URBAN GOVERNANCE AND GLOBALISATION

- ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN MALAYSIA

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THE URBAN EXPLOSIONS

Cities in Malaysia and Asia are undergoing some of the most dramatic and spectacular changes ever. Malaysian and Asian cities boast to have the facilities to welcome global business; not only having the tallest building in the world – The Petronas Twin Tower in Kuala Lumpur boast to have state of the art infrastructure and technology to accommodate global tenants. Asian has the priciest cities for expatriates – Singapore, Tokyo and Hong Kong. Eight of the ten priciest cities in the world are Asian cities. Thus skyscrapers are familiar urban horizons; the tallest building in the world is in Asia and the successors will also be in Asia.

According to a World Health Organization (WHO) study, 13 of 15 cities with the worst air pollution are in Asia (air pollution, including lead poisoning, in Jakarta, Indonesia, according to an Asian Development Bank Study, was costing more than US$ 2 billion year in terms of brain damage to children and premature deaths and illnesses generally).
Urban poverty is potentially the most explosive political, economic and social force in many mega cities of Asia, such as in Indonesia and India. For example, the number of urban poor is exceeding the rural poor, with profound socio-economic consequences. On the other side of the coin we have cities like Singapore that are aiming to be, and will probably succeed to be, the world's most intelligent city-management wise and information wise.

GOOD GROWTH AND BAD GROWTH

Asian Cities are growing faster than what has been perceived by their respective governments. Thus urban governments are faced with both the good and bad facets of growth. The United Nation Human Development Report describes five kind of bad growth:

i.   **Jobless growth** – the overall economy grows but fails to sustain, enrich or expand job opportunities.
ii. **Ruthless growth** – the rich population gets richer, and the poor gets marginalised.

iii. **Voiceless growth** – the economy grows, but democracy and empowerment of the majority of the population fails to keep pace.

iv. **Rootless growth** – cultural identity is submerged or deliberately outlawed by governments or destroyed by the global telecommunications revolution.

v. **Futureless growth** – the present generation squanders resources needed by future generations.

There is fear in many Asian cities that we are being trapped by these 'bad' growths. Five key processes are impacting on Asian cities that raised the necessity of urban governance. Firstly, we are seeing a horrifying population explosion in the cities and new kinds of both richness and poverty that comes with it. Urban migration is limited to intra-country but inter-countries. Not only has this confused the socio-economic character of the urban population but conflicts amongst the alien cultures emerged.

Secondly, we are witnessing a deepening of alienation and anger especially amongst the marginalised communities, manifesting itself in urban violence, and even more, in urban terrorism; the cities are becoming crisis zones. Thirdly, we also see painful disintegration, breaking up of family, of community, of indigenous values. We see wasted lives of young children and youths turned into socially sick delinquents developing sicker values. Fourthly, we are experiencing a technology invasion. The introduction of new, complex, often ruthless technologies, operating in environments inappropriately prepared for such ventures. We see them side by side with problems requiring, but not getting, the simple technologies that will give decent shelter, clean water, adequate nutrition, basic literacy and the kind of livelihood opportunities that could eradicate poverty.
Fifthly, we are also seeing an information invasion–proliferation of mindless entertainment and marketing propaganda that is overwhelming and confusing, often creating new addictions and distractions, often enlarging the power of bureaucracy and commercial propaganda.

CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

The concept of globalisation that propagates a world with no border and international standards that cuts across cultural and traditional values demands managers with much broader world view. Today we need to work more vigorously on good governance. The UNDP has defined it having nine dimensions:

i. **Participation**
All men and women should have a voice in decision-making, either directly or through legitimate intermediate institutions that represent their interests. Such broad participation is built on freedom of association and speech, as well as to participate constructively .

ii. **Rule of law**
Legal frameworks should be fair and enforced impartially, particularly the laws on human rights, rights of individuals and the interest of the community.

iii. **Transparency**

Transparency is built on the free flow of information. Processes, institutions and information are directly accessible to those concerned with them, and enough information is provided to understand and monitor them.

