

Chair's Summary

Overview

1. The First Forum of Ministers and Environment Authorities of Asia Pacific was held on 19-20 May 2015 in Bangkok, Thailand (see Annex 1 for Agenda). The meeting was organized by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and co-hosted by the Royal Thai Government. The Forum was attended by 33 of the 41 countries served by the UNEP Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP). Participants included one President, one Vice-President, one Deputy Prime Minister, six Ministers and 12 Vice-Ministers, 4 Parliamentarians, along with other High-Level Representatives of Governments, intergovernmental organizations, United Nations organizations, and representatives of civil society groups.
2. The President of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) of UNEP and Member of Parliament of Mongolia, Ms. Oyun Sanjaasuren, chaired the First Forum of Ministers and Environment Authorities of Asia Pacific.
3. The objectives of the Forum were to discuss and find common ground on:
 - Opportunities provided by the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for saving our planet, lifting people out of poverty, and advancing sustainable and inclusive economic growth.
 - Pressing health and environment challenges, including air pollution, chemicals and waste, and how to address them.
 - The environment outlook and emerging priorities in Asia and the Pacific, and how these issues could be articulated at global and regional forums.
 - Progress in the region in implementing resolutions and decisions adopted at the first session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-1) of UNEP; and identification of regional priorities for the second UNEA in May 2016, and UNEP's Medium Term Strategy (MTS) for 2018-2021.

Session 1: Opening

4. The President of the UNEA of UNEP, Ms. Oyun Sanjaasuren, and UN Under Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director, Mr. Achim Steiner, made welcome remarks. Mr. Steiner also delivered the message of the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki Moon, in which he highlighted the region's pressing challenge to build a common environmental agenda that, among others, addresses the need for enhancing resilience, moving towards a low-carbon economy, and decoupling economic growth from intensive resource use and pollution.
5. The Forum was officially opened by HE General Dapong Ratanasuwan, Minister of Natural Resources and Environment, Thailand.

6. The President of the Republic of Kiribati, H.E. Mr. Anote Tong, delivered the inaugural address on the theme: “Investing in the Pacific’s Nature-Based Economies.” He highlighted the need to enhance efforts to address global, regional and local pressures on ocean and island ecosystems. He stressed the need to invest in the green-blue economy that placed people at the Centre of development. He welcomed the opportunity presented by the Forum for member states to come together to find solutions to their sustainable development challenges. He expressed the hope that the Forum would lead to stronger cooperation in Asia and the Pacific on environmental sustainability.

7. UNEP Executive Director, Mr. Achim Steiner delivered the keynote address on the theme: “Opportunities for a Green Economy in Asia Pacific.” He said sustainable development in the 21st century was about universality, highlighting the need for an integrated approach, which addressed environmental, social and economic objectives of sustainable development. He underlined how human health and environmental challenges in Asia and the Pacific illustrate the urgency of moving towards a green economy and building the resilience of communities, decoupling growth from resource use and pollution, and realigning financial systems to invest in natural capital and green technologies. Noting the historic nature of the Forum, Mr. Steiner said it was an opportunity for the region to develop a common environmental agenda that could also shape the outcomes of the second UNEA and contribute to other global processes.

Session 2: Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda, sustainable development goals and environmental sustainability in Asia and the Pacific

8. The session discussed the role of the environment in delivering on the post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda and SDGs in the Asia and the Pacific region.

9. The Executive Secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Ms. Shamshad Akhtar, delivered the keynote address, emphasizing the need for a people centered and planet sensitive agenda. She highlighted the need to mainstream the environment in financing for development, including through climate finance, natural capital accounting, and applying financial incentives to provide clean and renewable technologies.

10. The session’s Ministerial Panel and open discussion on the post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda identified the following priorities for the region in preparation for adoption at the General Assembly in September 2015, and implementation, monitoring and reporting on the SDGs:

- National ownership of national and regional SDG indicators and accompanying metrics, adequate monitoring protocols and data collection modalities, and capacity for data management.
- An integrated approach in policy and planning, including mainstreaming environment and resource management in national sustainable development strategies, national planning processes and investment decisions in order to achieve multiple SDG targets.
- Strong national legislative and regulatory measures for implementing the SDGs through environmental rule of law.
- Strong national institutional arrangements and mechanisms that are aligned to implement the SDGs.

