

Regional programme: “Towards a Non-Toxic South-East Asia”



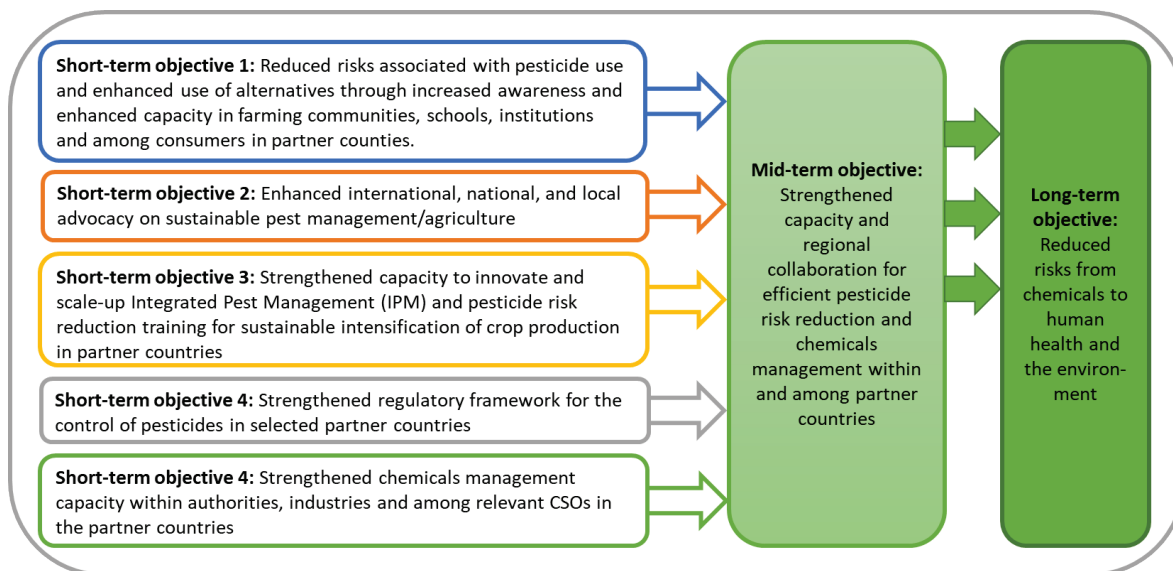
Achievements 2007-2019.
Lessons learned and recommendations from
programme partners.

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Introduction

The second phase of the programme has now been completed after 5.5 years implementation of activities (11 years since the initiation of the programme). All partners have continued their efforts to reduce the risks from chemicals to human health and the environment, thereby also supporting the member countries to achieve the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The programme has achieved all agreed objectives and targets set at the initiation of phase 2. This has also been confirmed by two external evaluations in 2019.



The objectives have been achieved through support for adoption of sustainable agricultural production and protection methods, trainings, campaigns and other activities to increase awareness on pesticide risks, support to the strengthening of regulatory control of pesticides, industrial and consumer chemicals and support for regional collaboration and exchange of experiences and best practices, to create better understanding of the situation in the different countries and to promote sharing of experiences and efficient use of resources on a regional basis.

Background

In 2004, Sida commissioned a number of studies to get an overview of the management of chemicals in the region and to develop ideas for possible interventions. The studies documented that there were serious issues that needed immediate attention and that vulnerable groups were disproportionately affected. The studies highlighted that there was virtually



no enforcement of laws and regulations around the management and use of such chemicals and a serious lack of capacity and political commitment to tackle the problem. This prompted a recommendation that regulations governing pesticides should be an important initial target in order to phase out WHO Hazard Class I (extremely and highly hazardous) pesticides. It recommended that a multi-sectorial approach, including more effective regional cooperation, should be used to tackle the issues. As a response to these findings and recommendations, the SENSA office (Swedish Environmental Secretariat for Asia) at the Embassy of Sweden in Bangkok developed a programme proposal with suitable components and identified a number of relevant organisations in the region and in Sweden that could provide expertise and support. The Swedish Chemicals Agency was asked

