AIT at Bali Conference

UNFCCC COP13 Side-Event: Carbon Management in Cities: Gaps in Policy Discussions and Scientific Understanding

"Cities must now lead the climate change agenda"

December 6, 2007, Bali, Indonesia

Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), Global Carbon Project (GCP) and National Institute for Environmental Studies (NIES) jointly organized an official side-event entitled 'Carbon Management in Cities: Gaps in Policy Discussions and Scientific Understanding' during the UNFCCC COP13/CMP3 meeting on December 6, 2007 at Bali, Indonesia. The side event, attended by over 100 people, was instrumental in initiating discussions on importance and role of cities on carbon management for mitigating global climate change. The side-event further highlighted not only the importance of mitigation at city scale but also the adaptation measures in cities. The event highlighted the needs for better science, bridging information gaps and more thrust for urban issues in global climate debate.

Dr. Shobhakar Dhakal, Executive Director of GCP briefly introduced the GCP and highlighted objectives and goals of the side-event. Prof. S. Kumar, Dean of School of Environment, Resources and Development, AIT welcomed participants on behalf of AIT and Dr. Yasuhiro Sasano, Director, Center for Global Environmental Research, NIES welcomed on behalf of NIES.

After the welcome, Prof. Kumar chaired the presentation session. The side event addressed the following questions.

- Why is carbon management in urban areas an essential component of addressing global climate change?
- What are the major gaps in scientific understanding and lessons in relation to urban carbon management?
- What are the knowledge and information that city planners need from science to support them for managing carbon?

Dr. Shobhakar Dhakal highlighted importance of urban carbon management in the context of global carbon management. He informed that past urbanization has been unprecedented in terms of speed and size and urban areas now contributes to 70-85% of the global CO_2 emissions, which is expected to grow significantly due to the rapid urbanization in developing countries, especially in Asia. However, this fact also provides an opportunity for carbon management at city scale but the response from science and policy has been weaker in the past.

Presenting paper on carbon emissions and mitigations: lessons from cross-city analyses in Asia, Prof. Ram M. Shrestha of AIT said that if the proper policy directions backed by sound scientific information is ensured, cities can reduce carbon emission however the instrument and tools might vary across cities. He presented lessons of cities in Asia and discussed the role and implications of various policy instruments including carbon tax with Thailand as an example.

Dr. Richard Dawson of Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research presented a paper "Beyond emissions: Scientific challenges in understanding cities and climate change". He shared Tyndall Centre's work in London and suggested that innovative approaches to adaptation and mitigation can be developed by evidence-based integrated assessment of cities and climate change and scientific community can provide the key needed knowledge to city authorities.

Dr. Debra Roberts of EThekwini Municipality (City of Durban), presenting on the need for pragmatic carbon management: bridging the science/policy divide at the local government level, emphasized on the importance of adaptation and mitigation issues for her city and information that decision makers need from science to develop appropriate policies.

Speakers emphasized that now cities should lead the climate change agenda, both on mitigation and adaptation. But this should be reinforced by the adequate scientific information required for the policy making.

Participants also discussed on the need to link and improve communication amongst ongoing initiatives in scientific and policy fronts such as C40 initiative and others. Participants also raised questions on impacts of polices such as carbon tax and biofuel for carbon management. It was reminded that recent studies have shown that biofuel may not be carbon friendly always as it was thought or presented. Similarly, discussions were held on the motivating factors for the developing country cities for local carbon management. As the cities are not only the source of carbon, they are also in threat from the possible climate impacts, and some cities like Durban and London have already witnessed it, the integrated climate assessment for both mitigation and adaptation can help city policymakers.

Prof. Kumar moderated the discussion and summarized the session at the end.