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Baseline survey for strengthening mercury analysis capacity in Asia and the Pacific

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[Introduction]

Responding the entry-into-force of the Minamata Convention on Mercury in 2017, United Nations Environment Programme supports science-based policy development and evaluation through strengthening capacity of mercury analysis. For preparing the assistance programmes to national analytical institutions, baseline surveys to such institutions are essential as it must reflect the current situation properly. In FY2018, Ministry of the Environment, Japan (MOEJ) undertook the baseline surveys for 13 institutions in 9 countries. 1)

[Methods]

Under the travel restriction due to COVID-19 pandemic, the study explores the possibility to obtain necessary data by a series of online hearings to the staff of the analytical institutions. Based on the MOEJ method, the survey items were selected as follows: laboratory overview; state for microanalysis; measuring instruments; analytical procedures; and treatment of wastes and safety. New and emerging online technologies that enables real-time two-way communications were considered as the means of this virtual survey. The survey items and the methodologies will be adjusted based on the results. The Internet connectivity, which is critical for the survey, is provided by us using LTE router as the internal Wifi facility of the surveying laboratories might not be sufficient.

[Results and discussion]

Nepal was selected as the survey country and the Laboratory in Department of Environment, Ministry of Forests and Environment, and National Public Health Laboratory, Ministry of Health and Population were identified as the present/future analytical laboratories. As the official visits were not possible, local coordinator was engaged to communicate with the stakeholders for survey planning. The actual survey will be conducted once the local movement ban due to COVID-19 is lifted and necessary tools such as camera can be brought into the sites.

[Conclusion]

Considering the rapid development of new online tools, surveys without physical travel could be a prospective future methodology, not just an ad hoc measure but more effective and efficient survey technique. For enabling this approach, capable local coordinators for meetings and surveys as well as the improved Internet connectivity are very important.

[References]

1) IDEA Consultants: Report on mercury monitoring and monitoring capacity strengthening assistances contributing Minamata Convention (FY2018), 4.1.8 Survey for environmental monitoring laboratories, pp165-179, 2019 [In Japanese]