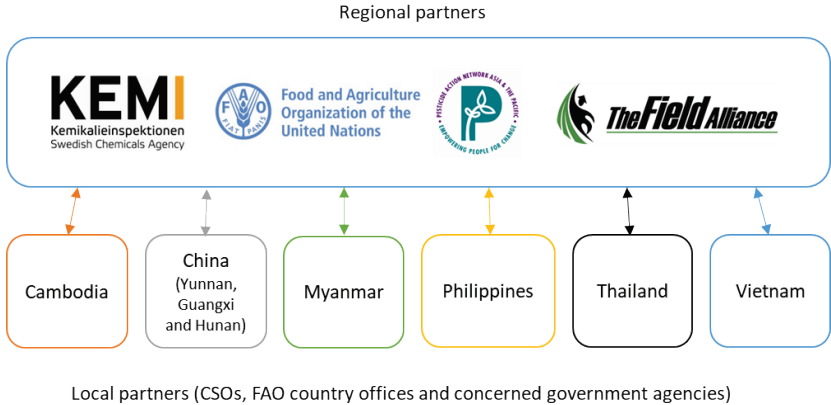


to be lead agency and overall programme manager and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Pesticide Action Network Asia and the Pacific (PAN-AP) and the Field Alliance (TFA) were selected as implementation partners. In addition to the regional partners, a number of local partners in the member countries have supported the implementation of programme activities.

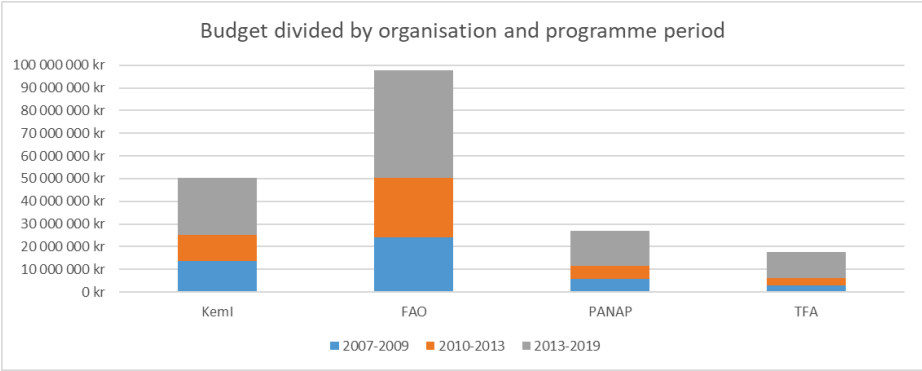
In January 2007, the programme “Towards a Non-Toxic Environment in South-East Asia” was launched. Objectives of the first phase were basically the same as the current programme (see above), with the difference that advocacy work

on local, national and global level was less pronounced and there was more focus on building up basic capacity of local partners and communities. Based on recommendations from an external evaluation, the first phase was prolonged with another 2 years and in 2013, Sida approved a second phase

of the programme (2013-2018) with largely the same focus as previous phase and the same implementing partners. The geographical scope of the programme has always been South-East Asia with a primary focus on the Mekong region countries. Initial partner countries were Cambodia, China (Yunnan, Guangxi and Hainan provinces), Lao PDR, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam and in phase 2, Myanmar entered the collaboration. Regional activities under the programme have sometimes involved other neighboring countries, like Bhutan, Indonesia, Nepal etc.



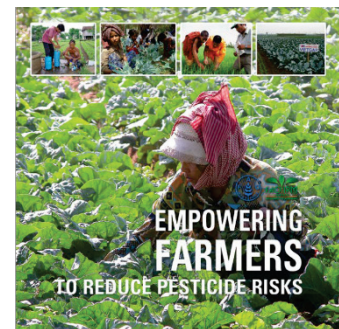
The programme has had a total budget of SEK 192 830 000 (phase 1, 2007-Aug 2013: SEK 93 500 000, phase 2, Sept 2013-May 2019, SEK 99 330 000). The division of the budget was made according to each organisation’s capacity and network of local partners.



Key results

The programme (2007-2018) has contributed to considerable achievements in the region. Many overall achievements related to the development objectives are, however, the result of a combination of factors, support from different projects and programmes, general political and economic development etc. As a consequence it is not always possible to determine the magnitude of the programme's contribution to the various aspects of this development.

