

Regional Cooperation in Ecosystem-based Management in the Seas of East Asia: The Partnership Approach

By

Chua Thia-Eng

Regional Programme Director

Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA)

What is PEMSEA?

PEMSEA is a regional project of the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), implemented by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and executed by the International Maritime Organization (IMO). The project focuses on environmental management for the Seas of East Asia which is composed of six large marine ecosystems (LMEs), viz. the Yellow Sea, East China Sea, South China Sea, Sulu-Celebes Sea, Indonesian Seas and Gulf of Thailand. It has major river systems draining into the regional seas with a combined watershed of 6.25 million km² (Fig. 1 A).

PEMSEA evolved as a regional project (1994–1999) on marine pollution prevention and management under the GEF pilot phase with the participation of 11 countries in the region and a budget of US\$8 million. Its second phase (1999–2006), now with 12 member countries, focused on building intergovernmental, interagency and multisectoral partnerships in environmental management for the seas of East Asia. It has a total GEF contribution of US\$16.2 million. Towards the end of the 2nd phase, the countries of Myanmar, Lao PDR and Timor-Leste joined PEMSEA, making a total membership of 15, viz. China, DPR Korea, Japan and RO Korea in the north and the Association of Southeast Nations (ASEAN) and Timor-Leste in the south, covering a total sea area of 7 million km² and a total coastline of 234,000 km.

Building upon its current structure, PEMSEA is in the process of transforming into a longer term regional arrangement to implement a regional marine strategy, the Sustainable Development Strategy for the Seas of East Asia (SDS-SEA), with GEF financial support and significant co-financing from the participating countries beginning 2007.

The Challenges

The East Asian Seas Region, like many regional seas in other parts of the world, faces the following challenges:

First, governance issues confronting the sustainable use of goods and services and environmental sustainability in the seas of East Asia are very complex due to the very high population pressure (with 1 billion people living near the coasts), the wide range of economic activities in the coastal

and marine areas, the changing use and consumption patterns, the uneven economic development among countries (the region is host to developed, developing and least developed countries), and socioeconomic, political, cultural, religious complexities, albeit with a strong traditional connectivity. Most governments still maintain a “development first” policy or attitude. Management measures remain weak.

Second, capacity and economic disparity among countries in East Asia pose a major challenge to regional cooperation in achieving sustainable coastal and ocean development due to the wide financial and technical capacity gaps between the developed, developing and least developed nations. The vast capacity gaps have made it difficult for countries in the region to effectively address severe environmental threats which include destruction of habitats, loss of marine biodiversity, deteriorating water quality, alteration of coastlines, depleted marine resources, illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing (IUU), and many more. Many of these threats are transboundary in nature, requiring cooperation among the affected countries.

Third, the lack of national and regional coordinating mechanisms or the institutional “home base” for coastal and ocean development and management exacerbates the imbalance between economic development and ecosystem conservation. The failure or deficiency in interagency and multisectoral coordination at national and local levels, which often leads to interagency and multiple-use conflicts, has compromised the natural marine heritage, undermined natural defense, damaged the functional integrity of ecosystems and largely jeopardized the development of both the ecological and biological economies of the future.

Fourth, scientific support in coastal and ocean governance has yet to be mainstreamed in the policy and management paradigm at all levels so that policy and management decisions are based on appropriate scientific advice. Given the technical capacity disparity in the region, scientific support has not played a major role in the decisionmaking process.

The Partnership Approach in Ecosystem-based Management

PEMSEA has adopted the concept of ecosystem-based management for river basins, estuaries and coastal seas in the region through the application of integrated and adaptive management approaches in addressing pollution, loss of habitats and biodiversity, depletion of fisheries and marine resources, coastal reclamation, and other coastal and marine issues in the context of the socioeconomic, political, cultural and ecological characteristics of the region (PEMSEA, 2004). PEMSEA applies the hierarchical principles to ICM practices by effectively utilizing the fundamental approaches, operational strategies and the availability of tools and international environmental instruments to achieve the overall goal of sustainable development at the local level and subregional and regional seas (Table 1). ICM mobilizes the three key sectors of society – government, private sector and NGOs -- in partnership, and uses the key dynamics of integrated management towards achieving environmental sustainability.

