

# Side Event on Sub-regional Cooperation for Implementing the Global Waste Management Goals towards Addressing SDGs and NDCs in South Asia

Fifth Session, Committee on Environment and Development, UNESCAP  
09:00 – 10:00 AM at Room (MR-F)  
23 November 2018, Bangkok

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## Background

The IGES Centre Collaborating with UNEP on Environmental Technologies (CCET) in collaboration with the Government of Japan, the United Nations Environmental Programme (UN Environment), and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) hosted a side-event at UNESCAP's Fifth Session of the Committee on Environment and Development (CED) on Friday, 23 November 2018 in Bangkok, Thailand. The event sought to share CCET's proposed plans for developing a South Asia sub-regional waste management roadmap as an implementation and monitoring mechanism for delivering on global waste management goals and related SDGs and NDCs in the sub-region. In addition to discussing key priority areas and goals, discussion also focused on CCET efforts to set measurable targets, develop appropriate actions and interventions, as well as identify potential financing options, technical innovations, partnership modalities and requisite monitoring and reporting mechanisms for its continued work in South Asia.

## In Context

Waste management is an issue of critical importance throughout the world, most notably in the sub-region of South Asia, which covers about 40% of the Asia's population and 24% of the globe. Home to about 1.8 billion people, South Asia generates approximately 334 million tonnes of waste per year of which 174 million tonnes (57%) is organic in content. In addition to the increase in municipal solid waste, managing complex and emerging waste streams, including plastic and marine litter, e-waste, food waste, construction and demolition waste, and disaster waste are also growing issues in need of high attention. Across many countries in South Asia, about 80%-90% of plastic waste is inadequately disposed of, and therefore pose the risk of polluting land, rivers and oceans. Due to a lack of effective policy and regulations, as well as technical, financial and human resources, many countries in the sub-region are facing tremendous challenges with ensuring the provision of adequate waste management services. The current waste collection rate remains low (44%) with uncontrolled dumping into rivers, and open spaces, which in turn is causing severe public and environmental health problems. Landfilling constitutes the most prevalent waste treatment method, as it represents the easiest and least expensive way to dispose of waste. However, a large majority of these landfills operate as unsanitary open dumpsites (75%), a source of continued risks for human health and the greater environment.

In this regard, sustainable waste management based on the waste hierarchy and 3R principles (reduce, reuse and recycle) is increasingly gaining local, national and international attention, recognised as one of the key drivers for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as mitigating greenhouse gases (GHGs) and addressing short-lived climate pollutants (SLCPs) associated with climate change and ambient air pollution. Recent analyses have identified that more than 60% of initially proposed Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) on climate include references to waste actions.

Accordingly, CCET, in partnership with UNEP-IETC and other partners has been providing technical support to the South Asian governments of India, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives for the development of national and city waste management strategies and implementation plans with a view towards promoting more holistic and integrated waste management practices. In addition, CCET intends to expand its work among all eight-member countries of South Asia (**Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan and Afghanistan**), working with other key stakeholders in the development of a Sub-Regional Roadmap based on the priority action areas outlined in UNEP's Global Waste Management Outlook (GWMO) and aligned with 3R goals. Guided by this ambition, CCET will work towards more effectively addressing waste issues, delivering on the promise of the 2030 Development Agenda and Paris Climate Agreement by accelerating the transition towards more resource efficient and pollution free societies.

## Discussions

This session included both keynote speeches and open discussions as summarised below.

**Mr. Yoshinori Suga, First Secretary (Alternate Permanent Representative of Japan to ESCAP, Embassy of Japan)** emphasised that improved waste collection and disposal systems require sufficient funding, but faced with financial constraints, policy makers often choose to allocate

budget to different development priorities, other than waste. Using the example of Japan, which has long prioritised waste management, including all steps of waste collection, proper treatment and disposal, Mr. Suga explained that industrialising countries can also work to find affordable solutions to waste management through careful planning, well-designed waste management strategies and systems. This can generate significant cost savings over the long term. In this regard, public engagement and partnership are critical for promoting more sustainable waste management.

**Mr. Stefanos Fotiou, Director, Environment and Development, UNESCAP** stressed that in terms of addressing environmental challenges, waste management is an area where demonstrated technologies and approaches both exist and can be implemented at scale. Commending Japan's political leadership on waste management initiatives, Mr. Fotiou affirmed ESCAP's continued support for CCET's South Asian initiative, including by working together with other regional partners, such as the ESCAP South Asia Office and UN Environment's New Delhi office. He also emphasised the importance of linking with other on-going efforts on the 3Rs in the region to ensure a cooperative approach. In addition, Mr. Fotiou drew attention to the importance of examining long term financing options that support integrated waste management practices. The future success of any such initiative will rest on collaboration and the sharing of experiences, opening opportunities for further growth through multi-stakeholder engagement.

