

An Overview of Regional/Subregional Environmental Cooperation in Asia and the Pacific*

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Regional and subregional programmes on environmental cooperation have been strengthened and accelerated in Asia and the Pacific, particularly since around the time of UNCED, 1992. However, the effectiveness of such cooperative efforts remains uncertain, and the outlook for future development is unclear in many cases. What steps need to be taken to improve the situation and to further promote regional cooperation toward sustainable development?

The answer depends on different cooperative schemes and mechanisms in each subregion. Thus, this paper takes up the two specific cases of subregional cooperation in Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia (the former being more established and the latter now slowly taking shape), together with a more generalized picture of environmental cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region as a whole, and explores the problems and possibilities for promoting environmental cooperation.

In Northeast Asia, where several programmes have been independently developed, a systematic relationship among all the initiatives will create a synergy for strengthening cooperation among the various forums and programmes in future. On the other hand, in Southeast Asia, where a comprehensive and strategic environmental action plan already exists, it might be suggested to give a sharper focus on its priority areas of action and to secure funding necessary for the implementation of those programmes and projects.

1 Introduction

During the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), the world reached a global consensus that integration of environment and development is essential in responding to the threats of deterioration of ecosystem, worsening poverty, and perpetuation of social disparities. Since most environmental problems brought about at regional and global levels are rooted in human activities taking place at local and national levels, appropriate national strategies, policies, plans and processes are crucial in achieving the tasks. Nevertheless, as clearly stated in Agenda 21, no nation can achieve the tasks on its own, but only in close collaboration and good partnership with the United Nations, other international, regional and subregional organizations, local governments, and with broad public participation.

The term “environmental governance” refers to processes through which domestic and

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international society deals with environmental problems. Since 1992 environmental governance structures in Asia and the Pacific have changed dramatically. It is important to examine the changing nature of environmental governance in the region and its implications for environmental outcomes¹.

Thus, the Environmental Governance Project of the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES) explores ways and means of improving environmental governance systems at local, national and regional levels in the Asian region. The Project has endeavored to systematically analyze environmental governance structures and processes within the region. More specifically, the Project examined several national environmental governance systems in a cross-sectoral and comparative manner by drawing out general features of each governance structure, as well as through case studies of three selected issues: water and marine pollution; air pollution and climate change; and deforestation. In addition, the Project is conducting studies of regional and sub-regional programmes for environmental cooperation, focusing on the three issue areas.

This paper presents the tentative results of research carried out so far on sub-regional and regional mechanisms for environmental cooperation. Since the Asia-Pacific region, which comprises about 40 countries, is characterized by the extent of its geographical scope and the diversity of economic and political systems, collaboration at subregional levels is emphasized by many international and regional organizations. For example, UNEP's Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (UNEP/ROAP) places one of its priorities on subregional environmental cooperation, and has endorsed the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programmes (SACEP), the environmental action plans facilitated by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Mekong River Commission (MRC), and the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) and has assisted them in the further development of action plans, based on an assessment of the state of the environment in each subregion².

As a result, there is now a multitude of cooperative environmental programmes and action plans in the Asia-Pacific region, and new ones are still emerging. Yet, the effectiveness of such cooperative efforts remains uncertain, and the outlook for accomplishing their tasks is unclear in many cases.

Thus, in Sections 1 and 2 this paper first returns to questioning why environmental cooperation at regional and subregional levels is needed. In Section 3, the current status of multilateral initiatives at subregional and regional levels is examined. Next, Section 4 is devoted to discussing prospects for the future. Finally, in the concluding section, a few suggestions are made to further promote regional environmental cooperation, focusing on the two subregions of Northeast and Southeast Asia.

2 The Need for Promoting Regional Environmental Cooperation

Over the past two decades or so, regional and subregional environmental cooperation has been gaining momentum all over the world. The need for promoting such cooperation has arisen from several sources, as follows.

First, it should be pointed out that industrial and economic development is often accompanied

¹ Miranda A. Schreurs, "An Analytic Framework for a Comparative Study of Environmental Governance in Asia," in IGES Environmental Governance, *Country Reports on Environmental Governance in Four Asian Countries*, P.11

² UNEP, *UNEP in the Regions*.

by environmental degradation, the impacts of which are felt beyond the confines of individual countries. No country can single-handedly control pollution in international waters, transboundary movement of hazardous wastes and chemicals, or deal with such issues as environmental refugees, and disputes over trade restrictions for the purpose of environmental protection. Thus, there are functional requirements that several countries work together to find solutions to commonly shared environmental problems.

