

## CITIES WORKSHOP

### INTRODUCTION

The discussions of the sustainable cities working group took place against an increasingly stark reality: urbanization, already at an extraordinary level, will only intensify as the economies of the Asia Pacific region continue to grow. Early in the next century, East Asia will be home to most of the world's largest cities, possessing all of the characteristics of the world's current megacities: pollution, crime and strained public infrastructure systems.

In terms of addressing these issues, and deciding where to focus the group's energies, the group agreed that it would be most appropriate to spend time thinking about the root of the problem. Unsustainable cities are merely a symptom; they are the product of poor decisions and earlier mismanagement. If these sorts of core issues can be addressed, only then can we hope for more sustainable cities and societies.

To begin accessing these issues, the group was asked by the chair to outline what they saw as the general objectives of our discussions. Some argued that what is needed is an expanded awareness of the possible directions in which we, as increasingly interdependent countries and societies, could choose. The general public, it was thought, is not necessarily aware that there are alternatives to the status quo. Insofar as we try to arrive at alternatives, it was added that we should attempt to address the basic needs of all people, such as housing, welfare, employment and personal security. Finally, it was also noted that what was needed was a clearer understanding of the link between economic development and social issues.

In identifying some of the specific issues and problems, the group highlighted the following: population pressures; push and pull factors in migration (urbanization); consumption patterns; and issues of governance, such as transparency, power balances and how to relate to the decision-making structure.

### Establishing a Guiding Set of Principles

In order to organize and direct our thinking, the group focused on defining a set of principles (or 'values'). Insofar as our values help govern our behaviour, it was thought that defining (or reminding ourselves of) a set of values that would encourage sustainability would be a useful starting point. Suggested values included:

- **People First** --- This involves putting the basic needs of all people at the centre of development priorities and planning. Not only does this speak to issues like governance, but it makes us ask more fundamental questions about the purposes of economic growth and ensuring the basic rights of all. This suggestion was not without debate. There were some who thought that, by putting the needs of people first, we run the risk of ignoring the needs of other species. As a response, it was thought that the word 'habitat' might be better.