

**Regional Forum on Environment and Health
in Southeast and East Asian Countries**

**Framework for Cooperation of the
Regional Forum on Environment and
Health in Southeast and East Asian
Countries**

This Framework for Cooperation will be submitted to the Third
Ministerial Meeting of the Regional Forum on Environment and Health in
Southeast and East Asian Countries
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia



World Health Organization



Regional Initiative on Environment and Health



United Nations Environment Programme

MF3

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**Third Ministerial Regional Forum
on Environment and Health
in Southeast and East Asian Countries
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PREAMBLE

Considering the global framework for action provided by global landmark commitments such as Agenda 21 of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the 2000 Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations, the 2002 Johannesburg Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the 2012 Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, other relevant multilateral agreements, and ongoing discussions about the post-2015 development framework;

Taking note of the events such as the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005–2014 and the International Decade for Action “Water for Life” 2005–2014;

Recognizing that the environment in which we live greatly affects our health¹ and development;

Acknowledging the importance of protecting human health and the environment, and that children, women, older people and the poor are among the most vulnerable and suffer the most from environmental deterioration;

Convinced that sustainable development leads to economic growth, better health outcomes and poverty reduction;

Reiterating the importance and cost-effectiveness of preventive action;

Highlighting the urgency to take immediate and coordinated action involving all relevant government agencies, private sector organizations, civil society, academia, occupational groups, nongovernmental organizations and the media;

Aware that effective solutions require interdisciplinary and cross-sector interventions with experts from physical and natural sciences; health, biological and social sciences; development; finance; and other fields;

¹ The World Health Report 2002, Reducing Risks, Promoting Healthy Life, WHO

Recognizing that social inequities are, among other things, linked to environmental determinants, for example, by the way natural resources are used;

Realizing that despite sustained economic growth in the Southeast and East Asian region, there are some common driving forces that impact on health and the environment negatively, such as rapid and unplanned urbanization, inequitable globalization, population growth, demographic change, increasing inequities within the region and persistent poverty;

Realizing that nations in the Southeast and East Asian region are interconnected by shared ecosystems and that many environment and health issues are trans-boundary and that globalization highlights the interdependence of communities and nations;

Upholding the existing international agreements on the protection of the ozone layer of the atmosphere, climate change, biodiversity conservation, the management of chemicals and wastes, occupational health, water supply and sanitation, and other initiatives related to environment and health;

Cognizant of the precautionary approach as guided by the “polluter-pays principle” and the norms of good governance, including civic engagement and participation, efficiency, equity, transparency and accountability;

Mindful of cultural diversity, unique historical circumstances and the range of governance arrangements that affect current efforts to address health and the environment at national and subnational levels;

Taking note of the possible areas of focus and vision in the post-2015 development agenda;

The Ministers of Environment and the Ministers of Health in the Southeast Asian countries of Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam and the East Asian countries of China, Japan, Mongolia and the Republic of Korea meeting together in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on 9–10 September 2013,

Adopt this Framework for Cooperation of the Regional Forum on Environment and Health in Southeast and East Asian Countries;

Agree upon the vision, goal, objectives, priorities, strategies, structure and functions and the entitlements and responsibilities set forth herein as the basis for their joint commitment to collective and individual country action and call upon their international partners to support its implementation.

I. VISION

The vision statement of the Regional Forum on Environment and Health in Southeast and East Asian Countries is “*Health and environment at the centre of development*”.

The effects of development and economic activity on the environment and on the health of human communities are not always immediately visible. Often, negative health outcomes and environmental degradation are realized only after the damage has been done.

Sustainable development implies purposive social and political action towards enhancing human health, enabling economic growth, promoting social equity, and reducing poverty in ways that do not deprive future generations from resources for their advancement.

Human health and well-being can be the main reference point for decision-making related to development and economic growth. This requires an understanding of how health and the environment are enhanced and their role in poverty reduction and national development.

II. GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

Goal

The overall goal of the Regional Forum on Environment and Health in Southeast and East Asian Countries is to create a platform for national and regional action to enhance and safeguard health and the environment and promote sustainable development.

Objectives

The objectives of the Regional Forum are to:

- a) identify and address priority environment and health issues that require regional action;
- b) facilitate dialogue, exchange of knowledge and best practices to promote sustainable development in the areas of environment and health;
- c) develop and sustain mechanisms for collaborative action; and
- d) mobilize material, human and technical resources to support work on environment and health.

III. ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH PRIORITIES FOR THE REGION

The Regional Forum on Environment and Health in Southeast and East Asian Countries will address environment and health priorities in ways that add value to the ongoing efforts of countries and other regional and subregional bodies, mindful of how environment and health priorities change over time.