Second, regional environmental cooperation is one of the major channels for promoting environmental security. Some researchers³ argue that environmental issues should be linked with economic and security considerations. That is, environmental degradation leads to an unstable economy and social unrest, and could result in regional conflicts. Promoting multilateral cooperation on environmental issues may be one of the most effective ways to avoid such conflicts. Others believe that advancement of regional cooperation on the environment is beneficial to fostering mutual trust and creation of peace in the region. The early stages of Long-Ranged Transboundary Air Pollution (LRTAP) regime formation endorsed by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UN/ECE) can be cited as one of the encouraging examples.⁴

Third, potential exists for regional geopolitical units offering an appropriate framework for rational utilization of the region's natural resources and mitigation of the effects of environmental degradation. Thus, regional arrangements often address collective efforts on not only a regional or subregional scales, but also global or national-scale on common issues. For example, the European Union (EU) is currently committed to meeting their greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction targets jointly at the regional level by agreeing on and implementing a set of differentiated national targets. Similarly, in Asia the need for a regional approach to adaptation to climate change has been identified as one of the priority areas of concern by several countries that have completed a regional study under the Asian Least-Cost Greenhouse Gas Abatement Strategy (ALGAS) Project.⁵

Finally, it is worth noting that Agenda 21,⁶ adopted at UNCED, has played a significant role in promoting regional cooperation on environment and development. In each of its priority programme areas, Agenda 21 clarified the role of regional and subregional organizations in supporting and supplementing national efforts. Since Agenda 21 represents a global consensus and political commitment at the highest political level, many governments and some local governments in Asia and the Pacific have prepared their own national or local Agenda 21, and have facilitated cooperative efforts in collaboration with international and regional organizations.

3 The Current Status of Multilateral Initiatives on Environmental Cooperation

This section deals with cases of environmental cooperation in the two subregions of Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia (ASEAN), and more generally in the entire Asia-Pacific Region.

³ Jessica Tuchman Mathews is one of the representative researchers on the topic, See Jessica Tuchman Mathews, "Redefining Security," *Foreign Affairs* 68 (Spring 1989), pp. 162-177.

⁴ It was the 1975 Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) in Helsinki that triggered the UN/ECE involvement in environmental issues. In the process, environmental cooperation turned out to be the least controversial area and materialization of regional cooperation with implications for the area of transboundary air pollution was assigned to the UN/ECE. R. R. Churchill, G. Cutting and L. M. Warren, 'The 1994 UN ECE Sulphur Protocol,' *Journal of Environmental Law*, 7 (2), 1995, p.174.

⁵ UNEP, *Global Environment Outlook 2000*, Earthscan, p.238.

⁶ United Nations, *AGENDA 21: Programme of Action for Sustainable Development; Rio Declaration on Environment and Development; and Statement of Forest Principles*, New York: United Nations Publications, 1993.

3.1 *Northeast Asia*⁷

The Northeast Asian subregion includes Japan, China, Republic of Korea (ROK), Mongolia, Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the Russian Far East. Within this subregion, since the beginning of the 1990s, several multilateral programmes and forums have been initiated.

Among such initiatives, the Northeast Asian Subregional Programme of Environmental Cooperation (NEASPEC) fulfills the central role as a comprehensive and intergovernmental programme in the subregion. It is a programme for cooperation agreed to on the occasion of the first Meeting of Senior Officials (SOM) on Environmental Cooperation in Northeast Asia in 1993, hosted by United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN/ESCAP). Its real proponent was the government of ROK. Since then, SOM has been held every year or every two years, to decide on programme activities including project planning and implementation. Its three priority areas identified are as follows: energy and air pollution, ecosystem management and capacity building. Several fundamental projects on energy and air pollution have been identified and implemented with the help of ADB financial aid. NEASPEC aims to develop its own firm financial mechanisms rather than ad hoc project-based funding, and establishment of a core fund was agreed upon in March 2000.

The Northeast Asian Conference on Environmental Cooperation (NEAC) also covers various issues on the environment. It has been held annually since 1992, and has provided a forum for government officials of environmental agencies, and other environmental specialists from local governments, and NGOs in the subregion to exchange information, experiences and views.

On the economic cooperation front, the Tumen River Area Development Programme (TRADP), which is promoted by UNDP and aims to promote regional economic cooperation between China, ROK, DPRK, Mongolia and Russia, developed a Memorandum of Understanding on Environmental Principles governing the TRADP 1995. The Tumen Region has been threatened by environmental degradation, namely, inland and coastal water pollution, biodiversity loss, deforestation and air pollution. In response to the memorandum, a Strategic Action Programme (SAP) was created for the purpose of developing an effective long-term regional strategy for dealing with international water pollution and loss of biodiversity. The Global Environment Facility (GEF) decided to sponsor the SAP with 5 million dollars over a two-year period, and the program was launched in May 2000.

