

# Environmental Health Update

## Sustainable Development and Healthy Environments



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### Focus of the Month

#### Healthy Settings – the essence of the process lies in sustainability!

Over the past 20 years or so, with the expansion of health promotion efforts to several local level entities within and outside cities (villages, municipalities, marketplaces, hospitals, islands etc.), the original “healthy city” has become the more generic “healthy setting”. The first Healthy City Projects (HCPs) of WHO emerged as a response to continually deteriorating health conditions associated with global urbanization. These projects were based on the principles and strategies of ‘Health for All’ and those embodied in the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (1986). The HCP strategy advocated the inter-sectoral approach to health development that focused on the environmental, social and economic determinants of health. The HCP aims to realize its objective of health promotion in these settings through partnerships between public, private and voluntary agencies. In addition, HCPs also aim to put health issues firmly onto the agenda of municipal and local level policy-makers.

It was not until the 1990s that the HCPs moved as an operational concept to developing countries – and in our case to the South-East Asia region. Introduced in 1994, SEA regional countries now have a decade long experience of *healthy settings* practice. Notable pioneers were Chittagong, Cox’s Bazaar, Sylhet and Rajshahi in Bangladesh; Bangkok and Yala in Thailand; the Trans-Yamuna area of Delhi, Mizapur, and Kottayam in India; municipalities of Banepa, Lalitpur and Tansen located in the Katmandu Valley of Nepal; and Badulla and Matale in Sri Lanka. Subsequently, Thimpu and other cities in Bhutan, Yangon in Myanmar, and Villingili Island in Maldives joined in. For us in SEA, this is in fact a revival of the locally independent approach to community development we practised decades



Fostering energy for sustainable healthy settings.

ago but lost in the process of modernization, centralization, and globalization. Bhutan’s model village example, initiated in the early 1990s, embodies this basic concept of the locality making do with the resources it has to improve health and hygienic behaviour. And once health is improved, economic development can follow.

In SEAR, HCP outreach depends on local priorities. Broad priorities include raising awareness of health issues and advocacy for public participation in community development work. More specific focus may be on improving personal health, management of environmental health infrastructure, general sanitation, and vector control and water quality. Yet other HCP activities help with immunization campaigns, smoking cessation, home gardening, collection



A rural health post in Maldives.

### Highlights

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and mapping of health information, income generation, child and mother care services including improving access to PHC services.

In many of the above cases, political mobilization has been satisfactory at least at the project launching stage, partly as it provides an opportunity for elected officials to fulfill the promise of service to the people and gain visibility, and partly the notion of the availability of funds to manage. Yet real sustainability of healthy settings action will require the ownership of enlightened citizens of the locality coming together in the spirit of benevolence for the welfare of the whole community, a nurturing of a common identity with the setting. For, ultimately, the test of the healthy settings process lies in its sustainability. For, in the end, sustainability differentiates one-shot community development actions from the comprehensive healthy settings type of action process. *(For information about individual country experiences, please contact our WHO country focal points.)*

### Rainwater and fog harvesting – an option for high altitude dwelling communities in Bhutan

The Public Health Engineering Division of the Ministry of Health in Bhutan has successfully completed two Rain Water Harvesting (RWH) systems in the location of two monasteries in Lhuentse and Pemagatshel. With support from the Bhutan Water Partnership, a second scheme has been approved for another monastery in Pemagatshel. Being pursued also is the option of RWH at the domestic level for facilitating greater household access. WHO will provide technical information on successful regional rainwater harvesting applications from Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

In addition to RWH, because rainfall is limited during the winter months, Bhutan is also trialling the potential of fog harvesting, i.e. collecting the condensate from abundant winter clouds and fogs on hill-tops. The successful eastern Nepal experimentation of fog harvesting is to be emulated



The clouds and fog creeping over Paro valley in Bhutan.

in Bhutan where the first trials are planned for January/February 2007 to assess the techniques' usefulness for small clusters of high altitude, water-stressed households.

