

Regional Forum on Environment and Health

Guidance Document on the Mechanisms for Conducting Meetings

This guidance document on the mechanisms for conducting meetings at various levels of the Regional Forum on Health and Environment in Southeast and East Asian Countries presents and describes the operations of the ministerial meetings, meetings of high-level officials, Scientific Panel meetings and Thematic Working Group¹ meetings. It also describes the roles of the Chair and the Vice-Chair, the frequency of meetings, rules of participation, criteria for inclusion of additional members in the Regional Forum and the Secretariat.

The Ministerial Regional Forum

The ministerial regional forum is a two-day event which includes one day preparatory high-level officials meeting followed by the ministerial meeting.

According to *Section V* of the Framework for Cooperation:

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

- *Provide overall guidance and strategic direction consistent with the vision, goal and objectives of the Forum;*
- *Determine priority areas and the associated actions to improve health and the environment in the region;*
- *Enhance coordination and cooperation among countries and partner agencies in addressing identified health and environment priorities;*
- *Review and discuss the reports, scientific evidence and proposed recommendations of the Secretariat;*
- *Consider recommendations of the member countries regarding future work and strategic directions; and*
- *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 among themselves a Chair and Vice-Chair to preside over the proceedings of the meetings of the Regional Forum.”

1. **Frequency of meetings:** the ministerial regional forum is to be convened at least every three years.

(Note 1: according to the Framework for cooperation, a separate guidance is not needed for the operation of the Thematic Working Group (TWG) meetings. However, during the Extraordinary High-level Officials Meeting in Bangkok Thailand, there was an active discussion about the operation of TWGs and the need to clarify TWGs roles and functions. The Bangkok Meeting agreed that a guidance is to be provided for the operation of TWGs as clarification to the Framework for Cooperation about TWGs).

2. **Operations:** the ministerial regional forum will review the progress of the Regional Forum on Environment and Health during the previous three years, and approve the work plan for the next three years, agreeing on priorities and common targets for the achievement of the objectives of the Regional Forum. The proposed work plan, priorities and common targets will be prepared by the secretariat.
3. **Election of Chair and Vice Chair:** the ministerial regional forum will appoint the Chair and elect the Vice Chair that will serve for the next three years. The host of the ministerial regional forum is appointed Chair for the next three years and the elected Vice Chair shall be the succeeding host country of the next ministerial regional forum. The countries chairing and vice-chairing the Regional Forum will have the prerogative to determine the appropriate coordination and/or alternation of duties among its ministries in carrying out the tasks related to the chairmanship/vice-chairmanship.

In the event that no country volunteers to host the next ministerial regional forum, the delegates of the meeting should elect a Vice Chair to support the Chair to preside that specific meeting. The elected Vice Chair under this circumstance is not under any obligation to host the next ministerial meeting of the Regional Forum. Any country that wishes to host the next ministerial regional forum may express the interest to do so at a high-level meeting. On acceptance of this offer the country will be regarded as the vice chair of the Regional Forum.

4. **Duration and roles of the Chair:** the Chair of the Regional Forum will be in office until the next ministerial meeting is convened. During this period, the roles of the Chair include:
 - to preside over the proceedings of all Regional Forum meetings and events;
 - to represent the Regional Forum in other meetings and events such as attending in ministerial meeting/conferences in other regions;
 - to voluntarily lead and facilitate the strategic direction of the Regional Forum;
 - to convene and host a ministerial regional forum, which will mark the inauguration of its chairmanship.
5. **Duration and roles of the Vice Chair:** the Vice Chair of the Regional Forum will be until the next ministerial meeting is convened and will then assume the Chairmanship of the Regional Forum. During this period, the roles of the Vice Chair include:
 - to support the Chair to preside over the proceedings of all Regional Forum meetings and events;
 - in the absence of the Chair, to represent the Regional Forum in other meetings and events such as attending in ministerial meeting/conferences in other regions;
 - to support and follow the lead of the chair on the strategic direction of the Regional Forum;
 - to convene and host the next ministerial regional forum, which will mark the inauguration of its new chairmanship.

