ACTION AT COUNTRY LEVEL

Sound action in individual countries is the core of the HELI initiative. Country-level pilot projects harness the combined international, regional and country-level resources of WHO/UNEP into a single focused effort. Each partner country chooses a pilot project theme according to national priorities and performs an intersectoral assessment of policy from an environment and health perspective. Local actors choose the specific assessment methodology, tools and process best suited to local realities and needs. However, each assessment includes the following elements and procedures.

- **A core team** conducts the assessment; this team includes key experts from various sectors of government, academia and civil society.
- **An advisory committee**, including a wide range of stakeholders and government actors, reviews and contributes to the assessment process and its conclusions.

Once the assessment is complete, the initiative supports a public and technical dialogue regarding implementation of the recommendations.

- **Briefings** are provided to key groups/actors, e.g. politicians and decision-makers.
- **Public presentation** of the assessment’s recommendations and results is organized, with participation of the media.
- **A workshop**, hosted by the pilot project partner and including other countries in the region, is conducted to disseminate professional knowledge and build capacity for intersectoral collaboration.
Jordan: Water is Life

Jordan has one of the lowest levels of water resource availability, per capita, in the world. Water scarcity will become an even greater problem over the next two decades as the population doubles and climate change potentially makes precipitation more uncertain and variable, particularly in this region. Management of water resources is therefore a key issue facing national government authorities. Increasing overall water extraction to meet demand carries a high cost; Jordan is now accessing non-renewable water resources from fossilized deep-water aquifers. Water quantity and quality also have major health and environmental impacts. Assessing those impacts against alternative water management and efficiency strategies, and in the light of policy costs and economic development issues, can optimize the use of a scarce resource.

The Process:
The initiative has brought together representatives from the Ministries of Planning, Water, Agriculture, Environment and Health respectively; science and research institutions; consumer/producer associations; and bilateral/international agencies such as USAID and UNDP. A core research group, facilitated by the WHO Regional Centre for Environmental Health Activities (CEHA) in Amman, is preparing a strategic environmental assessment of existing and planned water efficiency policies and various alternatives. The assessment considers linked environment and health impacts together with the economic valuation of health and environment costs and benefits. The review considers issues such as: differential pricing for water use in various sectors; education and awareness campaigns; relative allocation of water for economic production and domestic purposes; wastewater treatment and pollution control; and the agricultural use of purified sewage wastewater. A study group comprised of four teams of government officials and scientists has been formed to conduct the review. At the conclusion of the assessment process, recommendations will be presented to a stakeholder advisory group and before policy-makers, as well as at a WHO/UNEP cosponsored regional workshop hosted by Jordan and involving other countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

“The challenge is to manage a most limited vital resource in a way that best responds to the growing needs, and nurtures the health of the next generation.”

HELI Technical Advisory Group in Jordan.

An arid landscape, a growing population, and increased demand for water resources all make effective water management a critical issue for both health and environment in both Jordan and the region.
Thailand: Healthy Agriculture

Thailand is regarded as an emerging economy that has experienced rapid industrial growth. Nonetheless, 65% of the country’s workforce is employed in agriculture -- ranging from the traditional rice sector to expanding export-oriented cultivation of products such as tropical fruits and cotton.

In order to boost agricultural production and efficiency there has been a marked increase in the use of more powerful agricultural chemicals, both herbicides and pesticides. Anecdotal evidence indicates an increased incidence of agrochemical misuse and occupational farm worker exposure, partly due to field workers’ inadequate understanding of the acute toxicity and long-term health hazards associated with improper pesticide use. Marketing strategies that aim to maximize pesticide sales sometimes exacerbate these problems. At the same time, economic losses can occur if unacceptable levels of pesticide residues are found in produce designated for export.

The Process:
An environmental health impact assessment (EHIA) is being conducted for the use of agrochemicals. This is coordinated by the Thai Department of Health and the Health Systems Research Institute, in collaboration with the Thai Food and Drug Administration, Departments of Agriculture and Agricultural Extension, Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning and a range of civil society NGOs. The goal is to provide an evidence-based assessment of agricultural pesticides for sustainable agricultural development, from a health and environment perspective. This includes analysis of existing policies and legislation and the development of new national policy recommendations. Improved guidelines and tools and their pilot application at the local level also are part of the process. The assessment supports Thailand’s own drive to mainstream and institutionalize health impact assessment as part of its sustainable healthy public policy. Findings will be presented at a national event and workshop cosponsored by WHO/UNEP and hosted by Thailand with regional participation.

“More efficient tools and methods for policy decision-making can help Thailand to cope efficiently with the threats that excessive agro-chemical utilization pose to the country’s rapid development.”

Senior health officer, Thai Department of Health

Life in a Thai field (above). Inappropriate or excessive use of agrochemicals is a linked health and environment issue in many developing regions, including Asia (background).
Uganda’s indigenous Ankole cattle are valued for their meat. Livestock production is an important economic activity in a number of Ugandan districts, including the country’s south-western region (background) sometimes referred to as the ‘Switzerland of Africa’. Nationally, there is potential for developing the livestock branch with an aim to expanding trade. However, livestock development choices and management practices also have impacts on the environment and health. There are concerns about the possible human health impacts of exposures to chemicals and pharmaceuticals used to protect livestock from disease; these may enter food, soil and water supplies, the latter shared by animals and humans. There are long-term economic, health and ecological trade-offs between policies fostering the development of local and exotic cattle breeds. The local breeds are valued for their meat and are more resistant to vector-borne diseases, some of which affect humans. The exotic breeds require more chemical treatments due to their lower natural resistance, but typically produce greater quantities of milk. For this reason they are valued by poor households seeking to improve family nutrition or supplement income. Some of the chemicals used to treat livestock also are used in malaria control programmes, raising concerns about preserving long-term efficacy by managed use.

**The Process:**
The initiative has brought together key experts and policy-makers from nearly a dozen Ugandan institutions including the Ministries of Health; Agriculture; and Water, Lands and Environment respectively; the National Drug Authority; and academia. Four core teams are now undertaking an impact assessment of livestock management development options and agrochemical use, from an environment and health perspective. The topic was chosen by the Ugandan Ministry of Water, Lands and Environment, which is coordinating the project in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. The assessment includes the first-ever series of government tests of chemical and pharmaceutical residues in animal products, soils, water and invertebrates. The data will be used to generate an initial profile of health and environmental risks, with technical support from WHO/UNEP. Analysis of current policies in the light of new and existing evidence can inform decisions on livestock branch development, public health, environmental management, economic development and poverty reduction. The HELI analysis parallels a UNEP-sponsored review of environmental issues related to Uganda’s poverty reduction strategies and planning policies. When the assessment has been completed, the pilot project conclusions and recommendations will be presented at a WHO/UNEP cosponsored regional workshop hosted by Uganda for other countries in the African region. It is hoped that the findings will be used to position and steer Uganda’s livestock industry to international markets, enhance implementation of multilateral agreements on chemical safety, health and environment, and contribute to achieving the Millennium Development Goals at the national level.

“Livestock: a hidden insurance for sustainable livelihoods.”
Principal Environment Inspector,
Ministry of Water, Lands and Environment, Uganda.