

Asia Regional Seminar for Sustainable Resource Management
10 March 2009
Tokyo, Japan

Co-Chairs' Summary

Introduction

1. The Asia Regional Seminar for Sustainable Resource Management was held in Tokyo, Japan on March 10th, 2009. It was co-organised by the Ministry of the Environment of Japan, United Nations Environment Programme and Asia - Pacific Forum for Environment and Development (APFED). The seminar was attended by the members of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) International Panel for Sustainable Resource Management, APFED members, senior governmental officials from eleven participating countries from Asia namely Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam, and seven international organizations namely the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Secretariat of the Basel Convention (SBC), Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD), UNEP, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the United Nations Economic Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), and prominent experts on the 3Rs and sustainable resource management.
2. The seminar was co-chaired by Dr. Anna Bella Siriban-Manalang, Mr. Hideyuki Mori, Dr. George Varughese, and Prof. Cielito Habito.
3. The participants had intensive discussions based on the opening remarks, keynote speeches and presentations in accordance with the Programme. Throughout the discussions, they have underscored the importance on sustainable resource management as priority policy agenda, and examined the diverse issues associated with sustainable resource management, the 3Rs and waste-related issues. They have also elaborated the global nature and concern of resource-related issues and reviewed field level good practices for promoting sustainable resource management in the context of pursuing sustainable development.
4. This Co-chair Summary is intended to highlight further the thrust of discussions and the views broadly shared among the participants on key issues related to sustainable resource management at the Seminar.

“Decoupling of economic development and environmental degradation” and
“prioritization of products and resources from an environmental sustainability point of view”

5. Benefits of improving resource productivity and efficiency

Decoupling of environmental impact from economic growth is a key for sustainable development in Asia. In the context of Asia, resource efficiency in industrial production and resource sufficiency in consumption provide important perspectives in promoting decoupling.

Understanding material flows is an essential element for the fine tuning of policy efforts to achieve the goals of sustainable resource management.

6. Most important categories of resources, consumption and product groups in terms of sustainable development

For the prioritization of products categories, it is important to understand energy use and materials toxicity in the products. Materials including waste, water and energy are the important resource categories for sustainable resource management in Asia and Pacific. In this context, efficient use of the resources should be linked to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). For rapidly industrializing Asian economies, policy makers should give more attention to the linkages between infrastructure development and sustainable resource management.

7. Policy instruments for decoupling economic development from environmental degradation

Facing the recent economic crisis, the governments should regard this as an opportunity for green growth through governmental interventions including policy coordination at the regional level. Such intervention should be combined with innovative policy instruments, regulatory, economic and voluntary instruments for price adjustment/stabilization of resources and market creation for new businesses. Multi-stakeholder involvement is vital for the success to realize the changes intended by such policy interventions. However, the evaluation and guidance concerning policy instruments for resource productivity and sustainable resource management are vital to improve policy rectitude for better outcomes.

Metal resources and recycling

8. Challenges and benefits of metal resource recycling

Metal recycling has a clear benefit in terms of environmental issues associated with mining and waste generation and a response to resource scarcity which are challenges faced by fast growing Asian economy. However, there are needs for further examination of the social and economic challenges to make metal recycling sustainable. Since most of developing Asia still needs to take stock of metals to meet further the need for developing infrastructures, the longer-life and stable use of resources should be promoted.

9. Metal resource recycling and virgin resource extraction

To overcome price fluctuation associated with metal markets and to make metal recycling contributing to the sustainable resource management, there are needs for tuning resource price and associated market mechanisms right by internalizing externalities as well as through better valuation of resources such as primary resource tax. In view of the implementability, however, much thought should be given to possibilities to promote other systems such as the take-back system, the deposit and refund system.

10. Stakeholder collaboration for sustainable metal resource management

For the sustainable resource management, various stakeholders such as local governments, IGOs, private sectors, consumers, and communities should play a major role. They must work

more proactively to overcome social and economic challenges associated with metal recycling along with the introduction of integrated policy instruments including both regulatory and economic ones to make economic incentives for supporting environmentally sound recycling of wastes including metals.