The programme's overall objective was to contribute to reduced risk from chemicals to human health and the environment. Unfortunately, there are no monitoring data to confirm that risk levels have actually decreased in the member countries during the programme period and as a result of programme activities. Monitoring pesticide levels in peoples' blood, in water, soil, and sediments is very costly and would have required substantial additional resources and technical input from the programme. Neither is such data available from other actors in the region since there is no system in place to systematically collect and analyse samples. Instead, proxy-indicators of risk reduction have been used to measure progress. Farmers who implement IPM and other sustainable agricultural methods use less pesticides, use less toxic pesticides and protect themselves better. As a result, risks from pesticides are reduced, both for the applicators, for other worker on the farm and for consumers eating the agricultural products. A long-term impact assessment study done within the framework of the programme confirms this. This study shows that trained farmers reduced their total pesticide use with 50%, they stopped using WHO Class I pesticides (extremely and highly hazardous), they reduced exposure due to less mixing of pesticides, improved disposal of pesticide containers and increased the use of protective clothing when handling pesticides.



Countries banning or severely restricting the use of hazardous products will eventually lead to sustainable risk reduction. It is, however, important that legislation is properly enforced to ensure that concerned actors follow the rules. The fact that several countries in the region have banned the same pesticides increases the probability that such products are actually being phased out since import, production and use is prohibited in all those countries.

Implementing regulations for industrial and consumer chemicals also has the potential to reduce risks to human health and the environment. In many countries in the region, the production, import and use of these chemicals were basically unregulated at the beginning of the programme and the general public was not aware of potential risks from such chemicals.

National level

Within the programme more than 150,000 farmers and 2,000 extension workers have been trained in Integrated Pest Management, Pesticide Risk Reduction or other alternative agricultural practices, including ecological agriculture.

A Pesticide Impacts Assessments curriculum has been adapted to identify gender roles in agriculture with the emphasis on decision making and handling of pesticides in addition to the assessment of the status of the pesticides use and impacts to health and the environment.



A new curriculum has been introduced and used by teachers and children in farming communities on pesticides impact and agro-biodiversity. School gardens have been used to introduce safer agriculture practices and for raising awareness.



Organic food production is slowly increasing with organic shops and markets being set up mainly in cities and small towns. The programme has supported this trend by expanding awareness and demand at consumer level as well as by providing farmers with knowledge and access to sustainable farming techniques, i.e. making it possible for farmers to produce biocontrol products themselves or purchase these from the private sector. The programme has also actively worked to link organic farmers to more rewarding local and international markets.

The programme has worked with farming communities to promote safer handling of empty pesticide containers. As a result, communities have constructed disposal tanks where they can put empty containers and thereby avoid contamination of the environment. In Vietnam, the programme contributed to the development of a circular that regulates collection, transport and treatment on empty pesticide containers.

With support from the programme, levels of pesticides residues in blood and urine as well as in vegetables and fruit used for school lunches have been monitored. Results showed that the presence of pesticide residues was widespread. Presentation of the results to community members, local authorities and concerned government agencies contributed to raised awareness on the seriousness of this issue. In Thailand the government later issued a ministerial order with the aim that all schools must be freed from pesticides.

Through trainings and workshops, a large number of government staff have increased their knowledge in chemical management practices including, development of legislation, risk reduction methods, classification and labelling, enforcement and cooperation between private and public sector.

The programme has supported development and adoption of enhanced legislation on pesticides and other chemicals by providing technical and legal advice to Lao PDR, Cambodia, Myanmar and Vietnam. The programme has also facilitated ratification of the Rotterdam Convention in Cambodia and Lao PDR, and helped build capacity for its implementation. This enables these countries to take informed decisions on what products still can be permitted for import, to use the provisions of the Convention as a mechanism to better control imports and to be able to influence the continued development of the convention.

The programme was directly involved in the development of inspection manuals and training of pesticide inspectors in Lao PDR and Cambodia. With support from the programme, a large number of inspections of pesticide retailers were subsequently carried out. The educational effect of inspections led to broad improvements among retailers. Persistent cases of non-compliance were recorded, some of them resulting in fines/warning letters/sanctions.