Overarching Goal Operational Definition of Sustainable Development	Integrated Coastal Management
Fundamental Approaches	Integration and interrelationship principles Adaptive management Ecosystem-based approach Environmental protection Sustainable livelihood Vulnerability/Resilience thinking
Operational Strategies	Effective governance Institutional arrangements Multi-stakeholders participation Functional partnerships/Networking Knowledge management Capacity development Financing arrangements Monitoring and evaluation Scaling up
Tools and Instruments	Coastal strategy and implementation Governance analysis Coordinating mechanisms Risk assessment Environmental Impact Assessment Stakeholder analysis Cost-benefit analysis Participatory tools (negotiation, conflict resolution, arbitration) Legal/regulatory instruments (land- and sea-use planning, marine resource allocation, codes, standards, etc) Economic instruments (charges, subsidies, quotas, fines, incentives, etc)

Table 1. Application of the Hierarchical Principles to the ICM Practices.

Partnerships at the Local Level

PEMSEA has set up a series of integrated coastal management (ICM) demonstration sites to serve as working models for ICM application. Achievements in local actions such as conflict resolution, improvement of coastal landscapes, effective waste management, clean beaches and habitat restoration in several ICM demonstration sites in the region create confidence and capacity in coastal management and thereby generate more interest among local governments in replicating ICM practices. Twenty-six local governments in nine countries have set up and sustained ICM programs using their own financial resources (Fig. 2). Efforts are now being made to scale up ICM practices. The PEMSEA Network of Local Governments (PNLG) has been established, with one of the local governments (Xiamen, China) hosting the regional secretariat

and an annual event, the International Forum on Sustainable Coastal Cities, during the World Ocean Week.

PEMSEA has demonstrated that the ICM framework, process, platforms and tools can be effectively applied to address issues related to marine pollution, conservation, fisheries, sea-level rise, mariculture, ecotourism, use conflicts and many other issues pertaining to the sustainable use of coastal and marine resources.

Partnerships at the Subregional Level

Based on experience in local ICM implementation, management efforts have extended beyond administrative boundaries within or between national jurisdictions. A subregional agreement between Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam for oil and chemical spill preparedness, response and cooperation in the Gulf of Thailand is now in operation, with appropriate private sector groups involved in oil spill training and response. In Manila Bay, Philippines (Fig. 1 B, C, D), political commitments at national and provincial levels have been forged through the Manila Bay Declaration and subsequently through the Operational Plan adopted by the Manila Bay Project coordinating Council. There is a current effort to develop a new institutional/coordinating mechanism for the integrated management of Laguna Lake, Pasig River and the Manila Bay. In effect, ICM is streamlined into the national coastal and ocean management program. Risk assessment information is being considered for policy decisions with respect to the possible designation of Manila Bay and adjacent water bodies as a “non-attainment area” under the Clean Water Act. In the Bohai Sea, the inner sea of China, cooperation between three provinces and two cities has been promoted through the Bohai Sea Declaration and the implementation of the Bohai Sea Management Strategies. Appropriate legislation on Bohai Sea Management has been tabled at the national assembly while over US\$5 billion of environmental infrastructure will be built along the coastal cities bordering the Bohai Sea in order to reduce nutrient loading in rivers and bays.

Partnerships at the Regional Level

With the development and endorsement of the SDS-SEA (PEMSEA, 2003), the countries of the region have now moved forward to implement a common regional marine strategy that responds to the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and several ocean-related regional instruments including the Seoul (2002) and Bali (2005) Declarations of the APEC ocean-related Ministers and several strategies and action plans.

The 15 PEMSEA participating countries have agreed on a set of priority actions for the next ten years, including the formulation of rolling ten-year national plans of action to implement the 217 action programs of the SDS-SEA. A number of these plans already exist or are projected government activities. Initial estimates of national expenditure/budget already committed have reached a combined US\$4 billion. It is expected that national investments in implementing action programs listed in the SDS-SEA will exceed the committed amount many times over.

