

**HIA: A Tool towards the Healthy Life**  
**Learning the Development of HIA in Asia and the Pacific for the Health of Thai People**

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**Knowing Health Impact Assessment (HIA)**

**“HIA”<sup>1</sup>**

“**Health Impact Assessment**” – “**HIA**” means the learning process of a society in analyzing and projecting the positive and negative impacts that a policy, program or project or various policies, programs or projects implemented at the same time and area may cause to the health of the people using various tools and appropriate participatory process. The results from such process will be used to support the decision making process to ensure the health of the people in short term and long term.

Health Impact Assessment is designed as a tool to enable public health policy for health promotion. It is an important process/tool/mechanism for the protection and promotion of human health from possible impacts/effects of government and non-government activities, projects, programs and policies. Good governance and true participation of all stakeholders throughout the process is considered the heart of the Health Impact Assessment. It is essential that all stakeholders and relevant partners share their information, visions, opinions and concerns at every stage of the Health Impact Assessment process which is to be understood as a learning process leading to the selection of the most beneficial option from a set of possible alternatives.

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<sup>1</sup> HIA Coordinating Unit. 2552. (Draft) Health Impact Assessment Guideline. National Health Commission Office.

### *Health – The Board Perspective of Health beyond Physical Wellness*

Health as a holistic state consists of 4 dimensions including physical health, mental health, social health and spiritual health. These 4 dimensions of health are tightly interrelated and contribute to the holistic state of healthiness. Thailand also embraces this universal definition of health. According to the Thai Law on health, “Health” means the state of human being which is perfect in physical, mental, spiritual and social aspects, all of which are holistic in balance.<sup>2</sup>

### *Impact – Assessing Beyond Health Outcomes*

HIA goes beyond the assessment of traditional risks e.g.: sanitation conditions; communication diseases, malnutrition and other physical health risks but also focus on the assessment of modern risks which are the results 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 type of assessment aiming at mitigating the negative impacts by focusing on “the cause of the causes”.

### *Assessment - It's time to use the tool*

HIA is a tool that support the decision making process. The expected result of HIA is a set of “**evidence-based** recommendations” reflecting the guidelines towards a healthy society. The set of recommendations have to support/promote the potential positive impacts and mitigate the potential negative impacts of the program or policy .

It is essential that the HIA is designed to stimulate all sectors in the society to think, analyze, discuss, argue and learn throughout the process to create the healthy society.

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<sup>2</sup> National Health Act, B.E. 2550 (2007), Section 3

The HIA process focuses on the following:

1. Enhance the value of all dimensions of health as well as the importance of equity of all relevant stakeholders in policy making process at all levels.
2. Systematically and clearly present accountable and credible evidence-based results on health impacts and health concerns.
3. Use a learning process and awareness raising among all relevant stakeholders for cooperation and resource mobilization.

HIA is by no means a tool to be used by experts but is a learning process of all relevant stakeholders in the society with the goal of building a healthy society.

#### ***HIA Development in Asia and the Pacific***

Globally, Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is one of the crucial tools used for health promotion strategies by WHO. For decades, WHO has extensively supported and encouraged the use of HIA worldwide. HIA guidelines and tools have been developed as well as HIA bodies in global and regional levels of WHO. In 2002, HIA became a part of European Community Regulations. In 2006, the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the World Bank included HIA as parts of their safeguard policies and standards.

In Southeast Asia, there has been a continuous collaboration on HIA development among countries outside and within the region. In Thailand, HIA International workshops and capacity building activities were organized. The first events were aiming for the promotion of joint learning between Thailand and other developed countries with HIA experience i.e., the UK, Australia, New Zealand and other European countries. The collaboration remain largely for a while on the academic level where HIA prominent universities and academic institutes shared their experience and knowledge with regional health researchers and practitioners. The latter workshops were aiming more towards creating joint learning processes and at encouraging HIA implementation and knowledge sharing in the region. Through that process, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and Malaysia became Thailand's close counterparts.

In 2007, the University of New South Wales, Australia, organized the Southeast Asia and Oceania Regional Health Impact Assessment Conference (HIA 2007) and this marked the first regional

event on HIA in the region. However, the HIA 2008 conference in Chiang Mai, Thailand, was organized as the first official Asia Pacific HIA conference aiming to present and to exchange the knowledge and experience on HIA at all levels, leading to a commitment to further collaboratively develop HIAs within the Asia Pacific region and to assure the sustainable social and economic development. There were 300 participants from 18 countries i.e., Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, The Philippines, Laos, Cambodia, Brunei, South Korea, New Zealand, Australia, China, India, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Maldives, Mongolia and Switzerland attending the conference and being signatories of the Chiang Mai Declaration (CMD). The CMD reflects the strong determination and commitment of all relevant sectors in the Asia and Pacific region in taking HIA as a tool and process to empower the people in the region as well as to ensure health for all. During the conference, HIA was discussed both in national and regional contexts and it was agreed that this mechanism should be developed at the regional level first within ASEAN level and then extended to Asia Pacific.



**The Map of Asia and the Pacific Region**

Asia and the Pacific includes much of East Asia, Southeast Asia, Australia and Oceania. However, this part of the document will focus on several countries of the region that have been developing HIA under different contexts to best portray the overall picture of HIA developments in the region. The selected countries are Thailand, Lao PDR, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand.