At a non-governmental level, a regional network called the Northeast Asia and North Pacific Environmental Forum (NEANPEF, now renamed the North Asia-Pacific Environment Partnership (NAPEP)) commenced in 1992. It is comprised of environmental experts and NGOs from subregional countries, and has promoted exchanges of information and expertise among environmental NGOs by holding workshops and mobilizing resources to support some specific projects, particularly for ecosystem management being undertaken by member NGOs in the region.

As for sectoral cooperation, problems related to the marine environment are under the purview of the Northwest Pacific Action Plan (NOWPAP). NOWPAP differs from NEASPEC and NEAC in that it was initially advocated by UNEP rather than on the initiative of the countries within the region. The participating countries are China, Japan, the ROK and Russia. These four countries

⁷ Wakana Takahashi and Kazu Kato, "Subregional Cooperative Programmes on Environment in Northeast Asia," *IGES Working Paper*, Jan. 2000.

adopted action plans at the first intergovernmental meeting held in Seoul in 1994⁸

The Acid Deposition Monitoring Network in East Asia (EANET) also focuses on one issue, and is aimed at developing a common understanding of the “acid rain” problem in the region. Covering a much broader geographical area than the subregion of Northeast Asia alone, its establishment was advocated by the Environment Agency of Japan.⁹ Its preparatory-phase activities started in 1998, and its full operation is expected to start by the end of the year 2000.

As for migratory waterbird protection, the North East Asian Crane Network Center was established in 1997, based on the "Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Protection Strategy." The strategy was formulated at the 7th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on Wetland (Ramsar), in which actions and priorities to protect migratory water birds and their habitats in Asia and the Pacific were identified. Based on the strategy, the East Asian Australasian Shorebird Site Network was also established in 1997, in which 24 sites from 10 countries participate. Also, the East Asian Anatidae Site Network was launched at the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on Wetland held in Costa Rica in May 1999.

In addition to these, cooperative efforts at a higher ministerial level were initiated recently. Following a proposal from the ROK, the Tripartite Environment Ministers Meeting (TEMM) between China, Japan and Korea was held in Seoul in January 1999. The three major countries in the subregion recognized the need to come together and intensify environmental cooperation. The TEMM is expected to be held on a yearly basis. The 2nd TEMM was held in Beijing in February 2000, where the ministers agreed to develop and work on specific projects -- in particular focusing on raising consciousness of environmental community, fresh water pollution and land-based marine pollution prevention and cooperation in the field of environmental industry. The three countries have already initiated the concept project proposals, and steps have been taken toward implementation.

3.2 Southeast Asia (ASEAN)

In Southeast Asia, many cooperative efforts have been initiated under the framework of ASEAN.¹⁰

In 1977, the ASEAN Sub-Regional Environment Programme (ASEP) was developed in collaboration with UNEP. The ASEP I set out six priority areas and listed more than one hundred projects and activities. Thereafter, two ASEPs were developed and implemented. In 1993, a new ASEAN Strategic Plan of Action on Environment was agreed upon, which consisted of 10 strategic thrusts and 27 supporting actions. In addition, the ASEAN Cooperation Plan on Transboundary Pollution (ACPTP) was agreed to in 1995.

Moreover, the haze disaster experienced in Southeast Asia in 1997 resulted in the most serious challenge in the subregion, particularly in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. Accordingly, a Haze Technical Task Force (HTTF) was set up in 1995, and the Regional Haze Action Plan (RHAP) was

⁸ UNEP, *Regional Seas: Action Plan for the protection, management and development of the marine and coastal environment of the Northwest Pacific region: NOWPAP Publication No.1*, 1997.

⁹ Environment Agency, Government of Japan, *Acid Deposition Monitoring Network in East Asia: Achievements of the Expert Groups*, March 1997, p.1.

¹⁰ ASEAN, *ASEAN: Overview*, Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat, 1995; ASEAN, *ASEAN Strategic Plan of Action on the Environment*, Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat, 1994; ASEAN, *ASEAN into the Next Millennium: ASEAN Vision 2020, Hanoi Plan of Action*, Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat, 1999; ASEAN, *ASEAN Cooperation Plan on Transboundary Pollution*, Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat, 1995, and other ASEAN materials.

adopted by the ASEAN Senior Officials on the Environment (ASOEN) in 1997 for the purpose of fighting against land and forest fires. Furthermore, the ASEAN is exploring the possibility of concluding an Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution, and has conducted a feasibility study on a comprehensive assessment of legal, institutional and administrative arrangements.

In parallel with these initiatives, the Hanoi Plan of Action (HPA), the first in a series of comprehensive long-term visions adopted at the ASEAN Summit in 1998, identified 15 activities for environmental protection and sustainable development to be undertaken, with emphasis on transboundary haze control.

