



HL5/3/1

English Only

**Second Ministerial Regional Forum  
on Environment and Health  
in Southeast and East Asian Countries  
14-15 July 2010, Jeju, Republic of  
Korea**

## DRAFT CONCEPT NOTE

### **Expanding Partnerships, Strengthening the Governance and Impacts of the Regional Forum on Environment and Health for Southeast and East Asia**

#### **Background:**

Recognizing that environment and health problems are closely interwoven and that one cannot expect to have healthy people if the environment is polluted and degraded, the Ministers of Health and the Environment of the 14 countries of Southeast and East Asia<sup>1</sup> agreed to work together to address environmental health in an integrated manner.

Considering that there is a commonality of problems and institutional constraints; that some environment and health issues are transboundary in nature; and, that there is a growing economic interdependency among countries due to globalization, the Ministers saw the need to enhance regional cooperation.

#### **The Regional Forum**

The Regional Forum on Environment and Health was the response to this need for improved regional cooperation. It was formally organized during the first Ministerial Meeting of the Ministries of Health and the Environment on August 9, 2007 in Bangkok, Thailand. The Charter for the regional cooperation was also approved.

The general objective of this regional initiative is to effectively tackle environmental health problems within and among Southeast and East Asian countries by increasing their capacity for environmental health management. This is to be done by “strengthening the cooperation of the ministries responsible for environment and health within the countries and across the region by providing a mechanism for sharing knowledge and experiences, improving policy and regulatory frameworks at the national and regional level, and promoting the implementation of integrated environmental health strategies and regulations”<sup>2</sup>.

Priority areas which the regional initiative will focus on were also agreed upon<sup>3</sup> with Thematic Working Groups (TWGs) organized per priority area. Lead institutions and members of each TWG were also identified. The governance structure of the Regional Forum was also agreed upon. See

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<sup>1</sup> The 14 countries include Brunei Darusalam, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

<sup>2</sup> Charter of the Regional Forum

<sup>3</sup> The 6 priority areas are air quality, water supply, sanitation and hygiene, solid and hazardous waste, toxic chemicals and hazardous substances, climate change, ozone depletion and ecosystem changes and contingency planning for emergencies.

attached Annex A. It is composed of the Ministerial Regional Forum, the High Level Officials, the Advisory Board, the Thematic Working Groups, the International Partners and the Secretariat.

#### *Ministerial Regional Forum*

The Ministers of the Environment and Health agencies of the 14 member countries meet in a Regional Forum which is held every three years. The Forum provides overall guidance for strategic directions and supervision of this regional cooperation initiative.

#### *High Level Officials Meeting*

This is similar to the meeting of the Senior Officials for Environment (SOEN) and Senior officials for Health (SOH) which the ASEAN and its counterpart in South Asia have. This is composed of deputy ministers and similar high ranking officials who backstop for their Ministers for work on environment and health in their respective countries and the region. They undertake the final review of any documents which the technical staff prepare for the Ministers to approve. They also take care of briefing their respective Ministers of what will be taken up and decided during the Ministerial meetings.

There have been four meetings of the High-Level Officials starting with the preparatory work in 2004, 2005 and 2007. Following the First Ministerial Regional Forum in August 2007, it was decided to organize this meeting every 18 months to review the progress in the implementation of the Charter, the updates on the NEHAP and the work plans of the Thematic Working Groups (TWGs). The last meeting was held in 2009.

#### *Advisory Board*

The Advisory Board is presently composed of the Chair (Thailand) and Vice Chair (Republic of Korea) of the Regional Forum and the Chairs of the six (6) TWGs. During the 1<sup>st</sup> Ministerial Meeting, it was agreed that the Chair be the host of the 1<sup>st</sup> Ministerial Meeting while the incoming host of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ministerial Meeting serve as the Vice Chair. This is rotational with the Vice Chair subsequently becoming the Chair after the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ministerial Meeting in July 2010 and the host of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ministerial Meeting becoming the Vice Chair.

The Advisory Board meets annually 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. They review the implementation of decisions made by the Regional Forum, the recommendations of the High Level Meetings; discuss the existing and future plans and activities of the TWGs.

