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# Partners for sustainability

Economic growth is essential for reducing poverty. But rapid economic expansion in the developing world is often associated with environmental degradation. Here in Asia, tremendous growth over the past few decades has put sustainable development at the forefront of the public agenda. People in Asia are now suffering from the huge toll that growth has exacted: vastly diminished mangrove forests, dying coral reefs, the depletion of fisheries, land degradation, alarming levels of air pollution and the extinction of species, just to name a few.

Sustainable growth is key to achieving a poverty-free Asia-Pacific region. But the "grow now, clean up later" approach to development is simply not sustainable. Fortunately, we are now starting to see a shift in political will in Asia to address the environmental consequences of growth. We also see the pri-

ivate sector, especially companies based in Europe, North America and Japan, moving toward greater corporate social and environmental responsibility and accountability.

The conservation community has led the way in building successful frameworks for cooperation with the private sector, but much more can and should be done. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is currently preparing a report titled "Asian Environment Outlook 2005," to be completed early next year, which examines how cooperative approaches can promote environmentally sustainable development.

The report will explore how corporations can improve their environmental performance and accountability, and suggest new business opportunities as the region moves toward a more sustainable pattern of growth. Tremendous scope exists for building part-

nerships among governments, the private sector, the development community and non-government organizations to address environmental sustainability in a collaborative, more effective manner. We are committed to working with our partners to halt environmental degradation.

For example, ADB is working with the Global Environmental Facility and the People's Republic of China to arrest land degradation in north and northwest China. We are working with partners in the Pacific to better manage fish stocks and protect coral reefs, and with partners in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal to improve regional air-quality management. ADB relies on institutions like the World Conservation Union (known as IUCN) and others to complement and build on our development expertise by con-

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tributing specialized knowledge and experience. ADB and IUCN have collaborated on a number of environment and conservation projects over the years. We have just signed a memorandum of understanding that reinforces our partnership, and acknowledges common aims of poverty reduction and environmentally sustainable development.

Both institutions recognize that, given the scale and complexity of the development challenges in the Asia-Pacific region, collaboration is essential to build on mutual strengths and create a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. Institutional collaboration is also fundamental for addressing the challenge of meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the international community's agreed targets for improving global living conditions by 2015. The complex and inter-

related issues of poverty, disease, inequality and environmental degradation require partnerships at all levels to strengthen our performance, and to achieve lasting results.

In addition to forging partnerships, building local capacity is key to progress toward the MDGs. In Asia, there is a need for significant capacity development across most of the sectors essential to MDG achievement. Good governance, institutional capacity and political will must be aggressively pursued in all sectors, including health, agriculture, education and environmental protection.

Another factor central to achieving the MDGs is adequate financial resources. As we all know, foreign direct investment is now much greater than official development assistance in the developing world, especially in Asia. However, we must ensure that private capital flows contribute to sustainable

and equitable economic growth. We must ensure that the level of official development assistance is adequate to reduce poverty and achieve the MDGs. Many of the necessary elements are coming into place. We see a growing commitment among governments to act, greater levels of corporate responsibility, and new models of partnership as exemplified by the ADB-IUCN relationship.

For Asia and the Pacific, eliminating poverty and protecting the environment will require additional partnerships, innovative approaches and even greater commitment in the years to come. By working together, we can create a brighter and greater future for the Asia-Pacific region and the whole world.

**Tadao Chino is president of the Asian Development Bank. This article is based on his keynote address at the recent World Conservation Union forum in Bangkok.**