3.3 Asia-Pacific region¹¹

Beside Northeast and Southeast Asia, a number of cooperative initiatives on environment have been developed in other subregions of Asia and the Pacific. Amongst them, the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) can be cited as one of the most prominent and encouraging examples. Its history can be traced back to 1973 when a subregional programme for nature conservation was launched for the first time.. Since then, several action plans, strategies and programmes on marine environment and nature conservation were developed and implemented. Moreover, the first legally binding agreement called the Noumea Convention on Marine Environment was adopted in 1986 and entered into force in 1990. Furthermore, the SPREP has been marked by acceleration in terms of its institutional development in the 1990s.

In South Asia, an association of 8 member countries¹² called SACEP (the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme) was established in 1981, with the aim of promoting and supporting co-operative activities in environmental protection and management, facilitating sharing of knowledge and expertise and providing resources for project implementation through donor assistance and support. Since then, a number of projects and programmes have been implemented. SACEP's Strategy and Programmes have been also developed since 1992. In addition, the member countries adopted the Malé Declaration on Control and Prevention of Air Pollution and Its Likely Transboundary Effects for South Asia in 1998, which makes provisions for baseline studies and an action plan for air pollution.

In Central Asia, where regional cooperative initiatives on environment have yet to be developed, there is a sign that countries are favorable to collaborating on environmental management. In February 2000, a intergovernmental meeting on Strategic Environmental Management for Central Asian Countries was held for the first time in Tehran. The meeting adopted a Tehran Statement on Subregional Environmental Cooperation and agreed that a subregional strategy and plan of action would need to be developed by the countries.

Whereas subregional environmental cooperation has been accelerated in most subregions of Asia and the Pacific, the recent wave of environmental cooperation can be observed not only at

¹¹ Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and Asian Development Bank, *State of the Environment in Asia and the Pacific 1995*, New York: United Nations, 1995; UNEP, *Global Environment Outlook 2000*, Earthscan; Asian Development Bank, *TAR:STU 29668, Technical Assistance (Financed from the Japan Special Fund) for the Asian Environmental Outlook*, 1998; Asian Development Bank, *TAR:OTH 33035, Technical Assistance (Financed from the Japan Special Fund) for Transboundary Environmental Cooperation in Northeast Asia*, 1999; Asian Development Bank, *TAR:CON 33030, Technical Assistance for Promoting Sustainable Development Agenda in Asia: Ministerial Conference 2000*, 1999; UNEP, *Asia-Pacific Environment Outlook*, Pathumthani: UNEP/EAP-AP, 1997; Andre Dua and Daniel C. Esty, *Sustaining the Asia-Pacific Miracle: Environmental Protection and Economic Integration*, Washington DC, Institute for International Economics; <http://unescap.org/enrd>; <http://www.unep.org/unep/regoffs/roap>;

¹² 8 member countries include: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

subregional levels but more generally in the entire Asia-Pacific Region.

UN/ESCAP fulfilled a significant role in facilitating such regional and subregional cooperation. It has embarked on a subprogramme on Environment and Natural Resources Development for the purpose of promoting regional and subregional cooperation for sustainable development and strengthening national capacities in achieving environmentally sound development, including the integration of environmental concerns into development strategies. It has several priority issue areas: namely, subregional cooperation on environmental issues; implementation of international environmental conventions; energy, water, and mineral resources; space technology applications for sustainable development; and natural disasters.

In addition, the Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development has been held every five years since 1985. It has reviewed the state of the environment in the region since 1990, and has promoted implementation of Agenda 21 and other outcomes of UNCED. The 1995 Conference adopted the Regional Action Programme for Environmentally Sound and Sustainable Development. The 2000 Conference is expected to review the progress made so far in implementing the Programme and to develop a new Regional Action Programme.

Along with UN/ESCAP, UNEP/ROAP has also conducted various activities underlining the catalytic and coordinating role of UNEP in promoting international cooperation on environment. The UNEP/ROAP has developed and is currently implementing several cooperative programmes, namely: Environment Assessment Programme for Asia and the Pacific (EAP-AP), Environmental Education and Training, Environmental Law and Institutions, Industry and Environment, Regional Seas Programme (East Asian Seas Action Plan) and Environmental Information.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB), whose membership has grown to 58 (of which 42 members are from within the region and 16 from outside), has also contributed to promoting subregional and regional cooperation on environment through providing financial and technical assistance to developing member countries (DMCs). In particular, the Bank funded various Technical Assistance (TA) projects, which amount to nearly \$20 million a year, aimed at improving the efficiency of resource management and pollution prevention and control in agriculture, fisheries, forestry, water resources, energy, and industry sectors. These projects include not only national TA's but also regional TA's such as ALGAS, and transboundary environmental cooperation in Northeast Asia¹³.

