



ENVIRONMENTAL DISPATCHES:

Reflections on Challenges, Innovation
and Resilience in Asia-Pacific

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This publication was conceived and coordinated by Mr. Manesh Lacoul and Ms. Carly Timm at UNEP/ROAP.



FOREWORD

Asia-Pacific is a region of sharp contrasts. The region is the engine of the global economy pulling millions out of poverty over the past two decades. At the same time there are signs that the way countries are growing is undermining growth itself, and comes with large social and environmental costs. Air pollution, ecosystem degradation and waste management are some of the most visible signs. Floods, drought and increasingly unpredictable weather linked to climate change are also having a negative impact on food security and livelihoods and costing the region billions every year. However, the region is also producing innovative solutions to these multiple challenges. Local governments and communities have been helping to put Asia-Pacific on a more sustainable pathway, one community at a time. Yet, these micro-actions often fly under the radar of the media and the stories of the people who lead green innovations and those who are affected by the results, largely go untold.

This publication “Environmental Dispatches: Reflections on Challenges, Innovation and Resilience in Asia-Pacific” brings together some of these stories. The APFED Showcase Programme offered the chance for journalists in the region to tell those untold stories, spreading knowledge and awareness of how Asia-Pacific communities are addressing sustainable development.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Zahedi', on a light-colored background.

Kaveh Zahedi
Regional Director and Representative for Asia and the Pacific
United Nations Environment Programme

PREFACE

Asia-Pacific faces major environmental issues, from climate change and biodiversity conservation to resource resilience and water security. As the greatest consumer of natural resources, the region is experiencing the effects of increased waste and pollution as they take a massive toll on resource availability, livelihoods and quality of life for many families. Addressing the challenges that come with climate change appears enormous and often insurmountable outside of top-down global and regional actions. Yet, local governments and communities in the region are facing these challenges head on by developing and utilizing innovative solutions to climate change and many other environmental challenges.

Through our support to 58 sustainable development pilot projects across Asia-Pacific, the Asia-Pacific Forum for Environment and Development (APFED) Showcase Programme witnessed the positive impact of local innovation. In China, local communities are utilizing new methods of mediation via public participation in protecting environmental rights of citizens. In Vietnam, a small conservation research and development center is working to develop effective rice-husk gasification techniques to mitigate climate change. Through local

marine and coastal zoning management, communities in the Philippines are effectively protecting their sea-based livelihoods. Rural households in Pakistan are enabled to create and maintain water-purifying systems for better health.

In fact, it is these micro-actions, undertaken by individuals and communities on a daily basis that cumulatively creates the bottom-up approach to regional and global sustainable development. Community-based actions toward wildlife conservation, water availability and livelihood enhancement represent a vast array of available development solutions to help address existing and emerging environmental challenges throughout Asia-Pacific. This recognition of the necessity of using local, inclusive innovation to address the environment has been called for from the 1992 Earth Summit to the 2012 Rio+20 Summit. Despite the emphasis on the need for scaling-up and replicating proven successful grassroots solutions, such approaches are often unable to garner the attention of media with impactful reach. Due to their lack of visibility at the national, regional and global levels, much of the potential value of local innovations goes unrealized.

While supporting community-based pilot projects for sustainable development across Asia-Pacific, we identified localized success stories again and again in the areas of climate change adaptation, access to and use of natural resources, solid waste management and energy efficiency, just to name a few. But, we also recognize the low visibility of such successes is limiting the value of all the lessons learned and knowledge gained during project implementation. We believe the results of many of the pilot projects have the potential to act as valuable resources for other communities seeking solutions to similar environmental challenges. This publication is our way of telling these stories and bringing them to a greater audience.

