The challenge of sustainable development in Asia
Facing up to the challenges ahead

Jeffrey D. Sachs

Interview by Tu Muham Medan, chairman of Sime Darby

The issue is striking the right balance

T he rapid rise in oil and food prices has heightened the specter of those two markets. The world is poised against escalating food and energy costs that could bring on a period of food and fuel shortages as one of the most serious threats to global prosperity. As a result, we are facing a crisis that can only be resolved by addressing the fundamental causes of climate change and poverty.

The global food and energy crises are interrelated and both directly or indirectly linked to the large-scale increase in population, which has brought about a doubling of global food consumption and energy demand. The rapid growth of population has put a strain on natural resources, and the world is facing a serious challenge in ensuring that everyone has access to basic necessities.

The challenge of sustainable development in Asia

Growing in harmony with nature

New certification standards ensure sustainable palm oil

Profile

Jeffrey D. Sachs

Author

Jeffrey D. Sachs is director of The Earth Institute, Columbia University, and special adviser to the United Nations Secretary General on sustainable development. He is co-author of The End of Poverty (HarperCollins, 2005), and is involved in the development of new environmental policy tools and public-private partnerships to ensure global sustainability. He is also a senior advisor to the Global Poverty Project and the chairman of the advisory board of the Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security Program at the University of California Berkeley.

Palm oil is a valuable crop that contributes significantly to the economic development of many tropical Asian countries. Used in everything from food to fuel to pharmaceuticals, this cheap, versatile crop can be grown on relatively low-quality land and is therefore less vulnerable to the price and weather shocks that affect many staple food crops.

However, the rapid expansion of palm oil production has led to deforestation, wildlife loss, and soil degradation. In many cases, palm oil has been produced at the expense of critical areas such as tropical rainforests, which are home to some of the world's most endangered species.

New certification standards like the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) seek to address these issues by promoting sustainable practices in the palm oil industry. By ensuring that palm oil is produced in an environmentally and socially responsible manner, the RSPO helps to protect biodiversity and ensure the long-term viability of the palm oil sector.

Jeffrey D. Sachs's vision for the sustainable palm oil industry

Sachs believes that the palm oil industry should be able to strike a balance between profit and environmental sustainability. He argues that a fair and transparent auditing system is essential to ensure that companies are meeting the standards established by the RSPO.

Interview

Jeffrey D. Sachs: "To make progress, we need to balance profit with environmental sustainability. The RSPO has been very effective in this regard. It ensures that palm oil is produced in a way that is environmentally and socially responsible, and that the benefits and lessons learned can be transferred to other sectors as well."