6. ***Date and venue of meeting***: the date and venue of the ministerial meeting must be identified at least six months in advance to allow timely sending of invitations and preparations for the meeting. Official invitations are to be provided by the host country, addressed to the ministers with copy to the national communication focal points.
7. ***Cost of participation***: the expenses for organizing the ministerial regional forum are based on cost sharing between the host country, member countries and the Secretariat. The host country shall support meeting venue, meals, coffee breaks, accommodation and local transportation for the ministers and high-level officials. Member countries may cover own travel costs. The travel costs of delegates from developing countries may be covered by the Secretariat, depending on availability of funds.
8. ***Role of Secretariat***: the secretariat is responsible to prepare the work plan, priorities and targets of the Regional Forum for the approval of the Ministerial Regional Forum. In addition, the secretariat will support the reporting, development and circulation of the meeting's technical working documents before and after the meetings.
9. ***Rules of participation and Criteria on New Memberships of the Regional Forum***: the current members of the Regional Forum are Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam.

A country wishing to become a new member of the Regional Forum and accepting the Framework for Cooperation of the Regional Forum, can submit an expression of interest in joining the Regional Forum to the secretariat, who will circulate it as membership application among member countries. After this, the said country's representatives can be invited as observers in Regional Forum meetings, conferences and other events. The formal admission as member or permanent observer will then be deliberated during the next available high level meeting and formalized in the immediate next ministerial meeting.

10. ***Rules of participation and Criteria on Partnerships***: international organizations include private sector wishing to become partners or observers of the Regional Forum should accept the Framework for Cooperation of the Regional Forum. Such organizations should approach the secretariat, who will then invite their representatives as observers, experts or technical partners in Regional Forum meetings, conferences and other events. The secretariat may also invite and approach international organizations with potential interests in collaborating on the work plan of the Regional Forum.

High-Level Officials Meetings

According to the Framework for Cooperation:

“The High-Level Officials of the Ministries of Health and Ministries of Environment may represent their respective ministers in the meetings of the Regional Forum to be convened more frequently and make decisions on behalf of their respective ministers about:

- *Adoption of interim reports, work plans and recommendations by the Secretariat;*
- *Establishing coordination and cooperation mechanisms among ministries and partner agencies of member countries’ to address identified health and environment priorities;*
- *Acceptance of new members or observers;*
- *Acceptance of the Regional Forum’s policies, strategies, budget, and action plans.”*

11. **Frequency of meetings:** high-level officials meetings are to be convened at least every 18 months or more frequently as deemed necessary.
12. **Operations:** the high-level official meeting will review the midterm progress of the Regional Forum during the past 18 months based on the current work plan. The senior officials delegated to represent their agencies in the high-level officials meetings should have the authority to take decisions related to the meeting agenda.
13. **Host country:** hosting of high-level officials meeting is voluntary and open to member countries of the Regional Forum, except for the high-level officials meeting that immediately precedes a ministerial meeting as part of a ministerial regional forum, which is to be hosted by the Vice Chair.
14. **Date and venue of meeting:** the date and venue of the high-level officials meeting must be identified at least six months in advance to allow timely sending of invitations and preparations for the meeting. Official invitations are to be provided by the host country, addressed to the ministers with copy to the national communication focal points.
15. **Cost of participation:** the expenses for organizing the high-level officials meeting are based on cost sharing between the host country, member countries and the Secretariat. The host country shall cover meeting venue, meals, coffee breaks, accommodation and local transportation for the high-level officials. Member countries may cover own travel costs. The travel costs of delegates from developing countries may be covered by the Secretariat, depending on availability of funds.
16. **Role of Secretariat:** the secretariat is responsible to prepare the work plan midterm progress review, interim priorities and targets of the Regional Forum for approval of the high-level officials. In addition, the secretariat will support the reporting, development and circulation of the meeting’s technical working documents before and after the meetings.

Scientific Panel Meetings

According to the Section V (Structure) of the Framework for Cooperation:

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.