We opted to do so through the creation of a UNEP-APFED Media Fellowship, which fostered ten competitively-selected environmental journalists from ten different countries in Asia-Pacific to explore the field and present these essential and engaging findings under APFED Showcase Programme, UNDP-UNEP Poverty-Environment Initiative (PEI), Global Environment Outlook (GEO-5), and a broader domestic environmental challenge, through print, audio or visual media. The result is a collection of intriguing, behind-the-scenes human-interest stories

portrayed in varying styles. These stories offer a fresh perspective on the personal impacts of environmental challenges– insight that is not gained through general reporting guidelines on projects or outside of small, local news media.

The individual authors’ works, which were originally published in national news outlets in the respective countries of origin, can now be found in this publication, accompanied by additional country-specific environmental information and supported by beautiful photographs that help to demonstrate both environmental hardships and solutions. The compilation of all of the stories offers the reader a unique perspective on the state of sustainable development from the community level to the national and regional levels. The fellowship and resulting publication aim to bring awareness to innovative solutions developed at the community-level, as well as, inspire young journalists to report on environmental issues in their communities.

APFED Showcase Programme Secretariat
United Nations Environment Programme
Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN ASIA-PACIFIC COUNTRIES

NEPAL

The Himalayan Mountains of Nepal are the country's most well-known attribute. However, the small nation is full of valleys and forested watersheds which are rich in biodiversity. Environmental issues such as deforestation, land degradation, waste management and contaminated water are growing challenges for the country. On a daily basis, many people have only limited access to freshwater supplies. As the use of vehicles continues to rise, the country faces public health threats due to increasingly poor air conditions. The most significant emerging environmental issue in Nepal is the accumulation of black carbon particles in the atmosphere of Himalayas, which causes increased melting of snow and ice, raising risks of severe flooding.

KYRGYZSTAN

Rugged mountains cover the majority of Kyrgyzstan. Though it has largely avoided many of the environmental problems faced by other Central Asian countries, it does share efforts with its neighbors to decrease the rapid desiccation of the Aral Sea which it borders. In general, the terrain of Kyrgyzstan lends unique environmental challenges to the country. The economy depends heavily on mining, which has had negative effects on the natural environment, including loss of biodiversity, pollution from waste water and land resources degradation. Nuclear waste dumping during the mining of uranium and other rare-earth metals within Kyrgyzstan has also led to radioactive pollution of the surrounding lands and water resources in some regions. Water aquifers are also at risk of contamination from these mining activities, agricultural runoff and livestock wastes.

CHINA

China's diverse geography boasts plateaus, fertile plains, basins, foothills, mountains and some of the world's longest rivers. Recently, the country's vast economic growth and high population have led it to become one of the world's largest emitters of greenhouse gasses and carbon dioxide. Today, China faces environmental challenges such as severe air pollution in major cities and groundwater scarcity and contamination in rural areas. Nearly 30% of the land has been impacted by desertification, decreasing biodiversity and endangering rare species.

MYANMAR

Myanmar is rich in natural resources and still notes a high degree of biodiversity within its ecological landscape. The country is also one of the least-GHG and CO2 emitters in the region. However, as Myanmar seeks to develop economically, environmental pressures are expected to grow rapidly in the coming years, due to increased demand for agricultural goods, industrialization and energy consumption. Controlling the loss of forest resources, land degradation, biodiversity losses, waste management and climate change as the country develops represent key environmental challenges of the country.

VIETNAM

Vietnam is a country of tropical lowlands and highlands. As part of the Mekong River Delta, the country holds fertile lands, perfect for rice cultivation. Forest occupies nearly half of land coverage, making it an incredibly important resource for both economic growth and wildlife biodiversity. In recent years, rapid population growth has added to environmental pressures stemming from

urbanization and intensification of agriculture in the country. Efforts are being made to combat logging and slash-and-burn agricultural practices which have led to deforestation and soil degradation due to excessive use of fertilizers in a number of areas. Along Vietnam's coastline, overfishing has also begun to threaten marine life populations.

