EcoHealth research in South East Asia: past, present, and ways forward

EcoHealth is a comprehensive and integrative conceptualisation of health as an outcome of the complex relation of human, animal and environment systems. Although it was only introduced in South East Asia (SEA) in the 2000’s by IDRC, its development in the region shows a dynamic evolution in research and widening application to various fields such as emerging and zoonotic diseases, agriculture and health, and, education and training. We review ecohealth activities in SEA over the last 10 years to capture the lessons learned and challenges as well as evaluating the future of Ecohealth in the region.

Methods

1. We analysed all the EcoHealth programmes, initiatives and projects (now called projects) that have been being implemented in the past 10 years with support of IDRC in SEA.

2. The level of EcoHealth characterised by how much “ecohealth content” was analysed using main principles of ecohealth published by Charron (2011).

Results

The results showed that generally, EcoHealth has been well perceived and taken up by partners, in particular academia, policy makers and communities and it has generated some good research results in the field of zoonotic and emerging diseases. Some projects focused purely on capacity, others on research or both.

Main ecohealth project in South East Asia

- APEIR: Asian Partnership on Emerging Infectious Diseases Research
- BECA: Building Capacity in Ecohealth for SEA
- EcoEID: Ecohealth Emerging Infectious Diseases Research in SEA
- EcoZD: Ecosystem Approaches to the Better Management of Zoonotic Emerging Infectious Diseases in SEA
- FBLI: Field Building Leadership Initiative in SEA

The way forward from a regional perspective

Research: more integrated and practically oriented case studies of EcoHealth are needed.

Training: degree training and short course in Ecohealth to expand knowledge to mainstream practitioners.

Policy translation: sensitize policy makers to EcoHealth and good advocacy to apply EcoHealth

Conclusion

EcoHealth is a good approach to deal with complex problems of health and environment. Further incentive based application at all levels are need to promote the use of EcoHealth.