

**Report of the NACT Working Group on  
Environment Protection in ASEAN and China: Challenges and  
Cooperation**

**Co-hosted by NACT Singapore and NACT China  
17 May 2019, Friday**

**Background**

1. The Network of ASEAN–China Think Tanks (NACT) Singapore and NACT China co-hosted a working group (WG) meeting on “Environment Protection in ASEAN and China: Challenges and Cooperation” on 17 May 2019 in Singapore. The meeting recognised that ASEAN countries and China face prevalent environmental problems in air, land and water as they achieved impressive gains in economic development. Serious environmental degradation is a threat to people’s well-being, the flora and fauna, and the sustainability of economic development.
2. The objectives of this WG are: (i) to better understand ASEAN member states’ and China’s environmental protection issues in terms of air, land and water pollution; (ii) to identify ASEAN member states’ and China’s major environmental challenges and experiences in policy formulation and implementation; and (iii) to recommend various approaches to promote mutually beneficial environmental collaboration among ASEAN member states and China.
3. To achieve these objectives, this WG focuses on two main themes. First, how does each respective country in the “Ten Plus One” (“10+1”) framework address multiple problems of air, land and water pollution (rivers and sea)? Second, what are the prospects of cooperation within ASEAN and between ASEAN and China in resolving some of these environmental problems? Ideas on the second theme were generated and presented as recommendations in the following section.
4. Under the first theme, there are mainly three common challenges faced by the countries. First is the problem of waste management. Improper disposals and non-functioning waste management not only aggravate living conditions, they also cause other forms of pollution, such as water and air. Second, several countries raise concerns about their ineffectiveness in raising public awareness of environmental protection. Third, the lack of tools and means for implementation of environmental policies has posed an obstacle to many countries’ efforts.
5. While countries like China and Vietnam are facing increasing pressures in striking a balance between economic development and environmental protection, Myanmar’s main cause of environmental degradation is underdevelopment. The lack of capital and technical resources to resolve environmental problems in ASEAN’s developing countries has also in turn held back economic and social developments. These common experiences shared by various countries corroborate the fact that environmental protection goes hand-in-hand with sustainable and holistic development of countries.

**Recommendations**

6. The WG reiterates the importance of environmental protection in sustainable long-term socio-economic growth and development in ASEAN and China. With this focus in mind, the WG makes the following recommendations to further promote cooperation in environmental protection at the “10+1” level:
- (a) That ASEAN and China forge a community of environmental protection & cooperation regionally and globally.
  - (b) ASEAN and China should regard the environmental protection issue a priority when pursuing economic development.
  - (c) ASEAN should also align their environmental protection goals with ASEAN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and seek synergy with China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
  - (d) In the spirit of regional and international cooperation, and to ensure environmental sustainability, Chinese investment in ASEAN, particularly the BRI, should seek to align its strategies with ASEAN’s SDGs.
  - (e) In recognition of development gaps between countries, the better-endowed states and societies should share their information, expertise, technology and resources to promote regional environmental protection and cooperation.
  - (f) China and ASEAN should strengthen communication and cooperation on both sides among government agencies, entrepreneurs, research institutes, researchers and associations in environmental protection industry, by organizing conferences and workshops on China–ASEAN environmental protection cooperation regularly, as well as by building a platform for sharing experiences and for promoting technology transfers among enterprises in China and ASEAN.
  - (g) China and ASEAN should develop a comprehensive training for “10+1” environment management personnel to enhance their capability in policy formulation and implementation of environmental protection.
  - (h) Both sides should cooperate to enhance public education and participation in environmental protection in ASEAN and China.
  - (i) It is imperative that respective ASEAN countries affected by the transboundary haze pollution problem to draft a national framework or plan of action and law in accordance with the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution.
  - (j) Youths from ASEAN and China could be recruited for activities sponsored by the ASEAN–China Green Envoys programme, in order to boost cooperation network among regional youth for greater public participation and heightened awareness.
  - (k) To encourage the use of biodegradable plastics as an alternative and to phase out single-use plastics.

- (l) China and ASEAN could jointly present annual awards to cities, towns and villages that are most environmentally friendly. The awards are a recognition of and encouragement to local governments, enterprises and citizens for being environmental role models.
- (m) To promote sustainable agriculture and plantation.
- (n) To support the ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN) initiative by engaging efforts with other smart/green Chinese cities.
- (o) To study the sustainability and practicability of adopting a common environmental standard in the future for an ASEAN–China community of environmental protection and cooperation.