG on Water supply, Hygiene and Sanitation

6. The Chair of the TWG on water supply, hygiene and sanitation (Water TWG) presented the TWG workplan and current status of implementation. The presentation included:
- a. Review of the objectives and activities: Water TWG has four objectives and several activities are planned according to each objective.
 - b. Progress of the workplan: Up to April 10, 2008, the TWG Chair received the information related to activities that had been done on water supply and sanitation from the Philippines, Thailand, China and activities introduced by the World Bank Water and Sanitation Programme in the Philippines, Indonesia, Viet Nam and Cambodia. The TWG also achieved progress related to the workplan including the establishment of TWG mailing list, and TWG website at the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Beijing. The Chair provided examples of progress, which included:
 - i. Philippines: The Philippines issued the 2007 Philippine National Standards for Drinking Water which adopted Water Safety Plan as a strategy for program on water quality surveillance. The Philippines finalized the Water Safety Plan of Maynilad Water Services Inc. The Philippines developed an institutional roadmap for reforms in the second generation water supply services, etc;

- ii. China: China established 51 surveillance points of drinking water quality and water-borne diseases in 7 pilot provinces since 2007;
- iii. Cambodia: Cambodia expanded water treatment technology verification based on the experiences of performance evaluation of ceramic water purifiers for domestic treatment.

7. Major discussion on Water TWG activities included:

- a. WHO informed the meeting that the First East Asia Ministerial Conference on Sanitation (EASAN) was convened in December 2007 and the TWG participated in the meeting.
- b. The meeting noted that the TWG activities were not meant for a collection of national-level activities. They should be presented as regional activities.

V. TWG on Solid and Hazardous Waste

8. The Chair of the TWG on solid and hazardous waste (Waste TWG) presented the TWG workplan and current status of implementation. The presentation included:

- a. Background: Waste problem is becoming common to all of the countries in Southeast and East Asia, especially municipal waste and medical waste. Regional actions as well as national level actions are needed to cope with the waste management issue;
- b. Objective: Waste TWG has three objectives: (1) to ensure environmentally sound management of solid and hazardous waste; (2) to prioritize issues by analyzing status-quo of municipal waste and medical waste management in the member countries; and (3) to provide useful information;
- c. Recent TWG meeting: The first TWG meeting was hold on 28-29 February, 2008 in Singapore and the meeting agreed that:
 - i. Member countries will develop their own national inter-ministry/agency steering committees;
 - ii. Member countries will identify national contact points;
 - iii. Each country is allowed to have up to 2 focal points for contact and they have to work closely;
 - iv. Membership will depend on the main topics to be discussed, where relevant or appointed person can participate.
- d. 3R Knowledge Hub (3RKH): 3RKH has been established. 3RKH will (1) provide the TWG with information on the progress made in the activities of 3RKH, (2) advise the Secretariat on how to proceed with the TWG work taking into account the ongoing activities of 3RKH, including data format, gap analysis etc, (3) update the 3RKH database by integrating the information prepared through the activities of TWG, and (4) disseminate the outputs of the TWG;
- e. Secretariat & Implementation: UNEP/ROAP serves as the secretariat of the TWG and Japan is ready to provide financial contribution to cover the cost related to the activities of TWG until the first quarter of 2009.

9. Major discussion on Waste TWG activities included:
 - a. The meeting discussed the need to include the TWG members covering all the countries and the expertise to implement the TWG workplan;
 - b. It was informed that WHO produced a document on health-care waste treatment and disposal technologies, including comparison of costs and risks of different technologies, and it would be useful for the TWG as a reference. WHO will share the document with the TWG Chair;
 - c. It was suggested that information sharing with the Secretariat of the Basel Convention would be useful.

VI. TWG on Toxic Chemicals and Hazardous Substances

10. The Chair of the TWG on toxic chemicals and hazardous substances (Chemical TWG) presented the TWG workplan and current status of implementation. The presentation included:
 - a. Background: The workplan focuses on three important issues: (1) prevention and reduction of pesticide poisoning; (2) reduction of exposure to heavy metals; and (3) control of food related chemicals;
 - b. Objective and Activities: The workplan has three objectives: (1) to share information and data; (2) to improve the technical knowledge and skill among personnel of member countries on risk assessment and risk management of the chemicals; and (3) to strengthen the networking and collaboration of regional institutions on toxic chemicals. The activities are:
 - i. Activities related to Objective 1: (1) Compile the data from member countries; (2) develop an inventory of institutions and experts; and (3) establish web-site for regional cooperation;
 - ii. Activities related to Objective 2: (1) Provide training and capacity building on risk assessment and risk management; and (2) conduct regional (annual/specific theme) meetings;
 - iii. Activities related to Objective 3: (1) Create collaborative mechanism; (2) organize workshop on creating mechanism; and (3) collaborate with existing programmes.
 - c. Challenge: Challenge included: (1) Commitment (lead country confirmation); (2) WHO/UNEP assistance in funding sources; (3) improvement of communication (updating contact persons); and (4) formation of "Core Team" of active members to get start.

