

The Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia: From a Regional Programme to a Sustainable Mechanism

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The Seas of East Asia are ecologically and economically important to the region and globally. The past decade, however, saw the continuing degradation of these resources due to the growing coastal population and intensified economic activities. National efforts proved futile in addressing environmental pollution problems that transcend jurisdictional boundaries. To address this problem on a regional scale, the Global Environment Facility launched the Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA) in 1994, implemented by the United Nations Development Programme and executed by the International Maritime Organization.

Operating on the principle of interconnectivity, PEMSEA catalyzed the strategic partnership among the littoral countries and the gradual gelling of the region. PEMSEA introduced Integrated Coastal Management (ICM) demonstrating the management paradigm at work on the ground. The changes effected after ICM helped generate the interest and zeal of stakeholders to commit to work together for the sustainability of their shared resources. This led to the development of the Sustainable Development Strategies for the Seas of East Asia (SDS-SEA) as the regional framework for collaboration. Implementation of the SDS-SEA requires longer time frame, policy reforms, strategic management interventions and sufficient financial resources. However, as a programme, PEMSEA would come to an end and the region would be left without a mechanism to provide technical assistance and coordinate the collaborative efforts of the countries for SDS-SEA implementation.

This paper reviews the efforts of the countries and the processes undertaken to transform PEMSEA from a regional programme into a sustainable mechanism. It will discuss the nature and structure of the organization, its composition, functions and mandate and its decision-making process given its multisectoral, inter-agency and intergovernmental feature. It will assess the effectiveness of PEMSEA as a regional mechanism for SDS-SEA implementation as it traces the



legal milestones of PEMSEA – the Haikou Partnership Agreement for the Implementation of the SDS-SEA and its twin document, the Haikou Partnership Operating Arrangements, and the efforts in obtaining the recognition of the International Legal Personality of PEMSEA, and the current efforts in the negotiations for the Headquarters Agreement.

The paper will further look at scenarios after the recognition of its legal personality and the signing of the Headquarters Agreement in terms of PEMSEA's structure and operations as well as future challenges and opportunities for improving PEMSEA's functional efficiency as a mechanism responsive to the needs of the region towards achieving the sustainable development of the Seas of East.