ADB has recognized that the region is short of action-oriented policy analyses of sharply defined common or transboundary environmental issues amenable to cooperative mitigation efforts. Subsequently, the Bank is developing a TA project for a well-researched Bank publication: *Asian Environmental Outlook-2000*, aimed at contributing substantially to the formation of the Bank's policy advice on and promotion of regional environmental cooperation and governance, as well as project and programme lending interventions of the Bank in DMCs.

On another front, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, inaugurated in 1989 and including 18 member economies, also began to work for integration of environmental and economic considerations. The First Environmental Ministerial Meeting held in 1994 developed an "APEC Environmental Vision Statement." Following on the Statement and other declarations, APEC has developed a three-pronged environmental work programme: namely, 1) integration of environmental and economic considerations in APEC's working groups; 2) attention to sustainable cities, clean technologies, and the marine environment; and 3) long-term focus on food, energy,

¹³ The Senior Official Meeting of the NEASPEC identified the Project in 1994. Thus the ESCAP Secretariat (the interim secretariat of NEASPEC) requested ADB to give financial support for the Project, which was subsequently granted.

environment, economic growth, and population.

On the scientific front, the Asia-Pacific Network for Global Change Research (APN) was established in 1995 for the purpose of strengthening links between science community and policy makers in the Asia-Pacific Region. It is an inter-governmental network, and aims at promoting, encouraging and supporting research activities on long-term global changes in climate, ocean and terrestrial systems, and on related physical, chemical, biological and socio-economic processes.¹⁴

Finally, the Environment Congress for Asia and Pacific (ECO ASIA) itself must be mentioned. ECO ASIA was initiated by the Environment Agency of Japan, with the objective of fostering policy dialogue and cooperation on the issues of environment and development among environmental ministers of participating countries. While ECO ASIA was originally intended as an informal forum of information exchange among ministers, it has now endorsed the “ECO ASIA Long-term Perspective Project” aimed at identifying options for environmental policies that promote long-term sustainable development of the Asia-Pacific region by identifying major environmental issues confronting the region; examining their links with socio-economic issues; and forecasting the future social economic and environmental issues that may be anticipated from different development scenarios of the region.

4 Prospects for the Future

As described in the preceding section, various cooperative environmental programmes are being carried out in the Asia-Pacific region. In Northeast Asia several programmes have been independently developed, whereas in Southeast Asia a comprehensive strategic plan has long been established, led by the ASEAN. This indicates that the mechanism of environmental cooperation varies from one subregion to another.

4.1 *Northeast Asia*

Agenda 21

In Northeast Asia, environmental cooperation was not carried out at the subregional level until the latter half of the 1980s. During the first half of the 1990s, a large number of subregional environmental programmes and bilateral agreements were established with the assistance of the United Nations organizations such as UN/ESCAP and UNEP, as well as ADB and the World Bank. This means that environmental cooperation in this subregion has been largely influenced by the UNCED process, and Agenda 21 in particular. For instance, at the first SOM (Senior Officials Meeting) of NEASPEC held in ROK in 1993, it was recommended that as a follow-up to the UNCED a subregional cooperative programme should be developed on a step-by-step basis. At the first meeting of NEAC held in Japan, also in 1993, it was agreed that an integrated regional strategy was required in order to achieve sustainable development as suggested by Agenda 21.

Spurred on by Agenda 21, subregional conferences, forums and programmes were initiated in Northeast Asia through different channels including official diplomatic channels (i.e., ministries of foreign affairs), environmental ministries and agencies, NGOs, academic and scientific communities. Since all of these programmes were aimed at promoting subregional environmental

¹⁴ <http://www2.rim.or.jp/apn/index.htm>

cooperation as their primary goal, there was a possibility that their functions and activities might overlap with each other and there would be a lot of duplication. However, NEASPEC later began to implement a small number of technical assistance projects on air pollution control, and it has been playing a key role in environmental cooperation in Northeast Asia as an official intergovernmental programme for subregional environmental cooperation. NEAC, on the other hand, has been serving as a forum for its participants to exchange information and views on a wide range of topics, including the use of innovative techniques and policy instruments, the role of local governments, and the use of the Internet. The participants in NEAC meetings included not only environmental authorities from central governments but also local governments, other specialists and NGOs.

In this way, the respective roles of various subregional mechanisms for environmental cooperation have gradually been defined in Northeast Asia. This trend is expected to continue.