### Nepal gears up on city preparedness for emergencies

Lalitpur Sub-metropolitan City, as part of the overall earthquake preparedness, held a planning workshop on 31 October 2006 to develop its emergency water supply system. The meeting had broad representation from municipal counsellors, related agencies, NGOs and various support agencies such as UNICEF and WHO. In the context of emergency preparedness, WHO supports UNICEF, which has the mandate to lead the UN efforts in water and sanitation related matters.

Also in Nepal, WHO is currently working with the Epidemiology and Disease Control Division of the Ministry of Health on capacity development in districts where the health system and the health status of the population have been affected by the conflict of the last decade. This is happening through revitalizing the District Health Working Group to operationalize an emergency workplan and activating WHO's "Health as a Bridge to Peace" approach through "healthy village" networking. *(For more details, please contact Mr Han Heijnen, WHO Nepal at the e-mail address [heijnenh@searo.who.int](mailto:heijnenh@searo.who.int).)*

## SDE News



### New Entry into SDE Team

Mr Aaro Samuli Seppanen (Finland) was appointed Junior Professional Officer in the area of Health and Human Rights in the SDE department on 30 October 2006. He will be responsible for developing advocacy

material for the advancement of the right to health concept in Member countries and elaborating workplans for training WHO staff and nationals. He will also identify research needs and develop appropriate plans to address them. The SDE team welcomes Mr Seppanen and assures him full support in fulfilling his responsibilities. He may be contacted at the e-mail address [seppanens@searo.who.int](mailto:seppanens@searo.who.int).

## WHO supports household water treatment in Nepal



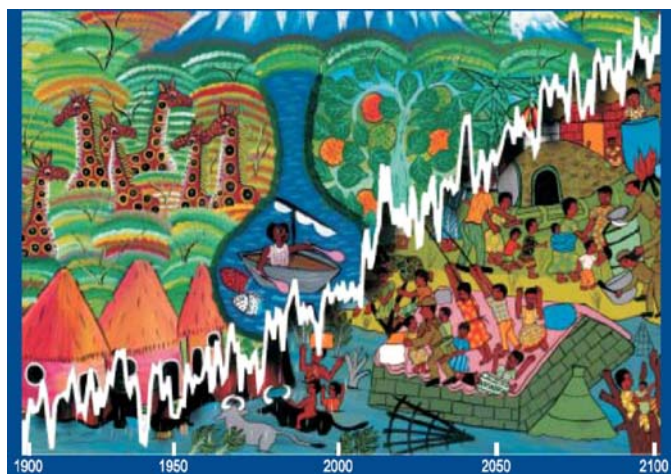
SODIS Poster in Nepal.

WHO and UNICEF are helping the Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation department (DWSS) of Nepal to develop promotional project activities for a variety of Household Water Treatments (HHWTs). The project offers HHWT options (boiling, chlorination: Piyush Water Guard,

bio-sand filter, Colloidal Silver filter: Safa filter, and SODIS). The promotional materials (radio spots, TV, posters) are being taken up by a local advertising agency. A local environment NGO (ENPHO) is behind the training materials, fact sheets, etc. Work will commence soon in four districts (Panchtar, Parsa, Kapilvastu and Dang) in the Terai, where WHO is providing support to several Village Development Committees to follow up on HHWTs. From this experience, WHO also hopes to generate a Nepali version of the WHO Healthy Villages document. (Further details can be obtained from Mr Han Heijnen, WHO Nepal, [heijnenh@searo.who.int](mailto:heijnenh@searo.who.int).)

## EH News

### WKC holds workshop on urban settings and climate change



Heat waves, floods and the health impacts of climate change.