Criteria for prioritization could include:

- a) the magnitude of the problem, including impacts across a group of countries or the region;
- b) effects on vulnerable populations;
- c) availability of evidenced-based or science-based interventions;

- d) implications for socioeconomic development; and
- e) political sensitivity.

The Regional Forum will create mechanisms for engagement with multisectoral stakeholders across geopolitical jurisdictions and inclusive of traditional programmes, such as air and water pollution control, water supply and sanitation, solid and hazardous waste management, emergency response, environment and health impact assessments, and climate variability.

The Regional Forum will focus on evidence-based interventions, policies and actions that have a strategic impact and that uplift and protect vulnerable populations.

IV. STRATEGIES

The strategies to meet the objectives of the Regional Forum on Environment and Health in Southeast and East Asian Countries are:

- a) enable engagement of the environment and health sectors at regional and national levels to assess and resolve priority environment and health issues;
- b) use knowledge and international exchange of scientific evidence to guide dialogue and policy debates;
- c) advocate for the recognition and implementation of actions to achieve health, environment and development targets under the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, the post-2015 development agenda, the Rio+20 Outcome Document entitled The Future We Want, and other related international commitments;
- d) support collaborative research efforts aimed at filling gaps in the knowledge base in the areas of environment and health;
- e) identify environment and health strategies, policies and plans that have proven to be highly effective in addressing these priorities in both high- and low-income countries (for instance, environment and health “best buys”);
- f) build on existing successes and further enhance capacity for integrated environment and health work through leadership development and capacity-building;
- g) provide technical support to countries in developing and implementing strategic actions and plans to resolve priority environment and health issues that have regional implications; and
- h) advocate for integrated and coordinated management of health, environment and development programmes at multiple levels within and among countries.

V. STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS

The Regional Forum on Environment and Health in Southeast and East Asian Countries is a platform that brings together the Ministries of Environment and Ministries of Health of the Southeast and East Asian countries at regular intervals to fulfil the vision and objectives set herein.

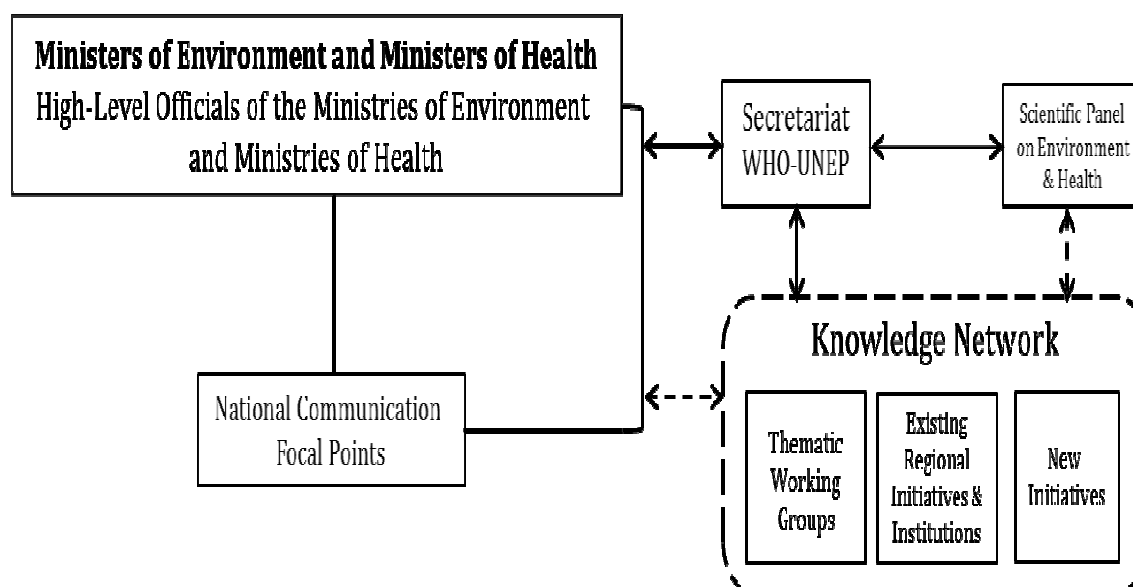
Structure

The Ministers of Environment and the Ministers of Health serve as the highest body of the Regional Forum that decides the policy direction of the organization.

High-level officials are nominated by the two ministries to represent their respective ministries. The high-level officials also serve as national communication focal points for the Regional Forum and will liaise with the Secretariat of the Regional Forum on Environment and Health in Southeast and East Asian Countries (Secretariat).

