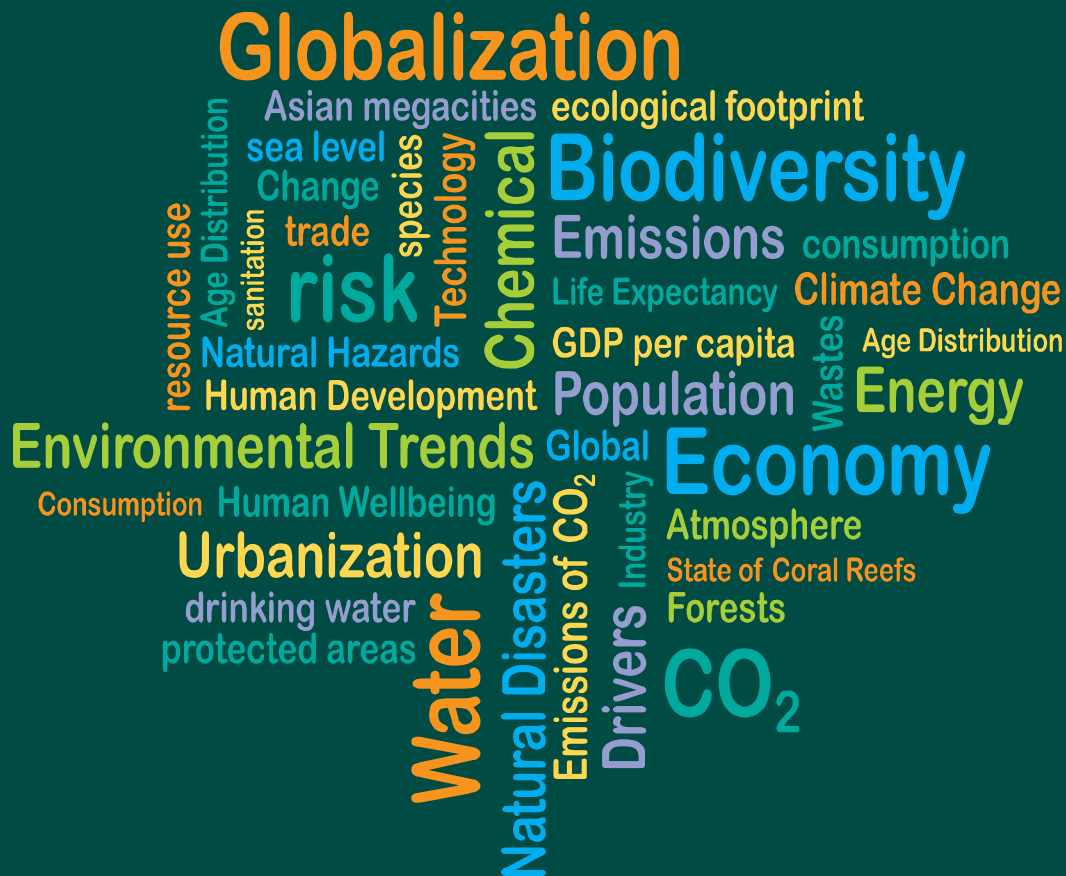


KEEPING TRACK

of our changing environment
in Asia and the Pacific



UNEP

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KEEPING TRACK OF OUR CHANGING ENVIRONMENT IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

FROM RIO TO RIO +20 (1992-2012)



FOREWORD

Over the last quarter of a century, Asia Pacific as a region has enjoyed rapid economic growth, which has dramatically reduced the number of poor people and improved human development. However, there is a large unfinished agenda. While the region is less poor, it is also more unequal and is still home to half of the world's poor. There is social and economic inequality between subregions, between countries and within countries, between the rural areas and cities and within the cities where over 1.6 billion people now live.

The rapid economic growth has also often come at the expense of environmental degradation that not only undermines the long term sustainability of growth, but also has an immediate impact on people, most notably through air pollution, water contamination and scarcity, chemicals in soils and food and the significant health impact that these have. And to compound this, climate change is expected to magnify existing vulnerabilities throughout the region, especially in the small islands of the Pacific and the low lying coastal areas and deltas.

This is the underlying message from this UNEP report: *Keeping Track of Our Changing Environment in Asia and the Pacific*, a unique scientific and indicator-based assessment report produced by UNEP, with contributions from experts and UNEP National Focal Points from the region. The report analyzes emerging and persistent development and environmental challenges in the region. The report also traces the patterns of economic development and resource use and degradation since 1992 when leaders from countries around the globe made their commitment to sustainable development at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

What this report clearly demonstrates is that tackling resource use and efficiency, promoting sustainable energy production and access, halting depletion of natural capital, and eliminating air and water contamination are not simply environmental concerns, but a vital part of the region's aspirations for inclusive growth. Confronting these challenges with the same intensity as the region tackled poverty over the past two decades is the only way to ensure sustained and sustainable growth.

I hope the findings of the report provide a valuable benchmark for countries in the region which are in the process of developing the post-2015 global development agenda and sustainable development goals. Bringing about the transformation in finance, policy and action for an inclusive green economy is our biggest collective challenge in the next stage of our development in Asia and the Pacific. UNEP is committed to be a partner in the process.

Kaveh Zahedi

Regional Director and Representative
for Asia and the Pacific
United Nations Environment Programme

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INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE

Keeping Track of Our Changing Environment in Asia and the Pacific was conceived to illustrate how the region has changed in two decades since decision-makers met at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio De Janeiro in 1992. To convey this information in a compelling and succinct manner, environmental and related socio-economic trends are charted and presented using globally, regionally and nationally-aggregated data sets collected by international agencies, research bodies and other official entities. This regional publication was produced following the structure of the global **Keeping Track of Our Changing Environment report**.

In this regional report, major economic, environmental, social and technological trends are shown through numerically-based graphs, with their upward, downward or stable trend lines as dictated by the data. While most of these trends speak for themselves, short explanations of the phenomena observed are also provided for further elucidation. Also included are a number of illustrative “before and after” satellite images, primarily covering the same time period of 1992-2012 and showing environmental changes at the local level. In some cases, impacts are ongoing.

SCOPE & METHODOLOGY

Most of the time-series data were collected directly from countries and aggregated to national, regional and

are based had to be global and regional in coverage – that is, covering all or at least most countries in Asia and the Pacific so as to represent the entire region and not only selected countries. Third, the data had to be clearly sourced from authoritative and reliable institutions with extensive experience in the thematic areas treated in each case.

To ensure reliability, indicator charts are only presented for areas where all three requirements are met. For thematic areas where one or another of the criteria was not met (i.e. freshwater, chemicals and waste, land degradation and biodiversity indicators) any analysis might not be reliable and so trends are not provided.

The implications of any shortcomings in the data are clear. To promote evidence-based environmental policies and actions, the underlying data needed to support sound decision-making must be part of the equation and be of proven scientific quality. Today, there are several reasons why the quality of international statistics varies greatly. First, statistics may not be available at the national level; second, the statistics that are collected may be of poor quality or outdated; and third, the comparability of statistics over time and between countries inherently presents challenges. These deficiencies and issues demonstrate the need for a comprehensive data and information system to optimally support the vast array of related policy, scientific, technical, methodological and practical issues.

Thus, a comprehensive capability is needed at the global

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