Introduction

Local Contributions to Global Sustainable Agenda: Case Studies in Integrated Coastal Management in the East Asian Seas Region – the 25th Anniversary publication of Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA) – highlights the sustainable coastal development efforts of PEMSEA partners over the past quarter century. The multi-sector, interdisciplinary approach applied in the design and implementation of integrated coastal management (ICM) programs in East Asia has generated a wealth of knowledge and experiences in policy and functional integration that cut across coastal use sectors, disciplines, levels of government, and stakeholders, as well as spatial and temporal scales. This publication, which includes 47 case studies written by managers, practitioners, scientists, and various other government and nongovernment participants, is a unique collection of ICM good practices and lessons learned from the perspectives of both users and beneficiaries.

Over the years, PEMSEA’s pursuit to operationalize ICM in the region has aligned with the objectives and targets of international agenda, particularly those related to biological diversity, land and sea-based pollution and waste management, climate change, natural and manmade disasters, water management, fisheries, and food security. As progress and innovations developed globally to address existing and emerging challenges to sustainable development, PEMSEA’s thrust was to translate high-level concepts into on-the-ground practices that were attuned to issues on the international agenda but manifested at the local level.

As a consequence, ICM gained political and social acceptance across the region by providing participatory platforms to strengthen interagency, inter-sector cooperation; strengthening policy-science integration to ensure effectiveness and efficiency of management interventions;
building local institutional and individual management capacities for addressing governance and management complexities in coastal and marine areas; and creating innovative financing mechanisms for long-term investments.

In 2012, a call to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development was expressed in the Rio + 20 document, “The Future We Want”. Subsequently, in 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals were adopted by the United Nations, providing 17 goals and 169 targets to guide actions globally in key areas where government, private sector, and citizens alike are required to invest to transform economies and prosper within the social and ecological boundaries of the planet.

Consistent with these political commitments, the ICM system evolved throughout the East Asian Seas region. In many cases, ICM working models were well-ahead of concepts, mechanisms and methodologies being discussed in the international arena. Tractable outcomes were achieved through ICM system applications that supported approaches in ecosystem-based management, spatial planning, governance and public administration, systems science, and leadership development. From 1993 to 2017, PEMSEA established ICM sites in almost 60 locations in 12 countries, in collaboration with national and local governments, demonstrating the value of ICM with concomitant capacity building for program expansion and upscaling. By 2017, 19% of the region’s coastline was under ICM (Figure 1).

The ICM system continues to be upscaled both geographically and functionally in coastal areas and watersheds throughout the region. PEMSEA’s Country Partners adopted a target of 25% ICM coverage of the region’s coastline by 2021 for sustainable development and management of the region’s ocean and coastal resources. This target was confirmed as a voluntary commitment of PEMSEA’s Country Partners to SDG 14, Life Below Water, during the UN Ocean Conference in June 2017.

This three-part publication seeks to provide the reader with:
- A comprehensive discussion of the ICM system backed by case studies;
- A series of case studies written by local leaders, managers and practitioners, natural and social scientists, academicians, private sector, and partners from nongovernment organizations;
- Good practices and lessons learned to support replication and scaling up of ICM in the region; and
- An operational modality that other regions of the world can consider adopting and applying.

The case studies demonstrate that addressing sustainable development challenges at the local level does not solely depend on scientific and technological interventions. Many require a mix of innovative and strategic policy, legislation, education, financing, and capacity development, boosted by political will and strong leadership mechanisms to effect change. The case studies further show that successful ICM systems in the East Asian Seas region significantly improve institutional and individual capacities to lead, develop, and implement programs and action plans to attain local sustainable development priorities and objectives.

Overall, the case studies emphasize the critical and essential roles that sub-national/local governments can and need to play in the global agenda for sustainable development. Without local buy-in and action, it is evident that global targets, for the most part, will remain unattainable. The ICM governance and management systems described in this publication provided local governments and local stakeholders with the direction and means to work together, to identify acceptable solutions to overcome common challenges and potential threats to sustainable development, to influence and facilitate policy reforms, and to create an environment for efficient and effective public and private sector investment.
Figure 1. ICM replication and scaling up in the EAS region.
The operational challenge to scale up and sustain the ICM system remains a priority of PEMSEA and its partners, recognizing that ICM is a governance and management system that encompasses ecological complexities and environmental uncertainties, as well as new and emerging political and social priorities of government and governance mechanisms. It is a constant reminder for leaders and managers to stay attuned to the issues and priorities at the national and local levels, and to continue embracing integrated management as a vehicle to sustainable development.