- Sustainable financial systems aligned with achieving the SDGs, including through sustainable banking, promoting green business practices, tax reforms to internalize the cost of environmental degradation, and reducing fossil fuel subsidies.
- Wide engagement and involvement of the public, youth and civil society in SDG implementation including through environmental education and national curricula to promote sustainable development.
- Ecosystem based assessments and approaches that ensure ecological resilience in order to promote disaster risk reduction and sustainable development.
- Linking the work on SDGs in Small Island Developing states to the implementation of the SAMOA Pathway.

11. The following were highlighted for action:

- Strengthen capacity in statistics and data management at national and regional levels, including supporting countries to undertake regional, subregional and national SDG data assessments, identifying data gaps and regionally and nationally appropriate indicators to report against SDG targets.
- Strengthen integrated national institutional arrangements for SDG implementation and raise awareness of SDGs among national and sub-national planning officials.
- Support mainstreaming of environment in financial and budget planning systems in partnership with appropriate national stakeholders, including Ministries of Finance, Central Banks, Stock Exchanges, and the private sector.
- Support governance framework for integrated ecosystem management including for oceans through initiatives such as the Pacific Oceanscape Framework.

Session 3: Environment Outlook for Asia and the Pacific

12. The session highlighted the critical environmental issues and trends facing the region and the consequences of which are currently undermining sustainable development.

13. The Vice-President of the Asian Development Bank, Mr. Bindu Lohani, delivered the session's keynote address, highlighting that rapid urbanization and expanding cities were accelerating environmental degradation. He emphasized the importance of addressing resource efficiency and increasing investments towards building smart and livable cities. He also mentioned the importance of enforcement and compliance of the standards and regulatory regimes in addressing the brown agenda.

14. The following critical environment issues of common concern were identified:

- The effect of climate change and disasters and increasing vulnerability of countries in Asia and the Pacific, which will continue to impose economic losses that could offset development gains, increase poverty and threaten water and food security.
- Deteriorating health and rising costs from air, water and soil pollution due to emissions, effluent and waste from industry, transport and agriculture.

- Threatened food, water, and energy security due to increasing population, rapid urbanization, changes in land use and widespread pollution.
- Increasing resource use, with little improvement in resource efficiency, causing degradation and loss of ecosystems services, and additional financial burdens.
- Gaps in scientific knowledge and evidence-based understanding of the causes of environmental degradation were adversely affecting the confidence of policy-makers in taking timely and decisive action to safeguard the common environment.

15. Despite the serious environmental challenges, there was optimism on moving Asia and the Pacific countries towards inclusive green economies. With increasing and large investments in new infrastructure expected over the next two-to-three decades, Asia and the Pacific countries can leapfrog to smarter solutions for resilient development and lasting prosperity.

16. The following were highlighted for action:

- Enhance resilience and disaster preparedness to help protect communities from adverse effects of climate change through increased investments in strengthening ecosystem-based adaptation measures, and developing early warning systems and sufficient support to implement disaster risk reduction and preparedness plans.
- Support countries with policy and regulatory reforms towards a low-carbon development pathway, underpinned by energy efficiency and shift to renewable energies especially for the transformation of the power sector. .
- Support countries develop and implement policies and programmes to promote decoupling of resource use from economic growth.
- Develop and promote policies and methodologies for valuation and management of ecosystems and ecosystem services.
- Improve systems and capacity for monitoring, data generation and analyses and reporting to identify emerging issues and threats, and provide decision-makers with policy-oriented information.
- Integrate poverty reduction measures in policies and strategies for responding to climate change, and also disaster risk reduction and preparedness.
- Create public awareness and greater understanding of the costs of pollution and the ecosystems' functions and services to chart a transition to sustainability.
- Strengthen environmental institutions and governance for providing skill development, enforcement of environment laws, scientific assessment and integrated environmental sustainability policy responses.
- Improve regional environmental cooperation and information sharing for responding to transboundary issues and natural disasters.

