

Health Impact Assessment (HIA): A Foundation for the Well-being of the ASEAN Community

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INTRODUCTION

1. ASEAN has committed to intensify community building through enhanced regional cooperation and integration, in particular by establishing an ASEAN Community comprising the ASEAN Security Community, the ASEAN Economic Community and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, as provided for in the Bali Declaration of ASEAN Concord II.
2. ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) has the primary goal of contributing to realizing an ASEAN Community that is people-centred and socially responsible, with a view to achieving solidarity and unity among the nations and peoples of ASEAN by forging a common identity and building a caring and sharing society which is inclusive and harmonious where the well-being, livelihood, and welfare of the peoples are enhanced.¹
3. The ongoing processes of economic development and integration, as well as globalization, are creating new challenges for the ASEAN Community and have the potential to create both positive and negative impacts on the well-being and quality of life of both individuals and communities. Negative impacts which have arisen have included development induced disasters, pollution of soil, air and water supplies, natural resource depletion, climate change and global warming, population displacement and the deterioration of the determinants of health. Achieving well-being in this context requires progress on gender equity and the empowerment of women, food security, widening access to education, management of the impacts of cross-border migration, maintaining the environment and the promotion and protection of human

¹ Roadmap for an ASEAN Community: 2009-2015, ASEAN Secretariat, April 2009. p67

rights. ASEAN as a community needs to have an enhanced awareness of the multitude of factors impacting on the well-being of ASEAN peoples.

WHY HIA?

4. HIA as defined by the World Health Organisation, is a combination of procedures, methods and tools by which a policy, programme or project may be judged as to its potential effects on the health of a population, and the distribution of those effects within the population².

5. HIA is also a structured method for assessing and improving the health consequences of projects and policies in the non-health sector. It is a multidisciplinary process combining a range of qualitative and quantitative evidence in a decision making framework.

6. HIA is an important process for the protection and promotion of human health from possible impacts/effects of the processes of regional economic integration and environmental change.

7. HIA is comprised of three conceptual elements.

7.1 Health.

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.³ The determinants of health include the social and economic environment, the physical environment, and the person's individual characteristics and behaviours.⁴

7.2 Impact

HIA goes beyond the assessment of traditional risks e.g.: sanitation conditions, communicable diseases, malnutrition and other physical health risks but also focuses on the assessment of modern risks which are the result of the changing physical, biological and social environments. HIA also covers the assessment of significant Social Determinants of Health (SDH) which include life skills, access to health services, social safety net, gender, age, income, social status and environment. HIA is a

² <http://www.euro.who.int/document/PAE/Gothenburgpaper.pdf> (accessed date 14 September 2009)

³ Preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization as adopted by the International Health Conference, New York, 19-22 June, 1946; signed on 22 July 1946 by the representatives of 61 States (Official Records of the World Health Organization, no. 2, p. 100) and entered into force on 7 April 1948.

⁴ <http://www.who.int/hia/evidence/doh/en/print.html> (accessed date 20 September 2009)

form of assessment aimed at mitigating negative impacts on health by focusing on “the causes of the causes” of a lack of wellbeing.

7.3 *Assessment*

HIA is a tool that supports the decision making process. The expected result of HIA is a set of “evidence-based recommendations” reflecting the ultimate aim of a move towards healthier societies. HIA should provide possible strategies to support and promote the potential positive impacts of a programme or policy and mitigate the potential negative impacts of a programme or policy. It is essential that HIAs are designed to stimulate all sectors in society to think, analyse, discuss, argue and learn throughout the process to create healthy public policy.

8. HIA IS BASED ON 4 VALUES;⁵

8.1 *Democracy* – allowing people to participate in the development and implementation of policies, programmes or projects that may impact on their lives.

8.2 *Equity* – HIA assesses the distribution of impacts from a proposal on the whole population, with particular reference to how the proposal will affect vulnerable people (in terms of age, gender, ethnic background and socio-economic status).

8.3 *Sustainable development* – both short and long term impacts are considered, along with both the obvious and less obvious impacts.

8.4 *Ethical use of evidence* – the best available quantitative and qualitative evidence must be identified and used in the assessment. A wide variety of evidence should be collected using the best possible methods.

