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SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE USE IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC A major policy challenge



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Abstract: While growth in global resource use and emissions was until recently driven by wealthy industrial countries, today's main drivers are the rapidly developing economies of Asia. The presentation focuses on natural resources both as drivers and as consequences of economic activity and social development, and highlights the recent history of natural resource use in the Asia-Pacific region, covering the period from 1970 to 2005, which has been a time of unprecedented economic development in many countries in the region. The rapid growth in economic activity experienced by many Asia-Pacific countries since the 1970s has come at some cost, however, with an increased use of resources resulting in greater environmental pressures, greenhouse gas emissions, and consumer waste.

The current transition in developing Asian economies from an agrarian, biomass based resource use pattern to an industrial resource use pattern involves a major increase in material and energy flows, corresponding to a two- to fourfold increase in the demand for materials and energy. Despite rapid economic growth during the last decade, the Asia Pacific region still shows relatively low material and energy consumption per capita, suggesting that major growth may follow.

At the same time, many Asian developing economies are already approaching their limits in terms of domestically available resources, and have become net importers of raw materials, especially fossil fuels and metals. Future economic development will rely increasingly on their capacity to purchase these strategic resources on the world market, and prices for many strategic resources may increase.

Because Asia Pacific developing economies are already planning to establish new infrastructure over the next decade there is a short window of opportunity to invest in resource efficiency that will have a lasting effect over the next 20-30 years to come. It will require well designed policies to guide Asia and the Pacific towards more sustainable development.

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