REGIONAL COOPERATION FOR AIR POLLUTION IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC: SUBREGIONAL DIALOGUE SERIES

NORTH AND CENTRAL ASIA

25 January 2022
12:00 – 15:00 (GTM +7)

Online Consultation
I. Concept Note

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) is organizing a series of six virtual dialogues and one knowledge sharing workshop to identify opportunities to address air pollution in Asia and the Pacific. These dialogues will focus on strengthening regional cooperation and facilitate a broader exchange of innovative air pollution solutions and best practices, including policies, data and technologies, and capacity needs.

Clean air is among the public goods that will contribute to sustainable, resilient and inclusive recoveries. Yet air pollution, a transboundary environmental challenge that threatens all countries in Asia-Pacific, continues to increase and actions to date have been insufficient to protect the health of populations, food and water security, and the emerging economies across the region. Roughly 70 percent of the nearly seven million deaths due to air pollution globally occur in the region, which has recorded some of the highest air pollution levels.

The dialogue on North and Central Asia is part of a sub-regional dialogue series. Dialogues will also be held for East and North-East Asia, South-East Asia and South and South-West Asia, in coordination with the respective Sub-regional Offices and the United Nations Environment Programme. Moreover, two thematic dialogues are organized in all subregions, focusing on: 1) Data and Technologies for Air Pollution and 2) Health and Gender Implications.

Each sub-regional dialogue is structured to include two segments:

1) High-level dialogue for senior officials to be focused on regional cooperation, including through enhanced regional modalities. The summaries of high-level dialogues will inform further consultations and preparations for the 7th ESCAP Committee on Environment and Development in 2022 for its deliberation and action;

2) Technical segment for other senior government officials, experts from academia and think tanks, representatives from international organizations and other relevant stakeholders from the respective sub-region. The technical segment will focus on the sharing of technical solutions such as air quality monitoring and forecasting, establishment of a publicly accessible geoportal for spatial information that integrates satellite and aerial data with ground-based sensor networks, as well as on health and gender implications.

OBJECTIVES OF THE DIALOGUES
The overall objective of the sub-regional dialogues is to generate specific recommendations for the following:

- Strengthening regional cooperation, including regional modalities and harmonized air quality standards, based on the WHO air quality guidelines;
- Addressing knowledge needs/gaps and mechanisms (geo-portals, use of knowledge management hub, communities of practice);
- Enhancing the use of data and technologies to inform policies;
- Identifying most appropriate clean air solutions and means to accelerate implementation;
- Further building the capacity needs to ensure policy development/implementation.

The recommendations from the dialogues will be compiled in a policy brief that will be shared with member states to mainstream adoption of the solutions and provide the basis for more effective regional cooperation. The dialogues will facilitate peer-to-peer and regional level sharing of lessons learned and allow member states to share specific technical solutions with country stakeholders and to strengthen the air pollution data generated by governments and partner institutions. Further, the dialogues will strengthen the community of practice on air pollution which will provide momentum and support for regional cooperation and action.

The policy brief will serve as the foundation for a knowledge-sharing workshop/side event to be organized in conjunction with the 9th Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development and inform the preparatory processes for the 7th ESCAP Committee on Environment and Development.

**AIR POLLUTION IN NORTH AND CENTRAL ASIA**

Emissions are found to be on the rise in Central Asian countries. Several Central Asian cities are frequently ranked among the most polluted in the world during winter, largely due to the burning of coal, low-quality fuel and firewood.

Central Asia is also one of the most carbon-intensive regions globally, with 88 per cent of the energy supply coming from fossil fuels. In contrast, investments in renewable energy comprise only 0.2 per cent of global commitments in the region (UNEP, 2021).

Emissions from industrial sources generate serious air pollution issues at the local level and negatively impact the air quality of broad regions because emissions are carried long distances by winds. Stringent emission standards for various industries and enforcement of those standards are critical to addressing the problem.

Indoor air pollution from household heating and cooking is also a significant issue in the region. Kyrgyzstan, for instance, ranks among one of the most affected countries in the region for diseases resulting from indoor air pollution. Still, there is a lack of understanding on how household heating and cooking systems impact air quality and individual health.
Both national laws and cooperation mechanisms exist in the region. Several countries in the region have national programmes promoting clean energy for cooking and heating. Moreover, several countries in Central Asia are parties to the Air Convention (LRTAP): Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and the Russian Federation. As a result of integrated air pollution management strategies developed under the UNECE, air quality has improved in the region over the past few decades.