Regional implementation of the SDS-SEA in the initial ten years (2007–2016) shall focus on these major component activities:

- a) Mobilize the necessary regional partnerships, capacities and services, as well as legal, financial and institutional arrangements for the sustainable implementation of the SDS-SEA. The partnership mechanism will be participated in by governments, the business sector, NGOs, the academe, and other stakeholder partners.
- b) Promote, facilitate and assist interested countries in the development/formulation of national coastal and ocean policy so that by 2016, 70 percent of the participating countries will have a national coastal or ocean policy, through policy seminars to increase policy awareness and political commitments, and policy support in terms of marine sector contribution, particularly ocean contribution to future ecology and biological economic paradigm.
- c) Scale up ICM programs to cover 20 percent of the region's coastlines by 2017 so as to develop a critical mass of local governments practicing ICM and increase appreciation of the benefits of ICM practices with a view to self-multiplication of ICM practices throughout the region; through the development and operationalization of ICM training centers and regional and national ICM task forces to promote and assist local governments in the implementation of ICM practices.
- d) Implement ecosystem-based management of watersheds, estuaries and adjacent coastal seas through the sharing of knowledge and experience, particularly through twinning arrangements of successful management regimes of large water bodies in developed countries such as the Chesapeake Bay in the USA and Seto Inland Sea in Japan with management initiatives in the region including Masan-Chinhae Bay of RO Korea, Bohai Sea of China, Manila Bay of the Philippines and Jakarta Bay of Indonesia.
- e) Initiate activities to reduce or narrow the technical capacity disparity within the region through capacity-building programs using expertise from selected Areas of Excellence in the region; develop a network of universities and research institutions to provide ICM and specialized training; and strengthen regional expert networks and an information database to create dynamic teams of experts, trainers, and specialized institutions that could be mobilized to continue the noble function of capacity disparity reduction in the long term.
- f) Promote public and private sector cooperation for sustainable coastal development and create a policy environment for investment and financing of environmental infrastructure projects and services; and facilitate the implementation of public-private sector partnership for environmental infrastructure development.
- g) Form strategic partnerships between PEMSEA and other donor partners to generate investments for environmental improvement facilities to reduce the impacts of pollution, particularly in small and medium-sized cities and townships. Initially PEMSEA will form a strategic partnership with UNDP and the World Bank for nutrient-reduction initiatives for LMEs in the region.

A New Paradigm for Regional Cooperation — A Process- and Partnership-oriented Regional Mechanism

Although PEMSEA has been operating smoothly and successfully over the last 12 years, it is still project-oriented even with its programme focus. Institutionally, it is functioning under a UN (IMO) umbrella and lacks a legal personality of its own. It has become apparent that structural change to transform PEMSEA into a more permanent regional mechanism is a necessity for the following reasons:

- a) Implementation of the SDS-SEA to achieve the shared vision requires a dynamic and stable institutional arrangement to coordinate, facilitate and support national implementation;
- b) A good partnership foundation has been laid for regional cooperation involving all stakeholders of the region;
- c) Stronger national commitments have been secured with financial support not only from donors but also from the contributions of the participating countries;
- d) The Putrajaya Declaration, reflecting the countries' desire to cooperate, has provided the needed political commitments from the participating countries to implement the SDS-SEA;
- e) GEF has provided the needed financial support for the follow-on phase thus creating an opportunity and the resources to facilitate structural change.

The Putrajaya Declaration, like any other declaration or resolution, is in fact a non-binding agreement, but anchors on the moral obligation of countries to commit their human and financial resources to ensure sustainable use of the shared natural ocean resources. The Putrajaya Declaration draws its aspiration from the concept, principles and objectives of the UNCED, WSSD, the MDGs and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The regional declaration and the regional marine strategy are a response to the international maritime and environmental instruments. Despite the lack of a regional convention, most countries have demonstrated willingness to contribute and commit to the implementation of the SDS-SEA.