They had their First Meeting right after the 1<sup>st</sup> Ministerial Meeting in August 2007. The Advisory Board meets annually and has had 3 meetings since its organization (in Bangkok in 2007, in Jeju in April 2008 and in Beijing, China in March 2009).

#### *Thematic Working Groups*

Six (6) Thematic Working Groups (TWG) were created to deal with the priorities approved by the 1<sup>st</sup> Ministerial Meeting. A 7<sup>th</sup> Thematic Working Group on Health Impact Assessment is to be created this year. Each TWG is led by member institutions from either the Ministry of Health or the Ministry of Environment and are composed of representatives from the 14 member countries who are keen to tackle the said priority issues. This means that not all 14 countries are involved in all the TWGs. Some international and regional development partners including the academe are also members of the TWGs.

#### *International Partners*

International partners are invited to serve as resource persons to the Regional Forum. Many international and regional partners are active members of the TWGs and also support the Scientific Conferences which the Regional Forum organizes from time to time.

#### *Secretariat*

The WHO and UNEP serve as the joint Secretariat to support the operations of the Regional Forum, the High Level Officials and the Advisory Board. They collaborate with the Chairs of the Thematic Working Groups to supporting their operations. The Secretariat provides day-to-day management of the regional initiative.

#### **Initial Assessment of the Regional Forum**

This regional initiative has done much since its inception. Not only is there an approved Charter and a Bangkok Declaration to guide the workings of the Regional Forum but the governance structure has been put in place and operationalized. The 6 Thematic Working Groups have been organized and are functioning. See attached schedule of meetings of the TWGs (Annex B). Work plans for 2007-2010 which had been approved are being carried out. Two TWGs have actively participated in other Regional activities such as the Better Air Quality (BAQ 2008) Conference in 2008 organized by the Clean Air Initiative for Asian Cities (CAI-Asia) and the recently concluded Second East-Asia Ministerial Conference on Sanitation and Hygiene (EASAN 2010) organized by the Philippines Department of Health with the support of World Bank, WHO and UNICEF.

Concrete outputs have also been generated such as the Training Needs Assessment by the TWG on Contingency Planning for Emergencies, the Municipal Waste Management report and Medical Waste Report by the TWG on Solid and Hazardous Waste, the Regional Status Report on Sanitation by the TWG on Water Supply, Hygiene and Sanitation which was presented during EASAN2.

As mentioned earlier, the Advisory Board has met 3 times and the High Level Officials four times. In addition, there have been two Joint Thematic Working group meetings held in Jeju, Korea in April 2008 and in Busan, Korea in June 2009. The Chair and co chair of the Regional Forum also participated in the 1<sup>st</sup> Joint Meeting of the TWG members, the secretariat and some experts.

These joint meetings have led to substantive recommendations to strengthen the regional initiative. For example, the 1<sup>st</sup> Joint Meeting pointed the need to address the overlaps between the TWG on Air and the TWG on Climate Change, Ozone Depletion and Ecosystem Changes, the need to better link the work of the TWG on contingency planning, preparedness and response with other existing activities and the need for a core team of active members in the TWG on Toxic Chemicals and Hazardous Substances to get it started. On the other hand, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Joint Meeting stressed the need to address the

two new priority areas of children's environmental health and the health impact assessment as a cross cutting concern and asked the TWGs to include these issues in their work plans for 2010 -2013.

Three (3) Scientific Conferences had also been held in Bangkok, Thailand in 2005, Seoul, Korea in 2007 and Jeju, Korea in 2009. These conferences provided the venue to present and discuss significant and emerging environmental health issues to build the capacity of the concerned Ministries. They also provided an opportunity to learn from what others outside the region have done or are doing to address these issues.

### **Possible areas for strengthening the Regional Forum**

#### *1. Enhancing the impact of the Regional Forum*

While much has been accomplished, there is still much that needs to be done to make the Regional Forum an affective mechanism for enhancing capacities for environmental health in the region. For one thing, the profile of the Regional Forum, needs to be enhanced so that it can have more impact in the region. It is not yet widely known in and outside the region as THE venue for fostering integrated environmental health management.

