WHY WE NEED SYNERGY

Environmental hazards are an insidious and growing threat to our health. In Asia and the Pacific, it is estimated that a quarter of the burden of disease and death is due to environmental conditions.

The air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat: all are affected by the state of our environment. Globally, air pollution has become unbearable in many big cities, and is responsible for 8 million deaths each year from cardiovascular disease. Close to a third of the population do not have regular access to safe water and sanitation. We face crisis after crisis that requires action from both the environment and health sectors – be it severe air pollution, forest fire haze, lead in water, fish kills, explosions that scatter toxic chemicals, contamination of waterways or outbreaks of diarrheal disease. Yet in so many countries, these sectors are not joining their efforts with the urgency needed.

Health is a resource for living.
But health cannot be achieved in degraded environments.

Health and the environment are what will ensure the survival of future generations.

These sectors must synergize their efforts to protect health and save lives. Better collaboration is the only way we will achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The actions of these two sectors generate “co-benefits” that can be used as leverage for greater support and investments in solutions for sustainable development. Boosting active transport, for example, promotes physical activity and reduces traffic congestion, air pollution and carbon emissions.
THE FORUM AT A GLANCE

SYNERGY IN ACTION

The Regional Forum on Environment and Health in Southeast and East Asian Countries was established in 2004. The vision of its original charter was “to safeguard and enhance health and the environment, thereby promoting development that reduces poverty”.

The ministers of health and environment have met every three years since 2007 to set the overall policy direction of the Regional Forum, while their high-level officials have met every 18 months since 2004 to deal with policies, strategies, budgets and plans with the secretariat. Since 2010, thematic working groups (TWGs) have reported on progress in key areas such as air quality and environmental emergencies.

In its first decade, the Regional Forum sparked new cooperation among ministries and sectors at the country level, especially with the development of National Environmental Health Action Plans, environmental health impact assessment, and legal and policy reforms.

The founding members of the Regional Forum are 10 Associations of Southeast Asian Nations countries plus China, Japan, Mongolia and the Republic of Korea (ASEAN+4). Members agreed in 2016 to invite all countries of the WHO South-East Asia and Western Pacific regions into the Forum. Therefore, the Manila meeting has been named the “Asia-Pacific Regional Forum on Health and Environment.”

Its secretariat consists of the WHO South-East Asia and Western Pacific Regional Offices and United Nations Environment Programme Regional Office for Asia Pacific (UNEP-ROAP).
The specific objectives of the Asia-Pacific Regional Forum on Health and Environment are:

- to seek ideas and inputs on how the Regional Forum can serve as a practical platform for cross-sector collaboration on SDGs and meeting commitments made under the Paris Agreement on climate change;
- to discuss emerging environmental issues affecting health in the region including transboundary concerns;
- to provide updates on what has been achieved by the Regional Forum over the three years since the Third Regional Forum in Kuala Lumpur;
- to finalize the 2017–2019 workplan, setting out a viable and effective programme for the next three years;
- to agree on the expansion of the membership of the Regional Forum; and
- to agree on the Manila Declaration for endorsement of the ministers which will provide updated policy directions of the Regional Forum.

Expected outputs and outcomes

Information and insights gathered in the scientific meeting will help Ministers and high-level officials deepen their knowledge of the environment and health nexus and prioritize the goals of the forum in 2017–2019. Moderated discussions will provide an opportunity for ministers to highlight new priorities, explore new solutions, and seek more effective ways of working together.

An official report of the conference proceedings including a post-workshop evaluation result will be produced by the end of November 2016.
**KEYNOTE SPEAKERS**

**Professor Peng Gong** is Professor and Director of the Center for Earth System Science at Tsinghua University. He also serves as the Vice Chair of the Academic Committee at Tsinghua University. Before joining Tsinghua, he was on faculty in the Department of Environmental Science, Policy and Management at the University of California, Berkeley for over 20 years.

His major research interest is global environmental change and health. He is author/co-author of more than 500 articles and seven books. From 2004 to 2006, he was one of the nine members on the Board of Overseas Advisors to the Ministry of Science and Technology of China.

**Professor Ramanathan** discovered the greenhouse effect of halocarbons, particularly CFCs, in 1975. Along with R. Madden, he predicted in 1980 that global warming would be detected by 2000. His proposal that mitigation of short lived climate pollutants (black carbon, methane, ozone and HFCs) will slow down global warming significantly during this century has found life as a Climate and Clean Air Coalition, which takes action on the issue. In 2013, he was awarded the top environment prize from the United Nations, the Champions of Earth for Science and Innovation. He is now serving in Pope Francis’ Council for the Pontifical Academy of Sciences.

**MODERATOR**

**James Chau** is a television broadcaster who has guest presented on BBC World News and is currently a Special Contributor to CCTV News. He has interviewed Winne Mandela, Robert Mugabe, Aung Sang Suu Kyi, Elton John, Kofi Annan, Paul Kagame, Jacki Wudodo and Chinese First Lady Peng Liyuan. Following the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370, he reported extensively from Kuala Lumpur and was the first journalist to reveal the last words spoken by the missing pilots. He is a World Economic Forum Young Global Leader.

A long time activist, he has 1.7 million followers on Weibo to support the rights of people living with HIV and AIDS. In 2009, he was named UNAIDS National Goodwill Ambassador for China. He expanded this commitment in 2016 with his appointment as WHO Goodwill Ambassador for Sustainable Development Goals and Health.

He frequently speaks at high-level events, most recently at the G20 Summit in Hangzhou. He lives in Beijing.

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**THE FORUM AT A GLANCE**

Other leading scientists and experts from the academic sector, NGOs and other intergovernmental organizations are expected to provide new knowledge and evidence on health and the environment, including climate change at the scientific meeting on 6 October.

The following partners join this meeting:

- **Health Care Without Harm (HCWH)** – climate resilient health-care systems
- **International Water Association (IWA)** – water and sanitation safety
- **Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Philippines (DENR)** – climate change impact on water, air, POPs and food
- **Asian Development Bank (ADB)** – Health Impact Assessment and financing
- **World Alliance for Mercury-Free Dentistry – dental amalgam**
- **Climate & Clean Air Coalition (CCAC)** – short-lived climate pollutants
SYNERGY FOR THE SDGs

Evolving from the Millennium Development Goals, the SDGs require systems thinking and an appreciation of how development is bound up with ecology. They demand new ways of working with others. Nowhere is this more obvious than on SDG 3 (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages). It includes a specific target related to air, water and soil quality, impossible to meet without progress on other goals such as Clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), Affordable and clean energy (SDG 7), Sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), Sustainable consumption and production patterns (SDG 12), Climate change (SDG 13), Oceans (SDG 14) and terrestrial ecosystems (SDG 15). The health sector must therefore collaborate widely to achieve this.

Scientific discussions will highlight knowledge, practice and gaps in capacity. Officials will consider how member countries can help and benefit from each other in the SDG process, including collaboration on cross-border environmental health issues. With the diversity of countries and their institutions in mind, SDG processes at the national level provide an opportunity for the two sectors to identify where the work can converge and how synergy can contribute to achieving priority goals, targets and indicators.

Organizers

The Regional Forum secretariat of UNEP ROAP, WHO South-East Asia and Western Pacific Regions has planned and organized the Asia-Pacific Regional Forum on Health and Environment. Hosting arrangements are taken care of by the Government of the Philippines.