

Sub-theme: Managing Asia's Rapid Urbanisation for Social Progress



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Good morning to you all. First, I would also like to share my gratitude to Hitachi for investing in our future leaders. I am sure that it is the best investment any multinational company can do in our countries, which will be sustainable, and bring economic, social, environmental and cultural benefit. So thank you on behalf of our countries for this.

I am asked to talk about managing rapid urbanisation for social progress and I would like to start with some historical data of urbanisation. In 5 years BC, Rome was the first urban area of more than 1 million population, and only from 1800 later, London was the second city with more than 1 million population. By 2015, Asia will be predominantly urban in half of the time it took Europe and America. We will have 267 cities with more than 1 million population will be in Asia and 12 of the world projected 21 mega cities will be in Asia.

Now, if we look at urbanisation trends in Asia, we see some cities like Mumbai, Dakka, New Delhi and Jakarta with very high percentages of increase in population among others due to the big urban-rural disparity. Conversely, if we look at cities such as Osaka and Seoul, there is no increase in population in 15 years from 2000 to 2015, because the rural-disparity is very small.

What are the Asian urban challenges? The Asian urban landscape is one of immense contrast: of ostentatious plenty and abject poverty, of great beauty and terrible ugliness, and of vast opportunity and yet rampant oppression.

But why such rapid urbanisation? The first reason is economic progress. If you talk about elements of economic progress, be it good infrastructure and public utilities, accessible markets and financial institutions, healthy and educated workforces, as well as an appropriate and supportive legal system and regulatory framework, or safe and healthy work places - they are more assailable in the urban area than in rural areas. Hence urbanisation is unavoidable. People move to cities because of these attractions.

Elements of social progress are: solidarity where there are social capital shared by the people; participation and social inclusion; and also gender equality, which is increasing in our countries. Other factors include respect and friendliness to elderly, children, and the diffabled, this is not a typo error - this is 'different ability' diffabled, which the deputy minister was talking about today; respect and diversity on pluralism- all our countries are very diverse and have plural communities; security, resilience and adaptability.

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These are all more challenging in urban than in rural areas, especially for the urban poor. So if you are poor and living in the urban areas, this element of social progress is a requirement that is difficult to achieve.

If you stay in rural areas, values of family and respecting the elderly, mentioned today by the keynote speaker, are still stronger in the rural areas. Yet people go to the urban area and face lots of problems, especially the urban poor. The urban poor go to the cities despite insecure and unsustainable employment, the slum living areas and cold inhuman shelters, small living areas for the families, unsafe public transportation because they cannot afford private transportation. On top of that they have poor access to clean water and sanitation, poor access to health and education facilities, minimum safety and security, prone to crime and violence, prone to evictions. We see that a lot in Indonesia nowadays, from the different examples in Jakarta, and in other cities. But yet, the urban poor prefer to stay in cities because in the rural areas they have less choice of livelihood. They have more problems of survival. So they go and try to live in cities.

So what is it that the young leaders have to give their attention to in managing rapid urbanisation for social progress? First is to recognise the scale, characteristics and irreversibility of urbanisation. That urbanisation is there to stay, and to recognise the scale and develop the cities according to this potential growth. Next, to manage urban development for lasting economic growth to keep pace with the city's growth and so manage change. You cannot chase away all urbanites, but have to develop the cities accordingly. And there are many working poverty reduction schemes in many countries. In Thailand it is very remarkable. And also greater social inclusion I think you will hear from the next speaker on urbanisation tomorrow, Mr. Paiboon, on how he is managing their slum areas. I think they are improving more than two hundred and seventy slum areas all over Thailand, getting resources from the government and their own. It is very impressive.

But equally important and maybe even more important, is building urban-rural linkages and synergies. Build the rural areas, agriculture and also infrastructure in the rural areas so that the social frameworks would refrain them from moving to the cities, but encourage them to make their livelihood in the rural areas.

“Managing rapid urbanisation needs a new outlook at cities.”

So managing rapid urbanisation needs a new outlook at cities. It needs to redefine cities, as settlements and population concentration increases into centres of economic activity, areas with high quality of life, repositories of knowledge, information and ideas, and also compact eco systems. So then it has to continue change and has to continue to grow based on these characteristics. But it is not just that. Also it needs the population of the urban poor, to turn from being a problem to becoming a repository of resources. The urban poor need to live in harmony with the urban rich.

So managing rapid urbanisation also needs good urban governance, and we all know the core principles of good governance, which are listed here. I am very impressed with the keynote speaker, who puts good governance high on the priority of improving the human resources in Thailand. With bad governance, you cannot attain development the way you want it to be. So I am also glad my previous speakers were also talking about the bad development caused by bad governance, especially corruption. Good urban governance is fostering the corporation of the sectors and the stakeholders, building interaction, relationships and recognising the capacities and roles, and putting stakeholders together to build synergies. All these stakeholders have their own roles and you as the youth can choose what role you want to play.

What strategic roles can you play to promote good urban governance for social progress? One right now, even at this moment, you can spearhead the civil society's active participation in urban governance. You can also advocate corporate social and environmental responsibilities in urban improvements. What Hitachi is doing now is corporate social responsibility. It is very possible that corporations that are not socially or environmentally responsible are left behind. You can also advocate for municipal government and city councils to implement good governance principles like accountability, transparency and responsiveness.

More and more changes are catalysed by public pressures. And later on, if you decide to be mayor of a city council, please walk your walk and talk your talk, because only then can you bring improvements to

your countries, promote social integration, support the disadvantaged group and work with the urban poor. I stress here that it is work with and not just work for the urban poor. I think there is a big difference between working for the poor and working with the poor. You can work with them to facilitate their direct involvement in formulating and implementing poverty eradication policies and programmes. You can show them that they can be a part of the solution in making your cities socially just, ecologically sustainable, politically participatory, economically productive and culturally vibrant.

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I want to share with you an urban governance initiative that I am working on for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) under The Urban Governance Initiative (TUGI). It awards the TUGI Young Leadership for Good Governance Award to young professionals from Asia to specifically address urban poor issues aimed at providing access to local governments, civil society or private sector organisations that are in partnerships to address urban governance issues or urban poverty reduction measures. We are working on creating urban housing and local housing, and slum areas' improvement. We also want to encourage young professionals to develop a commitment to pro-poor policies and urban poverty reduction. I would like to offer the Hitachi Initiative my suggestion that you continue this Young Leaders Initiative, and also to provide opportunities to those who have graduated, and not those who have not entered the work force. To set aside, let's say, one year of their time to work with the poor.

If we look at leaders from developed countries who have closer affection to developing countries and who are also more able to bridge to developing countries, they were probably members of the Peace Corps, volunteers in Asia, or many other schemes like this 20 or 30 years ago. We are happy that the Asoka Foundation



has been doing this for several decades and you see that leaders of developing countries from Asoka Foundation and working with the poor are already harvesting good or better leaders who can develop pro-poor policies in their countries.

Thank you!