
INTRODUCTION

It must be remembered that there is only one Earth and that its natural resources are finite. To be sustainable, the sum of human activities has to be within the regenerative capacities of the Earth, a fact most often conveniently ignored.

The Asia-Pacific region has experienced tremendous economic growth in recent years. Annual growth of gross domestic product (GDP) per capita between 1975 and 1995 in the region was 3.09%, as compared to 1.17% for the world. This rapid economic growth fuelled by, among others, industrialisation and international trade, while having led to the flourishing of some economies, has also added much strain on the environment and negatively affected sustainable development of the region.

Asia and the Pacific will soon be the most dynamic economic centre of the world. With continued economic growth accompanied by population expansion, the region needs to follow a development paradigm that fully integrates economic with social and environmental concerns. A sustainable world is simply not conceivable if this region fails to follow a sustainable growth path for the future.

APFED members believe that the formidable challenges this region is confronted with can be dealt with, but only if all stakeholders make a conscious effort to live in accordance with sustainability principles. Strong political will and sensible policies are required to keep the region peaceful, promote democracy, sustain economic growth, and strengthen social cohesion, all without which sustainability cannot flourish. Nothing less than a paradigm shift is needed for the region to move towards sustainable development, by turning challenges into opportunities.

During 2001 and 2002, APFED worked on five key issues namely freshwater resources, renewable energy, trade, finance, and urbanisation. In May 2002, APFED presented the “APFED Message to the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD)” as its interim output. In this Message, APFED committed itself to launching three new partnership initiatives: “Collection and Analysis of Best Policy Practices (BPPs),” “Development of a Network of Researchers and Research Institutions (NetRes),” and “Creation of an Inventory of Capacity Building Programmes (CBPs) in Asia and the Pacific Region.” The APFED Message and outcomes of the APFED Commitments are attached in section 2 of the appendix to this report.

The members gathered at APFED have therefore developed a broad set of forward-looking recommendations to enable the region to take steps to enrich its possible sustainable future. APFED, together with all interested stakeholders, is committed to taking action where possible within its capacities, to realise the proposed recommendations in a step-by-step manner.

Some of the many environmental challenges that the region experiences include unsustainable energy production, air pollution, shortages and pollution of water, depletion of natural resources, biodiversity loss, and land degradation. Global warming is also a serious problem, particularly as it pertains to small island states and other vulnerable countries in the region.

Freshwater resources have reached a critical stage in most parts of Asia and the Pacific, with regard to both quality and quantity. Due to the growing imbalances between water availability and demand, conflict over water resources is predicted to increase at all levels, and may eventually threaten peace in the region. The impacts of this water crisis—such as insufficient food supply, unsafe water supply, and poor sanitation—and natural disasters—such as flood and drought—particularly affect the poor. Given the region’s ongoing growth in both population and economy, actions for sustainable water management should be taken, with special consideration given to the diversity of water-related issues in the region, so that the water crisis will not constitute a major constraint to sustainable development. Such actions are basically in line with the outcomes

of the International Conference on Freshwater held in Bonn in 2001, keeping in mind the International Year of Freshwater in 2003, the 3rd World Water Forum held in Japan in 2003, and the “Jeju Initiative” which was adopted at the 8th Special Session of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Governing Council / Global Ministerial Environmental Forum (GCSS/GMEF) held in Jeju Island, Republic of Korea in March 2004.

Energy demand in Asia and the Pacific is expected to soar with the rapid economic growth that the region is experiencing. Considering that renewable energy resources are suitable for many decentralised communities in the region, with effective policies and governance to promote their use, the region has high potential to lead the world in the use of renewable energy. To meet the increase in energy demand in a sustainable way, actions should be taken now to promote the use of promising renewable energy resources such as biomass, wind and solar energy, and to further develop and invigorate the market for renewable energy technologies. Shifting to renewable energy will greatly reduce the emission of greenhouse gases and the intensity of global warming and climate change.

The economic impacts of globalisation have deeply affected Asia and the Pacific. Although globalisation has both positive and negative impacts, its negative aspects, such as the inability of small- and medium-sized companies and economies to overcome the formidable barriers to full participation in regional and global markets, and unsustainable production and consumption patterns, have affected the poor disproportionately. Because the poor and the least developed countries (LDCs) are the most vulnerable, globalisation’s adverse impacts have further intensified poverty.

