

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



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Making Asian Cities Livable for Everyone

Excellency, distinguished guests, fellow Asians, ladies and gentlemen and of course dear Young Asian Leaders.

I would like to start by appreciating Hitachi for coming up with this very imaginative and creative programme, the Hitachi Young Leaders Initiative, which not only brings together young leaders of the future to talk about Asian values and Asian future but also opens up the opportunity for all of us Asians to get together, to think together, and to appreciate the sense of fraternity. We are all brothers and sisters, as you can witness by last night's show when the Indonesian students came up with their 'shadow puppet', I heard the Malaysians saying, 'that is not Indonesian, it's Malaysian'. So I said, 'you're both wrong, it's Thai'. That's our common bondage.

Ladies and Gentlemen, when thinking of the future, we also think of where and how we shall live. Ten years ago people still lived mainly in rural areas. About 40% of us lived in urban areas or cities. Now something like 45% live in cities. But 10 years from now, it is forecast that half of us will be living in cities. And 20 years from now more than half, perhaps about 55%.

Is this going to be the future city that we are going to live in? High-rise buildings, mingled with slums and squatter areas?

Rapid urbanisation of course brings with it progress but it also brings about problems. And we have many of these in this city of Bangkok. The problems associated with rapid urbanisation include poverty, housing, crimes, social conflicts, basic services like waste disposal, and environmental problems. Bangkok's air quality is not the best although perhaps it is not the worst. Our water pollution is pretty serious. Basic services, environment, transportation - you must have witnessed the traffic problems in Bangkok. And of course sometimes employment - even though big cities are places where you normally should find employment.

What kind of a city do we want to live in? Do we want to live in a big city, a small city, a cosmopolitan city, a cultural city, a livable city, or a healthy city? When I say livable city, what does it mean? It has been defined as a city which is economically productive, socially just, culturally vibrant, politically participatory and environmentally sustainable. That means it is a place where you can get employment, your livelihood, fairness, safety, harmony in social relations, spiritual health, places where you can relax and enjoy as well as having cultural values. A place where you can feel free with liberty, freedom, legal justice and so on. And also a place where you can live in a good environment and in harmony with nature.

A healthy city is another turf. It is in fact a world movement, a movement which includes hundreds, or now it must have gone to the thousands, of cities participating in this movement. A healthy city is a

place where people can feel healthy and by healthy it means physically healthy, mentally healthy, spiritually healthy and socially healthy. That is, the economy, the material and the physical surrounding, and our physical bodies are all healthy. Where we can feel inside healthy - that is mentally healthy or deep down to the consciousness; the spiritual healthiness and also social relationships. That is called a healthy city, which of course also means a 'livable' city.



Now what are the key ingredients of a healthy and livable city? We need of course a good government, national and local government which should be under the system of good governance with transparency, honesty, accountability and so on. We need people's participation. All people living in the city should participate in the running of the city either directly or indirectly. We need the partnership among the various stakeholders, not just people in government but businesses, NGOs, peoples' organisations and community networks. That is called multi-stakeholders' partnership. And we need to 'marry' together the term I coin as "co-management," which includes learning together, planning together, taking action together, monitoring, evaluating together and also reviewing feedback and re-learning together.

If you look at Thailand's urban problems it is not surprising to see that we have all the normal problems that you see in a city - inadequate infrastructure, traffic congestion, water and air pollution, crimes and of course, in a big city like Bangkok, we have something like a thousand slums or "congested communities". These are the problems of a city.

To give you an example of how we deal with such a problem in a proactive and creative manner, and also to prevent such problems in the future, may I cite this programme. It is called "Baan Mankong" programme. Baan Mankong in Thai means secure housing. It is an effort to solve problems to make the cities livable for everyone including the poor.

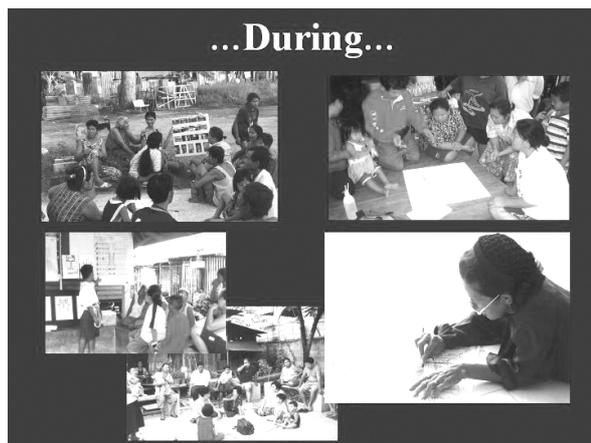
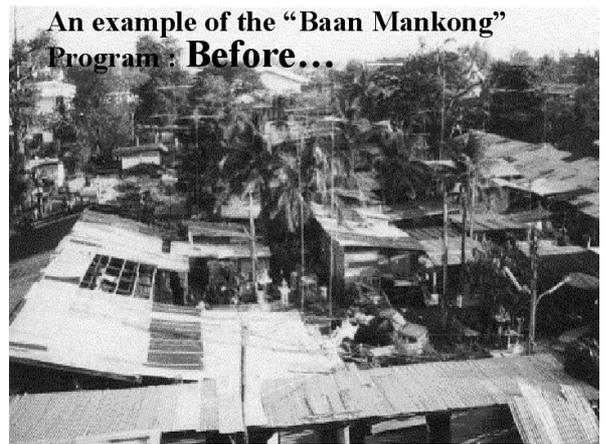
The main concept of Baan Mankong, is first, that the community organisations and the community networks are the core actors. They are not the recipients, they are the actors. Secondly, we change from supply-driven to demand-driven, having regard to the wishes, the requirements, the needs and the aspirations of the poor themselves. We need flexible financial management. Of course, financial arrangements are difficult for big businesses as well as small businesses, so it is even more difficult for the poor. Hence we need different ways to handle the financial aspect and we have found those different ways which have worked quite well in the past 10 years. We need to integrate housing development with city development. It's not just housing but the whole city that needs to be developed and we need to do it on a city-wide scale, not just in different separate pockets.

