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Discussion Document for Agenda Item 15 (c)  
**Policy perspectives on a pollution-free planet**

## Policy Perspectives on Pollution-Free Planet

**Discussion Document -- Not for quotation or citation.** The purpose of this document is to facilitate discussions during the Second Forum of Ministers and Environment Authorities of Asia Pacific, 5 – 8 September 2017, Bangkok. Comments are welcome and should be sent to [uneproap@un.org](mailto:uneproap@un.org).

## I. Introduction

1. The flip side of the impressive economic growth Asia-Pacific has witnessed over the last few decades is increasing levels of pollution and depletion of natural resources. Huge volumes of gaseous, liquid and solid emissions, discharges and disposals are generated in the value chain. This pollution is further contaminating already depleting natural resources, and creating serious impacts on public health, life on earth under the sea. Pollution is not a new phenomenon and it is largely controllable and avoidable. However, pollution is now increasing at an unprecedented rate and increasing volumes of hazardous substances will make it harder and difficult to control at later stages. The transboundary movement of pollutants is also a major environmental, economic and political challenge.

2. We can move from this vicious circle to a virtuous circle, where economic growth, jobs, improvement in public health, reduced poverty, and gender equality, are linked with a more sustainable management of pollution and environmental resources. For this transformation to take place a shift is needed to develop more coherent and comprehensive set of cross-sectoral policy frameworks. Such policies will also need to align with necessary pre-requisites such as green technologies, financing mechanisms and stakeholder's engagement.

3. Existing policy frameworks can be strengthened, re-formulated and enforcement capacity can be enhanced by providing domestic support (political and technical) and through international cooperation. This Forum of Ministers and Environment Authorities of Asia Pacific can provide the platform to discuss and launch initiatives for boosting domestic support and strengthening international cooperation – including south-south cooperation. This will facilitate greater alignment amongst member states to achieve the targets under the various Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the 2030 Development Agenda and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement.

## II. Pollution and Policies - Current Scenario

4. Broadly speaking there are two main types of pollution, namely one is environmental pollution (Figure 1) and the other is depletion of natural resources and risk for future generation of not having equal access or availability of natural resources.

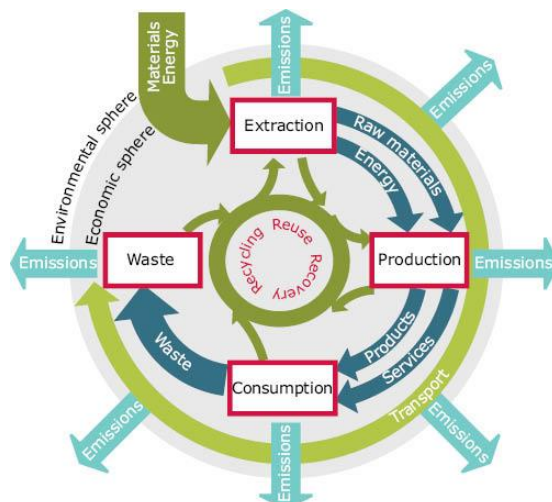


Figure 1: Environmental pollution related externalities in entire value chain  
<https://www.eea.europa.eu/soer/synthesis/synthesis/chapter4.xhtml>

5. For existing policies, there are three dimensions of importance; multilateral environmental agreements, national and local legislative frameworks for pollution control, and indirect, or sector-wide national and local policies.

6. Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) provides framework for targeted and time bound actions – while some also include compliance-related actions like monitoring and reporting. However, many countries, despite being parties to Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), do not have regulatory frameworks and enforcement mechanisms in place to effectively implement the agreements.

7. Countries are increasingly adopting national policies and legal frameworks to address pollution issues. However, implementation, compliance and enforcement remains a great challenge – especially in developing countries. This is due to factors such as lack of institutional capacity, insufficient training of relevant officials to enforce legislation, and unavailability of information and national guidance materials to enforce the law.

8. The third dimension is indirect or sector-wide policies. For example, legislation, regulations, and standards for chemicals and waste management are diverse and complex. Some countries have more than 100 different instruments across different sectors such as circular economy for reutilizing waste, or waste to energy. Moreover, voluntary initiatives and global alliances have been instrumental in aiding and pushing improved and faster actions as seen in the case of fuel efficiency improvements and cleaner air.

### **III. Strengthening the System – Policy Perspective**

9. The first step, to turn Asia-Pacific resource efficient and pollution free, is to strengthen the system through enabling environments to ensure that all major stakeholders play their roles effectively. An enabling environment is created through political will, awareness-raising, legislation frameworks, financing mechanisms, and support for capacity building. This could be done in a systematic way starting from assessment of the current situation and the identification of gaps in policy and practices.