There are existing official regional cooperation mechanisms in place such as the ASEAN plus 4 and its South Asia counterpart. These regional initiatives are officially approved by the governments of countries involved and are recognized globally. While their work is divided into sectoral issues, there is no reason why the work of the Regional Forum on environmental health could not be brought into the formal structure of the regular meetings of Ministers for the Environment and the Senior Officers of the Environment and also with the Ministers for Health and their Senior Officers. If the work plans and outputs of the Regional Forum could be integrated into these formal bodies, then there will be more appreciation for its value. Synergies with other existing or planned activities can be built. Resources could be more efficiently used and more resources could possibly be provided. At the same time, the work of the Regional Forum could possibly influence the workings of this official initiative.

This can be done by the concerned Ministries lobbying with the organizers, supporters and secretariats of these formal bodies (such as the Asean Secretariat) to have the work/activities and outputs of the Regional Forum calendared and shared during their regular meetings. This lobbying will be more effective if undertaken by the member countries rather than by WHO and UNEP alone, although their support will carry some weight.

Along these lines, efforts could also be made to get the work of the Regional Forum integrated into the Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development which the UNESCAP holds every 5 years.

Participation of the TWGs in other regional activities such as BAQ, EASAN and the Asian Environmental Compliance and Enforcement Network (AECEN) also promote the profile of the Regional Forum. In addition, it will demonstrate the value-added of the Regional Forum to these existing regional initiatives that tackle health and the environment issues separately or jointly. On the other hand, participation in these other regional initiatives will also enrich the knowledge of the members of the Regional Forum.

There must be a conscious effort to identify similar initiatives for the 4 other priority areas. The Ministers and the High Level Officials could mandate the TWG and the secretariat to include this in their 2010-2013 work plans. The TWGs with the support of the secretariat could then reach out to the organizers/supporters of these other regional initiatives to explore possible areas for collaboration.

2. *Assessing the impact of the Regional Forum at the country level to make it more relevant and responsive*

As mentioned earlier, the objective of this regional cooperation is to effectively address environmental health problems within and among Southeast and East Asian countries by increasing their capacity for environmental health management. This was to be done through the preparation of national Environment and health Action plans (NEHAPs), capacity building efforts through the scientific conferences, participation in regional for a as well as through the work of the various Thematic Working Groups. To what extent has this objective been achieved? Do the member countries and agencies of health and environmental really see value to the Forum? How can its value-added at the country level and regional level be enhanced?

Three years after its establishment is a good time to take stock and get answers to these questions. The findings and recommendations can feed into the future work of the Forum to make it more responsive to the needs of its members

3. *Improving the Governance of the Forum (Rotating Chairmanship and reconfirming membership in the TWG, expanding membership of the Forum)*

3.1 While all the TWGs have been activated and have been carrying on their 2007-2010 work plans, some TWGs are more active than others and have been able to mobilize other partners to work with them. The interest and commitment of some member countries in some TWGs needs to be reconfirmed.

3.2 As discussed in past meetings of the Advisory Council, the chair and membership of the TWGs have been left largely to the TWG itself. It may be worth considering the rotation of the Chairmanship of the TWG so as not to unduly burden the existing Chair. This will also allow others to take on the responsibility of ensuring that the work plan of the TWG is carried out, that monitoring of progress is regularly undertaken and reported to the Ministers through the Advisory Board and the Meeting of the High Level Officials. This will also allow for better sharing of responsibilities by the member countries/ministries. The selection of the Chair by the TWG members should be based on willingness to serve. This will ensure the commitment of whoever will assume the chairmanship.

3.3 The preparation of the 2010-2013 work plan for the Regional Forum provides a good opportunity to review the existing membership with the end of view of possibly expanding same to involve others that could play a key role or can substantially contribute towards achieving the objectives of the regional initiative.

3.4 Members of the Regional Forum and those of the TWGs have largely been from government. While some academic institutions are members of some TWGs, addressing environmental health issues, both at the national and regional level, requires the involvement of all stakeholders. This includes the private sector, NGOs and the communities themselves.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Ministerial Forum should seriously consider opening the membership of the Forum to these other key stakeholders. The existing institutional arrangements of the Forum needs to be reviewed to identify the most appropriate means of engaging them.

4. *Exploring Sustainable Financing Mechanism*

The need for a sustainable funding source to finance the operations of the Secretariat, the TWG, the Advisory Board and the Scientific Conferences has been raised. To be able to implement

the work plans being developed by the TWGs, needed resources have to be mobilized. Instead of mobilizing them on an adhoc basis, the idea of setting up a Trust Fund has emerged. Whether this is feasible or not needs to be examined. Other options for funding the Forum in a more sustainable manner needs to be explored.

