

Asia Pacific Regional Statement to the 7th GCSF¹

“A sustainable world is simply not conceivable if the Asia Pacific region fails to become sustainable.”

Asia Pacific Forum for Environment and Development (APFED) Report 2005

1. Introduction

The Asia Pacific is a very diverse region. It has 3 of the world's most populous countries, 3 of the world's largest countries, 2 of the least populated, 13 least developed countries, 12 landlocked countries, two of which is among the 2 double landlocked countries in the world, and 17 small island developing countries. Asia-Pacific accounts for one-third of the planet and houses two thirds of the world's population, the majority of whom live on less than a dollar a day. The enormous growing population that will soon reach 4 billion is expected to use more resources to achieve economic growth. More often than not this economic development will occur at a cost to the environment.

2. Asia Pacific Civil Society perspectives on the current situation and challenges

It bears reiteration that all the internationally agreed goals and targets including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are inter-related and equally important. The need to ensure environmental sustainability and eco-security is a prerequisite for poverty alleviation. The importance of mainstreaming the environment into all sectoral policies and addressing poverty across the board in all sectoral policies should be a priority for all governments.

In addition to this, civil society organizations call attention to the other cross-cutting issues of particular importance to the three thematic issues under consideration as outlined in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI), including:

- Poverty alleviation
- Changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production
- Education for sustainable development
- Technology support and capacity building
- Means of implementation

At the national level, governments need to:

- (i) Promote/facilitate the participation of all stakeholders in the formulation of basic policy responses and decision making on development projects that impact on the environment;
- (ii) Integrate environmental sustainability under MDG-7 with developmental concerns into sectoral policies, national development planning and establishing the multidimensional poverty-environment linkages;
- (iii) Adopt coherent policy and regulatory framework that supports a development agenda based on clear and operational sustainability criteria. Policy integration, cooperation and coordination among various ministries and agencies is vital for sustainable development but this aspect is not taking shape in the region;
- (iv) Develop institutional capacity and ensure adequate finance for enforcement of environmental regulations; and
- (v) Adopt a strong scientific approach to promote the understanding of the value of ecosystems services for conservation of life support systems and livelihoods of the poor

3. Recommendations to UNEP and the 9th SS of the GC/GMEF on the three themes

¹ UNEP/ROAP facilitated the participation of 45 participants including representatives from various networks, advocacy groups, technical experts and grassroots NGOs involved in the three main areas of energy, chemicals and tourism, from the 5 sub-regions namely North East Asia, South East Asia, South Asia, Central Asia and the South Pacific at the Regional Preparatory Meeting of the 7th UNEP Global Civil Society in Bangkok on October 28th and 29th 2005.

ENERGY

Recommendation to Governments

- Governments should adhere to the legally binding Kyoto Protocol and urge wider compliance by all countries in the second implementation period beyond 2012 in order to ensure effective global reduction of green house gases.
- Governments should fulfill their commitments in the JPOI and assist small island developing states (SIDS) in their implementation of the Barbados Plan of Action at the national level with financial and technical resources through the Global Environment Facility (GEF), bilateral and multilateral development banks
- Energy is not only the prime mover of economic development but vital to improving the lives and livelihoods of the rural poor and stemming tide of migration to urban areas. We urge governments to ensure rural electrification through renewable energy to alleviate poverty and raise quality of life.
 - Technologies for rural electrification should tap renewable energy sources that are locally available such as mini-hydropower for islands instead of imported and costly grid connection
- Prioritize the need for sustainable energy policies as part of the national sustainable development strategies
- Energy efficiency will lead to an appropriate use of energy, cut down its wastes, and have lesser impact on the environment. Hence, governments should provide:
 - Utility based incentive for the renewable energy technologies (RETs) as whole;
 - Tax incentive, low price and capital cost incentive can be provided by the government to promoters of RETs, such as extension of loans to RET promoters and consumers shifting to RETs;
 - Market mechanisms and pricing policies such as the net metering facilities in China, and the tax-exemption on public bus purchases in Bhutan
- We urge governments to integrate energy policy with land use, urban planning, eco-housing projects and viable transportation options to encourage the use of public transportation. Governments should adopt policies that encourage the use of hybrid vehicles and the use of ethanol and bio-diesel blending.
- Civil society firmly believes that:
 - Market forces and privatization are unlikely to ensure affordable access of the poor to energy services;
 - Nuclear energy should not be part sustainable energy policy in view of the problems associated with the disposal of nuclear waste and the global security issues concerning nuclear materials falling into the hands of terrorist groups
 - Micro and mini hydro community-based and biomass-based projects should be supported by governments and regional and multilateral funding agencies
 - The construction of big dams should be opposed. We urge governments and multilateral development banks to adhere to the recommendations of the World Commission on Dams (WCD), and the adoption of the Report on Extractive Industries Review (EIR) commissioned by the World Bank and chaired by Emil Salim.

