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ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK

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State of the
Environment in
Asia and the Pacific



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PREFACE

The 1990s can be viewed, among other things, as both a time for looking forward to the twenty-first century with anticipation and hope, and for reviewing the achievements and the failures of humankind during the preceding decades. During the last two decades the Asian and Pacific region recorded a much higher growth rate than that of other regions of the world. It has also become increasingly clear, however, that the rapid pace of development in the region has been accompanied by widespread overexploitation of environmental resources and by more frequent and severe instances of acute pollution. In a way, these factors have lowered the quality of life, even though development is providing the resources to enhance it. Governments in the region are moving to address these issues in accordance with their own priorities and international situations. There is a need for an overview, however, which is provided by 5-yearly state of the environment reports such as the present one, to allow progress to be charted, to identify regional trends which may not be apparent on a national basis, and to allow critical issues to be identified and addressed. Identifying these trends and issues assists in promoting opportunities for regional cooperation which has a vital role in ESCAP and ADB's core mission of providing support to sustain economic development in the region. The mission is carried out through various programmes such as technical and financial assistance, implementing and supporting projects and by undertaking activities which facilitate regional cooperation.

The 5-yearly State of the Environment reports provide a collected series of statistics and trends which indicate the aggregate effect of development on the environment across the region. They also illustrate successful local, national or regional initiatives which may be usefully transferred to other parts of the region, and identify the key areas in which urgent action is needed, particularly in regard to international collaborative efforts. The current report benefits from the improvement in the collection and reporting of environmental statistics within the region during the last five years. It is hoped that the utility of this report would add impetus to the compilation of such data and help further in charting the course towards environmentally sound and sustainable development.

The 1995 report on the State of the Environment in Asia and the Pacific, strikes a somber note of environmental degradation, but it also has room for optimism. The process initiated during this decade to minimize the burden of the past still offers not only hope but also provides possibilities of meeting this challenge effectively, if not totally, with the development of new political will and the vast array of resources and tools that humankind has developed during the current century. The concept of sustainable development, as proposed by the Brundtland Commission's report, "Our Common Future", and elaborated by Agenda 21, is now universally accepted as the basis of all future development-environment relationships, and any deviations in this regard could jeopardise not only the sustainability of the development process but also the human survival at large. The findings in the present report confirm these observations and point to the urgency of the need to move in the right direction.

The rapidly changing demographic, economic and environmental conditions in Asia and the Pacific make this report highly relevant to the planning process for sustainable development in the region. It should assist in the formulation of sustainable development policies at the national, sub-regional and regional levels. Being a regional report, it cannot claim to cover all aspects of the environment-development nexus in detail. Nevertheless, the report has probably assembled more information on factors and forces influencing the environment and the prospects for sustainable development in the region than ever before. It offers a reasonably clear view of the prevailing situation, identifies the challenges that the nations of the region will face in the future and should prove to be a beneficial tool for policy makers.

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