iv. **Responsiveness**

Institutions and processes try to serve all stakeholders.

v. **Consensus Orientation**

Good governance mediates differing interests to reach a broad consensus on what in the best interest of the group and, where possible, on policies and procedures.

vi. **Equity**

Every citizen, children and youth, man and women have access to equal opportunities to improve or maintain their well-being.

vii. **Effectiveness & Efficiency**

Processes and institutions produce results that meet public needs while making the best use of resources.

viii. **Accountability**

Decision-makers in government, the private sector and civil society organizations are accountable to the public, as well as to institutional stakeholders. This accountability differs depending on the organization and whether the decision is internal or external to an organization.

ix. **Strategic Vision**

Leaders and the public have a broad and long-term perspective on the good governance and human development, along with a sense of what is needed for such development. There is also an understanding of the historical, cultural and social complexities in which that perspective is grounded.

Operationalising good governance practise however, calls for an in-depth understanding of the aims of governance and tools that can be used to achieved the stipulated aims. The tools to be used may varies and changes based on the stakeholders involved and the level of governance at which it is to be implemented. (see appendix)

THE VISION

There is a need for a clear vision of our cities with a holistic approach. Several principles need to be adhered, that can help to shape the future of our cities. The elements are that if we want our cities to develop as safe havens, they have to be developed in ways that are:

a. Socially Just
b. Ecologically Sustainable
c. Politically Participatory
d. Economically Productive
e. Culturally Vibrant

URBAN ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN MALAYSIA

As being experienced by other fast growing developing countries, Malaysia is seeing her urban population growing in a pace beyond the capacity that the urban centers could accommodate. Currently, some 70% of the 22 million population resides in the urban areas, mostly along the west coast of the peninsula. Some 5 million people concentrate in the Kuala Lumpur metropolitan. Thus various urban issues are hounding the urban managers. These include urban housing and services, land management, environmental management, urban infrastructure and maintenance, the informal sectors, urban finance and poverty alleviation.

Where does Malaysia stand in all this? Malaysia is among those who can hold their head high in what we call Sustainable Human Development. Her record in nearly eradicating poverty, providing universal education, in health, in providing shelter is commendable. Of course, this record can still be improved, and a long and arduous journey lies ahead.

The cities and urban areas is the new frontier. Every Malaysian deserves to enjoy good living. Much however depends on how we manage our urban areas. Malaysia offers some unique challenges and opportunities. These include:

i. A fragile eco-system consisting of major coastlines, hill lands, forest areas and major threats to water and environment generally
ii. Rapid urbanization and large scale property development that is causing environmental, economic and social stress
iii. A vigorous multi-racial and multi-cultural society that has created a very special 'heritage' of tolerance, respect an cooperation
iv. A dynamic economy that has made Malaysia a major player in tourism, new information and industrial technologies
v. A progressive community setting ever receptive to new ideas and innovation.

To date Malaysia has initiated various programmes to instill good urban governance. She is fast becoming a leader in innovation and exchange in urban management among her peers in the world. For example:

i. Penang has the highly acclaimed **Sustainable Penang Initiative** – the first popular community indicator programme in this region. This is being done with the cooperation of the Institute On Governance (IOG), Canada, and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).
ii. Kuantan can show the way in **benchmarking**, a programme they are doing with the Asian Development Bank (ADB)
iii. Kuching is a world model for the **Healthy City Programme**. This is linked with the World Health Organisation (WHO).
iv. Subang Jaya is experimenting with becoming an **E-Community** with launch of SJ 2005. They are working with MIMOS.

v. Petaling Jaya and 3 other cities will be leading with funding from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), a **'Local Agend 21' initiative**.

vi. Putra Jaya the new capital of Malaysia is generating excitement for its many special features especially blending the newtown to the enhanced natural environments.