**Ms. Kakuko Nagatani Yoshida, the Asia Pacific Coordinator for Chemicals, Waste and Air quality, United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment)** discussed the recent surge of interest in marine litter and plastic waste issues, noting that although these are emerging challenges, the solutions remain the same; namely, waste prevention, reduction and proper treatment. Ms. Yoshida shared key lessons from UN Environment's work, noting that although waste management is conducted at the local level, it requires collaborating with other partners both nationally, regionally and internationally to examine policy gaps and enforcement challenges. Given that certain types of waste related issues are transboundary in nature, such as hazardous waste and air pollution, pooling of resources and expertise – including experts who speak local languages - across the region is needed, in order to address data management, share knowledge, and identify waste management technologies and tools that are appropriate to the local conditions found in respective sub regions. In South Asia, key areas of intervention are disaster waste management and the ship recycling industry. Highlighting a recent report launched by the Climate and Clean Air Coalition (CCAC) and the Asia Pacific Clean Air Partnership (APCAP) entitled *Air Pollution in Asia and the Pacific: Science-based Solutions*, of which IGES was a contributing author, Ms. Yoshida discussed that solutions to climate change and air pollution rest on tackling agricultural waste, residential burning and promoting source separation, which afford opportunities for realising co-benefits including for public health.

**Mr. Kazunobu Onogawa, Director, IGES Centre Collaborating with UNEP on Environmental Technologies (CCET)** outlined the history of CCET and the main activities of the Centre, which include providing technical assistance to developing countries for improving waste management policies and practices through the preparation of waste management strategies, action plans and pilot initiatives at the national and city levels, knowledge development and capacity building,

and support for partnerships, networking and peer-learning. Currently entering its second phase as of this year, the Centre is now focusing on expanding its coverage to address local and national needs so as to ensure its work becomes more demand driven. For example, some countries (India and Indonesia) are anticipating support from the Centre for developing national and city waste management strategies focusing on holistic approaches to plastic waste. Noting that 75% of waste in the South Asian sub region is openly dumped or burned, the highest rate in the world, Mr. Onogawa underlined the fundamental importance of partnerships in tackling waste challenges, especially with regard to raising awareness and reporting on issues, (i.e., data collection), preparing a regional roadmap or strategy to address waste management issues and promoting collaborative actions to improve the situation on the ground. In addition to the roadmap, collaborative activities led by the Centre include the development a multi-stakeholder partnership network, information and knowledge exchange, resource mobilisation, and contribution to regional and global policy development linking waste, climate and the SDGs. Such initiatives will be conducted together with partners from national and sub-national governments, regional level actors, research institutions and other supportive bodies. Mr. Onogawa closed by stating that CCET's work will help in translating global waste management goals into practical policies and concrete actions at national and local levels.

## Take Aways

Following these statements, the floor was opened for discussion among participants. Key points included as follows:

- Participants expressed appreciation for CCET efforts introducing sustainable waste management policies and systems in developing countries, especially in the South Asia sub-region, highlighting the need to explore further engagement in the broader context of South-South Cooperation; this would include expanding the Centre's activities to other countries in East Asia with a view towards supporting additional peer learning opportunities.
- It was also agreed that CCET activities focusing on sustainable waste management in developing countries remains highly important, but should also work to consider waste management within the wider scope of related circular economy and resource efficiency agendas, a key focus of the upcoming United Nations Environmental Assembly (UNEA) to be held in 2019 under the theme of "Innovation solutions for environmental challenges and sustainable consumption and production".
- Engaging with technology providers and the financial sectors remains essential starting from initial development of the roadmap, which can help in securing the necessary technical assistance and investment for CCET to channel its support towards waste-related climate activities in developing countries.
- The South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP), an inter-governmental organisation, established in 1982 by the governments of South Asia to promote and support protection, management and enhancement of the environment, highlighted the importance addressing waste management, and welcomed the proposal of developing a waste management roadmap in the sub-region. SACEP also pointed to the importance of considering implementation and follow-up monitoring actions , noting that SACEP is interested in cooperating with CCET in preparation, delivery and monitoring of the roadmap in South Asia.

- Other comments touched on the need for CCET to more fully consider local conditions in supporting the design of waste management solutions, noting that waste markets and categories vary across different countries. Requests were also made for CCET to expand activities into other regions, such as Central Asia, where the development of an implementation framework emphasising technical support and knowledge sharing about potential partnerships and relevant good practices would add value to existing initiatives.
- Finally, it was proposed to involve all stakeholders including responsible ministries, markets/financial institutions, technical service providers, and other partners in future discussions related to preparing the waste management roadmap for South Asia.