Recommendations to UNEP

- Under the Bali Strategic Plan of Action for Technology Support and Capacity Building to developing countries, UNEP can:
 - Act as an intermediary in supporting RETs' manufacturing base for less developed countries;
 - Play a role of facilitator for exposure visits and knowledge sharing among countries and civil society groups to go through the cost-intensive process of experimentation and learning
- On clean development mechanisms (CDM), UNEP can:
 - Identify and unite the group working on RETs
 - Sponsor the CDM application
 - Support capacity building on CDM
- UNEP should promote joint research on RETs, facilitate joint research and development projects and encourage investment in RETs from the WB, ADB, etc.

- Support research and documentation in the new developing area of carbon capture and storage (CCS)

TOURISM

Tourism Trends in Asia-Pacific

- Economic over-dependency on tourism; there is a need to seek more balanced growth
- Negative cultural influences and destruction of traditional values as liberalization – ‘westernization’, ‘Disneyfication’, sensation-seeking consumers
- Less ‘local’ content and authentic experience and more international ‘non-authentic’ development as countries open up to liberalization
- Emerging outbound markets – boom of Asian inter-regional tourism presenting new demands and expectations on destinations

Key Issues and Challenges:

- The tsunami and other natural and man-made disasters including SARS and bird flu epidemics have highlighted the vulnerability of the tourism industry. The post-tsunami reconstruction is highlighting the lack of community consultation and cooperation.
- The vulnerability of tourism to terrorism, counter-terrorism measures and armed conflicts is also affecting the region.
- Environmental/resource degradation and deflection of resources from communities e.g. water and waste management
- Energy consumption and ozone damage linked to transportation, especially the explosive growth in air travel
- Human rights, especially land rights of communities are under threat and in particular affect indigenous peoples and minorities
- Women, children and youth and other disadvantaged social groups also find themselves being exploited and/or abused
- There is also theft of cultural heritage/items and bio-piracy under the guise of tourism
- Tourism is being allowed to cause financial leakage, unbalanced and inequitable distribution of income, and local communities are not benefiting from the tourism industry
- Loss of control over natural resource – e.g. privatisation of national parks

Recommendations to UNEP

We urge UNEP to:

- Adopt and promulgate regional and international definition and indicators of sustainable tourism, linked to sustainable development
- Bridge the gap between environment and tourism and between civil society, government and industry
- Establish a coalition/committee of sustainable tourism advisors at a regional and national level – facilitate regular seminars/information exchange
- Spearhead educational and communication programs aimed at schools, industry, travelers and policy makers on the impact of tourism in both host countries and outbound destinations.

Recommendations to Governments:

We urge Governments to:

- Establish a strong legal and regulatory framework and ensure the enforcement of these rules and regulations on the tourism industry. In the event voluntary initiatives, such as guidelines, codes of conducts and industry standards are adopted by the industry, these should also be adequately monitored.
- Develop integrated tourism and environmental policies at the national level, and ensure that these policies:
 - Recognize traditional cultural diversity and traditional values, especially of indigenous people;

- Prioritize biological diversity and the need to protect the natural environment;
- Address national and global threats to energy, environment and indigenous peoples by tourism; and
- Incorporate fair and just trade principles
- Be cautious in opening up their tourism markets and agreeing to progressive liberalization in the service sectors as presently negotiated under the World Trade Organization (WTO). GATS and the current trend in services liberalization negotiations in the WTO could undermine local efforts to promote sustainable development through tourism as regulating the protection of the environment may be considered trade distorting. Also the influx of international tourism operators could displace local entrepreneurs and affect livelihoods.

CHEMICALS MANAGEMENT

The improper use or inadequate management of chemicals, including chemicals in products and wastes and from accidents and releases, increasingly threatens the human rights to life, health and well-being of all people, especially children, vulnerable populations and future generations. The Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM), as the Earth's action plan for achieving, by 2020, that chemicals are used and produced in ways that lead to the minimization of significant adverse effects on human health and the environment², is a crucial part of the global effort to protect human health and the environment from these threats.

While CSOs have been supportive of the SAICM process, we are of the view that it has many gaps and deficiencies. For instance, pharmaceutical companies that manufacture many chemicals are not part of the process. SAICM does not cover food additives, radioactive and several other chemicals. Chemicals are a global issue and as such manufacturers and producers have to be held responsible for impacts of these substances beyond their borders.

We urge all governments and participating stakeholders in the negotiations for the SAICM to agree that:

- SAICM, as a political, moral and ethical commitment to work toward achieving the 2020 goal, should be a legally-binding international instrument;
- Implementation of the SAICM must include measures to phase out chemicals that pose unmanageable hazards to health or the environment under its ordinary conditions of use in any country, and require safer substitutes and solutions;
- Implementation of the SAICM must embrace core principles and approaches of Agenda 21, the Rio Declaration, and other relevant international agreements, including the precautionary principles, liability and compensation, public participation, the principle of "no data, no market", comprehensive right-to-know laws, the polluter-pays principles, and others; the SAICM should provide guidance on how these principles and approaches can be applied to sound chemical management;
- The institutional arrangements for implementation of the SAICM must be dynamic, fully participatory, multi-sectoral, and multi-stakeholder;
- The SAICM can succeed only if substantial new and additional funds become available to developing countries and countries with economies in transition, and only if such funds are used effectively;
- Encourage donor countries and donor agencies to provide new and additional financial and technical assistance that enables developing countries and countries with transitional economies to implement fully all their commitments under international chemicals and wastes agreements and initiatives; and
- Promote establishment of a chemical safety focal area within the Global Environment Facility (GEF) with new and additional funds to encompass not only the GEF's present POPs Operational Program, but also to include additional operational programs that support implementation of other chemicals conventions, as well as integrated approaches to chemicals management called for in the SAICM

² The 2020 goal was adopted in the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) Plan of Implementation, paragraph 23.

