Assessing the Progress towards Sustainable Development for cities

- Sustainable development is a major challenge for cities particularly in Asia.
- Rapid economic growth and urbanisation has had major impact on nature and the environment.
Sustainable Development is a contested concept

- No single definition can be entirely relevant or meaningful
- Cities are so dependent on imports of materials and energy, prospects of a sustainable future appear impractical
Making cities more sustainable

- Cities may never be entirely sustainable but they can be far more sustainable than they are today
- Cities as centres of consumption and production
Cities in Asia where nature does not appear to matter/or have disappeared
Urgent agendas for cities in Asia

- Improving ecological management and urban environmental quality
- Reducing and minimising transfer of environmental problems to other ecosystems – downsizing ecological footprints
Conceptualising sustainability for cities

- Focusing on the balance between natural, artificial and cultural elements for a determined quality of life
- Emphasis on environmental processes and impact of cities on areas outside the urban
Cities and their role in Asian development

- Cities are actors/entrepreneurs in economic globalisation
- Population concentrations as well as where most resources for infrastructural development are concentrated
Greater Efficiency as Human Settlement Forms

- Population densities are higher in cities and in many Asian cities these densities can be as high as 10,000 per sq km.
- Cities and particularly the largest cities in most Asian countries generate the most employment as well as a substantive proportion of GDP – Bangkok generates half the GDP in Thailand.
Cities are strategic to the promotion of sustainable development

- City wide environmental problems are more serious in mega cities
- Human societies are not truly urbanised – we behave like `slash and burn’ shifting cultivators in cities
- We develop areas based on a scorch earth policy
If in the developed countries or the west, city dwellers are idealising the rural or the rustic countryside. In developing countries in Asia, there remains a highly ambivalent policy outlook on the role of cities in economic and social progress.
Claiming the sustainable development agenda for cities

- Cities and especially the mega-cities in Asia have to stake their claim in their national governments’ sustainable development agendas.
- More work on sustainability indicators for cities.
- More information in the public domain to enable state and society to act more responsibly.
Participation of all sectors

- State and society relations in decision-making on development pathways for cities
- State, market and civil society actors have to be fully participatory