10. The legislative frameworks for resource efficiency and sustainable pollution management can cut across various sectors and sector-specific policies such as water, agriculture, industry, transport, fisheries, and so on. Pollution management policies are usually part of pollution control or environmental protection. However, recently, the policies on circular economy cover a host of sectors.

11. Several Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) are related to different types of pollution. For example, the implementation of the Paris agreement on Climate Change will be a major step forward in tackling air pollution as the root causes of climate change, and air pollution largely overlap. Addressing Short-Lived Climate Pollutants could avoid as much as 0.5°C of warming, and prevent 2.4 million premature deaths from air pollution. Air pollution-related specific agreements, such as the Convention on Long-Range Trans-boundary Air Pollution, provide additional protocols to address transboundary issues, such as acid rain.

12. For national policies the political will and awareness is picking up as by 2015, 109 Member States had adopted air quality standards, 73 had a specific air quality policy, Act or Rules, and 104 had vehicle emission standards. Globally 167 countries have national legislation addressing the issues covered by the Basel Convention, 142 of which have specific chemicals or wastes legislation. As of 2017, 65 countries had legally binding controls on lead in paint. In water

pollution management, the WHO 2006 guidelines for safe use of wastewater is used by all countries. Of 130 countries, 41 per cent indicated that, in 2012, they had fully implemented, started or advanced implementation of integrated water resources management plans or equivalent.

13. For cross-sectoral policies, which are also directly and indirectly linked with pollution control, are becoming a major focus such as circular economy, resource recovery, or utilizing waste as an alternative energy source. Some countries have more than 100 different instruments across different sectors such as circular economy for reutilizing waste or waste to energy. Moreover, voluntary initiatives and global alliances have been instrumental in aiding and pushing improved and faster actions as seen in the case of fuel efficiency improvements and cleaner air.

14. Following are the key elements to derive policy perspective for pollution management:

- Strengthening the science-policy-business-society interface;
- Supplementing and complementing legal agreements and conventions with more outcome-based and light footed, voluntary initiatives;
- Engagement of diverse actors and stakeholders;
- Engagement of industry and business community in solutions; and
- Integrated innovations in production systems with social considerations, competitiveness and employment.