Under its "Healthy Urbanization" project, the WHO Centre for Health Development in Kobe, Japan (WKC), organized a prototype training workshop entitled "Heat Waves, Floods, and Health Impacts of Climate Change", for city health officials, on 29-31 August 2006. This was hosted at the Chulabhorn Research Institute (CRI) in Bangkok, Thailand. The workshop was conducted to pilot-test training materials on climate change and human health suitable for use at the city level; to develop city action plans on assessing vulnerability and adaptation interventions to climate change; and to document the whole capacity-building process. The participants were from the South-East Asia and Western Pacific regions. (For more details, please contact Dr Jostacio M. Lapitan, Technical Officer, WKC, at the e-mail address [lapitanj@wkc.who.int](mailto:lapitanj@wkc.who.int).)

### UNEP, UNESCO and WHO launch OzoneAction Education Pack

UNEP, UNESCO and WHO have forged a unique partnership to provide primary school teachers with practical, hands-on and entertaining curricula material to educate their students about the protective role of the ozone layer and the causes and consequences of its depletion. The *OzoneAction Education Pack* was launched simultaneously on 15 September 2006 in Nairobi, Santiago and New Delhi. A side event at the 18<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Parties to the Montreal Protocol (190 countries participating) was also organized on 1 November 2006 in Delhi to promote the Education Pack to the National Ozone Units and international press. Mr A. von Hildebrand from SEARO represented WHO in this event and made a presentation. (For details please contact Ms Anne Fenner, Information Officer, UNEP/DTIE OzoneAction Branch at [anne.fenner@unep.fr](mailto:anne.fenner@unep.fr).)

### WHO's Air Quality Guidelines launched

On 5 October 2006, WHO unveiled its new Air Quality Guidelines, with dramatically lower standards for emission levels of pollutants. For the first time these guidelines address all regions of the world and provide uniform targets for air quality. These targets are far tougher than the national standards currently applied in many parts of the world. Air pollution is estimated to cause approximately 2 million premature deaths worldwide per year. More than half of this burden is borne by people in developing countries. The new guidelines recommend the lowering of average annual levels of particulate matter (the main source of which is the burning of fossil and other types of fuels) to lower than 20 micrograms per cubic metre. This is expected to reduce the deaths from air pollution by around 15%. The guidelines provide the basis for all countries to build their own air quality standards and policies supporting health with solid, scientific evidence. (For further details, please visit the website [www.who.int/phe/health\\_topics/outdoorair\\_aqg/en](http://www.who.int/phe/health_topics/outdoorair_aqg/en).)

## Events

### IFCS Budapest Statement calls for harmonized international standards

The fifth session of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS Forum V) was held in Budapest, Hungary, on 25-29 September 2006, with 415 participants from governments, UN bodies and agencies, intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations, convening under the theme "Chemical Safety for Sustainable Development." It included topics on applying precaution in the context of chemical safety, the sound management of chemicals and poverty reduction, heavy metals (mercury, lead, cadmium), toys and chemical safety.

Forum V adopted "The Budapest Statement on Mercury, Lead and Cadmium" which recognized that the risks posed by these metals require further action at all levels of society, including by WHO and UNEP. A report on the heavy metals side event held in conjunction with Forum V can be accessed online at [www.iisd.ca/chemical/ifcs5/heavymetals](http://www.iisd.ca/chemical/ifcs5/heavymetals).

Forum V also recommended a number of actions for designers, manufacturers, decision-makers in supply and sales, and governments and regulators to ensure that toys are safe. It also recommended efforts to develop guidance on harmonized international standards for toys. Forum V identified a series of next steps to assist developing countries and countries with economies in transition with tools and approaches for applying precaution in the domestic chemicals management decision-making processes. Mr A. von Hildebrand, Regional Adviser, Food and Chemical Safety, represented SEARO at this meeting. *(Information on these agenda topics are available on the IFCS website: [www.who.int/ifcs/forums/five/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/ifcs/forums/five/en/index.html).)*

