The State of the Environment in Asia and the Pacific 2000 is the fourth in a series of reports published every five years on environmental trends in the region. It reviews the dynamics of the region’s environmental conditions and the status of national and regional response to the changing environmental situation. Its objective is to provide a general evaluation of the quality of environment and emerging sustainable development trends, so that major issues can be brought to the attention of governments, intergovernmental organizations, the private sector, non-governmental and community-based organizations and other public interest groups in the region.

While providing a series of statistics on environmental conditions and trends and emerging issues, the present report critically analyses the aggregate effect of policy response on environment and sustainable development across the region. It also illustrates successful local, national, regional and international initiatives and best practices which may be usefully replicated both inside and outside the region. Finally, the report identifies key challenges and areas in which urgent action is needed, particularly in regard to regional and international collaboration efforts.

The report strikes a sombre note on environmental degradation in eroded croplands, falling water tables, declining forests and biodiversity, and increased pollution. Apart from this gloomy scenario, the positive trends are the decline in birth rates, increased life expectancy, improved nutritional and poverty levels, growing awareness and public participation and the enhanced role of governments and the private sector in the promotion of sustainable development. The principal environmental challenges in the twenty-first century are promoting growth while safeguarding natural resources, promoting eco-efficiency, countering the negative effects of globalization and enhancing public participation while empowering communities to become custodians of the environment.

An important lesson that can be discerned from the report is that environmental initiatives in the Asian and Pacific region cannot be effective unless they are implemented in the context of development policies. Failure to consider the environmental implications of developments in agriculture, urbanization and industrialization is having serious environmental consequences. Overpopulation, poverty and difficulties in meeting basic needs are also aggravating factors. Lack of appropriate planning and foresight in the development process will further exacerbate the degradation of the environment.

These interdependent and interconnected environmental challenges for the twenty-first century contain an important inherent message for the countries of the Asian and Pacific region. That message is to broaden the vision of economic growth to the holistic perspective of sustainable development in the new century.

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