PHILIPPINES

Comprised of 7,107 islands, Philippines is considered as one of 17 mega-diversity countries of the world. Its marine and coastal ecosystems are equally diverse, with coral reefs, mangroves, sea grass beds, wetlands, estuaries, lagoons, sandy beaches, rocky headlands and sand dunes. However, the country's marine ecosystems are heavily under threat from pollution stemming from households and industries in coastal areas. Additionally, increased tourism has put a strain on natural ecosystems and degraded habitat quality for wildlife. Overfishing and destructive fishing, coastal infrastructure development, deforestation and waste management are the country's most pressing environmental challenges to date.

INDONESIA

Indonesia is an archipelago consisting of the large islands of Borneo, Sumatra, Java, Sulawesi and Papua and over 13,000 small islands, many of which are low-lying. This makes the country vulnerable to monsoons, climate-related rainfall changes and sea level rise. Additionally, Indonesia has long combated mass deforestation due to global demands for palm oil and timber. These primary challenges have led Indonesia to face an overall declining capacity to produce food due to agricultural land conversion and a shortage of water from unregulated forest clearance. Wildlife over-exploitation is also severe in Indonesia, where human resources and funding are inadequate to monitor the wildlife trade and enforce existing protection laws. Most, if not all, of Indonesia's fisheries are fully or overexploited. There are also environmental problems linked to rapid urbanization of the country's coastal cities and economic development, such as air pollution, traffic

congestion, garbage management, and reliable water and waste water services and energy supply.

SRI LANKA

As an island state, Sri Lanka is home to varying topography which has resulted in unique biodiversity found nowhere else in the world. This biodiversity faces major threats in the 21st century, stemming from population booms coupled with high levels of poverty. Sri Lanka is also particularly vulnerable to climate change and natural disasters such as sea-level rise, floods, landslides, cyclones, droughts, coastal erosion and earthquakes, just to name a few.

BANGLADESH

Bangladesh is a country largely defined by the congruence of three Himalayan rivers which pass through it and empty into the Bay of Bengal. The country's rivers help to make up a vast network of wetlands which are rich with biodiversity and wildlife. With 50% of its land standing a mere 10 meters above sea-level, the country is highly prone to climate change impacts and natural disasters. Over time, the clearing of lands for agricultural purposes and deforestation have increased this threat. In urban growth areas, increasing domestic and industrial activities and uncontrolled dumping have led to widespread water contamination. The conservation of mangroves is of major importance to the delta region of the country, as it preserves ecological integrity and helps to guard against flooding, storms and coastal erosion.

PALAU

As a small Pacific Island country, Palau's people and economy are tied to ocean resources. Through global warming, climate change poses the greatest environmental risk to the country causing rising sea level, coral bleaching, drought and other natural disasters. The country also combats destructive fishing practices such as deep sea bottom trawling, unsustainable harvesting of sharks and overexploitation of tuna stocks. Palau is challenged with inadequate water supply and limited agricultural areas to support the current size of the population.

THE AUTHORS



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(Nepal)

Smriti Mallapaty is a freelance environment and science journalist, previously based out of Kathmandu, Nepal. She has written for SciDev. Net, IRIN, Nature, Environmental Health News, Down to Earth, Yale Environment 360, Himal Southasian, Caravan and various daily newspapers in Nepal. Smriti holds a Bachelor's degree from Brown University and a Master of Science in Environmental Technology, with specialization in Water Management from Imperial College London. She is currently working as a Science Writer and Assistant Editor at Custom Publishing & Solutions, Asia Pacific, under the Nature Publishing Group.

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(Kyrgyzstan)

Alma Uzbekova works at the Central Asian Hub of Mountain Partnership as a Communication Officer and coordinates the work of the newspaper 'Ayil Demi' in Kyrgyz language, published under the support of Mountain Partnership. She graduated Kyrgyz National University in 1987 and then earned her Master degree at the Kyrgyz Academy of Management. She has background of experience in journalism (TV and printed media) and working experience in different national NGOs, engaged in rural development and implementation of projects funded by international donors.