And according to the Section V (Functions) of the Framework for Cooperation:

The Scientific Panel will be constituted (appointed) 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.*

17. **Tasks:** the scientific panel’s tasks and the related deliverables and outputs are presented in the following table

Tasks	Methodology by which the SP carries out task	Outputs/Deliverables
1. Note terms of reference, prepare division of work, and elect Chair.	The ToR is drafted by the Secretariat and approved by Ministerial or High-Level meeting, the SP panel members take note of them and of the specific issues under discussion (as proposed by the Forum), define division of work, and elect a chair with the duty to preside over the SP works and ensure that the ToR is respected.	SP notes ToR, and agrees on internal division of work (if necessary involving the knowledge network); Chair is elected.
2. Review and synthesize current knowledge on environment and health issues faced by the region and state of the art interventions; Identify and address gaps in knowledge;	SP members to undertake a review of the current existing knowledge on environment and health issues, following the division of work that they have agreed upon and involving the Knowledge Network. The review is to include evaluation of the effectiveness of previous Regional Forum initiatives, and is to be synthesized in a report highlighting the gaps in knowledge and the way to address them.	Support countries in the development of Environmental Health Country Profiles. A report on the current environment and health issues in Asia, including the identification of gaps in knowledge and the way to address them, and with a section dedicated to the evaluation of previous activities and initiatives of the Regional Forum.
3. Prioritize environment and health strategies that have proven effective in addressing priorities in high- and low-income countries (i.e., environment and health “best buys”);	SP members to identify the best environment and health strategies that can address the current issues in the region, focusing on priority areas. SP members to coordinate and develop related background documents, if necessary involving the Knowledge Network.	Background document for the SP meeting on environment and health strategies “best buys”; Recommendations on priority areas will be included in meeting report.
4. Guide the development of the Regional Forum and relevant country work plans, including proposal of indicators and common targets in the priority areas.	SP members to brainstorm about the Regional Forum significance and provide recommendations about its three year work plan to address priority areas resulting from the previous SP reports; Discussion and agreement about proposed indicators and common achievable targets for the member countries, backed by relevant scientific evidence for the member countries to deliberate upon.	Recommendations for the Regional Forum three year work plan; Set of indicators and common achievable targets on identified priority areas.
5. Serve as resource persons for technical and leadership capacity development needs of member countries and for the Knowledge Network.	As per request of the Secretariat	Deliver presentations or trainings in capacity development events, back to back with SP meetings.

18. **Membership:** the scientific panel will be convened on an ad-hoc basis to address specific issues that have been identified in the ministerial meetings or high-level officials meetings of the Regional Forum.

The secretariat, in consultation with Regional Forum Chair and Vice Chair, appoints the members of the scientific panel:

- a. Three standing (permanent) members may be appointed (one by each of the three Regional Offices of the secretariat) for up to three-years during the period of the work plan.
- b. Distinguished scientists or senior experts on specific issues, whose number will not be fixed or permanent and may vary according to the issues under discussion.
- c. Chair and Vice Chair of the Regional Forum, who will follow the discussion and provide policy context to the issues discussed.

The membership of the scientific panel, whenever possible, shall aim to achieve balance in gender and regional representation.

19. **Criteria for Selection of Scientific Panel:** at a minimum, the members of the scientific panel should meet the following qualifications and experience in order to be appointed:

- Extensive, high-level experience in national or international science policy processes;
- Comprehensive understanding of the environment and health issue identified by the Forum for analysis;
- An advanced university degree in the fields relevant to the Regional Forum;
- Established reputation in the international technology, science and/or policy arena;
- Excellent communication skills (oral and written) in English, the working language of the Regional Forum.

The panel may also include expert staff from UNEP, WHO or other relevant UN agencies. Participation in the meetings of the scientific panel will also be open to self-supported delegates of the Regional Forum member countries' environment and health agencies, who shall act as observers. Observers from the Regional Forum's Knowledge Network may also be invited by the secretariat.

20. **Chair of the Scientific Panel:** at each meeting, the members of the panel shall elect a chair among themselves to preside over the scientific panel meetings. The chair will preside over the scientific panel meetings and ensure that its activities, decisions and recommendations are impartial and aligned with the overall objectives of the Regional Forum and the terms of reference of the panel.