Under the Haikou Partnership Agreement which is expected to be adopted in December 2006 by the concerned ministers of the 15 participating countries, a new implementing mechanism will be developed. This new paradigm for regional cooperation differs from those of regional conventions in that the mode of regional cooperation is based on the spirit of partnership and the moral obligation of partners, be they governments or otherwise, to comply with agreed principles, objectives and activities guided by a shared vision. Partnering stakeholders are required to sign the Partnership Operating Arrangements which delineates roles and responsibilities and is an annex to the Partnership Agreement. Unlike the conventional approach which generally consists of a secretariat and an intergovernmental council, the new regional mechanism is made up of five interrelated components:

- a) A two-tier Partnership Council composed of both government representatives and those from the partnering stakeholders, to provide operational guidance, monitor progress and review new initiatives; the Partnership Council meeting is made up of two sessions: the

intergovernmental session where only government representatives attend and the technical session where all partners participate. Decisions are based on consensus rather than voting.

- b) A gradually country-owned PEMSEA Resource Facility (PRF) which provides both secretariat services for the regional cooperation and technical services for the implementation of SDS-SEA related projects. Governments provide financial support to sustain the operation of the Secretariat Services while the Technical Services shall be self-sustained through resources derived from project implementation.
- c) A Ministerial Forum which takes place triennially to renew political commitment and provide new policy direction for SDS-SEA implementation;
- d) A Regional Partnership Fund to receive donations from governments or other donors for the implementation of the SDS-SEA;
- e) An East Asian Seas Congress which takes place tri-annually for all stakeholders (government, NGOs, academe, experts, business communities and other members of civil society) from within and outside the region to convene or co-convene seminars, workshops, exhibits and other side meetings to review progress in the implementation of the SDS-SEA, and share information, experiences and knowledge.

The mechanism encourages the establishment or formulation of site or issue-specific subregional agreements within the overall framework of the SDS-SEA. The subregional agreement between Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam on oil and chemical spill preparedness, response and cooperation in the Gulf of Thailand is a perfect example. Implementation will be strengthened through the cooperative framework of the SDS-SEA. This approach will enable the region to streamline regional or subregional agreements and ensure a more effective, cohesive and vision-focused regional cooperation. Similarly, the PNLG is based on a subnational agreement in the form of a Charter signed by participating local governments for the implementation of ICM in the region. Such arrangements provide a stronger bond between partnering stakeholders as these are based on common concerns which are more immediate in nature.

The new regional mechanism is process- and result-oriented in establishing and consolidating its operational functions. It builds upon the 12 years of regional cooperation manifested through the GEF initiatives and operated within the UN framework. The process-oriented approach allows the regional mechanism to mature through succeeding phases, ensuring effectiveness, trust and commitment.

Effective implementation of the SDS-SEA will certainly create stronger cooperation and collaboration among various coastal and ocean management initiatives, including regional and international organizations, in fulfilling their ocean-related mandates as well as strengthening individual management efforts in the six LMEs of the region.

Sustainability of the regional mechanism very much depends on its effectiveness. Participating countries and stakeholders need to gain confidence and trust before agreeing to a more permanent and binding arrangement.

PEMSEA in Transformation

The Regional Programme Office (RPO) is now undergoing transformation to institutionalize its current project-based operation into a longer-term PEMSEA Resource Facility (PRF) which provides secretariat and technical services to the participating countries. China, Japan and RO Korea will provide annual cash contributions while the Philippines will continue to host the regional office, providing additional office space and facilities. By the end of 2006, the Second Ministerial Forum would have endorsed the Partnership Agreement and a group of partnering organizations signed the Partnership Operating Arrangement as founding members. The first Partnership Council will be held to officially establish the new regional ocean regime.

The timeline for PEMSEA's transformation reflects a lengthy operational process: from project to programme focus, from intergovernmental cooperation to multi-stakeholder partnership, from a project office to a regional institutional structure and from being donor-driven to government and stakeholder-ownership. After 12 full years of operation (1994–2006), PEMSEA is entering into a critical phase of transformation during which the government and the partnering stakeholders will take the driver's seat and propel the region towards achieving the vision of the SDS-SEA.

Reference

PEMSEA (Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia) 2003. Sustainable Development Strategy for the Seas of East Asia: Regional Implementation of the World Summit for Sustainable Development Requirements for the Coasts and Oceans, PEMSEA, Quezon City, Philippines.

