

Background Note
“Measuring the Progress of Societies: Key Issues for the Asia and Pacific region”
Kyoto, 23-24 March 2009

The Kyoto Conference

The OECD, in collaboration with the University of Kyoto, are organising an international conference on “Measuring and Fostering the Progress of Societies: Key Issues for the Asia and Pacific regions” to be held in Kyoto, Japan on March 23-24, 2009 at the Katsura Campus of Kyoto University. The conference will bring together 200 high level participants from across Asia and the Pacific. The audience will comprise statisticians, economists and policy makers, sociologists and political scientists as well as leaders from NGOs, the business world and the media: in short all those who share an interest in promoting a stronger facts-based discussion on whether and how their societies are progressing.



Rohm Plaza.-the venue of the conference



Cherry blossom in Kyoto

The Kyoto event will discuss the benefits of developing broader, shared visions of progress for Asian and the Pacific societies – visions developed from the bottom up. It will discuss the importance of sharing indicators of societal progress and turning those measures into societal knowledge. The conference will also analyse how better measures can lead to better policies to address issues of concern to the Asian and Pacific societies including:

- Energy and Climate: Towards a Low Carbon Society
- Public Health, Poverty and New Technology
- Economic, Social and Environmental Vulnerability
- Peace, Good Governance and Democracy
- New Institutional Arrangements to Measure and Promote Societal Progress

The third OECD World Forum will take place in Busan, Korea 27-30 October 2009. As usual, the World Forum will be prepared through regional and thematic events bringing together experts, practitioners and key policy-makers.



Kyomachiya –Traditional wooden townhouse in Kyoto

For information on the Global Project and this conference please visit www.oecd.org/progress or contact Ms. Suzanna Grant-Kéjairi (suzanna.grant-kejairi@oecd.org).

Reference

For 60 years, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has been the dominant way in which the world has measured and understood progress. This approach has failed to explain many of the factors that most impact people's lives. GDP measures only what the world produces – taking a very narrow view of economic activity and failing to account for the well being of people, our societies and our environment.

A new global movement has emerged to promote new and compelling ways to understand and measure the world's progress – whether life is getting better – in economic, social and environmental terms for people and communities around the world. This new approach moves well beyond conventional narrow measures of economic development like GDP to understand whether life is getting better for the world's people and communities. We need to measure and debate key indicators of our social progress such as: levels of trust in society, quality and health of our environment, satisfaction with our life and work, inequality and social cohesion.

In June 2007 in Istanbul, a global movement was born. One thousand two hundred policy-makers, policy experts, business leaders, civil society organisations and citizens participated in the OECD World Forum on “Measuring and Fostering the Progress of Societies”, which led to the *Istanbul Declaration*, signed by several international and national organisations, including United Nations, World Bank, European Commission and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference. They committed themselves to finding new ways to measuring progress and to a participatory process in which ordinary people can debate the measures that matter most in their lives.

To implement the Declaration, the “Global Project on Measuring the Progress of Societies” was launched. The Project is the first systematic global effort to move beyond GDP by enabling and promoting new ways to measure societal progress. The Global Project is creating the infrastructure required to turn this vision into reality – and a completely new way to think about progress. At the heart of the Global Project is the WikiProgress initiative, a technology platform that will serve as the hub and focal point of the many existing and nascent national efforts to rethink progress.

The existence of alternative measures of progress isn't enough in itself to change the way the world thinks about progress. The second key objective of the Global Project is to change the public debate about progress by making these new measures a touchstone for media and public discussion, much the way that measures like GDP, inflation and unemployment are today. To do this, the Global Project will:

- Lead a global effort to educate experts, practitioners and policy-makers about these new measures and how they can be used to enhance policymaking
- Promote these new measures through a sophisticated traditional and new media campaign in key countries – so that when these measures are released, media understand their significance and they receive extensive coverage
- Develop a network of policy-makers and well-known ambassadors who can promote this agenda in key countries.

The Global Project is committed to promoting the development and proliferation of a new set of measures not as an end in itself, but because rethinking progress holds the promise of dramatically improving policy-making itself.