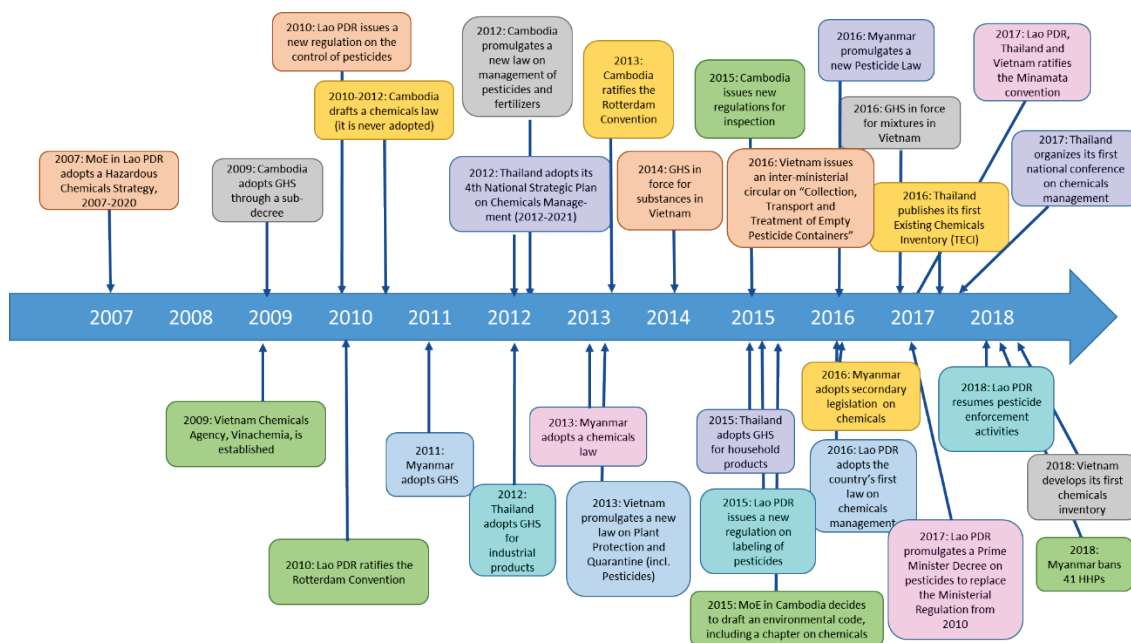


All programme countries have taken significant steps towards phase out of highly hazardous pesticides by restricting and/or banning such products. The programme has contributed to this progress both by highlighting problems with these pesticides through monitoring and data collection at local level, by demonstrating to farming communities how to grow crops without those products and by providing responsible authorities with increased knowledge on how to assess and manage them from a government and community perspective.

Within the programme, a large number of information materials on pesticides and other chemicals (reports, videos, posters, guidance documents etc.) have been developed. The material has been used for

general awareness raising, campaigns etc. and have reached a large audience through distribution via traditional media, websites, e-mails and social media.

Below is a summary of key decisions and policy development in the member countries from 2007 to 2018.



Regional level

The programme has supported regional collaboration and exchange of experiences and best practices, to create better understanding of the situation in the different countries and to promote efficient use of resources on a regional basis. This has been done in two different ways. One way has been to organize regional meetings bringing together several countries to share experiences and best practices and to allow regional discussions and networking. Examples are regional workshops on assessment and management of highly hazardous pesticides, licensing and inspection schemes, management of invasive crop pests, curriculum development, including sharing of training modules, working methods, results from national studies etc. The other way has been to collaborate with regional organisations and intergovernmental bodies with a mandate to support management of pesticides and other chemicals.

At the initiation of the programme there was no formal regional organisation or working group focusing on support for general chemicals management. In response to this vacuum, the programme created a regional Forum for capacity building and networking related to industrial and consumer chemicals (in 2009). Initially, the forum consisted of three countries (Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam) but has gradually expanded to include most ASEAN countries. The regional Forum has been highly appreciated by the member countries and has contributed to better knowledge among government officials on issues ranging from development of regulations and enforcement to anti-corruption and the connection between chemicals and human rights. The possibility to assign country delegations with participants from several concerned authorities has also contributed to improved inter-ministerial dialogue. The appreciation from participants and their organisations has been confirmed by external evaluations.

The programme has provided technical support and facilitated countries' participation in the Asia Pacific Plant Protection Commission (APPPC). Work of the Commission encompasses activities to ensure that production, trade and use of chemical pesticides are properly and effectively regulated in line with the FAO/WHO Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management and other international treaties, as well as to reduce the pesticide risks as much as possible. It promotes implementation of IPM by coordinating regional information sharing and agreements so that member countries can adopt IPM technologies that are appropriate for their situations.

