

Strengthening capacity of policymakers in South-East Asia to promote policies and developing plans for improved wastewater treatment and reuse in urban and peri-urban areas

CONCEPT NOTE

**Regional Policy Workshop of Stakeholders  
on Decentralized Waste Water Treatment Systems (DEWATS)  
in South East Asia (SEA)**

Bangkok, UNCC, 19-21 March, 2014

**Background**

By 2011, the population of the Asian and Pacific region without access to safe and drinking water was halved from the 1990 level, but the sanitation-related component of the target is still far from being achieved<sup>1</sup>. According to the report of WHO-UNICEF of 2010, 10.3 million people in Cambodia, 2.9 million in Lao PDR and nearly 21.8 million people in Vietnam did not have access to improved sanitation<sup>2</sup>. The lack of sanitation and wastewater treatment leads to fecal contamination of fresh water sources endangering the health of the population at large.

WHO reports<sup>3</sup> that diarrheal disease is cited as the second leading contributor to the Global disease burden causing a loss of 72.8 million Disability Adjusted life years (DALYs). Improving sanitation and hygiene are front line actions that can prevent diarrheal and other water related (including water borne and water washed) diseases.

In addition, studies conducted by the World Bank Water and Sanitation Programme<sup>4</sup> show that Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam suffer an annual economic loss of \$450 million, \$193 million and \$780 million respectively. These losses are accounted for by direct health impacts, costs for accessing clean drinking water, additional time to access unimproved sanitation and tourism losses.

Improved sanitation and wastewater management is crucial to maintain water security. It can bring significant benefits to poor communities, particularly women and ensure the health of ecosystems and local population. Lack of awareness amongst policy makers and the relatively high costs of sewage collection and treatment often deter investments.

The 2nd Asia-Pacific Water Summit on “Water Security: Leadership and Commitment, with special focus on water disaster challenges” (Chiang Mai, 2013) has focused on regional solutions and policy frameworks and highlighted that the universal access to water supply and to sustainable sanitation in the region by 2025 needs regional commitment and leadership, legal frameworks and training systems<sup>5</sup>. Strengthening further commitments to the wastewater

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<sup>1</sup> ESCAP, 2013, Statistical Yearbook

<sup>2</sup> WHO-UNICEF Joint Monitoring Report: Progress on Sanitation and Drinking Water 2010 update in 2008

<sup>3</sup> WHO, 2008, *The global burden of disease: 2004 update*. Geneva, World Health Organisation

<sup>4</sup> WSP, 2009, Economic Impacts of Sanitation in South East Asia. Jakarta (cite references)

<sup>5</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Asia Pacific Water Summit, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 19 May, 2013. Summary of the Focus Area Sessions ( [http://apws2013.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/fas-summaries\\_260713.pdf](http://apws2013.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/fas-summaries_260713.pdf) )

revolution<sup>6</sup> in the Asia-Pacific region also requires putting greater emphasis on resource recovery in wastewater management, and the adoption of the appropriate centralized and decentralized management systems in urban and rural settlements.

In this context, UNESCAP and UN-Habitat are implementing a joint project to address the fast-growing problem of untreated wastewater through promotion of the Decentralized Wastewater Treatment Systems (DEWATS). DEWATS provides an appropriate and low-cost solution in many situations in the rapidly urbanizing areas of developing countries where other systems are not suitable. DEWATS also provides a great business opportunity and community empowerment .

The project is implemented in Lao PDR, Cambodia and Vietnam and is focusing on building the capacity of policy makers and planners for better wastewater management through regional and national level policy studies and workshops. It will also establish or strengthen existing institutions, which can function as a regional resource centre or referral point for expertise on DEWATS. Promotional materials and a guidance manual for policy makers and planners will be developed and widely disseminated in 2014-16.

### **Scope of the Workshop and Objectives**

The goal of the regional policy workshop is to enhance knowledge and awareness of national level policy makers, local government officials and other experts on DEWATS amongst urban and peri-urban communities in South East Asia.

The specific objectives of the workshop are as follows:

1. To review and discuss challenges and barriers, as well as institutional, technical, financial policies and solutions on DEWATS in the SEA region;
2. To assess the situation and efforts on DEWATS and future programming in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam;
3. To discuss criteria for identification of the Regional Resource Centre on DEWATS, promotional materials, inputs to the Guidance Manual on DEWATS and the work plan.

### **Overview of the Programme**

The policy workshop will take a stock of the country situation: assessment of challenges, policy tools and practices of wastewater management and sanitation, presented by national governments and experts from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Vietnam, as well as from the MEK-WATSAN network experts. Besides, good practices on DEWATS from the region will be discussed. The key note presentation on DEWATS policy guidelines will be discussed and participants will have an opportunity to identify policy frameworks, practical solutions, financial schemes, technologies for DEWATS and the way forward within the project scope and beyond. Participants will search for working frameworks and solutions of enabling policies, as well as tools to strengthen networks and partnerships. The third day will focus on policy dialogues on

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<sup>6</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Asia Pacific Water Summit, Chiang Mai, Thailand, 19 May, 2013. Summary of the Focus Area Sessions ( [http://apws2013.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/fas-summaries\\_260713.pdf](http://apws2013.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/fas-summaries_260713.pdf) )

partnership co-benefits of DEWATS and summarize the criteria and the work plan for the Regional Resource Center for DEWATS, and will also commemorate the World Water Day 2014. In addition, new proposals and ideas for pilot projects in three countries will be developed during the project implementation period in 2014 for the discussions and further resource mobilization.

### **Participants**

Participants are mainly from government, academy, civil society organizations, international organizations and other stakeholders.

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