Functional requirements for transboundary pollution control

In Northeast Asia, transboundary acidic precipitation has been observed, although there is as yet no consensus among scientists of the countries concerned on the geographic extent and scale of transboundary flux and its adverse effects on inland water, soil and vegetation. Nevertheless, such problems may become critical in the future as economic and industrial development progresses in the area. Thus, there has been an increased call for promoting subregional cooperation in order to prevent environmental degradation. Programmes focused on monitoring are currently being implemented. At the first meeting of experts sponsored by the EANET, for example, it was agreed that further efforts should be made in monitoring and modeling acid precipitation, as well as making an emissions inventory, because “it was feared that adverse effects of acid precipitation would become a critical problem in certain areas in the future.” Similarly, NOWPAP emphasizes the importance of environmental preservation in semi-enclosed seas and coastal areas since they cannot be restored once contaminated. Yet, such programmes are not necessarily given a high priority by all countries of the subregion since these problems do not pose an immediate threat.¹⁵ This makes it difficult to obtain the necessary financial contributions from participating countries. It is urgently required to reach a firm agreement on institutional and financial arrangements for these programmes.

Environmental security

At present, environmental problems are not causing any observable regional conflicts in Northeast Asia. On the other hand, since environmental cooperation is not a controversial subject, some policy makers and analysts share the view that the creation of regional peace should be promoted through increased environmental cooperation.¹⁶ For instance, some argue that a scientific infrastructure like EANET is important in terms of security and should be considered a public asset to the region.¹⁷ In the political and military sense of the word, Northeast Asia does not have mechanisms in place for maintaining its own regional peace and security, since it was divided into East and West camps during the Cold War. In the subregion, some countries have not, as yet, been able to establish normal diplomatic relations with each other. In addition, several cases of territorial

¹⁵ There are opposing views among different countries. For example, in NOWPAP meetings, Japan has emphasized the control of sea contamination through land-based activities by enhancing monitoring programmes, whereas China and ROK insisted that the priority must be given to the issue of red tide, which is increasing in Bo Hai.

¹⁶ For example, see *A Report for the Environmental Agency 1998: Basic Investigation Report Concerning the Security of Global Environment*, Nomura Research Institute, March 1999.

¹⁷ See *Chiseigaku no susume*, Shohei Yonemoto. Tokyo: Chuogyosho, 1998.

disputes remain unsolved. Considering such circumstances, the belief that regional stability and peace can be enhanced through the development of a framework for environmental cooperation is intuitively appealing.

It must be noted, however, that environmental cooperation does not automatically result in the promotion of peace and security. In reality, ongoing cooperative programmes have not always been attended by every state in the subregion, due to certain political obstacles. Thus, in order to promote regional stability through the development of environmental cooperation, programmes need to be carefully designed with special consideration of these existing geopolitical dynamics in the subregion.

Common Policy / Rational utilization of regional resources

In Northeast Asia there is no observable trend toward regional integration, although there have been some instances of economic exchanges across the sea area of the Northwestern Pacific. The primary reason for this is that the countries in Northeast Asia do not share the same economic or political systems. Thus, Japan, as the most developed country in the region as well as one of the biggest donor countries in the world, has made environmental cooperation one of the pillars of its official development assistance (ODA) policy.¹⁸ Japan has prioritized environmental aid to China. Recently ROK, which is no longer a recipient country, is also promoting foreign aid focused on environmental problems. Bilateral environmental agreements have been signed between Japan and China, Japan and ROK, Japan and Russia, ROK and China, China and Mongolia, and ROK and Russia. Thus, environmental cooperation in Northeast Asia is characterized by the fact that it is promoted through bilateral, rather than multilateral, channels.

4.2 Southeast Asia

Common Policy / Rational utilization of regional resources

As described earlier, subregional environmental cooperation in Southeast Asia has been developed as part of the functional cooperation led by ASEAN member countries with the support of international organizations such as UN/ESCAP, UNEP, UNDP and ADB. Since 1977, ASEAN has developed and carried out several environmental action plans. An institutional structure supporting these programmes and plans has been established and includes ASOEN and affiliated working groups, together with the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on the Environment (AMME), ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM: Meeting of ASEAN Foreign Ministers) and the ASEAN Summit meetings. Their activities are organized and coordinated by the ASEAN secretariat. Since ASEAN countries are similar in size and at similar stages of economic development, unlike in Northeast Asia, functional cooperative relationships can be nurtured relatively easily among member countries.

A drawback to this regional characteristic is that the ASEAN countries have always faced financial problems, since most of them are still developing countries, except for Singapore. Many projects implemented under various environmental programmes have been carried out with financial and technical support from UN organizations such as UNEP, UNDP and GEF, and international financial institutions such as ADB and the World Bank, as well as donor countries

¹⁸ The outline of the governmental development assistance passed in a Cabinet meeting in 1992 states that “coexistence of development and the environment” is the basic principle of environmental conservation and the principle upon which eligibility for aid is determined.

including the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. However, such external resources do not necessarily provide a continuous, predictable and consistent source of funds and technical support. Many projects have not been carried out because they did not meet the criteria established by these external sources of funding, even though they were given high priorities within ASEAN. Thus, the establishment of a mechanism for a stable inflow of funds is urgently required. Another problem is that the scale of environmental projects is rather large for a body as small as the ASEAN secretariat. The ASEAN secretariat needs to be strengthened to fully service the various components of the programmes.