5. *Clarifying the Modus Operandi for the Advisory Board, the TWGs and the Secretariat*

While the functions of the various units in the present structure of the Regional Forum are generally clear, there is still a need for more clarity in some aspects to the present institutional arrangements. These include:

- the process of selecting the Host Country for the High Level Meeting and the Ministerial Meetings needs to be spelled out;
- the leading role of the Chair country for each TWG also needs to be elaborated. Among others, this could refer to its meetings, the process of drafting working documents, the review and finalization of the said documents. This way, expectations of the Chair are also leveled off.
- Ways to make the Advisory Board more active in preparing for the High level meetings and the Ministerial Forum.

Addressing the above would not only clarify the way the Regional Forum operates but also make it more effective.

6. *Improving the content and impact of the Scientific Conferences*

While the members have found the 3 Scientific Conferences useful, it is recognized that more scientific inputs from its members and from the Advisory Board could make it even more effective. More efforts needs to be exerted to involve the members in its preparation, especially in terms of substance. On the other hand, linkage between the scientific conferences and the workings of the TWGs, the HLM and the Ministerial Forum needs to be strengthened.

7. *Expanding existing partnerships*

It is worth noting that many international and regional development partners are involved in addressing specific environmental health issues through the 6 TWGs.

However, only UNEP and WHO have largely been the regional partner of the Regional Forum as a regional initiative. There are many other development partners who are active in environmental health concerns like World Bank, ADB, USAID, GTZ, UNICEF, UNESCAP, JICA, and others.

There is a need to involve more partners to support the work of the Regional Forum. This can be done by matching the interests of the donors/development partners with the priorities of the Forum. Reaching out to others has in the past, largely been done by the WHO and UNEP. It is strongly recommended that the members of the Regional Forum themselves take the initiative to reach out to other possible regional partners. Since the countries work with these international and/or regional development partners, they will be in a better position to influence them to see the value added of the Regional Forum to their work

As mentioned above, the ASEAN + 4 already regularly host meetings of the Ministers of Health and the Ministers of Environment. While these are always held separately, there is no

reason by at some point, these could not be held at back to back activities with a day set aside for a joint meeting. This should be explored

8. *The value of a dedicated regional working group (the Regional Task Force)*

Preparations for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ministerial Meeting of the Regional Forum are once again underway. This has largely been undertaken by the secretariat (WHO and UNEP) working with the Host. During the preparations for the 1st Ministerial Meeting of the Regional Forum, the High Level Officials saw the need to identify “relevant people from countries represented to form a Task Force to develop a program to progress towards the proposed regional initiative on environmental health”.

The Task Force on Environmental Health was subsequently organized with representatives from 5 countries (China, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam) representing the Ministries of Health and the Environment. The Terms of Reference (TOR) of the Task Force mandated them to:

- (1) develop a concept note and road map towards the convening of the Regional Forum;
- (2) draft the Regional Charter and other relevant documents in preparation for the Regional Forum;
- (3) identify potential arrangements and resources for the preparation for the Regional Forum;
- (4) prepare for the Regional Technical Meeting (2<sup>nd</sup> High-Level Meeting) on Health and Environment, involving ASEAN countries plus China, Japan, Mongolia and Republic of Korea;
- (5) develop strategies to address other regional-level recommendations from the November 2004 High-Level Meeting; and,
- (6) provide guidance and support to the regional secretariat and liaise with the national Technical Working Groups (TWGs).

The Task Force under the guidance of the High Level officials and working closely with the Secretariat and the Consultant was largely instrumental for ensuring the smooth preparations for the Ministerial Meeting and the formal establishment of the Regional Forum through a consensus among the 14 member countries on the Regional Charter and the Bangkok Declaration. They effectively served as the technical arm of the High Level officials until the Regional Forum was organized.

One could say that the work of the Task Force had been taken over by other bodies created under the Regional Forum, specifically, the Thematic Working Groups and the Advisory Board. However, the TWGs are largely focused only on carrying out the activities developed by their own working group as reflected in their approved work plan. They are not looking at the entire picture, determining areas of collaboration among the TWGs to build synergy into the work, networking and evaluating if the overall objective of the Forum is being achieved.