Illustrating below is the summary of each country's HIA development stages;

<b>Malaysia</b>		<b>Australia</b>	
Foundation of HIA Development	MoH initiatives and series of extensive researches	Foundation of HIA Development	Series of researches and Local Governments initiatives
Current Stage of HIA Development and implementation	Various EHIA practices	Current Stage of HIA Development and implementation	HIA practices on various issues and levels. Capacity building programs and activities
Challenges for further HIA Development	HIA to strengthen EIA	Challenges for further HIA Development	Health equity, policies. Development of different HIA formats to serve HIA applications in different contexts
<b>Cambodia</b>		<b>New Zealand</b>	
Foundation of HIA Development	MoH & NGO initiatives and movements	Foundation of HIA Development	Resource Management Act. IA network
Current Stage of HIA Development and implementation	Advocay for HIA Policies	Current Stage of HIA Development and implementation	HIA cases. HIA support unit. Capacity Building programs and activities
Challenges for further HIA Development	Achieving HIA Policies	Challenges for further HIA Development	Public Policy on HIA and HIA Institutionalization
<b>Vietnam</b>		<b>Thailand</b>	
Foundation of HIA Development	NIOEH network and movements	Foundation of HIA Development	Series of researches and Public Policy Advocacy
Current Stage of HIA Development and implementation	HIAs cases and learning process development	Current Stage of HIA Development and implementation	Various HIA platforms
Challenges for further HIA Development	Integration of HIA in EIA and introduction/application of HIA in other platforms	Challenges for further HIA Development	HIA Institutionalization and Governance
<b>Lao PDR</b>			
Foundation of HIA Development	MoH and WHO collaboration		
Current Stage of HIA Development and implementation	HIA policies and body. HIA in EIA		
Challenges for further HIA Development	Realizing meaningful HIA in EIA and HIA Policies		

It can be concluded that the fundamental platforms for the HIA development are the government public health sector or academia. These sectors gave greater attention to the environmental and/or social determinants of health. Some countries such as Lao and Malaysia pay a great deal of attention to environmental health while others such as Australia, New Zealand, Vietnam and Thai focus more on the social determinants of health.

The level of focus on environment aspect has an obvious connection with the country's experience in Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). Obviously, countries that have extensive experiences and expertise in this field would tend to development HIA within EIA. Conversely, countries that give significant attention to socio economic aspects are more likely to develop HIA in other directions such as Community HIA or HIA at the policy level. These fundamental differences explain the different set of directions in the development of HIA movements in countries in the region. Cambodia, Lao and Malaysia anchor their HIA within environmental frames relying on government decisions to integrate HIA within EIA. Other countries like Thailand and Australia use a public policy process to advocate HIA at the policy level as well as in EIA and at community levels.

Currently, several countries including Vietnam, Australia, New Zealand and Thailand are applying HIA in case studies on various topics, scopes and sizes, from national policy on transportation, agriculture and energy to public health and disease control programs, to learn from experience and further develop HIA. Many HIA case studies such as in Lao, and apart from being a good learning process, are found to be very useful in providing supportive information for EIA reports.

Almost every country conduct regular HIA capacity building activities such as workshops and trainings and develop HIA guidelines.

### **HIA Challenges in Asia and the Pacific:**

Each country in the region is facing challenges in developing and applying HIA in its national context and conditions. The common challenges facing the Asia and the Pacific countries are significant as these tend to become progressively more complex and increasing overtime. Cross country trade, investment and large development programs inevitably cause trans-boundary impacts including effects on the environment and natural resources as well as on the socio- economic fabric. All of the above-mentioned factors consequently affect the health of the general population.

**Current Challenges:**

The construction of dams on the Mekong River in China has impacts Thailand and Lao as it generates hazardous flow fluctuations, bank erosions, and decline of fisheries downstream and destroys arable land. As a mitigation measure, a multi-million-dollar bank erosion prevention program was launched.

The haze pollution is recognized in the region as a major trans-boundary issue. The phenomenon knows no border and spreads from Myanmar or Indonesia on to Thailand and Malaysia and evidently affects the health and well-being of the people. Many in the affected area are found to be suffering from respiratory related diseases and illnesses.

The Yali Fall dam although situated in Vietnam affects the Cambodians who are living downstream the river.

Apart from the above examples of current challenges, other upcoming regional issues can be considered both threats and opportunities for the people of the region.

The regional cooperation has been greatly enhanced to accelerate economic growth. Many regional development projects were launched to boost regional growth such as the program consisting in the construction of dozens of dams along the Mekong river and its branch rivers: the East-West North-South Economic Corridor transportation infrastructure program running from Yunnan in China to Malaysia and from Myanmar through the second Friendship Bridge in Mukdaharn to Thailand down to Lao PDR and to port cities in Vietnam is a clear illustration of this phenomenon. Regional cooperation has also facilitated the adoption of Free Trade Agreement between Thailand and Australia as well as of the ASEAN Free Trade Agreement.

While economic growth is pursued for the benefit of the general population, the programs can also impact negatively on the hydrobiology of the river, on the bio-diversity and ecology of the forestry as well as of the fisheries and most importantly, on the well-being, including life style, of the local communities.

**Constructive Guidelines for the Sustainable Regional Development:**

To achieve the development of Health Impact Assessment in the region the following steps are suggested to be undertaken;

- Normalize and customize the purpose and utilization of HIA to the local, national and regional level of governance;
- Develop appropriate processes and methodologies of HIA in compatible with each country's governance context;
- Create collaborative network to review, exchange and standardize the HIA procedure undertaken in each country as well as cross-border assessment;
- Integrate and formalize the HIA process into country and regional political processes of Development.

Some suggested HIA development initiations include:

- The cooperation between countries in conducting trans-boundary impact researches and studies;
- The establishment of data linkage systems to link available information on HIA among countries in the region;
- The HIA network that includes various sectors of the society;
- The cooperation and working mechanism with environmental sector;
- The HIA capacity building for academic and policy networks;
- The advocacy for ASEAN to be the regional HIA coordinating mechanism.

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