

to place limits on Asian growth?

That is just China, one example. And in questions of sustainable development the defining feature of Asia-Pacific is its diversity. The region contains very poor countries and rich ones too. Some are resource-rich and fuel-abundant, others resource-importers and energy-short. Several are densely populated; a few are only sparsely settled. All of these variables imply different interests, different values--different preferences in choosing trade-offs between economic growth, poverty relief, energy consumption, resource depletion, environmental degradation.

Then there are the intricate interconnections between sustainable-development issues and other regional policy issues. Achieving economic growth rates sufficient to sustain rising populations. The security threat of environmental scarcities leading to violence within or between states. The freedom of citizens in civil society to articulate their own interests in clean water, a stable fishery, or soil conservation--and to influence government policy. Or the presence of indigenous communities robust enough to share the benefits of economic growth while preserving the promise of sustainable forests and biodiversity.

Even so, one generalization is allowed: In virtually every Asia-Pacific country (as in Canada) there are habits and policies of growth that are simply unsustainable. For instance, in only 30 years fully half of Thailand's forest cover has been lost--and with it, an inestimable biodiversity, the precious capacity to store carbon dioxide, and protection against ruinous soil erosion. To cite another case, the Yellow Sea between China and South Korea is now listed among the "dying seas" of the world. Coastal industrialization, domestic sewage and offshore oil spills are to blame. But inadequate compliance even with existing environmental policies in both countries prevails against improvement.

Two implications begin to emerge from such examples. First, correcting past mistakes and instituting truly sustainable development often means fixing the dislocation between costs and benefits. If Canadians expect Thais and Chinese and Koreans to adopt sustainable environmental and economic strategies--and Canadians share the global benefits--are Canadians willing to share the costs? Is the present generation of Canadians, or Asians, prepared to invest in benefits to be enjoyed only by future generations? Finding ways of reallocating these costs and benefits, so that everyone has some stake in success, is one of the riddles of solving sustainable-development problems.

The second implication in the examples is that international action is nearly always necessary. Canadian loons in the Maritimes are ingesting mercury airborne from Eurasia (and from the United States, it should be added). South Koreans and Japanese suffer appalling air pollution from Northern China. The squalor of Manila or Jakarta cannot be eradicated by Filipinos or Indonesians alone. It has been estimated that APEC's Asian members would have to invest an additional \$42 billion (U.S.) every year to achieve sustainable growth by 2000; most of that could be financed by their own growth, but not all. Keeping in mind the benefits that Canadians stand to gain, what should Canadians contribute to Asia-Pacific's sustainable development?