If deemed appropriate, the secretariat will coordinate and mediate the interaction between the panel and the Knowledge Network components.

21. ***Duration of the Scientific Panel:*** the panel is convened on an ad-hoc basis, therefore membership of the panel will be time bound and vary according the issues under discussion, with standing members not exceeding a three-year term without renewal of appointment.
22. ***Operational Modality:*** it is expected that the panel would be convened annually or at least once during the three-year programme of work of the Regional Forum, at a venue and during dates to be agreed upon with the secretariat. The meetings' venue and dates will be circulated among the national focal points of the Regional Forum members, to allow for self-supported country representation as observers.

Recommendations and decisions of the scientific panel shall be decided by consensus where possible, with all core members supporting a particular point of view. Where consensus is not reached, all recommendations shall be presented to the Regional Forum and the lack of consensus noted. All recommendations will be recorded by the secretariat during scientific panel meetings and teleconferences.

The secretariat will support the meeting reporting, and will use the recommendations and studies of the scientific panel as guidance and background support for the development of the Regional Forum's work plan, to be submitted to the ministerial and high-level meetings. All outputs of the scientific panel are to be considered intellectual property of the Regional Forum on Environment and Health and its secretariat.

23. ***Funding of the Panel's Operation:*** financial support of the panel activities from member countries, including in kind contributions, is welcome on a voluntary basis but by no means linked to any appointment or function within the panel. The joint secretariat will also aim to mobilize resources to support the activities of the panel.

Thematic Working Group Meetings

According to the Section V (Structure) of the Framework for Cooperation:

Thematic Working Group (TWG) 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.

24. **Position of TWG in the Regional Forum:** a TWG shall be the lead body to deal with a technical area of work of the Regional Forum and represents the Regional Forum in the knowledge networking with other similar initiatives or working groups.
25. **TWG Members:** members of TWGs are representatives of the member countries of the Regional Forum. Partners of the TWGs are representatives from the private sector, academia, civil society, occupational groups, regional centres, institutions, and other regional and global initiatives or programmes.
26. **Chairs and Co-Chairs of TWGs:** since the activation of a TWG is initiated by a member country of the Regional Forum with the funds to support the TWG activities, that member country hosting the TWG is the Chair of the TWG. In the situation when more than one country is hosting that same TWG, both member countries will then Co-Chairs the TWG.

In coordination with the Secretariat, the Chair or Co-Chair(s) shall call and preside over TWG meetings, coordinate the implementation of agreed activities, and present progress of TWG plans at the Regional Forum.

The TWG shall prepare a workplan for their activities and submit it to the Secretariat to be part of the Regional Forum's workplan.

The TWGs can assist in analyzing environmental health data in the Region gathered by the Secretariat from the updating of country environmental health profiles.

27. **Collaboration between TWGs and Other Regional Initiatives:** the TWGs are encouraged to work and collaborate with other regional initiatives such as EASAN, climate change, clean air, asbestos, nuclear, etc. that are related to their thematic areas to strengthen knowledge network of the programme areas of the TWG and avoid duplication and redundancies;
28. **Operational Modality:** in coordination with the Secretariat, TWG Chairs or Co-Chair(s) may convene at least one face to face meeting during the three-year programme of work of the Regional Forum. Each TWG may create a website to communicate and disseminate information of the TWG and the website should be linked to the website of the Regional Forum.

The Secretariat will manage and maintain the Regional Forum's website and responsible for linking the TWG websites for effective and closer collaboration.

29. **Financial Resources to Support the Operation of TWGs:** the main source of funds to support the operation of the TWGs should come from the member countries of the Chair or Co-Chairs. The TWG may mobilize funds from other sources including international organizations.

Funds obtained from private companies should obtained approval at the Ministerial Regional Forum.

The Secretariat is encouraged to support or share the costs of activities of the Regional Forum.

30. **TWG Participation in the Scientific Panel Meeting:** although not mandatory, the TWGs may recommend to the Secretariat a representative to join as an observer to the Scientific Panel Meeting at the TWG expenses.