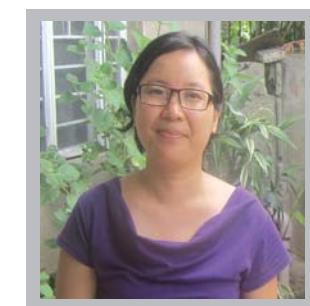
YAN WANG
(China)

Since 2008, Yan Wang has published some two hundred in-depth reports on environment-related topics. Her work through both domestic and International media receives frequent feedback from readers. Many of her publications have won international fellowships or nationwide awards. Her accomplishments include two Environmental Press Awards, issued jointly by China dialogue and the Guardian, received consecutively in 2011 and 2012.



KHIN SU WAI
(Myanmar)

Based in Mandalay, Myanmar, Khin Su Wai has honed her journalistic skills from fieldwork and professional trainings. She has covered regional environmental news since 2004. Currently, she is working as the new editor for the Myanmar Times Journal.



TRAN THI THUY BINH
(Vietnam)

Tran Thi Thuy Binh has been an editor of Hanoi Radio and Television, the third largest public media organization in Vietnam for more than fourteen years. Her major specializations are social and environmental issues. She holds a MA in Journalism from the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam. Apart from publishing two national research papers on the media coverage of environment topics, she is the co-editor of the book "Butterfly Effects of Quy Nhon: Visioning development options under climate change 2050".



FELINO 'CHINO' GASTON
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'Chino' Gaston is a tv broadcast journalist and news anchor working for GMA-7 in the Philippines. He primarily covers sectarian conflict in the Southern Philippines and environmental issues. Gaston also writes for the online news portal of GMA-7, GMAnews.tv.





MASRUR JAMALUDDIN
(Indonesia)

Masrur Jamaluddin Ahmad has been building his career as a journalist for nearly 15 years. He began as a reporter in a national newspaper and then jumped into broadcast journalism by joining two 24-hour TV news channels in Indonesia (Metro TV and TVOne). He also works as a documentary filmmaker, producing stories about poverty problems, religious and multicultural conflicts, gender issues, environment, youth, social and development issues. Currently, he is a contributor and correspondent for VPRO TV the Netherlands and Asia Calling Network. His works in the fields of journalism and filmmaking have received awards.

DILRUKSHI HANDUNNETTI
(Sri Lanka)

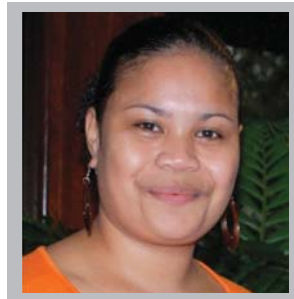
Dilrukshi Handunnetti is a lawyer by training and a journalist by choice. A journalist for over 20 years, Handunnetti had specialized in investigative journalism. She has taught journalism students and trained working journalists in many countries. Her work has received local and international recognition.



NUSRAT ISLAM KHAN
(Bangladesh)

Nusrat is very passionate about writing. Currently, she works as a country coordinator at The Media Alliance for the climate change campaign ‘Redraw The Line’ in Bangladesh. As a communications person, she has worked with Dnet, a renowned social enterprise in Bangladesh. Prior to

this, she worked as an Environment Journalist with news media organizations like Banglanews24.com, Radio Today FM 89.6 and Somoy TV. Though she is working for electronic media, she enjoys feature writing for print media as well. Additionally, Ms. Khan works in documentary filmmaking as a freelancer. Crafting audiovisual documentaries is a true passion and she feels connected with the reality of a society and its people through her work. Achieving PANOS SACCA media fellowship for environment journalists was a great inspiration for her. She is also involved with various environment activist associations and youth volunteer organizations.



ROLYNDA JONATHAN
(Palau)

Rolynda has always fancied the art of writing, but never had the courage to pursue it until her return home from living in the United States for more than a decade. For the past five years, she has worked at Oceania Television Network, a regional television station based in the Republic of Palau. As a TV reporter and an occasional presenter, she has covered countless local, regional and international events and issues. She hopes to continue to grow in the field of journalism and contribute to the Pacific for many years to come.

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