

## ABSTRACTS

### WORKSHOP ON DEVELOPING SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGIES IN ASIA

UN Conference Centre, Bangkok, Thailand, 8-9 March 2007

#### Session 1: Challenges to Integrating Sustainability and Development

The Asia and Pacific region illustrates many of the challenges to integrating sustainability and development. Economic growth in this region has been impressive over the past 40 years and has resulted in dramatic poverty reduction. Asia's share of world GDP has grown from 13% in 1960 to over 25% at present. This robust growth is expected to continue at a rate of 7% in 2007. Increasingly, what happens in Asia affects not only the 2.5 billion people that live there, but also the rest of the world.

However, rapid economic expansion in Asia and the Pacific has also had environmental and social costs. Growth has generated high levels of resource consumption, pollution and waste, with the costs of environmental degradation estimated at 4-8% of GDP in many countries. Asian cities are plagued by dirty air, low levels of sanitation, and scarce water supplies. In rural areas, ecosystems are strained by the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources. A large percentage of the poor remain dependent on habitats (agricultural systems, grasslands, forests, rivers, coasts) which are gradually being destroyed.

Nor has rapid economic growth resulted in overall better living standards. Fast-paced industrialisation processes and urbanisation remain juxtaposed against continuing poverty and growing social inequities in both urban and rural areas. While poverty has been alleviated in many parts of the region, some 620 million Asians still live on less than \$1 a day. And over 40% of the population live on less than \$2 a day.

Governments across the region are getting serious about sustainable development, especially in their speeches and political messages. Most countries have cabinet-level environment ministries and are increasing their budget allocations for environmental protection and enforcement of pollution control laws. Steps are being taken to provide access to sustainable livelihoods, education and health care for a larger share of the population. Stakeholders are becoming more active in calling for a sustainable future, and global pressures for good public and corporate governance are growing.

Sustainable development is part of the broader governance challenge facing many countries. While continuing economic growth will provide the foundation for addressing poverty and ecological issues, the "grow now, clean up later" approach must be abandoned. Finding the right balance between economic growth, environmental safeguards, and improved quality of life for all is the challenge to be addressed through more integrated sustainable development approaches.

#### Discussion questions:

- 1) *What are the main challenges in implementing more ecological and equitable approaches to economic growth in your country?*
- 2) *What is the relationship between environmental improvements and poverty reduction in your country?*
- 3) *How can good governance and institutional changes contribute to sustainable development in your country?*

## **Session 2: Good Governance Approaches to Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific**

Countries in the Asia and Pacific region are making progress in developing national sustainable development strategies (NSDS), which governments agreed to prepare as part of *Agenda 21* in 1992. For all countries, implementation of these strategies was targeted for 2005. According to UN and OECD recommendations, effective strategies are based on long-term timeframes for growth and development and the integration of economic, environmental and social objectives. Politically, NSDS are best when they receive high-level support and involve a range of government ministries.

Many of the non-OECD countries in the region are in the process of developing NSDS with technical assistance from the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and UNESCAP. These include countries in Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan); South Asia (Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka); the Greater Mekong Subregion (Cambodia, Vietnam, Myanmar, Thailand, Yunnan Province in China); and Mongolia in North East Asia.

Some countries, such as the Philippines, Nepal, Kazakhstan, Indonesia and Vietnam, have based their sustainability planning on *Agenda 21* processes, which are valuable for making links to sub-national governments to leverage their involvement. For example, the Philippine Agenda 21 (PA21) serves as the planning document for policy integration and includes a set of indicators to monitor progress towards sustainable development objectives. Strategic planning is carried out by the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA), which is also the lead agency for the Philippine Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD) bringing together the main government agencies and civil society organisations.

Other countries, such as Cambodia, Mongolia and Thailand, are building on their national development plans to formulate sustainable development strategies. For example, Mongolia established a National Council for Sustainable Development, chaired by the Prime Minister, which is engaged in developing an NSDS based on the Mongolian Action Program for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (MAP-21). Thailand's national development plan for a "Competitive and Self-Sufficient Economy" is seeking better integration of economic, environmental and social concerns.

National plans for environment and conservation also serve as a platform for sustainability advances. Pakistan is basing its NSDS on the National Conservation Strategy. Sri Lanka, which was the first country in Asia to prepare a National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP), is mainstreaming environmental concerns into sectoral development plans through its draft NSDS. The island of Tuvalu, which ascribes to the *Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Islands Developing States*, held a national conference to map out a NSDS building on its national environmental action plan.

Problems persist in many countries in obtaining sufficient political commitment, the involvement of a range of ministries, and financial support to advance national sustainable development strategies. A lack of institutional capacity and weaknesses in legislative and regulatory frameworks remain a constraint to integrated planning processes. Approaches for involving stakeholders, promoting sustainable local governance, and informing the public are still evolving.

### **Discussion questions:**

- 1) *What have been the main challenges to developing and implementing sustainable development approaches in your country?*
- 2) *How can sustainable development concepts and goals be introduced in a range of government ministries (economic, environment, social)?*
- 3) *What further capacity building is needed in your country to develop and implement national sustainable development strategies?*

### **Session 3: Increasing the Role of Stakeholders in Sustainability Strategies**

A main tenet of sustainable development is openness and inclusiveness, underlining that national sustainable development strategies should be transparent, multi-stakeholder processes. The development and implementation of sustainability strategies should involve groups such as environment and development NGOs, business, unions, farmers, youth, women and indigenous people.

