

The Sri Lanka health and environment initiative

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In response to the recommendations of UNCED 1992, WHO formulated a new Global Strategy for Health and Environment, which was adopted at the 46th World Health Assembly in 1993.

The Sri Lanka Health and Environment Initiative has the following objectives: (i) to investigate and identify the approaches and actions which should be taken to ensure that priority National Health and Environmental Issues are placed in an inter-sectoral development context. (ii) to develop national plans for Sustainable Development based on Agenda 21 of UNCED and (iii) to identify national capacity building requirements for implementation of the Health and Development Plan.

Sri Lanka is a party to the major international conventions, which is a reflection of its concern for the environment.

1. The Convention on Biological Diversity.
2. The Basel Convention on the Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Waste and their disposal.
3. The Convention on International Trade in endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.
4. The Ramsar Convention on Wetland of International Importance, especially as Waterflow Habitat.
5. The Bonn Convention on Migratory Species.
6. The Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer and its Montreal Protocol on Substances that deplete the Ozone layer.
7. The Framework Convention on Climate Change.

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The National Environmental Act was established in 1980. The Ministry of Environment with its implementing arm, the Central Environmental Authority, was formed in 1990. Environmental Impact Assessment regulations were gazetted in 1993 and updated in 1996. The National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP) was prepared in 1990. The update exercise of NEAP was undertaken in 1992/1993 with the assistance of the World Bank/Norwegian team of consultants. WHO's involvement in the Sri Lanka Health and Environment Initiative (S.R.L.H.E.I.) was to carry out a Situation Analysis with the collaboration of the Ministries of Environment and Health (1995-1996). A National Consultative Meeting was held on August 1996, by the Ministries of Environment and Health with WHO assistance, to review the Situation Analysis Report. The meeting was attended by several Ministries, NGOs, UNDP, UNICEF and JICA.

Various presentations highlighted the Environmental Concerns and recognised the need to incorporate the health concerns and remedial actions in the NEAP. Based on the recommendations of the National Consultative Meeting and the findings of the three Working Groups, a Core Group was established in September 1996. The Core Group met in September, November and December 1996. The Consultant was requested to prepare a draft Strategic Framework for a National Action Plan, based on the findings of the Working Groups of the Conference. The draft framework was presented in December 1996.

Working Groups to collect background information on the Quality of Drinking Water; Sanitation and Solid Waste Disposal; Ambient Air Pollution; Noise Pollution; Vector, Food and Water Borne Diseases; Chemical Safety and Hazardous Waste Disposal; Urban Health Concerns and Food Safety & Hygiene were identified.

The Working Groups were requested to collect information on the extent; nature and trends of

the problem; population affected and the socio-economic and health consequences on the above areas of environmental concern.

During the period February to July 1997, the draft framework was revised twice and the National Strategic Plan on the Sri Lanka Health & Environmental Initiative was finalized and published in August 1997.

Simultaneously, the Government recognised the need to revise and update the NEAP. Several sectoral sub-committees including one on Health, with the WHO Consultant co-opted as a member, were established in January 1997. Several sub-committee meetings were held during 1997. Two chapters on Health were developed. Finally, a composite NEAP first draft was produced in January 1998. After two inter-sectoral meetings, the first draft was modified. It is hoped to have the final updated NEAP by October/November 1998. The Strategic Plan was used to develop two chapters on the Health Aspects in the NEAP.

The Areas of Environmental Concern identified in the Sri Lanka Context were:-

1. The Quality of Drinking Water
2. Sanitation
3. Food Safety and Hygiene
4. Water and Food Borne Diseases
5. Vector Borne Diseases (Malaria, Filariasis, Dengue Haemorrhagic Fever and Japanese Encephalitis).
6. Ambient Air Pollution
7. Noise Pollution
8. Chemical Safety
9. Toxic and Hazardous Wastes, including Hospital Wastes.
10. Urban Health Concerns

Under the Quality of Drinking Water, Faecal Contamination, Contamination by Solid Wastes, Contamination by Agrochemical and Contamination by Industrial Effluents; are dealt with separately.

Under Ambient Air Pollution; Vehicular Air Pollution, Indoor Domestic Air Pollution, and

Industrial Air Pollution; are considered under separate headings.

The information available on the Extent; Nature & Trends; Population Affected; and Socio-economic & Health Concerns of the 10 Areas defined above, were described.

The specific issues under the Problem Areas were prioritized.

Strategies/Approaches to address each of the Issues were next provided, with Lead Agencies and Support Agencies defined to carry out these strategies.

The present status of Occupational Health and the existing issues and recommendations to overcome these issues, were described.

The Plan also sets out the Implementation Mechanism. Specific Multi-sectoral Groups will be set up to address the issues and the strategies developed. Each group will develop detailed sectoral plans within an appropriate time frame. The groups will also address Legislation (Review, Revision and Updating) and Enforcement problems; address Human Resources Needs which includes Recruitment and Training; develop effective Reporting and Monitoring systems; and mobilise additional Funds and Resources.

A steering committee is recommended with high level representation from the concerned Ministries and Agencies. It should develop an effective coordinating mechanism; define the role of the Private Sector and NGOs; monitor periodically the activities of the different sectoral groups and review annually, the implementation status of the Plan of Action and the detailed Sectoral Plans.

The National Environmental Council should be given more responsibility in the NEAP implementation, besides its advisory role.

To promote greater coordination, the Committee of Secretaries should regularly take up Environmental Issues at its meetings.

It is hoped that the revised composite National Environmental Action Plan will be finalised on schedule by October/November 1998.

Eight sectoral committees including one on Health will be developed with the Secretaries of each particular sector as Heads. Detailed sectoral plans will be developed based on the National Strategic Plan and should be in place by 1999. The time-frame set would be from 1999 to 2002. The implementation mechanisms already described above (Strategic Plan), will be set in place for effective monitoring and coordination.

Abbreviations:

NEAP	National Environmental Action Plan.
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.
WHO	World Health Organization.
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme.
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund.
JICA	Japanese International Cooperation Agency
NGOs	Non Governmental Organizations.

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