Functional requirements for transboundary pollution control

The ASEAN countries have focused on marine pollution as one of their primary concerns since ASEP-I in 1977. It was not until the 1990s when transboundary pollution control began to be emphasized. Initiatives against transboundary pollution problems were promoted through the 1992 ASEAN summit, the 1994 Resolution on Environment and Development and other informal AMME meetings. As a result, the ASEAN Cooperation Plan on Transboundary Pollution was established in 1995. The Plan classifies three areas of transboundary pollution: 1) transboundary atmospheric pollution, 2) transboundary movement of hazardous wastes and 3) transboundary shipborne pollution.

Among transboundary atmospheric pollution problems, the problem of haze has become increasingly serious in recent years and calls for special attention. The Regional Haze Action Plan (RHAP) was adopted at the AMME in 1995, followed by the establishment of the ASOEN Internet site as a part of the plan. In order to smoothly operate and promote the RHAP, a Haze Coordination and Support Unit (CSU) was established within the ASEAN secretariat. The funding for the implementation of these programmes is provided largely by the ADB through its Regional Technical Assistance programme. Financial and technical support is also provided by UNEP, GEF, Canada, Austria, the United States and EU. ASEAN is currently working toward the conclusion of a transboundary haze control agreement. If successfully concluded, it will be the first such international agreement on transboundary atmospheric pollution in the region.

Actions against transboundary pollution problems have been taken by other organizations besides ASEAN. For example, the UNEP/ROAP implemented the East Asian Seas Action Plan (EAS), and UNDP and GEF are providing assistance to an MRC programme in the Mekong River Basin.

Agenda 21

ASEAN recognized the need for achieving many of the goals set forth in Agenda 21 even before the UNCED was held in 1992. In order to better respond to the recommendations of Agenda 21 and to promote more regionally integrated environmental management, the AMME agreed on an ASEAN Strategic Plan of Action on the Environment. The Plan pursues 10 strategies and 27 specific actions, and is implemented by six working groups under the ASOEN.

ASEAN is also engaged in a study on the impact that an ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) will have on the environment, as a post-UNCED issue. Regional integration and cooperation during the past 30 years was reviewed at the ASEAN summits, and the ASEAN Vision 2020, aimed at strengthening further regional cooperation, was announced. Based on this Vision, the Hanoi Plan of Action (HPA) was adopted, covering a wide range of issues including macroeconomics, financial cooperation, promotion of science and technology, human resource development, and the issues of

peace and security. The HPA prescribes 15 plans of action on environment and sustainable development, and designates specific organizations for their implementation. The ASEAN Strategic Plan of Action on the Environment was completed last year and is currently being reviewed. A new, second plan of action is being prepared in coordination with the HPA.

Environmental security

Although it was feared that the haze problem might cause a temporary deterioration in relations among ASEAN countries, the establishment and implementation of the RHAP has contributed to increased cooperative efforts against the haze problem. Moreover, as mentioned above, it is likely that an ASEAN Legal Framework on Transboundary Haze Pollution will be established in the near future. Such enhanced cooperation on transboundary haze control would contribute to fostering a sense of mutual trust among the ASEAN countries, and is certainly consistent with the shared objective of promoting peace and security in Southeast Asia.

5 Policy Recommendation

This paper has examined the current status of programmes for environmental cooperation in Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific region as a whole. The future development of subregional cooperation is expected to face the following challenges.

First, it will be most important in Northeast Asia to create a systematic relationship among all the initiatives that will create a synergy for strengthening cooperation among the various forums and programmes, including NEASPEC, NEAC, NAPEP and TEMM, by defining the role of each mechanism for environmental cooperation. For example, NEASPEC is expected to become the center of environmental cooperation in Northeast Asia as an official inter-governmental programme of cooperation. Thus, it will be necessary to establish a more permanent structure on a firm financial basis, in addition to conducting a comprehensive review and expansion of the programme itself. Consideration might also be given to exploring the possibilities for cooperation with NGOs in implementing some of the agreed projects, particularly those related to ecosystem management.