Experience in OECD countries shows that the private sector should be engaged in the implementation of national strategies, and that firms can contribute know-how, technologies and financial resources. Governments should also provide incentives and assistance to foster broader civil society participation through strengthening capacity and other forms of support. Procedures for accreditation and recognition of stakeholder groups are needed to ensure appropriate levels of responsibility and accountability in fulfilling their roles. These groups should also seek to establish interactive networking among themselves to ensure more effective representation and participation with governments in the strategy process.

More participatory and flexible approaches to policy planning and implementation are increasingly being undertaken in the Asia Pacific region. Some countries (including Japan, Korea, Mongolia, the Philippines, and Thailand) have established National Sustainable Development Councils, which are effective vehicles for involving a range of stakeholders in the planning, formulation and implementation of national sustainable development strategies.

The Philippine Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD), established in 1992, gives recommendations for the coordination of sustainable development initiatives in the country. In addition to government ministries, the PCSD includes representatives from NGOs, business and labour. Similarly, the National Council for Sustainable Development in Mongolia, created in 1996, coordinates sustainable development activities and includes government, business and NGO representation.

The Thai National Council for Sustainable Development was set up in 2000 to include more civil society and business participants in sustainability planning. The Presidential Council on Sustainable Human Development of Kyrgyz Republic was established to strengthen dialogue and cooperation among public institutions, the private sector and NGOs. It has focused on developing a strategy for sustainable human development and building national capacities for strategy implementation.

Stakeholder involvement is a fundamental test of sustainable development at national level. Civil society, including private sector, representatives can be effective and constructive partners in the development and implementation of sustainable development plans. But it is up to governments to create a conducive political climate which encourages direct participation in decision-making processes. OECD countries (e.g. the network of European Environmental and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils or EEAC) can provide insights for involving as many relevant stakeholders as possible, stimulating informed debate, reaching those outside the capital city, increasing public awareness of sustainable development, and ensuring the participation of relevant groups over the longer term.

#### **Discussion questions:**

- 1) What are the most effective approaches for involving stakeholders in the development and implementation of sustainability strategies at national level?*
- 2) How can National Councils for Sustainable Development contribute to the national sustainable development strategy process?*
- 3) How can countries overcome political obstacles to ensuring more stakeholder involvement in sustainable development?*

#### **Session 4: Integrating Sustainability into Development Planning and Development Co-operation**

On a global scale, poverty reduction is the highest priority for sustainable development. Poverty is exacerbated by environmental problems, such as pollution and ecosystem degradation, as well as by the failure to empower all parts of society including workers, the poor, youth and women. Tackling environmental degradation and social inequities are preconditions for reducing poverty. Financial resources alone are not sufficient.

Development planning in the Asia and Pacific region, as in other parts of the world, needs to link economic, environmental and social concerns. Action plans for development, sustainable development, poverty reduction, achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and implementing Multilateral Environmental Agreements (*e.g.*, on climate change, biodiversity) have been formulated at national level with the support of multilateral, regional and bilateral development agencies. But in many countries in the region, these plans remain disjointed, which endangers the achievement of their overall objectives.

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are giving greater emphasis to the integration of environmental factors in Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS). Intended to help the least-developed countries secure debt remission and low-cost loans, PRS are agreed spending frameworks based on a country's macroeconomic and structural policies and external financing needs. Updated every three years, PRS provide the programmatic basis for co-operation between developing country governments and donors. However, World Bank studies show that the average level of mainstreaming environmental concerns into PRS is still low. In Asia, Cambodia and Sri Lanka are cited as good practice examples.

Similarly, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and regional organisations (*e.g.* the Asian Development Bank or ADB) are putting higher priority on sustainable development in their assistance programmes. For example, the ADB has established a Poverty and Environment Fund (PEF) to support environmental interventions that reduce poverty and improve the capacity of poor people in Asia to contribute to environmental management.

With regard to bilateral donors, the 2006 OECD Ministerial Meeting between the Environment Policy Committee and the Development Assistance Committee (DAC), which coordinates 90% of official development assistance from bilateral donors, recommended that instruments be developed for better integrating local and national environmental factors into national development plans, specifically PRS.

One avenue to improved policy coherence in Asia and the Pacific is through national sustainable development strategies (NSDS) which build on existing mechanisms and plans. The 2002 Johannesburg Plan of Implementation recommended that NSDS could be formulated as poverty reduction strategies (PRS) that integrate economic, environmental and social aspects. International and regional organisations need to increase the coherency of their development co-operation and assistance approaches, ensuring their conception and delivery in sustainable development terms (see *Proposed Working Arrangements for International Co-operation on National Sustainable Development Strategies*).

#### **Discussion questions:**

- 1) *What have been the main challenges to achieving greater policy coherence (economic, environment and social) in development planning?*
- 2) *Which processes would facilitate moving from poverty reduction strategies (PRS) to national sustainable development strategies?*
- 3) *How can international organisations work together to integrate sustainability concerns and safeguards into development assistance? I environmental agreements and conventions, etc.*