

Background

The strive for sustainable development with all its facets is one of the most complex and difficult undertakings ever attempted by the global community. Environment is one of the pillars upon which sustainable development is built.

Sida has for many years been an important partner to assist the efforts by governments and regional organizations in South-East Asia to solve environment problems. During the past ten to fifteen years national capacity to deal with such issues have been created in almost all countries in the region. The countries in South-East Asia have similar problems and problems that do not recognize national borders. Therefore Sida has also directly supported organizations that are active on a regional basis, e.g. IUCN, the Mekong River Commission and the Asian Institute of Technology, just to mention a few.

The Swedish Government has decided that cooperation between Sweden and Asia shall be intensified with respect to environment and sustainable development. Institutional cooperation, research cooperation, cooperation with civil society and training will be part of this. Specifically, a Swedish Environment Secretariat in Asia shall be created to assist Sweden to further improve the quality of work in the region.

SENSA is part of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, but has no resources of its own to fund projects. SENSA will be able to recruit consultants, organize workshops and function as a think tank. SENSA is initially staffed by two professionals plus local staff and is in this initial phase part of the Swedish Embassy in Bangkok and located in the same building.

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Swedish Environment Secretariat in Asia

(SENSA)

Bangkok, Thailand



What is SENSEA?

SENSEA is the **S**wedish **E**nvironment **S**ecretariat in **A**sia and is located in Bangkok, Thailand. SENSEA is a regional advisory unit both for Sida HQs and the Swedish embassies located in the region.

Why was SENSEA established?

- SENSEA will improve and increase the Swedish presence in South East Asia
- SENSEA will facilitate networking between Swedish activities in different countries in the region
- SENSEA will strengthen interaction between Swedish organizations and South-East Asia
- SENSEA and its network will be a resource base for strategic analysis and assessment
- SENSEA will ensure better use of existing regional knowledge bases and resources
- SENSEA has Agenda 21 and the Multilateral Environment Agreements as a base for its work.

Where are we working?

The Sida program countries in the region are Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. Sweden has decided that in the cooperation with Peoples Republic of China, the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia environment issues will be of priority.

What is done about environment in Asia?

Damage to the environment in Asia is visible to anyone – polluted rivers, dirty air, waste handling problems, depleted forests and loss of biodiversity. There is also damage that is less visible – persistent organic pollutants in the food chain,

pollutants that have entered the groundwater, a steady exhaustion of soils, etc. Quality of life is affected and economic growth is reduced. Many problems are not confined to one area or one country.

Governments and organizations in the region are taking these problems seriously and manpower and huge sums of money are mobilized on a scale never seen before to change the situation towards a more sustainable development. Many organizations in the region are involved in the work to stop and revert the trend of environmental destruction and to mainstream environmental concerns into the development of the region. Sometimes the excellent work of these organizations can be better utilized.

Some problems are best solved on a regional scale. The causes are often complex and solutions can only be found when many aspects are tackled together. Many specialised organisations are involved and it is sometimes difficult to get an overview of who is doing what and what possibilities for synergy exist between actors and subjects.

How will SENSEA work?

The main task of SENSEA is to strengthen Sida's work in environment-related issues in South-East Asia.

SENSEA works through networks both to get access to relevant information and further contacts between Sweden and the region. The civil society is an important partner in this work. Processes emanating from Agenda 21 and the Multilateral Environment Agreements will be supported and methods to improve decision-making related to regional environment issues will be elaborated.

Of special concern to SENSEA is strategic and cross-cutting issues, e.g.

Environment and poverty

Economic growth alone is not enough to alleviate poverty. Socio-economic and environmental concerns are both factors that have to be included in the fight to alleviate poverty.

Environment and disaster mitigation

Humanitarian aid is a rapidly growing part of the world's development budget. Asia and Oceania is responsible for a rapidly increasing and disproportionately large part (60%) of the world's natural disasters. Many natural disasters have their roots in environmental changes and can thus be mitigated or prevented.

Environment and democracy

The connection between democracy and damage to the environment is obvious both at macro and local level. Without a mechanism where the local community can influence its own situation, environment will inevitably suffer.

Environment and health

Poor people are those who are most severely affected from a health point of view by environmental degradation like air and water pollution, loss of biological resources and unsuitable disposal of solid waste.