

4 | Environmental and Climate Change Policies Towards Sustainability

4.1 Overview of national regulations and regional cooperation

More and more governments of Asia countries are seriously increasing priority level of environmental regulations in past two decades, especially in recent years. In most countries' national legislations and institutions have reduced the use of ozone-depleting substances, slowed losses of forest cover and reduced air pollution, and particularly in some newly developed mega-city areas in coastal regions. These developments reflect significant improvements in environmental performance at national and regional scales, particularly with respect to pollution control.

However, legislations and institutions designated for limiting energy consumption and solid waste through improving eco-efficiency of the production and consumption patterns are greatly delayed, though so-called low carbon development is increasingly highlighted by many Asia governments. In other words, the national policies of many Asia countries focus on short-term actions to improve environmental performance rather than long-term plans and policies to improve environmental sustainability.

At regional and sub-regional levels, environmental regulations and climate changes acts have been released by several regional organizations and multi-national mechanisms, such as ASEAN, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the 10-3 forum, etc. For example, ASEAN clear air act and climate change agreement may lead to common action against regional environmental and climate change issues. However, environmental and climate change are often not priority issued to be concerned in regional cooperation and regulations.

Since the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol in early 1990s, most Asia countries have released their national regulations to mitigate climate change. So far, all Asia countries but Armenia and Palestine have rectified the United

Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and most of them have submitted their national reports to UNFCCC. Months before the Copenhagen meeting, many Asia countries have expressed their strong willingness towards low-carbon solutions. China has just released its strategic plan for climate change adaptation and mitigation (2008) and put energy efficiency and carbon footprint as top priority in national and provincial planning. Indonesia has backed a U.N. scheme that could curb deforestation in return for billions of dollars in carbon credits, while India and China have snared the highest number of U.N.-backed clean-energy projects that also yield carbon credits. Emerging economies in Asia were more likely to use the financial crisis to help them shift into low-carbon development than developed countries. Asia has three of the world's top five greenhouse gas emitters—China, India and Japan, plus industrial powers Australia and Republic of Korea as well as Indonesia, where deforestation and forest fires are a major source of planet-warming pollution. Therefore, Asia regional and national climate policies have major impacts on global efforts on climate change mitigation.

Nowadays, all the major emitters in Asia understood they needed to act on climate change, but each differed in their approaches. China sees climate change issue as a important part of its sustainable development strategies and even a source of prosperity. Climate change issue is now highlighted on environmental legislations from national to local levels. However, some other countries were worried about imposing extra costs on its industries during a recession, and reluctant to act. It is still very clear that poorer nations will not commit to emissions curbs unless rich countries do much more to rein in carbon pollution and pay for adaptation and the transfer of clean-energy technology.

Asia countries are working more closely in recent decade than ever before to cope with regional environmental deterioration and climate change issues through sub-regional organizations and multi-lateral mechanisms. Some of the most important regional cooperation mechanisms are discussed here.

4.1.1 TEMM

China, Japan and Republic of Korea are situated in Northeast Asia and share the atmospheric, marine and natural environment. Recent years have seen rapid economic development in Northeast Asia, with continued growth expected. At the same time, various environmental issues have emerged, and how to achieve sustainable development, through initiatives such as green growth/green economy, has now become a crucial issue. Though the three countries have greatly varying economic and social conditions, they share the common task of having to address national, regional and global environmental issues taking into account their national circumstances.

Thus, the inaugural Tripartite Environment Ministers Meeting (TEMM) among China, Japan and Republic of Korea, was held in 1999, to launch the three countries' cooperative efforts for the environment. To date, the three countries have promoted and implemented cooperation, including information