

## Microcosms for change

### Sustainable Cities

Tuesday morning, 3 June 2008

*Moderator:* **David Eades**, Presenter, BBC World News

**Tasneem Essop**, Minister of Environment, Planning and Economic Development, Western Cape, South Africa

**Genevieve Ferone**, Vice-President, Sustainable Development, Veolia Environnement

**Michel Le Sommer**, Engineer, Le Sommer Environnement, France

**Hideaki Oda**, Councillor to the President, Japan Water Forum

**Mario Pezzini**, Deputy Director, Public Governance and Territorial Development, OECD

Cities are the engines for national economies and are key to their prospects for growth. On average, cities consume 75% of national energy supplies and account for 80% of national greenhouse gas emissions. Cities should therefore be central to environmental policy.

But speakers at this morning's session unanimously agreed that this has rarely been the case. Above all, the sustainable city is still a model rather than reality, and very clear and practical ideas on how to implement sustainability have yet to mature. **Mario Pezzini** lamented that discussion of climate change and sustainability has until now been focussed at either a national or sector level, not cities. "We rarely speak about cities, where the focus should be," he said. "In fact, the level of discussion concerning cities is generally quite poor." This misalignment of priorities was emphasised throughout the session.

"Sustainability is fundamentally about social justice and equality," said **Tasneem Essop**. The approach adopted by the Western Cape in the development of their Provincial Spatial Development Framework is based on the triple bottom line approach, encompassing equal consideration of economic, environmental and ecological issues for development and growth. Legislation and guidelines on these issues are seen as critical by Ms Essop to steer regional development that addresses the current needs of society and the legacy of the Apartheid era. A development strategy can only be considered by understanding the environmental and social base of the region in order to preserve its "ecological integrity".

**Genevieve Ferone** agreed with Ms Essop about the importance of considering the sustainability of cities in terms of their broader social context. She argued for a very deliberate, planned integration of the population into communities that mixed social, ethnic and age categories, unlike the current situation in most modern cities. It is as vital to the politics of sustainability as is local economics, transport, and architecture. Transport modes should reflect this; "No-one must feel excluded, neither the pedestrian,

the motorist or the bike-user.” This social revival requires functional diversity and it is essential that nature is brought back into cities “to let people breathe”. In response to climate change, future economic growth will be largely regionalised to reduce carbon footprints. More products must be sourced locally, resulting in “a new revival” of medium-sized cities which are brought closer together by modern transportation and information systems.

“The future is definitely that of medium cities,” said Ms Ferone. “It is impossible to change existing, large cities into sustainable ones.” Mr Pezzini added that cities generally see GDP per capita fall after reaching a population of exceeding six million.

Water is a central element of the sustainability of cities and Ms Ferone insisted on the need to undo the work of previous generations that has rendered cities impervious to rain and distanced a city’s people from their sources of water. **Hideaki Oda** presented a vision of what can be achieved in this respect, hailing the restoration of the Calamus River in Beijing in preparation for the 2008 Olympics and the CheongGheChong project to develop a waterway in the South Korean capital Seoul. The realisation of green areas in cities is essential for Mr Oda who argued that sustainability is a “switch from economically-oriented cities to sensibility-oriented cities”.

**Michel Le Sommer** presented the reality of implementing sustainable city models on a smaller scale. Mr Le Sommer, who works with local authorities, described the process of developing solutions in response to urban issues such as affordable housing, social integration and conflicting requirements for the essential resources of space, energy and water. Developing relevant indicators is central to identifying areas of improvement in districts, ensuring local authorities understand the absolute need for change and the requirement to share limited resources, and for monitoring the execution and progress of change. Such metrics are being actively developed by the Sustainable Building Alliance for use as future benchmarks.

The presentations from the panelists was followed by questions and comments from the floor. One remarked that all cities appear to be far from the ideal of sustainability described by the speakers and that examples of best practices were needed. Responding, Ms Ferone agreed that examples are limited to small-scale “eco-neighbourhoods”, developed mostly as private projects.

GT/AK/XF/AS