NEAC, on the other hand, is serving as an open and flexible forum for exchange of information and views among environmental experts, including officers from environmental ministries, local governments and NGOs. This should be continued and strengthened in the future.¹⁹ For example, the possibility should be explored of holding joint or back-to-back meetings of NEASPEC, NEAC and NAPEP. Furthermore, it will be necessary to ensure that new needs arising from such forums are reflected in the more formal programmes such as NEASPEC.²⁰ It is worth noting that in Northeast Asia, bilateral programmes are more commonly developed. Multinational cooperative programmes should, therefore, focus on issues that cannot be handled by bilateral programmes, either because of political sensitivities or due to lack of resources. Bilateral programmes, on the other hand, should strive to complement and reinforce multilateral efforts.

¹⁹ To this end, NEAC has proposed the practical use of the Internet and established an open dialogue on the Internet. ("Chairperson's Summary: The Eighth Northeast Asian Conference on Environmental Cooperation," Nov. 14-17, 1999, Maizuru, Japan)

²⁰ For example, the Ninth NEAC will review overall environmental cooperation in Northeast Asia to date. Such a review process is highly significant for Northeast Asia where many cooperative programmes exist independently and its results should be reflected in other cooperative programmes.

Improving the relationship between Japan and ROK is critical to promoting subregional (multinational) cooperation. The relationship between the two countries on environmental cooperation tends to be weak compared to other bilateral relationships, because of the declining level of official development assistance provided by Japan to ROK. As promoters of regional cooperation in Northeast Asia, the two countries should strengthen their cooperation. Recently, the Japan-Korea relationship has been rapidly improving at the summit level, and the relationship should be enhanced with regard to environmental cooperation, as well.

In Southeast Asia, on the other hand, a comprehensive and strategic environmental action plan has been effectively developed. However, the actual implementation always faces financial difficulties since most of the ASEAN members are developing countries. A large number of projects that did not attract external funding have not been implemented at all. Accordingly, the overall effectiveness of the entire plan has been limited.

Considering the situation, their biggest challenge would be to find a way to secure funding necessary for the implementation of these plans. Simultaneously, it should be pointed out that the ongoing action plans are perhaps too ambitiously designed to achieve the intended results. Therefore, it might be suggested that ASEAN give a sharper focus on its priority areas of action by reducing the number of project proposals that require external funding. Strengthening the ASEAN secretariat, as well as enhancing their capacity to provide the necessary services to the various components of the Strategic Action Plan of Action, is another challenge that they face.

In order to enhance systematic cooperation, as well as to implement the actions as described above, it is necessary to establish a comprehensive framework for subregional cooperation and identify the role of each actor within the framework. The ESCAP Ministerial Conference in 2000 is expected to adopt a new Regional Action Programme for the entire Asia-Pacific region. It is essential for all the existing subregional programmes and mechanisms to provide input to the preparatory process, and ensure that their priorities and concerns are appropriately reflected in the Regional Action Programme to be finally adopted. Once it is adopted, the existing subregional programmes and mechanisms should be reviewed in the light of the new Regional Action Programme, and necessary adjustments to their respective roles and activities should be made accordingly.

Acronyms

ACPTP	ASEAN Cooperation Plan on Transboundary Pollution
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AFTA	ASEAN Free Trade Area
ALGAS	Asian Least-Cost Greenhouse Gas Abatement Strategy
AMM	ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (Meeting of ASEAN Foreign Ministers)
AMME	ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on the Environment
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASEP	ASEAN Sub-Regional Environment Programme
ASOEN	ASEAN Senior Officials on the Environment
CSCE	Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe
DMCs	developing member countries
EANET	Acid Deposition Monitoring Network in East Asia
EAP-AP	Environment Assessment Programme for Asia and the Pacific
EAS	East Asian Seas Action Plan
ECO-ASIA	Environment Congress for Asia and Pacific
EU	European Union
GEF	Global Environment Facility
HAP	Hanoi Plan of Action
HTTF	Haze Technical Task Force
LRTAP	Long-Ranged Transboundary Air Pollution
MRC	Mekong River Commission
NAPEP	North Asia-Pacific Environment Partnership
NEAC	Northeast Asian Conference on Environmental Cooperation
NEANPEF	Northeast Asia and North Pacific Environmental Forum (now, renamed NAPEP)
NEASPEC	North-East Asian Subregional Programme of Environmental Cooperation
NOWPAP	Northwest Pacific Action Plan
RHAP	Regional Haze Action Plan
ROK	the Republic of Korea
SACEP	South Asia Co-operative Environment Programmes
SOM	Meeting of Senior Officials (for the NEASPEC)
SPREP	South Pacific Regional Environment Programme
TA	Technical Assistance
TEMM	Tripartite Environment Ministers Meeting (ROK, China, and Japan)
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UN/ECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UN/ESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNEP/ROAP	United Nations Environment Programme Regional Office of Asia and Pacific