Session 4: Environment and Health Linkages in Asia and the Pacific

17. The countries highlighted their concerns over human health impacts from environmental issues such as air, water, and soil pollution, exposure to harmful chemicals, inadequate waste management and transboundary e-waste, and climate change. The environment and health issues called for cross-sectoral, constant, and strategic interventions.

18. The Vice-President and Head of the Department of Environment of Iran, Ms. Masoumeh Ebtekar, highlighted in the keynote address that contaminants such as dioxin in air, soil and food, and emerging diseases due to climate change, and exposure to chemicals, including neurotoxin were leading to a range of health risks such as asthma and cancer. She underlined the importance of long-term policy interventions and involvement of all stakeholders as important elements for successful interventions.

19. The main environment and health related challenges faced by Asia and the Pacific countries identified during the session were:

- Increasing health threat from widespread air pollution, and from harmful chemicals and substances, including mercury and asbestos.
- Need to manage electronic waste at the regional level; scientific planning and cooperation with business and finance community and sharing knowledge on environment and health linkages.
- Need to strengthen partnerships between Ministries of Health and Ministries of Environment; between the public and private sectors (PPP), and beyond national boundaries to address the environment and health challenges.

20. The session highlighted different regional and sub-regional initiatives and networks that promote collaboration and action, including the Regional Forum on Environment and Health in Southeast and East Asian Countries, which will be held in Philippines in October 2016.

21. The following were highlighted for action:

- Strengthen collaboration between environment and health sectors and provide international assistance to support the collaboration.
- Improve knowledge and understanding of environment and health linkages, including through national studies calculating the cost of the adverse impacts on health and the cost of inaction.
- Strengthen capacity of national officials to assess the environment and health risks, and develop policies addressing these risks.
- Convene environment and health communities of Asia and the Pacific to share good practices, and marshal actions to address environment and health issues.
- Promote a regional strategy and mechanism on waste management, including 3R approaches, and strengthen cooperation on the control of transboundary movement of e-waste by engaging policy-makers across the entire route of trade in electronic goods with harmful substances.

- Support countries in developing integrated environment and health regulatory frameworks.
- Increase public and government awareness about environment and health linkages working with both the scientific community and the business sector.

Session 5: United Nations Environment Assembly of UNEP

22. The Civil Society Statement was submitted at the Forum calling for effective and meaningful civil society engagement in the Forum. Civil society groups recommended the following:

- Adopt sustainability principles as the central development paradigm, align national budgeting and finance with sustainable development priorities, and put in place policies, laws, regulations and economic instruments that internalize externalities.
- Make science and technology appropriate and responsive to the actual needs of people, and advance the goals of sustainability.
- Develop relevant capacities including, in research, technology assessment, data management, monitoring and data among institutions and communities.
- Use the SDGs to mainstream sustainability and to mobilize communities and other development actors, and recognize that governments cannot implement the SDGs without the support and partnerships of the different stakeholders and civil society.
- Disaggregate national data to reflect realities based on, for example, age, gender, sectors, ethnicity/indigenous status, and disabilities to present more accurate progress towards attaining the SDGs.

23. The Session reviewed progress in the implementation of the resolutions and decisions at the first session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-1) in June 2014. The session also discussed issues and priorities for the second UNEA session (UNEA-2) as well as for UNEP's Medium Term Strategy (MTS) 2018 – 2021.

24. The UNEP Regional Director and Representative for Asia and the Pacific, Mr. Kaveh Zahedi, highlighted in his presentation progress in the Region in the implementation of the UNEA-1 resolutions and decisions. He also underlined a number of issues and priorities for Asia and the Pacific for discussion by the Forum, and the roadmap for promoting regional priorities at UNEA-2 and in the UNEP MTS.

