

Joint Bangladesh–Sweden Policy Seminar for the South Asian Region on Near-term Air Quality and Climate Benefit - Promoting International Co-operation and Facilitating Action

Dhaka, 17-18 October 2011

Summary

Ministers from Bangladesh and Sweden and high level representatives, scientists, governmental and non-governmental organizations from 15 countries, both within the region of South Asia and internationally, and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) met in Dhaka on September 17-18th to participate in the *Joint Bangladesh–Sweden Policy Seminar for the South Asian Region on Near-term Air Quality and Climate Benefit – Promoting International Co-operation and Facilitating Action*. The seminar was hosted jointly by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Bangladesh and the Ministry of Environment, Sweden and co-organized by Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI).

The overall aim of the seminar was to share experience and practice to promote strategic action nationally, regionally and globally on short-lived climate forcers (SLCF).

The presentations and discussions during the first day of the Seminar covered the scientific knowledge base regarding the emissions, production, transport and transformation of SLCFs in the South Asian region as well as their impacts on human health, crop productivity and global and regional climate. Examples from other regions of the world including the Arctic were also presented. During the second day the focus was on policies and measures to achieve emission reductions on global, regional, national and local scales including regional co-operation and aspects of financing.

There is a large body of research evidence generated in the South Asian region on emissions and associated impacts of black carbon and tropospheric ozone and its precursors as well as other air pollutants. Experiences of introducing measures to reduce emissions were also presented at the seminar supporting the conclusions put forward in international studies such as the UNEP/WMO Integrated Assessment of Black Carbon and Tropospheric Ozone.

It has been concluded that there is robust evidence that:

- Harmful impacts of air pollution on human health in South Asia, in particular from high levels of PM, including black carbon, but also from tropospheric ozone and a range of other air pollutants, both indoor and outdoor, is widely recognized as a serious problem also undermining achieving internationally agreed development goals. The studies, summarized in the recent UNEP/WMO Integrated Assessment of Black Carbon and Tropospheric Ozone, indicate that air pollution in South Asia cause more than 500 000 premature deaths annually.
- There are negative impacts of air pollution on crop productivity primarily due to high levels of tropospheric ozone that are well documented and are estimated to cause several million tonnes of reduced crop yields in South Asia annually.
- There are negative impacts of black carbon and other anthropogenic emissions on essential components of the regional climatic system, such as monsoons, as well as on the regional hydrological balance with implications for food security.
- Mitigation of SLCF emissions will bring substantial benefits for human health and development in the region as well as help protect the regional climate from rapid change and will contribute in the near-term protection of the global climate.

Several specific sources of SLCFs and ways to mitigate them were discussed at the seminar.

- For black carbon these included brick kilns, cook stoves, open biomass burning, and transportation which currently are responsible for a large fraction of the emissions in South Asia. Important sources for methane include: livestock, rice cultivation, coal mining, biomass burning, gas production, solid and waste water treatment. It was shown that reducing some of these can be cost effective. It was stressed that measures to reduce these sources must be framed as part of sustainable development strategies with a need for strong emphasis on gender, health and development co-benefits. It was also noted that policies already exist in the region that could be adapted to include SLCFs.
- Action to mitigate SLCFs can be funded through a wide range of sources, from the local community to the global level, and from micro finance to large-scale funding. The fast start fund could be of interest in this context. Creative ways to generate and access funding must continue to evolve. The link between SLCF funding, natural disaster avoidance and poverty eradication will need to be drawn more clearly, highlighting the connection between rapid environmental degradation and development concerns. Innovative sectorial mechanisms along these lines include the Prototype Methane Financing Facility proposed for launch at COP-17 and the Global Alliance for Clean Cook Stoves, founded in September 2010.
- The UNEP supported project Atmospheric Brown Cloud (ABC) has played a major role in the development of our understanding of the occurrence and impacts of SLCFs in Asia. It is recommended that these activities be expanded to include additional monitoring sites at the outflow from the continent, for instance in southern Bangladesh. In addition it is important to continue and expand air pollution monitoring activities both in background, rural and urban areas in order to be able to follow trends and effects of emission reductions.
- Sweden and Bangladesh are initiating – together with other interested countries – a global initiative on SLCFs. This initiative aims to improve air quality and to slow the pace of climate change in the near term. During the discussions readiness and broad willingness were expressed to move forward to take actions on SLCFs and continue discussions and work in this area at different levels. There was also clear recognition of the key role UNEP plays and the expertise offered by UNEP. The need for awareness raising and outreach activities to broaden the efforts to reduce emissions of SLCFs was highlighted.
- Finally, the participants express deep gratitude to Governments of Bangladesh and Sweden for organizing this Seminar and urge Governments and other parties concerned to organize similar seminars in all sub-regions in Asia.