

**ASIA-PACIFIC FORUM FOR ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT
THIRD SUBSTANTIVE MEETING**
25-26 January 2003
Guilin, People's Republic of China

**Chairperson's Summary of the Expert Meeting
on
Integrated Approach to Managing Urbanization
with Particular Emphasis on Sustainable Land Use**

1. The Asia-Pacific Forum for Environment and Development's (APFED's) Expert Meeting on Integrated Approach to Managing Urbanization with Particular Emphasis on Sustainable Land Use was held on 23 January 2003 at the Sheraton Guilin Hotel in Guilin, People's Republic of China. The meeting was attended by approximately 50 participants including experts in China and other countries, representatives of international organizations as well as three members of APFED. Dr. Qu Geping, APFED member and the Chairman of the Commission for Environment Protection and Resource Conservation, National People's Congress, People's Republic of China (PRC), chaired the meeting.
2. The meeting began with the first session on sustainable and environmentally sound land use with special attention to land degradation. Prof. Zhang Kun, Director-General, the Sino-Japan Friendship Center for Environmental Protection, PRC, chaired the session. After the orientation by the Session Chair, Mr. Katsunori Suzuki, United Nations University/Institute of Advanced Studies (UNU/IAS), presented a regional overview on this topic, followed by country reports by experts from PRC and Mongolia. After comments by two experts, open discussions followed for about 40 minutes.
3. Major issues that were discussed at the first session were linkages between rural and urban areas: pressure from rural to urban migration, need for sustainable rural development, possible contribution by urban dwellers for rural area preservation, etc. The session also discussed a regional overview and national reports from PRC and Mongolia on land degradation and desertification: causes, consequences, severity and their implication for urbanization issues, etc.
4. Major discussions at the first session included:
 - a) The Asia-Pacific Region is facing serious land degradation and desertification problems. Northeast Asia has been facing serious dust and sand storms as a newly emerging problem due to desertification, which has been intensified by human-induced activities.
 - b) Consequences of land degradation and desertification include loss of productive capacity,

- adverse impacts on local economy resulting in so called “environmental refugees”, increase in rural to urban pressure, intensified dust and sand storms. Causes of desertification include natural disasters and human-induced factors such as overgrazing, mismanagement of land, shortened fallow periods, frequent use of heavy machinery, etc.
- c) There were many good practices to tackle land degradation and desertification in PRC, Australia and Mongolia.
 - d) National development planning/rural development planning should be promoted with the aims of poverty alleviation and improvement of quality of life. New rural development options such as eco-tourism should be further developed and promoted. Such planning should be based on scientific knowledge and information, and involve all stakeholders from early stage of planning. Priority on such planning should be put on vulnerable areas where ecological setting is threatened.
 - e) Sub-regional programmes to tackle land degradation and desertification are particularly useful because major problems are similar in the same sub-region.
 - f) Demonstration/pilot projects should urgently be developed and implemented in the field to address desertification, and dust and sand storms. Capacity building, particularly at community level, should receive highest priority. The important role that women play in land use should be duly recognized and emphasized.
 - g) Common indicators, methodologies should be developed to assess land degradation and desertification in different countries. Legal arrangements for both national and international levels, as appropriate, may be effective for developing necessary frameworks.
 - h) Information sharing among international agencies and all stakeholders should be actively promoted, particularly regarding reliable technical options, indigenous knowledge and information on good practices. Such information sharing could be facilitated by using websites and developing brochures. Mass media could also play an important role.
 - i) Appropriate actions should be taken for dust and sand storms, based on appropriate scientific information and knowledge. Data and information through continuous monitoring of dust and sand storms would constitute the basis for considering appropriate actions.

5. The second session on managing urbanization with special attention to urban land use management was chaired by Dr. Hidefumi Imura, Professor, Nagoya University. After the orientation by the Session Chair, Mr. Masakazu Ichimura, Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES), presented a regional overview on this topic, followed by presentations by experts from PRC and Thailand.

6. Major discussions at the second session included:

- a) Urbanization is the dominant demographic trend in the Asia-Pacific region and has been intensified over the last decade. Despite a number of positive impacts on the human and economic development, urbanization causes various problems in towns, cities and countries, via, inter alia a housing shortage, lack of infrastructure, congested traffic and environmental degradation and thus poses serious threat to sustainable development.
- b) Integrated land-use planning should be promoted at different levels to comprehensively address adverse impacts of urbanization, and to enable systematic consideration on broader urban issues, such as land use, infrastructure, financing, governance and

environment. Economic incentives should be applied to implement effectively such planning, in addition to regulatory tools.

- c) A number of obstacles have been observed through past experiences. These include i) flawed or ineffective policies at national and local levels, ii) lack of knowledge, iii) unresponsive and uncoordinated bureaucracies, iv) power of special interest groups, v) corruption and associated cronyism, and vi) weakness and fragmentation of the poor and marginalized.
- d) Efforts to improve urban governance should essentially include strengthening of roles of different stakeholders; promotion of participatory processes; developing effective partnerships; incorporating gender perspective; securing effective empowerment of local government, including greater autonomy in finance and legislation; and reform of bureaucratic structures.
- e) While decentralization in planning authority should be considered, the importance of the national government was reaffirmed in terms of providing legal framework, in particular, to enable integrated urban planning.
- f) A number of emerging tools are being developed for effective urban planning, e.g., geographical information systems (GIS), simulation models, urban information systems and indicators, and market-based land use planning.
- g) Investment requirements of urban infrastructure in the Asia-Pacific region impose enormous demands on fiscal resources. Available options are expanding with the region-wide trend of providing local governments with greater discretion in the levying of taxes, fees and service charges, and of increased reliance on the private sector.
- h) Proactive response to urbanization may provide opportunities for establishing alternative development model with less material- and energy-intensive consumption patterns. Such endeavours include eco-polis in China and eco-city in Japan.

7. Based on the above discussions, the conclusions and recommendations were as follows:

- a) Considering the importance of the urbanization issue in the Asia-Pacific region, it is recommended that APFED should strengthen its work in this field so that the results should be effectively included in its final report.
- b) To this end, APFED could initiate research concerning analysis and evaluation of the past urbanization policies, with regard to reasons for their successes and failures and develop a proposal for changes and adjustments. Such research may cover policies at international, national, regional and urban levels. Local and national academic institutes and international 'think-tanks' in the region should be involved in this work.
- c) In line with earlier APFED commitments, a new initiative might be undertaken to collect best policy practices (BPP) in the field of urbanization management. Specific focus may be given to strengthening civil society organizations, adjustments for performance improvements in government agencies.
- d) An inventory of capacity building programmes (CBP) would be developed to manage urbanization. Specific emphasis may be placed on land use planning and land use management skills, environmental and socio-economic assessment and methods for stakeholder participation. Opportunities for knowledge and awareness enhancement in politicians, NGOs and women's groups, private sector businesses and mass media should also be highlighted.
- e) In developing BPP and CBP inventories, available resources from ongoing international

programmes should be fully utilized. A network of researchers and research institutions (NetRes) on urbanization, could be established initially with the participants of the present expert meeting, and then expanded to facilitate exchange of information and experiences regarding innovative planning tools and methodologies, in particular, strategic environmental assessment techniques.

8. The participants expressed their gratitude for the chair, session chairs and the organizers of the Expert Meeting and called on APFED to consider and further elaborate the meeting's output in its deliberations.