The Secretariat will be composed of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The work of the Secretariat will be supported by a Scientific Panel that will engage with a Knowledge Network and existing initiatives, including national/regional working groups. This structure is depicted in Fig. 1.

Fig. 1. Structure of the Regional Forum on Environment and Health in Southeast and East Asian Countries



Functions

Ministers of Environment and Ministers of Health²

The Ministers of Environment and the Ministers of Health of member countries will meet at a minimum of once every three years to:

- a) provide overall guidance and strategic direction consistent with the vision, goal and objectives of the Regional Forum;
- b) determine priority areas and associated actions to improve health and the environment in the region;
- c) enhance coordination and cooperation among countries and partner agencies in addressing identified environment and health priorities;
- d) review and discuss the reports, scientific evidence and proposed recommendations of the Secretariat;
- e) consider recommendations of member countries regarding future work and strategic directions; and
- f) invite and engage other countries or relevant entities to be members and participate in the work of the Regional Forum.

At each ministerial meeting, the member countries shall elect a Chair and Vice-Chair to preside over the proceedings of the meetings of the Regional Forum until the next ministerial meeting.

The High-level Officials of the Ministries of Environment and Ministries of Health

The high-level officials of the Ministries of Environment and Ministries of Health may represent their respective ministers in the meeting of the Regional Forum to be convened more frequently and make decisions on behalf of their respective ministers about:

- a) adoption of interim reports, workplans and recommendations by the Secretariat;
- b) establishment of coordination and cooperation mechanisms among ministries and partner agencies of member countries to address identified environment and health priorities; and

² A guidance document on the mechanism for conducting meetings at various levels of the Regional Forum on Health and Environment in Southeast and East Asian Countries shall be developed separately. These meetings could include ministerial meetings, meetings of high-level officials, and Secretariat and Scientific Panel meetings. The guidance document will describe the roles of the Chair and the Vice-Chair, the frequency of meetings, rules of participation and criteria for inclusion of additional members in the Regional Forum on Health and Environment in Southeast and East Asian Countries. The guidance document will establish the mechanism for the election of the Vice-Chair without linking the Vice-Chair's role to the hosting of the upcoming ministerial Regional Forum.

- c) acceptance of new members or observers and the policies, strategies, budget, and plans of action Regional Forum.

National Communication Focal Points

Ministries responsible for health and the environment at the country level should:

- a) Nominate national communication focal points [NFPs] to coordinate national activities with Regional Forum activities. NFPs will be appointed by each ministry from among their high-level officials and include NFP tasks as part of the job description of that position and ensure that they are the individuals who participate in the high-level meetings in order to ensure institutional memory.
- b) Share information and expertise, and work together towards the development and implementation of their National Environment and Health Action Plans (NEHAPs) or equivalent plans.
- c) Develop Health and Environment Country Information Profiles and Health and Environment Data Sheets as inputs to the Knowledge Network.

The Secretariat

The WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia and the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific and the UNEP Regional Office for Asia Pacific will serve as joint Secretariat of the Regional Forum.

Member countries can voluntarily contribute to the Secretariat through the secondment of dedicated staff to the Secretariat (UNEP and WHO) as well as the provision of office space and facilities and material and financial support as a means to strengthen implementation of the Regional Forum's work plans.

The Secretariat shall:

- a) provide regular situational analysis and/or updates of environment and health in the region;
- b) convene international experts to serve on the Scientific Panel that will provide knowledge and information on priority issues and appropriate interventions;
- c) organize knowledge networks that will consolidate information and generate evidence on policies, practices and actions as appropriate;
- d) support technical work of the Regional Forum that address specific programmatic and/or project-based issues;

- e) ensure consistency and complementarity between the work of the Regional Forum and the related work of member countries in meeting their bilateral and international commitments;
- f) receive and provide advice on membership applications from other countries or agencies;
- g) develop, under the guidance of the Chair and Vice-Chair and based on priorities set by the ministerial Regional Forum, a budget and workplan for priority actions of the Regional Forum and keep accounts of relevant expenditures; and
- h) work with the Chair and Vice-Chair to monitor and evaluate implementation of the workplan and communicate with member countries periodically to keep them informed of the status of workplan implementation.

*Scientific Panel*³

The Scientific Panel will be constituted by the Secretariat to support and advise the Secretariat in the scientific and technical aspects of work, including identification of priority areas and gaps in knowledge, development of research initiatives, and evaluation of interventions at regional and national levels. It will work with the Knowledge Network, on behalf of the Secretariat, when required by the Secretariat. The panel will be made up of credible specialists and practitioners who will abide by the principles of neutrality, objectivity and transparency. Declaration of interests will be required of all members of the Scientific Panel.