9. The implementation of HIA requires good governance and true participation of all stakeholders throughout the process. HIA brings together different stakeholders including the general public, the private sector, and grassroots communities to determine how policy or programme implementation would affect the population’s health and its determinants of health.

⁵ <http://www.who.int/hia/about/why/en/print.html> (accessed date 14 September 2009)

HOW HIA CONTRIBUTES TO THE ASEAN COMMUNITY.

10. In order to achieve the purposes of sustainable development and the well-being of ASEAN people, as set out in Article 1 of the ASEAN Charter, ASEAN needs HIA as an appropriate and effective mechanism to enhance awareness of the impact of public policy and economic integration on health. HIA will also help develop strategies to mitigate the negative impacts of development as mentioned in ASCC Blueprint sub-section B.4 Action V.⁶

11. In addition, HIA can provide the strategic recommendations to ensure environmental sustainability through managing and preventing environmental pollution and through promoting sustainable development as mentioned in sub-section D2 and D3 of the ASCC Blueprint.

HIA DEVELOPMENT IN ASEAN

12. States in the ASEAN region are facing challenges in ensuring sustainable development in the dynamic context of regional integration and economic growth. Cross country trade, investment and large development programmes inevitably cause impacts on the environment, natural resources, socio-economic fabric, and most importantly, on the well-being, including the life style, of local communities which may extend beyond national boundaries.

13. Today HIA is being implemented in a number of ASEAN member states. In Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Malaysia, HIA is anchored within environmental frameworks relying on government decisions to integrate HIA within Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) programmes. Thailand's approach uses a public policy process to advocate HIA at the policy level as well as in EIA and at the community level. Grassroots communities and local government authorities are able to initiate and conduct their own Health Impact Assessments. Currently, Thailand and Vietnam are applying HIA in case studies on various topics. These vary in scope and size, from national policy on transportation, agriculture and energy to public health and disease control programs. These case studies are providing experience to be learnt from in order to further develop

⁶ "B.4.; Access to Healthcare and Promotion of Healthy Lifestyles, Action ; Enhance awareness on the impact of regional/global trade policies and economic integration on health and develop possible strategies to mitigate their negative impacts through regional workshops and seminars, advocacy, sharing of studies and technical document." Roadmap for an ASEAN Community: 2009-2015, ASEAN Secretariat, April 2009. P74

HIA. Many HIA case studies, such as in Lao PDR, apart from being a good learning process, have proven to be very useful in providing supportive information for EIA reports.

14. A number of ASEAN Member States have been conducting regular HIA capacity building workshops and conferences at national and regional levels since 2001. As a result of learning processes and experience sharing among ASEAN Member States HIA guideline have been developed and have now begun influencing policy and programme formulation.

15. The Chiang Mai Declaration adopted by the Asia Pacific Regional Health Impact Assessment Conference, hosted in Chiang Mai from the 22nd to 24th of April 2009, by Thailand's National Health Commission proposed to; *"bring the reflections in the Chiang Mai Declaration to the attention of ASEAN, in particular to the issue of HIA regional mechanism..."*

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROMOTING HIA IN ASEAN

16. HIA shall form part of the ASEAN strategies and actions especially under the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint.

17. ASEAN shall strive to enhance HIA capacity and implementation in ASEAN member states.

18. ASEAN shall set up a working group which consists of experts in the field of HIA to attain the following objectives:

18.1 to establish a body of knowledge, including ASEAN HIA Guidelines, and mechanisms for the implementation of HIA within the region and to follow up the progress of HIA development in ASEAN Member States

18.2 to share studies and technical documents on HIA to enhance public awareness of healthy lifestyles and healthy public policy

18.3 to support capacity building on HIA for all stakeholders through regional workshops and seminars.

19. Terms of Reference of the Working Group shall be formulated.

20. The ASEAN HIA working group shall engage with stakeholders in partnerships for HIA development within the region.

21. Each Member State shall encourage formal and informal networks at the regional and national level in order to ensure meaningful participation of all sectors of society and support information sharing and the building of a body of HIA knowledge.

22. In the initial phase, Thailand is willing to play a role as a focal point to facilitate and coordinate with other member states for the development of HIA within ASEAN and within Member States.

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