

OVERVIEW AND SUMMARY
SNAP SHOT CITIES CASE STUDIES
2001 Mayors' Asia-Pacific Environmental Summit

Session Co-chairs: Mayor Koichi Sueyoshi, Kitakyushu, Japan and Peter Kimm, Executive Director, U.S. - Asia Environmental Partnership

Case Study Presenters:

Mayor Phummasak Hongsyok, Phuket, Thailand

Mayor Shouhai Wang, Wuhan, China

Mayor Koichi Sueyoshi, Kitakyushu, Japan

Abe Malae, CEO, American Samoa Power Authority, Pago Pago

Dr. Prasanna K. Mohanty, Commissioner and Special Officer, Municipal Corporation of Hyderabad, India

The Honorable Ruth Galanter, Councilmember, Los Angeles, California and Adi Liberman, Vice-President, Board of Directors of Heal the Bay, and Chief of Staff to Councilmember Galanter

These sessions addressed practical ways that municipalities can reduce costs through energy and other resource efficiency investments in municipal operations. In addition to saving money, such actions can generate local employment and reduce air pollution. Key issues discussed included the identification of efficiency opportunities, structuring and financing energy efficiency projects, and barriers to implementation.

Studies in the past were focused on proving evidence that urban poverty is a significant contributor to environmental degradation. However, the question of how urban environmental hazards contribute to urban poverty has received less attention. Indeed, for so much of the poor urban population, environmental hazards are among the main causes of ill-health, injury and premature death – health burdens that can be greatly reduced by better environmental management. Their location also makes them vulnerable to asset losses due to flood, earthquakes, and other natural as well as man-made disasters.

One reason why critical poverty-environmental linkages are often overlooked is because the definition of environmental problems has failed to recognize the environmental health problems associated with inadequate provision for water, sanitation, drainage, waste collection and health care since these are no longer among the serious environmental problems in high-income countries. Moreover, common understanding about urban poverty is concentrated on the income-based or consumption-based definitions and has neglected the health, social and environmental aspects of deprivation.

The Snap Shot Cities case studies reflect the premise that “good governance” is at the core of poverty reduction that can be promoted by strong environmental management that meets the basic environmental and health needs of poorer groups. Four case studies of Asia-Pacific cities were prepared: Hyderabad, India; Ebeye, Marshall Islands; Phuket, Thailand, and Wuhan, China. They examined the large range of environmental actions that can not only improve health and contribute to employment generation but also lower costs and reduce the vulnerability of low income groups. They also discussed specific examples of innovation in linking environmental plans and poverty reduction among governments, NGOs, and community-based organizations.

City representatives presented the six case studies in two parallel sessions, and facilitated discussions followed. Highlights from the discussion by respondents and audience:

Member of audience (India): We must get citizens involved in poverty alleviation. Planning by government and NGO involvement are key to the only solution. Mayors must commit themselves to proper governance. Budget should reflect a minimum of 10-12 % spent on poverty alleviation. Information technology has a role to play: the results from Hyderabad must be shared widely with local authorities.

Gallanter: The International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives has many lessons to share. Putting pressure on national governments is essential.

Mohanty: A lot can be done with local public finance. Many third world cities are rich but local bodies are poor. Cities do not collect adequate resources and don't collect them properly. Hyderabad growth in the IT sector has also led to growth in property taxes and impact fees. There must be fees to collect and you must exploit the tax base. Cities have to find their own resources and create the necessary legal regimes.

Margaret Evans (New Zealand): Knowledge and action depends on high quality information. No policy integration is possible unless you understand public participation.

Bill Pondel: Information and technology are key and you must select the appropriate technology. Make sure it is appropriate for local conditions.

Malae: Ebeye is very tiny island compared to the other cities presented here. Certain things can be shared but resources are very limited. We look to bigger places for other resources, e.g., training and other ways to get new knowledge. Networking among cities is important.

Lolita Gibbons: There is too much ignorance of the people that live in the communities. Developing countries also means developing people. Every time you bring a development into a community, you are impacting their lives and that requires adjustment. Remember that the important resources are the people, and then the natural resources the people bank on.

Gallanter: I'm proud to move from government telling people what to do, to getting people involved. Los Angeles imports huge quantities of water. Now all toilets in new houses must use less water. We want to replace old toilets. The most effective way is for utility to buy toilets and have a community NGO explain the needs, offer people a toilet, and ask permission to install the toilet. Now communities are supportive of other programs, e.g. energy efficient refrigerators. Hire local people to do it. Spread the wealth.

John Fish (Marshall Islands): An effort is underway to resettle people back to Rongalep. Community, marine, and ecological studies must be done to rebuild a community in holistic way. We must be respectful of a traditional way of life. This is a chance to build a new community with that respect.

Cinnamon Dornsife (ADB): We must give attention to anti-corruption policies, involve local communities, and provide transparency in budgets. ADB does many things in these areas.

Member of audience (Canada): All communities told us about their "products" -- L.A. sewers, Hyderabad awards, Ebeye community involvement, etc.. We want products of something else-- process. The way you make decisions must be integrated. Mr. Topfer used "integration" ten times in his address. Use integration at the local decision making process.