

2008 Asia – Pacific Leadership Programme
On Environment for Sustainable Development

Tongji University, Shanghai, China
Sept 15th – 20th, 2008

<http://www.rrcap.unep.org/leadership/ptcp.cfm>

Dear all

This is to share with you some reflections from my recent visit to China, as I participated in this years' Asia – Pacific Leadership Programme on Environment for Sustainable Development, held from 15th to 20th September in Tongji Institute of Environment for Sustainable Development, Shanghai, China.

This programme is designed every year for young professionals from Asia and Pacific region. It is a joint venture of United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), Regional Office for Asia Pacific (ROAP), Tongji Institute of Environment for Sustainable Development (IESD) and Hanns Seidel Stiftung. The programme is being successfully conducted for young leaders/ mid career professionals for the last 5 years starting from 2004. Approximately 100 participants from 40 countries in Asia – Pacific region benefited from this programme so far.

The Asia Pacific Leadership Programme aims to improve the overall thinking and decision making abilities of young and emerging leaders working with government organizations, NGOs and private enterprises in the Asia - Pacific Region, direct and guide them to take into account the balance between environment and sustainable development in decision making and foster their insight, enabling them to coordinate factors of human, environment and sustainable development while dealing with complex rather demanding practical problems.

This years' programme was dynamic and different from the previous years in many respects as, this year only mid career professionals having background in the fields of environment and economics were invited. Unlike the previous years where the programme lasted for 10 days, this year the programme duration was 6 days. The time span indeed was limited for developing complete understanding and grasp on the complex but interesting issues of human, environment and sustainable development practically faced by people in *economically developing countries* of Asia and Pacific Region.

During the inaugural session we were informed that UNEP received a total of 320 applications for participation while only 28 applicants were finally selected. The youngest participant of all was of 24 years of age while the oldest was of 45 years. The variance in age shows that we were sharing knowledge of almost 20 years.

Some reflections of the programme content hopefully doesn't make my piece boring.

All the participants were divided into five sub regional groups i.e. Central Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia and South Pacific, clipped together based on their country of origin. The Tongji University also invite their newly inducted class of Masters' and PhD programmes of Environmental Studies every year along with the participants for the leadership programme. Therefore the inauguration of leadership

programme is accredited as the mega event of UNEP and its partners for the last five years.

The programme was designed in such a way that it focused on exploring leadership skills among the young and mid career professionals by imparting detailed modules on human dimensions, environment and economy thus covering all the basic elements of society environment and economy. Two days field visit to the Shuzhou city (the city known as the Paradise on Earth) gave us the opportunity to examine issues of sustainable development while planning a model city and reflect upon the lessons learnt from practical perspective. The element that was most emphasized during the programme was that the individuals can have same goals but their perspective can differ while achieving the goals. This difference in perspective is bound to ones' own needs, circumstances, external forces and preferences. A true leader is the one who takes along systematic thinking keeping into consideration the essential elements of human, environment and economic development. Peace of mind body and soul is essential while making decisions. Difference of opinion is in fact considered positive for development.

The course compiled by a day long pyramid exercise in which some common issues were highlighted by the members in each sub region and then synthesis was drawn revolving around the common issues. The common issues were defined against Nature (N), Society (S), Economy (E) and Well being (W). The four directions of the globe i.e North (N)/Nature, South (S)/ Society, East (E)/ Economy and West (W)/ Well being were given to us as reference points. Therefore leaders have to make decisions that entail all the directions/ elements of sustainable development. The issues were defined in terms of their prevailing trend and indicators in our region. As for South Asia our group was very open while discussing the issues in our countries and while defining strategies for improvement we were thinking in terms of our geographical boundaries. We devised strategies for our region. Finally the capstones were defined by each subgroup as a key learning that should be taken forward as a result of this programme. The programme served as a bridge for me to network with other professionals from different countries of Asia and Pacific. This network established during the programme will remain in contact and we will be coordinating over certain issues and discussions in future as well.

The warm welcome and care given to us by the Chinese people, UNEP coordinators and volunteers made us feel at home. Apart from learning, tours to the Eco-city exhibition, Shuzhou Museum and gardens also served for recreation. After the days' hectic routine we enjoyed, roaming about in the busy streets, malls and markets of Shanghai and Shuzhou city and dine outs with the participants and resource persons. This programme not only gave me an international exposure but also brought the realization that linkages and networks are essential while achieving a common goal. I am thankful to LEAD for nominating me for this programme and would like to encourage all my young colleagues to apply for this programme next year around July-2009.