

**“Bridging Development Gaps in East Asia:
Vision, Strategic Direction, and Plan of Action”
Hotel Le Royal
Phnom Penh, Kingdom of Cambodia
April 24-26, 2006
Organized by
The Asia Economic Forum
University of Cambodia
Supported by
The International Foundation for Arts and Culture
In partnership
Supreme National Economic Council of Cambodia
(SNEC)**

In each plenary session, a panel of speakers will address the topics in-depth, offering contending views and insights, and followed by an open discussion by all participants for stimulating interaction. Below is a list of different plenary session topics and a brief description of each topic:

Plenary Session I:	Leadership and Strategic Vision for Development in East Asia
Plenary Session II:	Reform, Governance and Security
Plenary Session III:	Capacity Building and Human Resource Development
Plenary Session IV:	Technology, Capital Formation and Foreign Direct Investment
Plenary Session V:	Grassroots Empowerment, Rural Development and Poverty Reduction
Plenary Session VI:	Bridging Development Gaps in East Asia: Future Direction and Plan of Action

Leadership and Strategic Vision for Development in East Asia

The topic of this session covers a wide range of leadership models and strategies for development. East Asia has experimented with both free market and status models and the results have been mixed. But there is no doubt that the region has achieved unprecedented economic development since the end of the Second World War. It has impacted material progress and life expectancy. But within the region, serious income disparities exist, for example, between Japan and the newly emerging states of Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar, that gap seems to be widening. Even in ASEAN, the so-called development gap is clearly emerging, despite efforts to promote regional integration.

The panel speakers are expected to focus on alternative strategic visions and leadership models for East Asian integration, taking into account the challenges of globalization and existing leadership styles. In particular what are the imperatives for change that will underpin economic development in the decades to come? What does it take to collaborate and cooperate (that is, collective action) to narrow the growing economic imbalance between nation states that make up East Asia? Is there a lack of political will? Are we victims of the logic of collective action (Mancur Olson) which states that there is a lack of incentive among individual economic actors (individuals and nation states) to take collective action, although it is generally acknowledged that collective action is essential for the common good.

Plenary Session II: Reform, Governance and Security

Panelists in this session are expected to examine and discuss the reform agenda at the regional and nation state levels needed to encourage flow of trade and investment in East Asia. What is

"democratic reform"? Why must it be democratic? Could it be something else? Strong regimes which may not be "democratic" have been able to develop their economies. Is honest, open and transparent governance, which may not be democratic in the political sense, sufficient for economic development?

Security which ensures peace and stability underpins progress, and this is a given. But what kinds of security arrangements are required for East Asia to promote more rapid development. The concept of collective and comprehensive security should be explored by panelists. Are we doing enough? What can we do better to secure peace, stability and security in our region?

Plenary Session III: Capacity Building and Human Resource Development

Education, intellectual capital development, and institutional building remain the prime responsibility of individual nation states. But given resource constraints, technical assistance will be needed by the less developed states in East Asia to supplement and complement their efforts. Panelists are required to examine various models for educational reform, capacity building, and financing education, technology transfers and skills training.

Technology, Capital Formation and Foreign Direct Investment

This session should be devoted to an examination of the links between technology, capital formation and foreign direct investment. Here the emphasis should be given to the role of the domestic private sector and the foreign investors. What kind of investment climate will be needed for both domestic investors and their overseas counterparts to come together? How can individual governments in East Asia enable collaborations and joint ventures to thrive? Where can multilateral agencies like the World Bank, especially its International Finance Corporation, the Exim banks, the Asian Development Bank and the International Monetary Fund can play a more proactive and entrepreneurial role to accelerate the process of technology transfers and capital formation in the less developed states of East Asia.

Plenary Session V: Grassroots Empowerment, Rural Development and Poverty Reduction

Panelists of this session should stress the importance of grassroots development, in particular the role of entrepreneurs and small-medium enterprises and rural development. In this area, consideration should be given to rural credit and rural banking institutions. Informal credit arrangements exist because the failure of such institutions to make credit available on a timely basis. But credit by middlemen and money lenders are expensive. Re-examination of the functions of civil society and NGOs and the UNDP in poverty reduction/eradication must be undertaken.

Plenary Session VI: Bridging Development Gaps in East Asia: Future Direction and Plan of Action

Key panelists and chairs of the various sessions may present their views and discuss the next steps forward. Is there a need for a regional plan? If yes, what are the key elements of such a plan which can be adopted by nation states in East Asia and supported by the multilateral agencies? Is there a need for a special commission to study various approaches and instruments for economic development? Should the Asian Development Bank and the UNDP examine and ensure that nations progress by their own efforts, instead of being constrained by the still unequal playing field?