Since 2015, the programme has had a continuous dialogue with the ASEAN secretariat and its working group on chemicals and waste in order to support their work and to investigate possible ways to collaborate and enhance the regional chemicals agenda. Contacts are now established and the member countries have expressed an interest in continued collaboration.

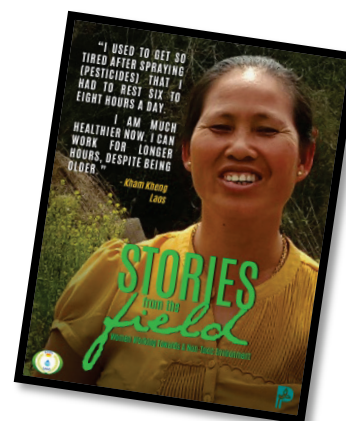
Global level

During the implementation of the programme, efforts to try to influence the global frameworks related to management of pesticides and other chemicals have gradually increased. On numerous occasions, evidence from the ground collected by programme partners has been used to influence international policies and conventions. Important examples are the decision to phase out endosulfan on global level and the adoption of a resolution on highly hazardous pesticides recognizing that such products cause adverse human health and environmental effects in many countries, particularly in low-income and middle-income countries. The resolution encourages stakeholders to undertake concerted efforts to implement the HHP Strategy at the local, national, regional and international levels, with emphasis on promoting agroecologically based alternatives and strengthening national regulatory capacity. Contributions and work by programme partners were instrumental in these processes. It was particularly valuable to be able to address the issue from different perspectives, as government, UN organization and CSO.

The programme has also supported the development of the FAO pesticide registration toolkit, a web-based registration handbook intended for day-to-day use by pesticide registrars. A number of national and regional trainings on the toolkit have contributed to the development of the toolkit itself as well as to increased knowledge among pesticide registrars from the member countries. Experiences from work on strengthening regulatory control within the programme also contributed to improved international guidelines on pesticide legislation and new guidelines on pesticide inspection and licensing.

Cross-cutting issues

Most of the cross-cutting issues have been imbedded in the everyday work of the programme. To leave no one behind has been very important. All partners have worked hard to raise general awareness on the importance of taking gender aspects into account when designing, planning and implementing activities so that both women and men can and want to participate. The knowledge and capacity have gradually increased at local level as well as on national and global level. To follow the gender balance in different activities gender-disaggregated data has been collected through the whole programme. The programme has adapted trainings and other activities so that everyone is empowered with relevant knowledge/skills and have a possibility to be part of decision-making and to take necessary protective measures. To highlight this work the programme let 25 women, who had benefitted from programme



interventions, describe their achievements in the booklet “Stories from the field”. Efforts within the programme have resulted in a good balance of male and female participants and the benefits of the broadened participation is acknowledged.

The programme has addressed climate change issues by working with rural communities on awareness and capacity building for implementation of mitigation and adaptation strategies in the agriculture sector.

The clear link between mismanagement of chemicals and violation of human rights, such as right to health, right to life, right to a clean environment, access to justice and right to information has been highlighted and documented by the programme. To raise the general awareness of this link the programme approached the UN special rapporteur on the Right to food and the rapporteur on Human Rights and Hazardous substances. In 2017, the rapporteurs delivered a joint report to the UN Human Rights Council detailing how pesticide use transgresses human rights and calling on the global community to take action. Information from the programme was important input to this report.

Corruption has been addressed both by strengthening internal management and control systems (such as external audits etc.) and by raising general awareness on the negative effects of corruption on poverty reduction and general development. Good governance, open and transparent governments, rule of law etc. has been promoted as means for reducing the risk for corruption. When developing and revising legislation an important focus has been to create clear criteria and definitions that minimize the room for interpretation. Inspection procedures have been designed to ensure transparency and implementation of efficient control systems.

Lessons learned and recommendations for the future

General

At present, combating climate change is higher on the political agenda than chemicals control in most countries. Since there is a clear linkage between chemicals management and climate change, this fact could be used to mobilise increased political priority and resources for work related to chemicals management. The chemicals and waste sector contribute to a significant proportion of global greenhouse gas emissions, particularly from energy consumption and direct material-related emissions in industrial production processes and waste treatment. The ambition of a more circular economy, in addition to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, is to contribute to better utilisation of resources and, if correctly designed, to also reduce the use and release of hazardous substances. The pursuit of a circular economy must not lead to the recycling of materials containing hazardous substances that could increase exposure and where the material would lose its value.