With regards to chemicals management in general, civil society urges:

- Minimization and phasing out anthropogenic sources of mercury and methyl mercury and other POPS-like chemicals in the environment, including through the development of a new, legally binding global instrument on these chemicals;
- Securing the ratification and implementation by all countries of the Stockholm Convention and other chemicals and wastes agreements including the Rotterdam Convention on Prior Informed Consent; the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, including its Ban Amendment; the 1996 Protocol to the Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter (London Convention); the ILO Convention 170 Concerning Safety in the Use of Chemicals at Work; and relevant regional chemicals and wastes agreements;
- Supporting and strengthening the capacity of the UNEP Chemicals Branch to facilitate the implementation of chemicals-related multilateral agreements and initiatives and to assist governments and civil society in global actions for the sound management of chemicals;

At the National and Local levels, we strongly urge governments to:

- Adopt and enforce developmental guidelines/standards/voluntary code of conduct on zero waste, water accessibility, community consultation, local fair trade, employment etc. in relation to tourism development.
- Governments must take more active position in terms of banning the export/import of dirty technologies and already banned chemical substances under the frame of the Doha trade negotiations and free trade agreements;
- Adopt zero waste strategies, emphasizing source recovery, employment generation and community ownership;
- Promote the current experiences available with civil society and communities to address chemical problems and build capacities for the same at the local, regional and global levels;
- Ensure the active participation of local communities in risk assessment and environmental impact assessment of upcoming chemicals manufacturing projects.
- Ensure the phasing out of lead from gasoline.

Civil society organizations urge the adoption and implementation of the SAICM, guided by the above-mentioned principles and elements, by all governments and relevant intergovernmental organizations, and we pledge to play our role to ensure achievement of the 2020 goal.

Role of Civil Society Organizations

Civil society remains committed to:

- Creating awareness and educating the people on environmental concerns and the linkages with other development issues in the three thematic areas;
- The fundamental reform of chemicals management policies and practices throughout the world – including those that will stimulate the design of safer chemicals, products, and production systems – as an essential step to creating a safe and healthy global environment;
- Working in partnership with governments and other stakeholders in implementing projects and programs that promote the sound management of chemicals that protect the environment and public health; tourism policies that promote sustainable development; and clean, efficient and affordable energy

4. UNEP and Civil Society engagement

UNEP and Civil Society can work together to:

- Create a database of civil society organizations, community-based organizations, grass root movements to encourage sharing information and exchange of experiences, including a directory of these organizations in the region;

- Broadening and strengthening of civil society capacity, including enabling community-based organizations and indigenous peoples to undertake risk assessments of energy, tourism and chemicals
- On issues of regional priority that impact on poverty and the environment. e.g., -Monitoring the achievement of the MDGs
- Capacity building on themes and technical issues such as social and environmental impacts of free trade agreements, trade-environment policy linkages, access and benefit sharing in biodiversity conservation, liability regimes, energy issues, consolidating research on issues of environmental security, bolstering engagement with international organizations, etc.;
- Promote environmental education in all school curricula
- Building sustainable networks across sectors, disciplines- human rights, trade, environment, as with Asian Civil Society Forums;
- Building capacity of civil society to work more closely with media, academia, research institutions as well as parliamentarians;
- Make participation of civil society more effective and meaningful by strengthening mechanisms at all levels and urging governments to adopt necessary policies and measures
- Further strengthen civil society engagement in terms of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, in addition to participation in preparatory processes

5. Conclusion

The Tsunami disaster and the recent earthquake in South Asia are wake-up calls, highlighting the vulnerability of the region, the fragility of the environment and the need for community/stakeholder participation in decision-making processes. The existing problems in tourism development have been exacerbated by recent natural and health disasters the region has had to endure such as the Boxing Day 2004 earthquake/tsunami, the 8 October 2005 earthquake in South Asia, the SARS outbreak and the current bird flu epidemic which is fast showing signs of becoming a global pandemic.

The looming climate change scenario is an ecological time bomb and with 17 SIDS in the region, Governments in Asia-Pacific must take the challenge seriously. It is a precondition for survival and prosperity and must therefore be considered a public good just like national security and public health. Issues of mitigation and adaptation strategies to enable the SIDS to cope with any impending disaster must receive adequate support.

A predictable “chemical quake” is also in the horizon and it could have grave transboundary and global consequences. It is incumbent upon governments and international governments to take timely preventive actions now!