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Figure 1: A) The Seas of East Asia
 B) Philippine Archipelago
 C) Manila Bay
 D) Manila Bay Watershed

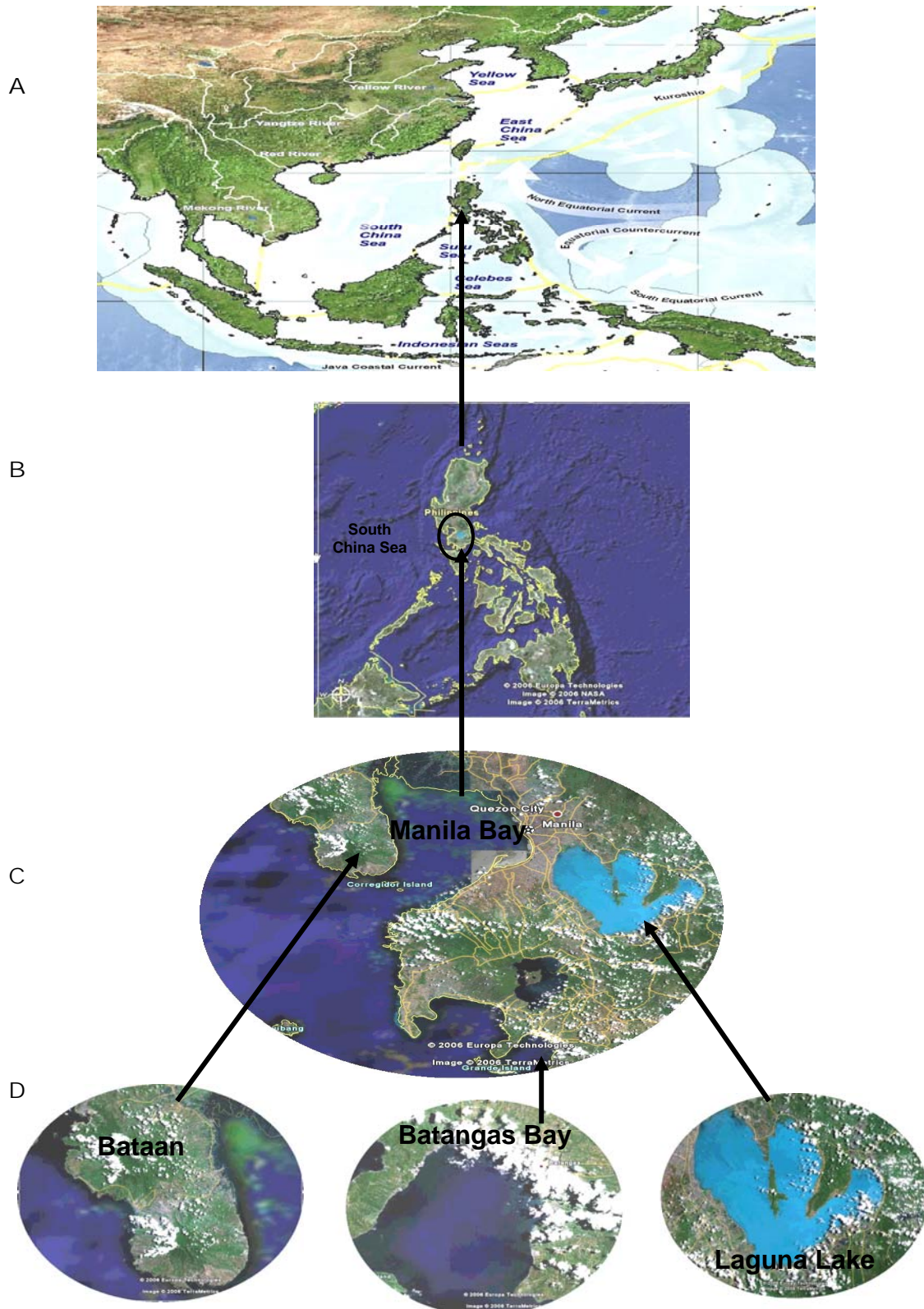
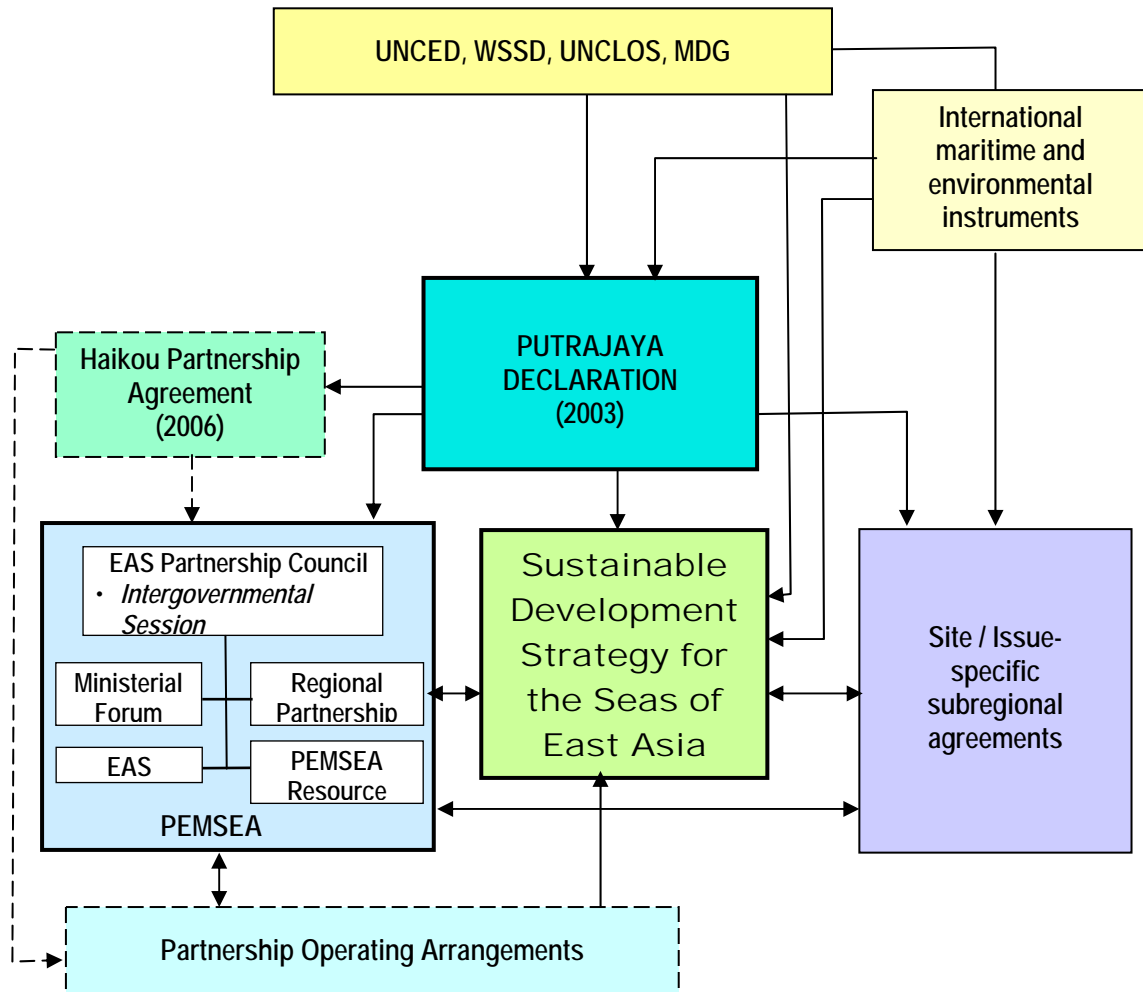


Fig. 2. PEMSEA ICM Demonstration and Parallel Sites and Subregional Hotspots in the Seas of East Asia.



Fig. 3. A New Paradigm for Regional Cooperation.



**Process- and Partnership-Oriented Regional Mechanism
for the Seas of East Asia**

- Regional coordination
- Policy and functional integration
- Results focus: Effectiveness
- Partnership Agreements
- Subregional Agreements
- Subnational Agreements