However, progress has also been uneven, and an increase in energy production, industry growth and urban development have raised emissions in Central Asia. Even if the understanding of the adverse effects of poor air quality is increasing in the region, more efforts are needed to improve awareness around air quality among decision-makers and civil society, promote clean air and curb transboundary pollution.

II. Tentative Agenda

25 January 2022

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<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>12:00-12:15</td>
<td>Welcome and Opening</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:15</td>
<td>Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Executive Secretary, UN-ESCAP</td>
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<td>Ms. Dechen Tsering, Asia Pacific Regional Director, UNEP</td>
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<td>12:15 – 12:45</td>
<td>Strengthening Regional Cooperation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>High-level Discussion On Priorities for Inclusion in Regional Cooperation on Air Pollution. Moderated by Mr. Kaveh Zahedi, Deputy Executive Secretary, UN ESCAP</td>
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<td>Expected outcome: Country statements will be made on key priorities for regional cooperation on air pollution.</td>
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<td>12:45-13:20</td>
<td>Existing modalities in the Sub-Region to Manage Air Pollution</td>
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<td>Session 1: Overview of the UNECE Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (Air Convention) in Central Asia</td>
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Expected outcome: Participants provide an overview of the implementation of the Air Convention and its Protocols in Europe and North and Central Asia, as well as guidance to facilitate implementation and ratification.

Speaker:
- Ms. Albena Karadjova, Secretary to the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution Environment Division
  United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Session 2: ESCAP Members experience on implementing the Air Convention

Expected outcome: ESCAP Members representatives provide an overview of their country’s experience in the implementation of the Air Convention and related protocols.

Speaker:
- Mr. Lasha Akhalaia, First Category Senior Specialist, Ambient Air Division, Environment and Climate Change Department
  Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia
- Mr. Jeyhun Hasanov, Director, Climate Change Center under the National Hydrometeorology Service
  Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan

13:20-13:40 Collectively Addressing Sand and Dust Storms

Session 3: Cooperative Approaches to Establishing Early Warning Systems for Sand and Dust Storms in Asia and the Pacific

Expected outcome: Participants share the opportunities of jointly establishing early warning systems for fine dust particles from sand and dust storms drawing from experiences in North and Central Asia.

Speaker:
- Prof. Alexander Baklanov, Scientific Officer of Research Department, WMO
13:40-14:00 Promoting Clean Fuel Use and Renewable Energy Supply

Session 4: Innovative Methodologies to Improve Indoor Air Pollution and Use Sustainable Sources

**Expected outcome:** Participants will identify alternative and affordable heating and cooking methods in the region. Among those is promoting off-grid renewable energy supply to reduce the reliance on fuel burning.

**Speaker:**
- Arch. Alessandra Fidanza, Environmental Advisor

14:00-14:20 Tackling Industrial Emissions to Improve Air Quality

Session 5: Effectiveness of Best Available Techniques to Abate Industrial Air Pollution

**Expected outcome:** Participants will review approaches to fight air pollution from industrial emissions and operations. It is anticipated this includes an overview of relevant national laws and regulations for the enforcement of air quality standards.

**Speaker:**
- Mr. Cornelis Braams, ESCAP Senior Air Pollution Specialist

14:20-14:40 Promoting Air Quality Awareness and Management

Session 6: Exploration of Tools and Measures to Build Air Quality Management Capacity of Government Actors and Expand Public Awareness

**Expected outcome:** Participants will review innovative techniques to build air quality management capacity in national and local authorities and expand awareness of civil society and decision-makers to drive action.

**Speakers:**
- Mr. Tomas Marquez, Regional Sub-programme Coordinator, UNEP
- Ms. Katherine Hall, Regional Air Quality Expert in Central Asia, UNEP
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<th>14:40-15:00 Final Discussion and Conclusion</th>
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<td>In this final session, all participants are invited to actively participate by posing questions and sharing comments. The Secretariat will summarize the recommendations and findings reached during the sub-regional dialogue.</td>
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