25. A number of issues and priorities were identified for consideration at UNEA-2 and in the MTS. They include the following:

- Address climate change and enhance resilience. With Asia and the Pacific's high vulnerability to the adverse impacts of climate change and extreme weather events, enhancing resilience is the main priority issue, particularly in cities and for key economic sectors and infrastructures. Though policies such as climate change adaptation, mitigation and disaster risk reduction and preparedness, have been introduced there is a clear need to further strengthen resilience, particularly in cities and in key economic sectors and infrastructure. It was recommended that UNEP support countries to

enhance their resilience and strengthen their capacity to reduce, prepare for, and respond to conflicts and disasters and to implement mitigation commitments.

- Decouple economic growth from resource use and pollution. Strengthening policy and regulations towards resource efficiency and sustainable consumption and production would contribute to human well-being and livelihoods while also reducing environmental impacts. It was suggested that UNEP could focus on SCP approaches that enable behavioral change, leading to decoupling growth from environmental impact, and contributing to poverty reduction. UNEP could also continue to further assist the development of Green and Blue economy pathways.
- Maintain biodiversity and sustainable provision of ecosystem services. Protecting ecosystems and their values was highlighted as a key element for poverty alleviation investments. The importance of supporting the integrated management of Ocean resources was also highlighted. There was recommendation to strengthen incentives, valuing and investing on ecosystem and natural resources. UNEP could strengthen the capacity of countries in the valuation and management of marine and terrestrial ecosystems and ecosystem services, including monitoring of illegal wildlife trade at national and regional levels, and through land-use management.
- Manage Chemicals and Waste. Technical support and capacity building were needed to further develop policies and their implementation, including standard setting, targeted regulations and law enforcement. UNEP could promote integrated solid waste management as well as transboundary management of chemicals and waste including e-wastes and microplastics in the marine environment by providing national and regional level support to Member States and stakeholders and through highlighting these issues at the next UNEA. Support implementation of chemical and waste MEAs including ratification of BAN Amendment of Basel Convention.
- Develop Integrated Approaches to Environment and Health, especially to address Air Quality. The urgent need for integrated approaches at national and regional levels to address the health challenges related to environment was emphasized. UNEP should support efforts to promote control and prevention of air pollution, including transboundary air pollution, to minimize impacts on human health and the environment, and support countries to meet WHO guidelines for indoor and outdoor air and water pollution.
- Use the Sustainable Development Goals to scale up environmental action. Asia and the Pacific countries should mainstream SDGs in national planning agenda. UNEP could support countries to align environmental governance structures and financing mechanisms for the delivery of the SDGs, and to support countries in their efforts to prepare for the adoption, implementation and reporting on the SDGs.
- Science-Policy Linkages. The Forum stressed the importance of science-policy linkages to effectively address environmental sustainability challenges. UNEP could provide technical advice and assistance to governments to strengthen science-policy linkages including through the Global Environment Outlook (GEO) and the UNEP Live and their regional processes. UNEP-Live should provide platform for sharing data, information and knowledge on environmental issues and trends.

Conclusion

26. The first Forum of Ministers and Environment Authorities of Asia and the Pacific identified regional priorities and recommendations to promote environmental sustainability for the post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda, and priority issues for consideration at UNEA-2, and for UNEP's MTS 2018-21.

27. Countries welcomed the First Forum of Ministers and Environment Authorities of Asia and the Pacific. It was recommended to hold the Forum every other year (in the year with no UNEA), and to adjust the timing so that it better fits with the UNEA preparatory process. It was also suggested to strengthen the linkages between the Forum and sub-regional Forums such as SPREP, SACEP and ECO. In terms of focus, the future Forums could cover implementation of UNEA resolutions by countries, the region and UNEP and contribute to establishing regional priorities and resolutions for upcoming UNEA and other relevant processes. Iran offered to convene interested countries from the region to develop a resolution or elements of a resolution for UNEA-2 to formalise the Forum of Ministers and Environment Authorities of Asia Pacific.

28. The Chair's Summary would be communicated to different forums, including the Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, the High Level Political Forum (HLPF), UNEA and its preparatory process and other relevant forums.

29. The Forum thanked the Royal Thai Government for co-hosting the event.