Biomass-use and biofuels

11. Challenges and issues associated with biomass utilization

Biomass energy production can ease growing concern over energy security, shortage, and climate change and rural poverty to some extent. However, it must be admitted that the energy supply that can be expected from the biomass sources would not exceed 10 per cent of the total energy demand.

For such a reason, policies for biomass production should be assessed vis-à-vis energy conservation and efficiency improvement that will achieve energy saving to the greater level compared with the supplementation of energy supply by biomass.

Nevertheless, there is still uncultivated biomass that could be turned into energy source. Slash and burn has been undertaken as traditional practice in rural areas to clear expediently paddy field and produce fertilizer. To capitalize upon agricultural residue as a source of biomass for energy production, it is important to understand the rational, belief and practice of local people, and to influence their perception.

12. Biofuels production and environmental sustainability

In term of efficiency in energy production, photovoltaic and wind power generation are far better than biomass. In planning biomass power generation, technology options must be assessed in a holistic viewpoint based on the lifecycle assessment of resource requirement and energy productivity.

13. Desirable direction of technological innovation

Research and development should be promoted to explore the wider application of the 2nd and 3rd generation biofuel.

Biotechnology can provide new policy options for developing renewable energy. Yet, their long-term impacts need to be assessed comprehensively and a precautionary approach must be applied to avoid irreversible damages to ecosystems and the environment.

Waste to energy biogas production is another way to explore. Yet, consideration must be given to ensure that the minimization of waste must be a prevailing guiding principle.

Key cross-cutting perspectives

14. Key cross-cutting issues identified in the discussions over three agenda items, the following aspects were further discussed and noted.

14-1 Getting price and market right for decoupling (Internalizing externalities, better valuation of resources)

It is not easy to set an optimal price for resources in practice due to the political resistance and technical difficulties. A certain political decision may be required to uplift the price for resources to overcome such conundrums in a way that is socially and economically acceptable. At the same time, in order to set a price at the justifiable level, efforts should continue to be made for valuating and internalizing externalities in the price of resources. The appropriate reflection of externalities including economic and social costs in the resource price is the first step to transform a market that is conducive to promoting sustainable resource management.

14-2 Developing national and regional markets for better environmental performance in resource use and management,

To reduce the cost of processing recyclables in environmentally sound manner, the formation of proper market for recyclables must be developed at the local, national and regional levels.

14-3 Optimizing food, ecosystem services and energy in developing biofuel,

As Asia and the Pacific continue to face the constraint of land space and land use conflicts, it is important to maintain optimal balance among food, biodiversity and energy in developing policies and plans for biofuel production.

14-4 Promoting concerted policy actions internationally,

An institutional structure should be further forged particularly at the regional level for Asia and the Pacific with a view to promote effective governance for sustainable resource management and promote concerted actions. The Government of Japan and other relevant international organizations such as ADB, UNEP, and ADB should play an important role in such a process. Support was expressed on the proposal presented by the Government of Japan earlier to establish the Regional 3R forum in Asia. Such a forum should be multi-stakeholder in nature and not be limited to the inter-governmental representation.

To promote concerted actions regionally and internationally, it is important to seek synergies among various initiatives referring to the 3Rs, resource efficiency, sustainable resource management and sustainable production and consumption pattern with a broader objective of sustainable development such as green growth or green economy.

Furthermore, there is a need to integrate consideration of the encompassing concerns of biodiversity, food and fuel into the many initiatives such as 3R, sustainability development, cleaner production, total quality environmental management and others into a whole at the regional level and promote the understanding of such across Asian countries.

14-5 Embodying policies in local actions

Translation of macro-policy into local actions remains vital. Mechanisms to support local actions should be strengthened. Local governments' initiatives should be further promoted.

Demonstrative local actions should be undertaken in order to promote the sharing of good practice on sustainable resource management particularly in Asia and the Pacific that are not yet properly documented and shared as useful knowledge.