However, several generic challenges still demand attention and need to be addressed to further enhance good governance in all the urban areas in the country:

i. A clear urban **Vision** – Other than as employment and service centers, there is a need of **Local Vision** for all the urban centres. Where are and what do our towns and cities want to be in the short, medium and long term.

ii. The challenge of **Competency and Capacity** –The country needs to have in place a local government service of a very much higher competency and capacity to cope with the challenges and demands of a more global urbanization.

iii. The challenge of **Transparency** – Planning decisions, development and especially infrastructure projects have not only to be done with due process, but seen to be done. There is deep public concern about the nature and direction of privatization in our country. This will reflect on the integrity of the urban managers and consequently the trust by the tax-paying public.

iv. The challenge of **Public Participation** – There is need for more participatory system of involvement by citizens. It should be expanded to more fundamental aspects of urban living than the social activities. With better education and exposure to other experiences the public is much informed of better practices elsewhere, thus more critical to any policy decisions affecting them.

v. The challenge of the **Community Spirit** – Having a multi-racial educated community it is always challenging to inculcate community spirit. Always the community be faced with conflicting perceptions and values due to different cultural and class backgrounds. The least would be for the urban managers 'unknowingly' to be part in destruction of community. There are too little systematic dialogue especially on urban issues faced by the public.

Local government, instead of being the lowest level of government, should become the highest in terms of community need and services. Recent development indicates these functions are being taken over by the central government. Local services such as the collection of garbage are being privatized and monitored by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government but paid by the local authorities.

Local government should be the heartbeat and bedrock of a living democracy. However, the Malaysian scenario is unique whereby the people's representatives in the local authorities are nominated by the respective elected State Governments in placed of local government elections. Residents association is a lively trend especially in the established townships. It would be interesting to have a study on the tendency of residents association being associated to political parties in the various neighbourhoods and newtowns with lesser inclination (to political parties) in the more elite neighbourhoods.

CONCLUSION

The future of the country in the demanding world of globalisation lies on an urban future. With the influx of expatriates in the future and the expansion of the borderless world mindsets of the urbanites urban governments and managers will have to benchmark their initiatives to the standards of the international practices and conventions in meeting the demands of the future. Thus good urban governance is paramount.

References:
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APPENDIX: **AIMS AND TOOLS OF GOOD URBAN GOVERNANCE**

Operationalizing good governance practise calls for an in-depth understanding the aims of governance, and the tools that can be used to achieve that aim. The tool to be used changes based on the stakeholders involved and the level of governance at which it is implemented.

AIM	TOOLS
Greater local participation and involvement	↑ promotion of city identity and a sense of citizenship for all ↑ public meetings, participatory planning and budgeting ↑ city referenda and public petitioning ↑ better democratic structures and culture ↑ involvement of marginalised groups in the city systems.
Efficient urban management	↑ taking account of all interests in promoting efficiency and better services ↑ labour relations ↑ efficient investment in infrastructure ↑ delegation of decision taking to the lowest appropriate level ↑ collaboration and partnerships, rather than competition ↑ appropriate training to improve capacity of city officials ↑ using information technology to best advantage ↑ environmental planning and management carried out in co-operation with the citizens ↑ disaster preparedness and crime control for safer environments.
Accountability/ transparency	↑ monitoring of govt activities by outside organizations ↑ rigorous accounting procedures ↑ clear guidelines on conduct for leaders and officials ↑ open procurement and contracting systems ↑ transparency in financial arrangements

	↑	disclosure of information
	↑	fair and predictable regulatory frameworks
	↑	independent and accessible complaints procedures
	↑	regular flow of information on key issues
	↑	a wide range of suppliers
Accessibility	↑	regular and structured consultation with representative bodies from all sectors of society
	↑	including individuals in the decision making processes
	↑	access to government by all individuals and organisations
	↑	access to economic opportunity
	↑	protection of the rights of all groups

Source: Consultation on "New Frontiers in Good Urban Governance" held at the St. George's House, Windsor Castle, 27 - 29 June 2000, organized by the Building and Social Housing Foundation (BSHF).