The Scientific Panel will meet at least once a year with the Secretariat to:

- a) review and synthesize current knowledge on environment and health issues faced by the region and state-of-the-art interventions;
- b) identify and address gaps in knowledge;
- c) prioritize environment and health strategies that have proven effective in addressing priorities in high- and low-income countries, for instance, environment and health “best buys”;
- d) serve as a resource for technical and leadership capacity development needs of member countries and for the Knowledge Network; and
- e) guide the development of the Regional Forum and relevant country workplans, including the proposal of indicators and common targets in the priority areas.

³ A guidance document on the operational aspects of the Scientific Panel shall be developed separately.

Knowledge Network

The Knowledge Network is a loose network of various forums and initiatives on various aspects of environment and health to enhance the impact of the Regional Forum by creating synergies and avoiding redundancy and duplication of work at both the regional and country levels. The Knowledge Network should function to:

- a) generate information;
- b) share evidence and knowledge;
- c) review and evaluate policies and actions at both the regional and country levels;
- d) conduct research on priority areas;
- e) nurture environmental health champions;
- f) implement a leadership development strategy on environment and health;
- g) create events, platforms and mechanisms for sharing experiences and best practices, knowledge, tools, the research agenda, and findings;
- h) foster new partnerships; and
- i) support and encourage innovation.

The Secretariat will coordinate the network and mediate the interaction among the network components comprised of Thematic Working Groups and existing and new initiatives.

Thematic Working Groups

Thematic Working Groups (TWGs) will be regional bodies composed of representatives from member countries to address specific priority issues and areas. Representatives from the private sector, academia, civil society, occupational groups, regional centres, institutions, and other regional and global initiatives tackling a particular priority issue and/or area may also be invited to become part of a TWG. TWGs will be independent technical bodies with a loose functional relationship with the Regional Forum, without any administrative bindings from either side.

TWGs will be activated upon availability of funds from at least one member country committing to host TWG meetings and support other relevant activities. Each TWG shall communicate to the Secretariat the activation of the TWG and the different activities that it conducts. Each TWG may develop its own guidance document on operations of the TWG.

TWGs may have a role in the development and implementation of relevant national and regional plans, policy briefs, reports and/or scientific meetings.

The Secretariat will provide technical support and link TWGs through the Scientific Panel.

Existing initiatives or forums and institutions

These include existing initiatives, for example, the Acid Deposition Monitoring Network in East Asia (EANET) and Clean Air Initiative (CAIAsia), and existing forums, for example the Regional 3R Forum and the East Asian Conference on Sanitation and Hygiene (EASAN), or existing institutions, for example universities, research organizations or development agencies, that work on environmental health areas.

New Initiatives

Subject to availability of funds, the Regional Forum may establish new initiatives to address the identified environmental health priorities to be integrated into the Regional Forum's workplans.

VI. ENTITLEMENTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Every individual is entitled to an environment that permits the achievement of the highest possible quality of life and access to information and participation in the entire decision-making process. All parties, be it government, civil society, nongovernmental organizations, the media, individuals, the private sector or partner agencies, are accountable for their actions and shall endeavour to evaluate their activities and implement them in a manner that protects people's health and the health of the ecosystems. They are encouraged to share information and contribute their resources to the protection of the environment and health at the local, national, regional and global levels.

Government authorities have the duty of protecting the environment and the people within their jurisdictions, as well as enabling people to protect themselves. They are also responsible for assessing environmental health risks and environmental management systems within their jurisdiction, choosing the most cost-effective and affordable interventions to manage the identified risks to health and the environment, and providing the necessary resources to implement these interventions. All government agencies, both national and local, should provide policies that proactively engage others in effectively addressing environment and health issues of the people.

The private sector is responsible for assessing the risks its commercial ventures impose on the environment and on people's health and minimizing these risks by implementing sound preventive measures and investing in research to develop cleaner and healthier technologies. The private sector is accountable and liable for any adverse consequences of its operations and products and should integrate corporate social responsibility in its operations.

The media plays a key role in creating awareness about environment and health issues and potential solutions and developing values and a constructive outlook that foster public vigilance towards environmental preservation and health protection. The media should have access to newsworthy, detailed and accurate information that will enable it to effectively communicate these issues to the general public in a timely and responsible manner. Civil society plays a critical role in disseminating information, raising public awareness, implementing projects and brokering partnerships that encourage communities, governments and the private sector to work together cooperatively to enhance environment and health protection.

The work of the Regional Forum on Environment and Health in Southeast and East Asian Countries should enhance the ability of individuals, organizations, societies and countries to fulfil their roles and responsibilities and should add value to efforts aimed at placing *health and environment at the centre of development*.