Preventive chemicals control is a prerequisite for sustainable development and a means for contributing to the achievement of most of the objectives in Agenda 2030. There are clear associations between sound chemicals management and several of the goals: safe food and agriculture (SDG 2), good health (SDG 3), clean water (SDG 6), safe working environments (SDG 8), sustainable cities (SDG 11), sustainable consumption and production patterns (SDG 12), climate action (SDG 13) and protection of

ecosystems and biodiversity in water and on land (SDG 14 and 15). To mobilize more resources for chemicals management issues, countries in the region could benefit from making the connection to the SDGs more visible.

The shrinking space for CSOs to work in several countries in the region is something that need to be addressed also in the future. Human rights and environment activists are increasingly being threatened, harassed or even killed and it is important to continue highlighting such cases and work towards elimination of this violence. When designing and planning activities it is crucial with in-depth knowledge on local and national contexts to be able to take necessary safety measures and avoid potentially dangerous situations.

National level

A large number of people are still unaware of risks from pesticides and other chemicals to human health and the environment. Continued campaigning, awareness raising activities and trainings for farmers, consumers, children, teachers etc. is important. It is also important that national work to phase out the most hazardous substances continue.

All countries in the region need to make sure that farmers have access to high quality training and advice on sustainable agricultural practices to be able to move away from use of hazardous pesticides. Currently, the number of trainers is limited and more resources and political priority need to be mobilized.

General knowledge and institutional capacity to manage pesticides and other chemicals is still quite weak in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar. These countries would benefit from continued support to develop their chemicals control. Countries like Thailand and Vietnam have stronger regulations and government capacity but need to devote more resources to enforcement activities to make sure that all stakeholders take their responsibility. All countries need to establish sustainable financing of their chemicals control based on national taxes and fees and move away from the need of external donor support.

Chemicals management requires good inter-ministerial cooperation. Most countries in the region lack functioning organisation that facilitate such cooperation and it is highly important that the countries continue improving this.

When collaborating with government authorities that are affected by changing political landscapes, priorities etc. it is important with flexible workplans with a possibility to adapt to changing circumstances.

It would be beneficial to analyse the system for agricultural production and distribution in the countries in the region to identify obstacles and opportunities for safer food production systems (from subsidies on agricultural inputs and conditions for farmers to access various resources to public procurement and links to value chains). How can you create incentives for farmers to switch to sustainable farming methods?

Regional level

A number of regional collaboration initiatives related to pesticides and other chemicals are in place today but their capacity to support the member countries is still weak and countries in the region do not allocate enough resources to make the collaboration work. It is important to find the right incentives for countries to invest time and resources into regional collaboration. Without common regional legislation and requirements or established work-sharing procedures, work and priorities on national level tend to limit resources that are set aside for regional collaboration. The big differences in government capacity in the countries in South-East Asia probably needs to be addressed before countries are ready to take steps towards increased regional collaboration where all countries benefit from it. Political priority for regional harmonisation of chemicals legislation, data sharing, joint assessments, classification and labelling etc. would facilitate improved use of resources, expertise and experiences within the region. Such aspirations are raised in many high-level declarations but need to be concretized and followed by sufficient resources from the countries. Since GHS is designed as a common system for classification and labelling of chemicals, implementation of the system could be a suitable pilot area for regional harmonisation.

Existing regional collaboration initiatives are currently only involving a limited part of concerned government authorities. Since the management of chemicals is a cross-ministerial issue and responsibility, efforts to expand and involve all concerned government authorities is important for the future development of the regional agenda on chemicals management.

Industry is asking for regional harmonisation of regulations on pesticides and other chemicals since it facilitates trade. Increased dialogue and involvement of the industry sector and relevant industry organisations would be beneficial for the continued development of chemicals management in South-East Asia. Linking requirements for using GHS to regional trade agreements could also be worth exploring.

Global level

Certain risks from chemicals are best handled on a global level, such as phase out of highly hazardous substances. In these global processes, experiences and data from local communities are important pieces of information. It is therefore very important to continue collecting and sharing such data to the global community to make sure that the chemicals causing most problems are prioritized and addressed. Knowledge on local contexts is also important for development of effective measures.

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