

INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT



1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout Asia, air pollution is typically addressed domestically at municipal and national levels. However, broadening efforts to ensure a more collaborative regional approach provides Asian countries with an opportunity to recognize and more effectively tackle their common and shared air quality challenges. Identifying commonalities and points of intersection will foster a more effective regional framework for cooperation that will ensure more cohesive action on air pollution without hindering countries' individual development trajectories.

2. INTERSECTIONALITY AND AIR POLLUTION

An intersectional approach is premised on identifying and understanding points of convergence at the macro (regional), meso (national and provincial) and micro (community) levels, the adoption of which can help to shape a new paradigm for the conceptualization of sustainable development throughout Asia.

It is a multi-dimensional framework that, in relation to air pollution, recognizes that the challenges being faced do not exist in isolation, and are instead the result of the intersections of different governmental, institutional, industrial, societal and cultural factors. The connections between, and the confluence of, these factors underpin the existing state of air quality both regionally and nationally.

Intersectionality requires a move beyond a singular focus on national concerns and the embracing of a more holistic, collaborative approach that is built on shared understandings of the root causes and characteristics of air pollution, and shared responsibility and action for regional mitigation. It is by its nature transformational, enabling more effective and efficient responses



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than the adoption of a “one-size-fits-all” approach and aligning potentially disparate national interests in a common cause.

It does not imply the delegitimization or sublimation of national air quality management efforts or development priorities; rather it posits them within and aligns them with this paradigm, enhancing their effectiveness and broadening their overall impacts.

An intersectional approach to air pollution is urgently needed as it is not simply a national issue. With the rapid growth of cities, industries and transport systems throughout Asia contributing to worsening levels of air quality and the continued proliferation of transboundary haze, it is increasingly a regional problem that requires a regional response. And while opportunities exist to make progress at this level, they are dependent on more effective regional collaboration.

2. REGIONAL COOPERATION ON AIR POLLUTION

Because many air pollution issues are transboundary by nature, it is necessary for cooperation to extend beyond national borders to ensure there are air quality improvements throughout Asia.

At present, there exist a number of spheres of inter-governmental cooperation, including the Acid Deposition Monitoring Network in East Asia, the Northeast Asia Subregional Programme on Environmental Cooperation, and the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution. However, significant improvements in regional air quality remain elusive.

This is because such initiatives are generally focused on capacity building, data gathering and monitoring, technology transfers and information sharing, with efforts often falling short of identifying specific goals for air pollution reductions.

In addition, the overall effectiveness of regional cooperation is hindered by conflicting priorities and competition between countries, overlapping responsibilities and a lack of coordination, and a lack of binding environmental agreements on mutually agreed upon reduction targets.

Compounding the challenges are the perceived high economic costs of emissions reductions, ongoing debates about transboundary pollution, its origins and impacts, and political sensitivities involving responsibility and attribution.

At present, there are two main forms of regional cooperation: Multilateral bodies and bilateral initiatives between nations. However, progress on the whole remains slow. What is needed is the development of new paradigms that enable a shift from isolated efforts to more integrated and better effective models that are aligned with national policies and local initiatives.

Viewing those frameworks through an intersectional lens enables more equitable reconfiguring of regional relationships, responsibilities and synergies in the mitigation of air pollution.

2. INTERSECTIONALITY AS THE BASIS FOR REGIONAL AIR QUALITY INTEGRATION

While many Asian countries and cities have developed some form of air quality management system to address the increasing levels of air pollution, those systems represent a plurality of perspectives and priorities and often significantly differ in chosen mitigation strategies, resource allocations, and levels of knowledge and technical capacity.

