

Sustainable development and changing Indonesia

A number of articles have been appearing in the press over infrastructure issues and sustainable development. This year sees the end of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with its 10 target areas to make a significant impact on world poverty and hunger through, importantly, much improved access to clean water for the poor areas of the world, investment in sanitation and health matters and gender equality, in particular.

While improvements to living conditions have been made in many areas much still remains to be done globally and this is recognized by establishing a continuance and broadening of the scope of the work of the past 15 years through the recent establishment by the UN of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The scope of the MDGs is expanded in the SDGs, following three years of deliberation, to include inequality and climate issues and is directed at developed as well as developing countries.

The sums of money deemed required to meet the new targets are huge, in the trillions of dollars, and, bearing in mind the history of world governments since 1980 to rise to these financial challenges, are extremely unlikely to be met by a very wide margin even if the private sector is involved as expected in the SDGs mission.

This is not meant to imply that the objectives should not be tackled, far from it. We just need to adopt a realistic view of what is achievable and examine other ways in which to try to make up for the inevitable shortfall when following the usual top down mandate.

What is constantly brought to mind, however, is the emphasis on this top driven approach to solving these perennial world problems when what we need, in parallel, is more thought given and action taken to solving matters on the ground with the individuals and communities that need to rise out of poverty and thus be given the chance to con-



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tribute to their environments.

While finding adequate funding from world governments is essential, the returns on investment can be vastly enhanced if the people being helped are directly empowered in the work needed to improve their livelihoods in order to lift them out of the poverty trap.

In the 1990s, Indonesia launched a highly successful Kecamatan (district) Development Program (KDP) where linking with and funding directly a number of communities across the archipelago brought some amazing results.

Ownership of the projects was fundamental to the communities that took part, and they contributed to the solutions, involving, for example, the construction of sections of road and bridges, small water projects and public toilets.

There were later manifestations of this enlightened and successful endeavor but, under the mantle of government departments, some of the enthusiasm generated by the concept of community ownership was lost.

Separately, there have been a number of private sector initiatives across the country, either through individuals or NGOs and IGOs.

However, the one I am most familiar with is the East Bali Poverty Project (EBPP), founded in 1998 for the peoples on the remote side of Mt. Agung, whose lives had been traumatically affected by the large 1963 volcanic eruption.

This project has completely transformed the lives of some 17,000 people from abject poverty, illiteracy and high sickness levels to health and the ability to contribute to the society of their environment. The two underlying principles were empowerment and ownership within a transparent operation.

What the project had to focus on from the beginning was infrastructure access (roads and water), health and education.

Six schools were built from 1999 as funding became available with solar panels being the basis of village power. By training Indonesians to run the many parallel programs needed to raise the communities, working from the bottom up, the results have been remarkable and at very low financial cost.

Many of the lessons are adaptable to other poverty areas of the archipelago and elsewhere.

Two important aspects of the EBPP concern the astonishingly low per capita cost per annum, in the order of US\$20/capita/annum for running all its programs and the fact that all of the staff administering EBPP are Indonesians, key managers having been involved in the project from the beginning.

The project also facilitates 47 Posyandu (integrated health services post) in the district and dental health is managed in 60 schools, only 15 of which are in the project area, as part of an outreach program.

Not surprisingly, infrastructure remains at the top of this and the preceding governments' agendas. It is noticeable where improvements to roads and access to electricity have been introduced in the regions how these locations show increasing activity. It is also a lesson from the KDP, discussed above, and from the EBPP.

While government must continue with its focus on delivering more infrastructure at an accelerated rate, there are also related improvements that can be managed by local communities themselves.

In planning comprehensively for the decades ahead, more attention has to be placed on the urbanization of the country and its related impact on the agriculture sector.

As elsewhere, Indonesia is steadily urbanizing. Such that by mid-century there will be approximately 210 million people living in an urban environment, led by the huge sprawl of Greater Jakarta.

The offset of this will be a significant decline in the rural population and in those depended on to produce food. The demand for this, in turn, will have increased to serve a 50 million increase in the overall number of people. Thus "business as usual" is not good enough when addressing the needs of the agriculture sector in the future.

Further, to help balance the urban growth points across the country, it is important that the major towns in the regions can offer good attractive opportunities to those who are urban-bound without descending on the major city hot spots of Java.

These new regional centers will be important to support the changes needed in their respective adjoining rural areas, with these changes requiring the adoption of more efficient agricultural practices to meet the increasing demand for food.

It is also notable that there is a considerable disparity between the percentage of people in poverty when comparing urban and rural areas, even bearing in mind that the income required for survival in rural areas is arguably less than that for the urban poor.

Indonesia has still much to do in overall terms on poverty, now standing nationally at an unacceptable level of over 11 percent according to the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), and relatable employment front.

However, the underlying message, when working toward a sustainable equitable and inclusive society and well stressed in the 2011 MP3EI 6 corridor master plan, is that, in order to achieve this, we need to engage the usually under-used energy of the whole population and not just rely on top down government directives. And this has to be properly laid out in the long term planning of the country.

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