With a new round of multilateral trade negotiations expected to take place under the World Trade Organisation (WTO), and as a result of regional and subregional trade negotiations such as through the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), trade liberalisation is expected to expand in the region. While increasing trade could lead to economic growth, it may also bring more stress on the environment and widen the gap between the rich and the poor within and amongst countries in the region. Therefore, a real challenge is to ensure that trade liberalisation is harmonised with the environment and that people in all the economies of the region, particularly the poor, are able to reap the benefits from trade liberalisation.

The Asia-Pacific region has emerged as the largest recipient in the developing world of private capital flows, in particular, foreign direct investment. However, within the region, globalisation has resulted in two categories of developing countries: those which have not been able to attract much private capital, such as LDCs, land-locked countries and small island states, for which Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) remains the primary source of external funding; and those countries that have seized new opportunities from globalisation such as China. Actions for financing sustainable development should take into consideration the difference between these two categories of countries.

Increasing urban migration is escalating the pressures on urban infrastructures. This trend is becoming unsustainable in many instances because urbanisation is concentrated in a few large cities. With nine of the world’s 14 mega-cities located in Asia and the Pacific, critical issues to be addressed include traffic congestion; inadequate waste management; air, noise, and water pollution and their associated health hazards; poor sanitation; and deficient infrastructure and services. Actions should be taken in line with the Kitakyushu Initiative for a Clean Environment, adopted at the Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development (MCED), 2000. Efforts should aim in particular at strengthening urban environmental management through information exchange and the sharing of best practices.

In addition to poverty, inequity—the uneven and unequal distribution of wealth, uneven rates of human development, and the increasing gap between the haves and the have-nots, especially when gender is taken into account—is a challenge. Equity, or the lack thereof, in the region has special implications as it relates to unsustainable urbanisation patterns. Rapid urbanisation has resulted in the expansion of slums, aggravating poverty in urban areas. Moreover, development focusing on urban areas has also created differences in progress in terms of human development between urban and rural areas.

At present, poverty constitutes the largest challenge to sustainable development. While the number of people living in absolute poverty has decreased in East Asia, the numbers for the rest of the region are increasing. South Asia suffers from the same level of poverty as that of sub-Saharan Africa. The magnitude of poverty in the region, where approximately 800 million or 70% of the world’s poor people live, calls us to view poverty

alleviation as the utmost priority.

It is thus clear that development patterns currently being pursued in the region have not succeeded in alleviating poverty and reducing income inequality. Furthermore, we recognise that the current development patterns constitute an important threat to environmental security, which is in itself a threat to global security.

The world community needs to change the current development patterns from unsustainability to sustainability. We believe that success in achieving sustainable development in the region will determine success for the rest of the world. In this context, we declare our commitment as the members of APFED, and call on other organisations and governments in the region to demonstrate tangible commitments to poverty alleviation and the achievement of sustainable development.

Throughout the deliberations of APFED, it was emphasised on a number of occasions that it is necessary to seek an innovative approach that actively uses the unique characteristics of the region: i.e., diverse nature, growing populations, rich religions, unique cultures and social values, and expanding economies.

Structure of the Report

The report is divided into four parts. Part I is the overview of the Asia-Pacific region, Part II discusses the future vision of the region, Part III sets out the APFED recommendations, and Part IV is the Action Platform that indicates the next step for APFED.

Part I (Overview of the Asia-Pacific Region), which is divided into three chapters, looks at the diversity and dynamics of the region. By 2025, the region is likely to have become the dynamic growth centre of the world, rendering attainment of sustainability in the region critical to the sustainability of the world. Further policy intervention in the region is needed in (i) increasing participation by all stakeholders in development of basic policies on sustainable development; (ii) integrating environmental concerns into basic policies of key sectors, such as energy and agriculture; and (iii) developing institutional capacity and financing to enforce environmental regulations to make the region sustainable.

The first chapter on Social and Economic Factors for Change outlines the social and economic factors identified by APFED as influencing the future direction of sustainable development in the region. Factors included are population and urbanisation (population trends, urban population and urbanisation, rural-urban migration, urban poverty, and transforming demographic structures); economic development (growing and transforming economies, economic globalisation and its impacts, rural-urban gaps, energy sources and availability, and production and consumption issues); major social concerns (poverty, nutrition and health, education, gender discrimination, social cohesion, conflicts, and corruption); and technological development (technological innovation, information and communication technologies, biotechnology, energy technologies, and cleaner production technologies).