### SACOSAN-II calls for intensifying equity of sanitation access for the poor

The Second South Asian Conference on Sanitation (SACOSAN-II) was held in Islamabad, Pakistan on 20-21 September 2006. The conference was attended by more than 300 participants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, including international and private agencies. Prime Minister of Pakistan inaugurated the conference. The Islamabad Declaration for SACOSAN-II adopted recommendations to accord high priority to sanitation, strengthening inter-governmental cooperation, monitoring progress, continuing to promote equity and access focusing on the poor and vulnerable, striving to increase the priority given to sanitation by relevant stakeholders and promoting the active participation of women and children in all the activities related to the sanitation sector. *(For more information, please contact Mr*

*Sharad Adhikary, WHO Nepal at the e-mail address [adhikarys@searo.who.int](mailto:adhikarys@searo.who.int).)*

### GEMS/Food holds Total Diet Workshop

The Global Environmental Monitoring System/Food (GEMS/Food), in collaboration with the Chinese Centre for Disease Control (CDC) convened the Fourth International Total Diet Studies (TDS) Workshop in Beijing, China on 23-27 October 2006. It was preceded by a one-week training course to review the design, planning, execution and reporting of TDS. The overall objective was to promote and provide technical support on TDS in SEAR countries. Mr A. von Hildebrand participated in the course and workshop from the SDE department. As an outcome, it was decided to hold a TDS regional workshop in Jakarta, Indonesia, in March/April 2007. *(For more details on the course, please contact Mr A. von Hildebrand at the e-mail address [hildebranda@searo.who.int](mailto:hildebranda@searo.who.int).)*

### ICMR and WHO hold workshop on pesticide residues

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) organized a two-day workshop on pesticide residues and their risk assessment on 5-6 November 2006 in New Delhi, India. The workshop sought to gain more understanding of the sophisticated methods of pesticide analysis and their limitations; the science behind setting standards or limits for pesticide residues; and effective implementation of the prescribed standards. ICMR sought SEARO support in identifying and funding participants from SEAR countries. One of the main outcomes was the decision to fix Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs) for pesticides in food, based solely on health risk assessment. *(For details, please contact Dr G. S. Toteja, Deputy Director General, ICMR at the e-mail address [gstoteja@yahoo.com](mailto:gstoteja@yahoo.com).)*

### WHO India brings out manual on water and sanitation in disaster management



India is prone to many natural and manmade disasters, exposing populations to hazards and hindering developmental activities. Recent disasters in India includes earthquakes in Gujarat (2001), Kashmir (2005) and the tsunami (2004) in South India. Drawing on the national experiences of this nature, the WHO country office has brought out a useful manual on "water and environmental sanitation for disaster management" focusing on the immediate and long term health priorities in emergencies and disasters. It lays out a set of interventions aimed at reducing community vulnerability. *(For further information, Mr. A.K. Sengupta can be contacted at [senguptaa@searo.who.int](mailto:senguptaa@searo.who.int).)*

## Upcoming Events

- **Regional Health and Environment Ministers Forum postponed**

The Ministerial Regional Forum on Health and Environment originally scheduled to be held in Bangkok from 7-8 December 2006 *has now been postponed to early 2007*. Exact dates are being negotiated and will be announced in the Environmental Health Update once finalized.

This meeting is a bi-regional initiative between WHO (WPR/SEAR), UNEP and ADB that strives to bring together ministers of health and environment of all the ASEAN countries – including Indonesia, Myanmar and Thailand from the South-East Asia Region. The Government of Thailand graciously accepted to host the meeting in Bangkok. The purpose of the initiative is to promote greater dialogue and collaboration between these two sectors and disciplines for more sustainable health action.

- **First Asia Pacific Ministerial Conference on Housing and Human Settlements** will be held at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi from 13-16 December 2006. This is being organized by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, Government of India and UN Habitat.

The participants will be the Minister for Housing and Urban Development, mayors and local authorities, representatives of the UN, NGOs, civil society groups, the private sector, Habitat Agenda Partners, eminent persons and sector experts. (For further details please contact Mr Pankaj Jain, Joint Secretary (Housing), Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, Government of India, at the e-mail address [js\\_uae@nic.in](mailto:js_uae@nic.in); or [info@apmcindia.com](mailto:info@apmcindia.com))

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