

APFED/01/Org/Doc. 2
(EPF/Prep/Doc.2/Rev. 2)
October 14, 2001

The Asia-Pacific Forum for Environment and Development
Draft Terms of Reference

Background

The past decades have seen significant degradation of the environment and ongoing depletion of environmental resources in Asia and the Pacific region. Air pollution levels in urban areas have been increasing. Freshwater contamination is commonly observed and both long-term and short-term water shortages have been occurring. The degraded land area of the region at present constitutes about 851 million ha, or 25% of total land area. Furthermore, 50% of the region's forest base has already disappeared.

Poverty also constitutes a threat to sustainable development in the region. The region's poverty issue is marked by two distinct factors: magnitude and diversity. Approximately 800 million, or 70% of the world's poor people, live in this region, which holds about twice as many people as the rest of the developing world combined.

Poverty patterns differ greatly from area to area. While the number of people living in absolute poverty has decreased in East Asia, numbers for the rest of the region are increasing. South Asia, in particular, suffers from the same level of serious poverty as that of sub-Saharan Africa. In addition to differences among these sub-regions, significant differences exist among counties and even among areas within countries.

This is not to suggest that development-related indicators are all negative. It is fair to say that some progress in these areas has been made. Indeed, in the second half of the 20th century, human society achieved development on an unprecedented scale. However, it has been painfully slow. To make matters worse, the fruits of growth are spread unevenly. Accordingly, inequality between the rich and the poor has been widening.

Socio-economic changes, such as population growth, migration, and demographic shifts (e.g., shifts in age distribution within societies) occurring in the region contribute to the worsening of these environmental and social issues. New issues have also emerged over the past few years, including globalization. Technological innovation, including information and communication technologies (ICT), is making the world smaller and smaller. Furthermore, new attempts are found in policy responses to conventional pollution issues such as industrial pollution.

These observations and figures call into question our current actions and future directions. We thus need to rethink the framework underlying our decisions and actions taken to date. We must reexamine whether the efforts undertaken at various levels and

sectors in the region are on the right track, heading toward our ultimate goal of sustainable development, or instead heading toward a dead end. We must also restructure existing frameworks, establish clear targets, and set a course of action.

Objectives, Scope, and Key Issues

The Forum was established to accept the challenges of addressing critical issues such as these, of proposing a new development framework that will lead to greater equitability and sustainability, and of proposing actions recommended for all relevant stakeholders in the region.

The Forum will discuss major constraints in Asia and the Pacific region. The Forum will examine and develop a framework of sustainable development with a long-term perspective, looking to the year 2025 and beyond. The scope of deliberation includes social aspects in addition to economic and environmental ones. In its deliberations, the Forum will pay careful attention to the environmental, economic, and social diversity of the region.

Forum deliberations should also pay special attention to the significance of newly emerging issues. These issues include technological innovation such as ICT and globalization. Notable potential benefits of ICT include reducing environmental impacts; enabling of more precise environmental monitoring; enhancing awareness by and coalition of relevant stakeholders; and promoting participation of relevant stakeholders in the decision-making processes. The relationship between globalization and the diverse nature of the region should also be taken into consideration.

Newly emerging attempts in policy responses to conventional pollution are also to be discussed. These attempts include increased use of renewable energy, integrated environmental and economic accounting, and re-cycle based industrial activities.

Capacity building in policy formulation and implementation, and regional cooperation in this regard are also points for discussion. Local and regional issues within the global context should be taken note of. Partnership with the private sector is an important issue in relation to the mobilization of finance.

Efforts to date regarding development and poverty alleviation, as well as perspectives

for the future based on these experiences, would give the Forum a new conceptual basis with regard to sustainable development as well as establish a way forward toward mid- and long-term sustainable development goals. Such a new way should be of comprehensive and feasible nature.

In its consideration of these viewpoints, the key discussion points of the Forum could include the following items. The key issues to be addressed by the Forum will be further discussed, prioritized and agreed upon at the 1st Substantive Meeting.

- Perspectives on environmental and socio-economic profiles in the region
- Economic growth, industrialization and sound management of environmental resources, in particular freshwater resources
- Rural development, urbanization, and environment
- Poverty eradication for sustainable development, including development of a comprehensive and feasible plan for actions
- Technological innovation, adequate transfer and environment
- International economic relations and environment
- Decision support systems for environment and development, including environmental governance
- Capacity building, raising public awareness and thereby mobilization of stakeholders toward sustainable development
- Interlinkages among international environmental conventions; and
- Regional and international cooperation to reduce gaps in human and financial resources and to strengthen institutional frameworks in the region

Effective Dialogues and Scientific Foundation

Sustainable development is multi-dimensional, involving many environmental, social, and economic factors. Environmental and socio-economic conditions in the region differ from sub-region to sub-region and from country to country. The venue of the Forum meetings will be selected to reflect the diverse nature of the region into the Forum deliberations.

No fruitful outcome can be envisaged without the incorporation of perspectives of all relevant stakeholders. The Forum will employ strategies to ensure a constructive flow of facts, ideas, and experiences to and from the Forum.

In the course of Forum deliberations, multi-stakeholder meetings will be held, as appropriate, to provide the opportunity both to receive information first-hand and to disseminate Forum deliberations directly. Relevant strategies would also include maximum use of recent technological innovation, such as the Internet.

In charting new, long-term courses for action for the regional community, Forum proposals and recommendations will be based upon the clear recognition and understanding of the inter-relationships between a number of crucial issues.

To this end, the Forum will review already-existing studies, reports, and plans of action relevant to its deliberations. To widen further the foundation of information and knowledge on which Forum deliberations are based, expert meetings will be held, as appropriate, on the occasion of Forum meetings.

The members of the Forum all serve in their own personal capacity, not as representatives of their governments, home agencies, or other affiliations. Thus, the Forum as a body is free to address any issues, free to formulate and present any views or recommendations, and free to present any proposals it deems appropriate.

Reporting

The Forum will present its messages on the most pressing issues in the region to the World Summit on Sustainable Development in September 2002. The Forum will complete its work by 2004 and present a report to the world community at relevant occasions, including the next ESCAP Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific in 2005.

A timetable of Forum undertakings is under separate development.