11. Major discussion on Chemical TWG activities included:
 - a. It was pointed out that some of TWG members were inactive. The Secretariat will communicate to the national focal points to confirm the TWG members and request them to participate actively in the TWG activities.
 - b. Resource mobilization for the TWG activities was discussed. The TWG in collaboration with the Secretariat will develop proposals for resource mobilization.

VII. TWG on Climate Change, Ozone Depletion and Ecosystem Changes

12. The Chair of the TWG on climate change, ozone depletion and ecosystem changes (Climate TWG) presented the TWG workplan and current status of implementation. The presentation included:

- a. Background: Climate change is not just an environmental issue, but this is a development issue. The findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) noted that climate change has led to change in the frequency, distribution and severity of a number of health impacts. There is relative lack of examples of adaptation in the health sector;
- b. Objective: The workplan has four objectives: (1) enhance knowledge management and technical support; (2) promote research and development; (3) effective management of the environment for benefit of human health; and (4) regional information centre;
- c. Activities: Each objective has several activities. Regional inventory of experts has progressed with support from the Secretariat;
- d. Follow-up Action for 2008: The follow-up actions for 2008 are: (1) updating list of the TWG members; (2) creating a national inter-ministry/agency steering committee; (3) establishment of Regional Committee for the TWG; (4) a regional meeting to identify priority issues for the region; and (5) developing an inventory of information sources, regional experts, etc;
- e. Key success: Keys to success are: (1) commitment (lead country confirmation); (2) WHO/UNEP assistance in funding sources; (3) improved communication (update contact persons); and (4) forming of "Core Team" from active members to get start.
- f. Review of workplan: the Chair proposed to change the workplan to accommodate the recent development in the issue of climate change.

13. Major discussion on Climate TWG activities included:

- a. It was pointed out that some of activities in the workplan were overlapping with activities of the TWG on air quality, especially Asian dust sand storm issues. The TWG workplan will be revised in consultation and agreement with the TWG members;
- b. It was suggested that the establishment of cooperation with existing activities was essential for the implementation of the TWG workplan;
- c. It was informed that the special session on Climate Change and Health, that will be organized as part of the Third Scientific Conference of the Regional Forum, will provide related information for the TWG activities;
- d. Resource mobilization for the TWG activities was discussed. The TWG in collaboration with the Secretariat will develop proposals for resource mobilization;
- e. It was suggested to develop a concept paper on the utilization of the procedure for the mitigation of ozone depleting substances for the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions.

VIII. TWG on Contingency Planning, Preparedness and Response in Environmental Health Emergencies

14. The Chair of the TWG on contingency planning, preparedness and response in environmental health emergencies (Emergency TWG) presented the TWG workplan and current status of implementation. The presentation included:

- a. Characteristic of issue: It was emphasized that contingency planning, preparedness and response in environmental health emergencies was a cross-cutting issue;
- b. Objectives: The workplan has three objectives: (1) to share information and data on contingency planning, preparedness and response in environmental health emergencies among member countries; (2) to improve the technical knowledge and skill among member countries on environmental health emergencies; and (3) to strengthen inter-country/regional cooperation in responding to environmental health emergencies;
- c. Activities: The activities are planned according to objectives;
- d. Outputs: The workplan will provide three outputs: (1) a regional information network established; (2) technical knowledge and skill of key personnel in member countries improved; and (3) intercountry/regional cooperation mechanisms on emergency response improved.

15. Major discussion on Emergency TWG activities included:

- a. It was pointed out that the issues of the TWG on contingency planning, preparedness and response in environmental health emergencies were new and needed cross-sectoral support;
- b. There was a need to establish the link with the existing activities related to this TWG.
- c. Resource mobilization for the TWG activities was discussed. The TWG in collaboration with the Secretariat will develop proposals for resource mobilization.

IX. Other Issues

16. The Executive Secretary of Asia-Pacific Network for Global Change Research (APN) informed the meeting about APN funding procedure and distributed information brochures on APN.

X. Conclusion

17. The meeting concluded with a summary of the meeting by the Secretariat. The Secretariat expressed its appreciation to the local host for the excellent arrangements made for the meeting.

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