The Baan Mankong Programme is a big programme for Thailand now. We started this year with 10 pilot sites. We shall increase it to about 175 sites next year and from 2003 to 2007 we shall be spending 56.5 billion baht. Less than half, i.e. about 20 billion baht will be on infrastructure and management, and about 36 billion baht will be on housing loans. The poor will borrow money, pay interest and return the principal. We shall be working in 200 cities, involving some 2,000 urban poor communities where some three hundred thousand urban poor families live and work. And that means about 1.5 million people.

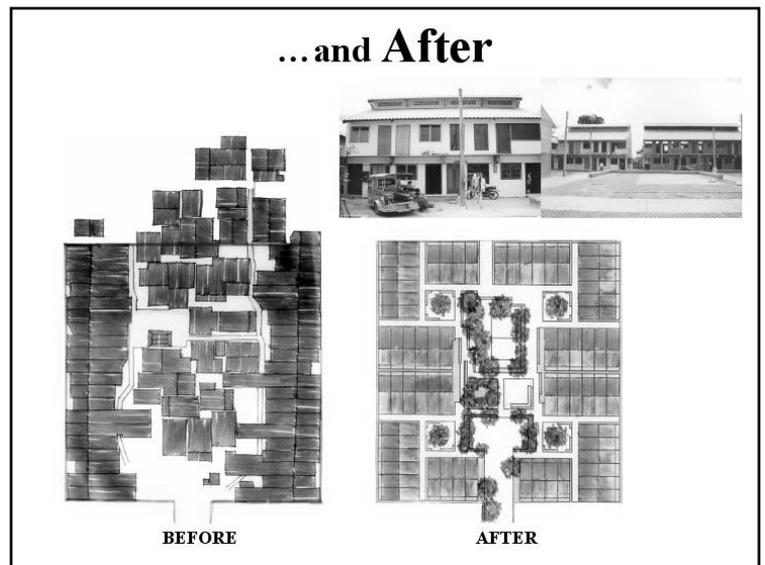
This is how the project mechanism works. We have community development committee as the coordinating mechanism, involving local authorities, academics, NGOs and others and of course the most important, the community. The network of community organisations co-manage the organisation that I chair: The Community Organisations Development Institute, which is a special type of public organisation, and not government bureaucracy. It's a little bit detached from bureaucracy. We work more like an NGO although we are a public organisation under the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security. The programme is fully supported by the Central Government. In working out this programme, we would work together to do surveys, plan and search for solutions. And solutions need to be various so as to be appropriate to the different types of communities and different situations. For example, the

housing arrangement might be on site upgrading, land-sharing or reconstruction. Land-sharing is a programme whereby you divide the land into two or three parts, part of which is for the poor and another part for the normal business development. Or it could be re-blocking, re-adjustment or re-settlement that is, moving away from the original site.

This is an example of the Baan Mankong Programme. You can see what it is like before the programme. During the programme, you see a lot of interaction and working together. The poor themselves come together to plan for their future. They even plan the design of the house, but of course, with the assistance and support from the



professional architect, who needs to understand and work very well with the poor communities. It is also a lot of fun.



Another example of what happens - this is a reblocking arrangement whereby you first need to rearrange the houses in a new way and make it more livable. In Ayutthaya, apart from restructuring the houses, we also add environmental scenery to it.

The distinctive features of the Baan Mankong Programme are as follows:

- 1) The poor are fully involved as major actors and not as recipients.
- 2) It is a multi-stakeholder partnership programme where the poor, the community networks, city government, civic groups, academics and professionals all work together in partnership.
- 3) It is an integrated, holistic programme, including housing, environment, livelihood, social development, community strengthening, etc.
- 4) And lastly, this is a programme that aims at self reliance and social cohesion. This is not a social assistance programme that gives away money to help the poor in a one-way system.



The Baan Mankong Programme, therefore, is just an example of how people join together, think together, work together to make a city livable for everyone.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we face many challenges in Asia. I think among the more important ones, we need the consciousness of fraternity, interconnectedness and interdependence, among all people who live in the same city. We need a sense of shared ownership of the city. Everybody feels that he or she owns the city together with other people. We need common aspirations, which would come with common, shared ownership and consciousness of fraternity. With these feelings, consciousness and common aspirations, we can then work together as partners for continuous development on an ongoing basis.

The final challenge is how we interact, work together and learn together through this interaction. This is called interactive learning through action. It is real learning, not learning in classrooms or reading books or listening to talks. From actually working and taking action together, the learning is so fruitful, positive and creative that it can bring about the solutions of many types of problems as well as the prevention of future problems.

My dear friends, ladies and gentlemen, the future of Asian cities are in the hands of all the people who live in the cities.

Thank you!