

# Coming Together to Protect and Foster: Promoting Innovative and Sustainable Planetary Health in the Asia-Pacific Region to Build Resilient Health Systems

November 29, 2023

The year 2023 marks fifty years of friendship and cooperation between Japan and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), and a commemorative summit to further elevate Japan-ASEAN cooperation is planned for December. At the 2020 Japan-ASEAN Summit Meeting, the ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases was established with close cooperation with each ASEAN country to serve as a stronghold for steady progress on the vision of a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” and on measures to protect the people of this region from the threat of infectious disease. In 2024, Japan will host the Tenth Pacific Islanders Leaders Meeting (PALM10), which will explore the themes of climate change, sustainable oceans, and sustainable and resilient economic development. Aiming to achieve stability and prosperity in the Pacific Island region, PALM10 will feature a summit-level discussion on potential methods of addressing that countries in this region share, such as the fact that they are small and scattered across wide areas of ocean; that they are distant from major international markets; and that they are vulnerable to natural disasters and climate change. At the G7 Hiroshima Summit hosted by Japan earlier this year, it became clear that it will be vital to deepen cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region to address global-level issues and achieve regional stability.

Given these circumstances, addressing the human health impacts of phenomena like climate change, environmental pollution, and biodiversity loss in the Asia-Pacific region will require actions to be taken with a planetary health perspective based on the three main directives described below.

## **1. Make the planetary health perspective a foundational part of every initiative**

First, we must promote flexible collaboration on initiatives that are based on planetary health concepts such as the One Health approach. This means building comprehensive health strategies based on the idea that human, animal, and environmental health are interlinked, as emphasized in Japan’s “Global Health Strategy” that was approved by Cabinet decision in 2022. As Pacific Island countries are vulnerable to natural disasters and climate change, the effects of climate change such as rising temperatures, increased extreme weather events, sea level rise, and greenhouse gas emissions will impact plants and animals as well as have significant effects on human health. It will be particularly important to establish measures and assessments to link efforts for health in Official Development Assistance (ODA) with measures for climate change and biodiversity implemented in these countries. As Pacific Island nations are small and scattered over wide areas of ocean, all efforts must include domestic, cross-border, and global data and information sharing; collaboration in initiatives and activities; digital transformation (DX) for innovative initiatives; and innovation. Furthermore, because the Pacific Island region is distant from global markets, it is reliant on inexpensive, imported food products that are both unfriendly to the environment and unhealthy. This also results in problems related to Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs). We

must recognize these issues and build food systems for planetary diets that help prevent and manage NCDs, which pose the greatest disease burdens in PALM and ASEAN.

## **2. Build health systems that are based on a planetary health perspective**

Second, it will be necessary to support the creation of sustainable and comprehensive health systems in Pacific Island and ASEAN countries. In addition to the concept of Universal Health Coverage (UHC), a topic for which the Government of Japan leads global discussions, that support should include health sector waste management, reducing environmental impact of health systems, cooperating with the Alliance for Transformative Action on Climate and Health (ATACH), and transitioning to resilient systems that can respond to climate change and other threats to public health, especially pandemics. When providing these forms of support, it will be important to respect the background and culture of each country and to have a human-centered perspective. Also, based on Japan's ODA policies, it will be necessary to provide robust support for each nation's independent efforts for development and to facilitate the effective and efficient provision of aid on an ongoing basis.

## **3. Promote collaboration that is based on a planetary health perspective**

Third, moving forward, it will be essential to reinforce various forms of collaboration. On the global level, Japan should further strengthen its ties to ASEAN and cooperate in addressing shared issues such as climate change and healthcare. Planetary health is related to every aspect of daily life and all activities for economic development, so it will be important to form broad partnerships, especially those that span industry, Government, academia, and civil society. To help form those partnerships, we will build a platform for mutual learning that will enable Japan, ASEAN, and Pacific Island countries to share knowledge, technology, and resources. We will emphasize that a broad variety of sectors should be involved in the platform. In particular, it will be important to have a system that enables personal collaboration among institutions such as the National Institute for Health Security, which will be formed after a merger of the National Institute of Infectious Diseases (NIID) and National Center for Global Health and Medicine (NCGM) in 2025; the National Institute for Environmental Studies (NIES); and the National Institute of Public Health (NIPH).

Finally, it will also be important to set a clear course for these developments at the summit commemorating fifty years of Japan-ASEAN friendship and cooperation and at PALM10 by incorporating these recommendations into concrete action plans, setting clear criteria, assigning roles, and sharing frameworks for evaluating progress; as well as by fostering human resources such as young researchers, policy makers and implementers, and advocates who will shoulder these responsibilities for the next generation,.

It is our sincere hope that these recommendations will help renew the commitment to a sustainable future throughout the Asia-Pacific region, ensure good health for people and the planet, and continuously accelerate joint efforts that will build prosperity.

**Suggested Citation:** Health and Global Policy Institute (2023). Coming Together to Protect and Foster: Promoting Innovative and Sustainable Planetary Health in the Asia-Pacific Region to Build Resilient Health Systems. <https://hgpi.org/en/research/ph-20231129.html>