For example, while it has been noted twice that there is a need for more integration across the TWGs for some issues, this has not yet been attended to. This was already pointed out during the 1<sup>st</sup> Joint Thematic Working Group meeting in April 2008 and reiterated in 2<sup>nd</sup> Joint thematic Working Group meeting in June 2009.

As of now, nobody is also looking at the different issues and recommendations which have come out of past meetings (of the TWGs, the Joint TWG meetings, the Advisory Board , the High Level Officials and even the Scientific Conferences) and identifying concrete steps needed to carry them forward. An integrated work plan to address these issues in a strategic manner and a review of the Charter to allow the Regional Forum to more effectively address the issues which have emerged may be worth undertaking at this time. Possible recommendations on changes to the Charter and an integrated work plan for the operating units of the Forum could be submitted to the High Level Officials for possible consideration in its next meeting.

In addition, an assessment of the impact of the Regional forum at the country level also needs to be undertaken. This will pave the way for the Forum to be more responsive to the needs of its members and thus enhance its value to its members.

As mentioned above, the financial sustainability of the Forum should also be studied in more detail. The idea of setting up a Trust Fund to finance the operations of the Secretariat, the TWG, the Advisory Board and the scientific conferences has emerged. Whether this is feasible or not needs to be examined. Other options for funding the Forum in a more sustainable manner needs to be explored and recommendations made for the High Level Officials and the Ministers to consider.

It is for the above cited reasons that it is recommended that a Task Force be convened. Just like in the past, they could provide support directly to the Advisory Board and help prepare for next meeting of the High Level Officials. The Task Force will not be another unit within the existing structure of the Regional Forum. It will remain adhoc in character and will only be convened to undertake specific tasks within a given time period. Just like the 1<sup>st</sup> Task Force, once the work has been accomplished, the Task Force ceases to function.

#### *Proposed TORs*

However, so as avoid confusion and any duplication of the work of other existing bodies (the Advisory Board and the TWGs), the TOR of the Task Force must be very clear. This could include the following:

- a) Review the Regional Charter and other relevant documents and recommend revisions to make it more responsive to the emerging issues and present needs of the Regional Forum;
- b) Study the issues which have emerged and the recommendations made by various meetings and conferences of the Regional Forum and suggest ways to address the said issues and/or implement the appropriate recommendations.
- c) Assess the impact of the Regional Forum at the country level to see if it has provided an effective mechanism for sharing knowledge and experiences, has improved the policy and regulatory frameworks, has promoted the implementation of an integrated environmental health strategies and regulations. Based on this assessment, make recommendations to increase the value-added if the Regional Forum to its members;
- d) Study the feasibility of setting up a Trust Fund or some other funding mechanism to provide a sustainable source of funding for the operations of the Secretariat, the TWGs, the Advisory Board and the scientific conferences and make needed recommendations;

- e) Clarify some aspects of the modus operandi of the Advisory Board, the TWGs and the Secretariat;
- f) Suggest ways to involve the members more in preparing the Scientific Conferences and to strengthen the linkage between these Conferences and the workings of the TWGs, the HLMs and the Ministerial forum; and,
- g) Identify opportunities for networking with other groups and other regional and international initiatives that deal with environmental health issues.

#### *Proposed Structure and Composition*

The Task Force will directly support the Advisory Board and will thus be working under the said officials. It should be lean and could be composed of 5 members from the member countries. It should include a mix of representatives from the Ministries of Health and the Ministries of Environment. Willingness to serve as members of the Task Force must be validated to ensure a working team.

#### *Proposed Modality to operationalize the Task Force*

The proposal to convene the Task Force could be presented for decision during the next Ministerial Meeting in Jeju, Korea in July 2010. Views on its membership could also be discussed. Once approved, volunteers from the member countries and ministries could immediately be solicited.

A discussion with the 4 - 5 countries concerned and the Secretariat should be immediately convened to discuss the TORs in detail, the proposed structure and the composition. A work plan should then be developed which should include face-to-face meetings for workshops to carry out the work assigned to the group. Said outputs will eventually be presented to Advisory Board who will endorse same to the High Level Officials for eventual endorsement to the Ministers.