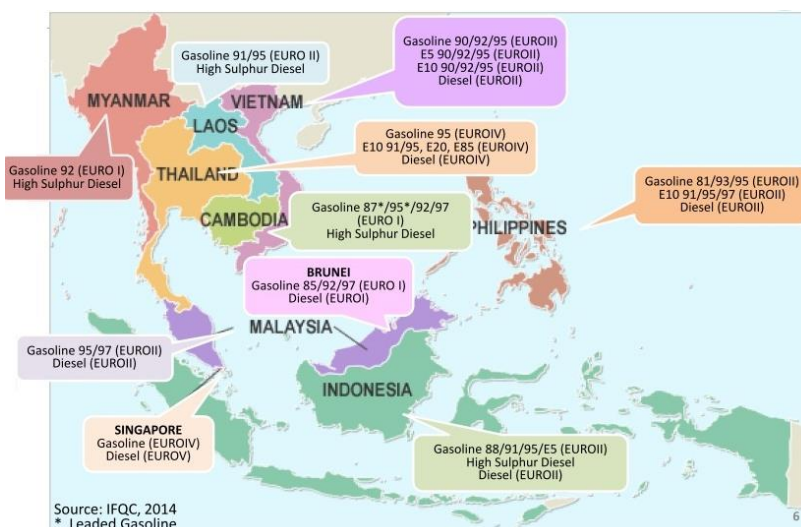
Finding common ground in the adoption of regional approaches can hence be problematic. However, the application of an intersectional approach based on areas of common need and objective enables identification of points of synergy and linkages that can facilitate the forging of new alliances.



EXAMPLE: REGIONAL ENERGY COOPERATION

Asia has reached a turning point in its energy trajectory. The fossil fuel-based energy solutions that have driven growth in the region in recent decades are no longer compatible with many countries' sustainable development aspirations. Because of the transboundary nature of many of the energy challenges, regional cooperation is paramount. Areas of common concern include the need to improve regional energy security, manage air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, and establish cross-border energy infrastructure. In this respect, ASEAN, South Asian and Central Asian countries as well as China, Russia and Mongolia are embracing cross-border energy connectivity. Initiatives such as the CASA 1000 and the ASEAN Power Grid will allow low carbon energy from gas, hydropower, solar or wind to be traded across borders, providing economic, social, health and environmental benefits.

(Akhtar, S, 2017, "Regional Solutions Key for Asia-Pacific's Transition to Sustainable Energy, IPS news agency, (www.ipsnews.net/2017/01/regional-solutions-key-for-asia-pacifics-transition-to-sustainable-energy/)



Current ASEAN transportation fuel quality

EXAMPLE: HARMONIZING VEHICLE FUEL QUALITY STANDARDS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Asia's motorized transport emissions are responsible for 23 percent of global energy-related greenhouse gas emission and are set to rise to 31 percent by 2030. Traffic congestion alone is costing Asian economies an estimated 2-5 percent of GDP every year due to lost time and higher transport costs. It's therefore imperative that a regional approach be undertaken for the development of effective strategies and the implementation of targeted policies.

However, a lack of consistent fuel standards, varying stages of industry development within ASEAN, a lack of baseline data and alignment with other regional goals, and multiple agencies with overlapping responsibilities at the national level are impeding the harmonization of regional fuel quality standards.

Applying an intersectional framework, areas of commonality emerge in consensus on desired objectives, including more flexible cross-border trade, greater consumer confidence in fuel throughout the region, fewer health risks, reduced air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, improved economic and logistical efficiency, better synergy of fuel types among ASEAN countries, and better economy of scale in fuel trading. Capitalizing on those areas of potential synergy will also help facilitate the realization of the ASEAN Transport Strategic Plan 2016-2025.

Sources:

Hsu, A, 2014, "Seeing Through the Smog: China's Air Pollution Challenge for East Asia", in *Routledge Handbook of Environment and Society in Asia*, eds Harris, PG, Lang, G, Routledge, London/New York
 Jung, W, 2016, *Environmental Challenges and Cooperation in Northeast Asia*, <http://isdj.eu/publication/environmental-challenges-cooperation-northeast-asia/>