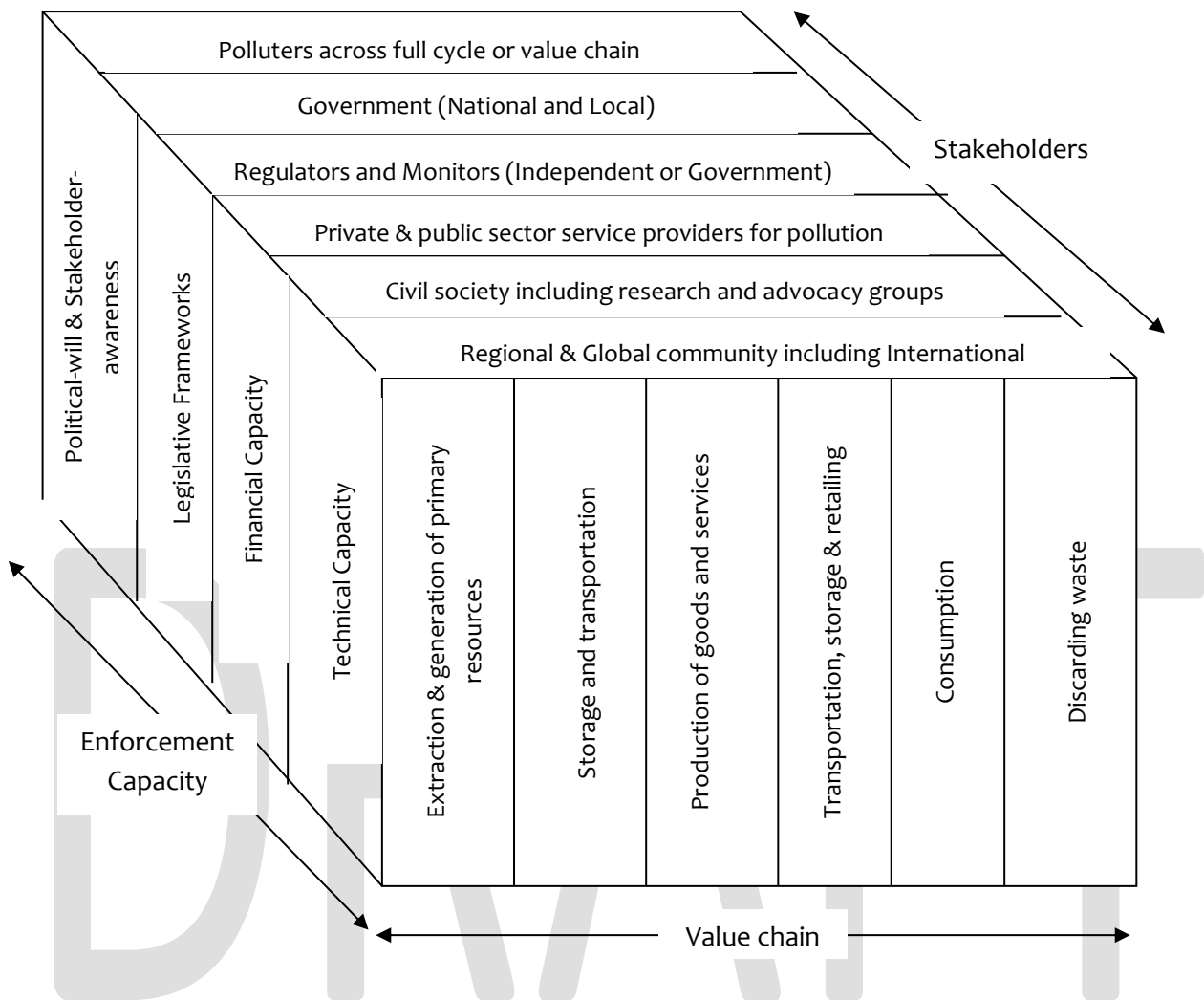
#### **IV. Empowering the Enforcement**

15. The policies itself may not help the national and local governments to achieve the targets of pollution-free countries and cities. The implementation of policies is viewed as a much bigger challenge than formulating these policies. To empower enforcement, there is a lot to learn from both the Rio Principles and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in terms of guiding effective action. The five principles which underpin the framework are universality, sustainability, integration, precaution and inclusiveness. These principles could also be applied to the ambitious goal of achieving a pollution free Asia Pacific

- Everyone in society is responsible for moving towards a pollution-free planet;
- Access to environmental information and data, education and public participation;
- Multiple risks to human health and well-being, especially to women, children and vulnerable groups, and to ecosystem health require a preventive approach;
- Innovation and leadership are central to tackling pollution in an effective and impactful manner; and
- Multiple benefits of action on pollution need to be recognized, policy uncertainty reduced, and innovation placed at the center.

16. A three-dimensional approach is required to strengthen their effective implementation by involving all the concerned stakeholders. Firstly, the political-will and stakeholder awareness is to match with available legislative frameworks and the financial and technical capacity to implement these policies. Secondly, the policies should cover whole value chains and not just end-of-pipe to reduce, control and manage pollution before it contaminates the environment and affects public and ecosystem health. And finally, a systemic approach involving all the relevant stakeholders is essential for long-term gains (Figure 2). This system approach shall focus on important stakeholders with respect to their roles.

Figure 2: Enabling Policies to Perform (Source: Author)



## V. Conclusion

17. Towards a pollution free Planet is an aspirational goal for governments and stakeholders alike. This goal brings common aspiration for all the member states as pollution is affecting all of humanity way beyond our geographical borders. Therefore, connecting economic growth with pollution control and environmental improvement is the key to achieve this goal. Availability and access to natural resources for current and future generations coupled with improved public health will see higher economic growth rates and improvements in human and ecosystem wellbeing.

18. This goal seeks to consolidate the partnerships among and between public and civil society entities including the private sector even further – with a view to strengthening synergies and bringing all networks together for greater collective impact in the region and beyond. It also responds to the need for enhanced regional partnerships to support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In this regard, the Ministerial Forum will seek to reinforce regional efforts and create a platform to mobilize and share

knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the initiatives in all countries of the region.

19. A Framework for actions could be agreed upon with technical support from UN Environment Asia Pacific office to reinforce integration and coherence in the way society responds to social, environmental and economic challenges related to pollution.

20. Targeted interventions can be both based on global and regional environmental agreements, or direction action beyond these to address the most pressing challenges in transforming cities, countries and the region to be pollution free. These interventions as well as transformative actions can be supported by system-wide enablers to ensure long-term positive impacts leading to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other environmental targets across Asia-Pacific.

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