Chapter two, Signs of Environmental Stress, highlights environmental problems of the region including trans-boundary problems, such as “haze” and “atmospheric brown clouds.” Seven areas exhibiting signs of environmental stress including freshwater resources, coastal and marine environment, air, climate change, land degradation, forest and biodiversity, and solid waste and chemical contamination have been identified and described in detail.

Chapter three outlines the Responses to Sustainable Development Challenges at the regional, subregional and national levels, and elaborates a wide array of actions that can be taken at these three levels for achieving sustainable development.

Part II of the report (Future Vision of the Asia-Pacific Region) is divided into two chapters.

Chapter one on Scenarios introduces four visions [(i) market first scenario, (ii) policy first scenario, (iii) security first scenario, and (iv) sustainability first scenario] of the future for the region in the next 30 years. It discusses the different paths of development and environment based upon the scenario analysis conducted by the UNEP in the Global Environmental Outlook 3 (GEO-3)¹.

¹ United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 2002. Global Environment Outlook 3. Earthscan Publications Ltd, London

Chapter two outlines APFED's future vision for the region based on the Sustainability First Scenario. APFED members believe that only the Sustainability First Scenario provides long-term solutions to the challenges confronting this region. Also emphasised is the need to turn unique features of the region, such as the huge population, robust economic growth, and diverse culture, into strengths.

Part III, also divided into three chapters, outlines the APFED recommendations which are essentially of two types. The first type applies to the regional or subregional level. These underpin APFED's attempt to propose ways towards sustainable development for the region as a whole. The second type addresses important sustainability issues common to many countries in the region. Those recommendations are, therefore, either at the national level or at the local level.

The recommendations in Part III have been put together in three groups. The first set is cross-sectoral in nature, with recommendations considered essential for advancing an integrated approach to environmental conservation. The second group contains recommendations for strengthening the role of major stakeholders as well as for facilitating partnerships. The third group of recommendations promote an integrated approach in the five sectors that APFED considers critical for a sustainable future in the region, namely freshwater resources; marine and coastal resources; energy and air; land use management including urbanisation, rural development, and forest conservation; and chemical issues.

Chapter one on Recommendations for Integrated Approaches for Sustainable Development focusses upon measures to promote environmental policies that are more an integral part of economic and social policies. Reflecting the features of new environmental policies, recommendations centre on (i) provision of incentives, (ii) promotion of stakeholder participation, and (iii) an intensified focus on trans-boundary issues. This chapter proposes measures intended to promote consistent and efficient implementation of cross-sectoral environmental policies. They are meant to strengthen the environmental foundations of the region, upon which various sectoral policies can then be formulated and implemented. The recommendations are categorised into six sections, namely institution building, systems development, capacity building, finance, trade, and technologies.

Chapter two outlines the Recommendations for Multi-Stakeholder Partnership. In a globalised world, international policies become intimately linked with domestic issues and policies. Interactions of people become more frequent and complex. Information flows become more dynamic than ever. As the world has changed, the importance of partnerships among stakeholders has been emphasised in recent international political forums, such as WSSD. Recognising the importance of participation, this chapter presents recommendations to promote actions of the primary actors, specifically civil society, the private sector, and the public sector.

Recommendations regarding integration of environmental policies into developmental sectors are discussed in chapter three of the report (Major Sectoral Recommendations), and are based upon a series of consultative meetings conducted by APFED in different parts of the region. At each meeting, APFED listened to local experts espouse a broad range of opinions regarding local efforts to achieve sustainable development. In addition to suggestions for the improvement of overall environmental management and the development of policy integration, APFED received a variety of ideas on how to strengthen the sectoral approaches in five specific sectors: Freshwater Resources; Marine and Coastal Resources; Energy and Air; Land Use Management; and Chemical Issues. This chapter presents the suggestions received during the APFED process, which have been developed into a series of recommendations, aiming to integrate the environmental principles underlying sustainability into sectoral policies. Each of the sections of the chapter consists of a sectoral overview and specific recommendations.