

ECO Asia 2006 - The 14th Environment Congress for Asia and the Pacific
Saitama City, Japan June 24-25, 2006

Chair's Summary

- 1.Environment ministers and senior officials of Asia and Pacific countries, representatives of international organizations, local governments, research institutes and NGOs, and experts gathered for ECO Asia 2006, organized by the Ministry of the Environment, Japan and hosted by Saitama City, on June 24-25, 2006, in Saitama City, Japan.
- 2.Brief presentations were made on the outcomes of related activities of ECO Asia 2006, which include Cool Asia, Saitama Environmental Forum 2006, GEA Virtual Globe Environmental NPO/NGO Meeting, and Kitakyushu Initiative for a Clean Environment: International Workshop on Local Initiatives Addressing Transformation of Lifestyles toward Achieving Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific. In addition, the awards ceremony for the ECO Asia Foreign Students' Essay Contest was held.
- 3.Discussions were focused on three themes, namely: (i) vitalizing actions by citizens, (ii) invigorating actions by communities and local governments, and (iii) promoting collaboration towards sustainable societies among countries in Asia and the Pacific. The Chair identified the following as major points made during the meeting.

Session I: For Vitalizing Actions by Citizens

4. The importance of campaigns to realize changes in individual lifestyles was highlighted. Efforts such as Singapore's initiative to promote the conservation of water in individual households, Indonesia's awards recognizing citizen groups and others protecting the environment through the use of traditional practices, and Japan's campaign to identify "environment ministers" at the household level were among the examples noted as transferable to other countries in the region. Participants also welcomed efforts by Japan to disseminate its Cool Biz campaign, which recognizes the value of traditional Asian clothes in promoting environmentally-sound behavior.
5. Emerging policy reforms, including democratization and decentralization, facilitate policy frameworks conducive to better environmental management and sustainable development. This is because they will empower various stakeholders to pursue more sustainable lifestyles drawing upon traditional cultures and practices while promoting economic development. Examples include, among others, "Gross National Happiness" in Bhutan, "Sufficiency Economy" in Thailand, "Unity in Diversity" in Indonesia, and the national philosophy of "Gandhi's Simple Lifestyle" in India.

6. A combination of indigenous wisdom, cutting-edge technologies, and political leadership will be key in advancing the sustainability agenda in the Asia-Pacific region. The potential for the Asian traditional lifestyle to improve the environment should be more prominently recognized.
7. Many developing countries in Asia and the Pacific need to pursue economic development and environmental protection simultaneously with poverty reduction. However, it was noted that lifestyle changes and other measures taken to address, for example, the issue of climate change can be carried out in ways that benefit both economy and environment.
8. Asian traditional beliefs often take a long-term perspective. Climate change was mentioned as a potential “time bomb.”

Session II: For Invigorating Actions by Communities

9. Given differences in local environmental and socio-economic conditions, the environment and natural resources can often be managed best by local stakeholders. Local-level initiatives have become important in many countries in Asia and the Pacific. Multistakeholder approaches and decentralization further make local stakeholders more responsible for management of both the environment and natural resources.
10. Local governments possess strengths in better managing the local environment and undertaking prompt local-level actions due to their proximity to the people and the environment. However, they face considerable human resource and financial constraints.
11. Many local governments carry out innovative approaches to promote the establishment of sustainable societies. Examples of these include financial incentives provided by central governments and community-based activities facilitated by, among others, regional initiatives such as the Kitakyushu Initiative for a Clean Environment and ICLEI Cities for Climate Protection Campaign. In addition, the initiative by China to create model cities of environmental protection was noted as a project-level innovative approach.
12. Suggested future actions include the creation and strengthening of promoters or change agents for local sustainable initiatives for the region, as well as the further promotion of programs for sustainable development education. It is also important to set quantitative targets/indicators to measure the impact of local environment initiatives, as seen in China in its undertaking of Green GDP efforts.
13. Environmental elements should be further mainstreamed in major sectoral policies. For example, UNESCAP has been promoting the concept of “Green Growth,” by which economic

instruments would be promoted along with regulatory, voluntary, and other measures. Another good example is the promotion of the 3Rs in various countries in the region, which is intended to meet both economic and environmental needs.

14. Countries in the region are diverse in terms of cultures, environment, economies, and political systems, which has made collaboration in the region challenging. However, it is beneficial to share lessons learned through good practices and to build partnerships in the region. Initiating an award for good practices on sustainable development can be a good incentive and therefore will be considered.

Session III: For Promoting Collaboration in the Asia and Pacific Countries

15. Japan's presentation on the proposed Eco-Action Partnership for Asia was well-received by the meeting and participants emphasized that its potential to bring about sustainable development would be enhanced by acting in partnership with existing initiatives and networks. In this respect, synergy with the Seoul Initiative Network on Green Growth should be further explored. Further, potential cooperation with major regional economic fora such as APEC should be examined. Participants emphasized the need to work out implementation mechanisms for this Eco-Action Partnership for Asia.

16. Further collaboration should be promoted to strengthen appropriate frameworks for regional/sub-regional environmental monitoring, early warning systems, and research activities, all of which will facilitate timely actions to deal with environmental crises and to rehabilitate degraded environments. A common platform for the sharing of global observation systems and decision-making support systems is strongly recommended, because this will facilitate the creation of innovative policies for sustainability in the region.

17. Capacity building for sustainability will continue to be key for this region. In consideration of this, the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development provides important opportunities. Future actions should focus on joint development of an Asia-Pacific learning space for sustainable development, based on the Regional Centres of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development as well as an international inter-disciplinary academic network. Such future actions can contribute in coherent and concrete ways to the strengthening of cross-border postgraduate courses in sustainable development, courses on sustainable development in business schools in Asia and the Pacific, and on-the-job training in sustainable development and environmental leadership.

18. Promotion of international trade that is based on sound material cycles is considered important to realize further resource efficiency. At the same time, it should be emphasized that prevention of trans-boundary movement of hazardous waste should be strengthened in

accordance with relevant international agreements. The 3R Initiative is expected to play a key role in achieving such goals. At the same time proper management of solid waste should be promoted, particularly in large cities in the region.

19. Renewable energy, cleaner energy supply, and more efficient energy consumption should be promoted more extensively to enable development that is sustainable while assuring future energy security. Such energy could be introduced under the CDM.
20. Promotion of biofuels deserves special attention, insofar as biofuels can be produced locally, providing employment opportunities while reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Care should be taken to address potential conflicts between, for example, energy production and food production.
21. Region-wide knowledge management schemes for collaboration among all stakeholders, such as the Clean Air Initiative for Asian Cities, UNEP's Environment Knowledge Hub, and APFED's Good Practices Database, should be further developed. Experiences and information on successful initiatives should be better disseminated and utilized.
22. ECO Asia could play a role in facilitating policy dialogue for the region while providing opportunities to policy leaders of the region to strengthen their partnership for more effective and efficient environmental actions. Future collaboration to promote action-oriented partnerships for the Asia-Pacific region is a point deserving further consideration.