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**Promoting Sustainable
Human Development
in Cities of the South:
A Southeast Asian Perspective**

by Adrian Atkinson



United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

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Acronyms

General

DPU	Development Planning Unit
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP	gross domestic product
GNP	gross national product
GTZ	(German Agency for Technical Co-operation)
ICLEI	International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources —now known as the World Conservation Union
IULA	International Union of Local Authorities
LA21	Local Agenda 21
NGO	non-governmental organization
ONG	organisation non gouvernementale / organización no gubernamental
PO	people's organization
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNCHS	United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development

The Philippines

BDC	Barangay Development Council
DENR	Department of Environment and Natural Resources
LDC	Local Development Council
LGC	Local Government Code
LGU	Local Government Unit
NEDA	National Economic Development Authority
PCSD	Philippine Council for Sustainable Development

Thailand

AFP	Area Functioning Participatory Approach
BMR	Bangkok metropolitan region
Moi	Ministry of Interior
NESDP	National Economic and Social Development Plan
OEPP	Office of Environmental Policy and Planning
UCDO	Urban Community Development Office

Indonesia

BAPPENAS	(National Development Planning Board)
DPRD	(Legislative Council)
FKLH	(Environmental Communication Forum)
FKPB	(Sustainable Development Forum)
FKS	(Surabaya Urban Forum)
ITS	(Surabaya Institute of Technology)
KIP	Kampung Improvement Programme
KKN	(corruption, collusion and nepotism)
SUDP	Surabaya Urban Development Project
URDI	Urban Research and Development Institute

(Titles in brackets are English translations of original names)

Summary/Résumé/Resumen

Summary

This paper considers the frequent discrepancies between theory and practice in Third World urban development programmes. Drawing upon three Southeast Asian case studies (the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia), it highlights the importance of understanding the challenges posed for sustainable urban development by current processes of urbanization, democratization, decentralization and economic liberalization.

Urbanization in Southeast Asian countries is extremely complex and fluid, raising difficult social, as well infrastructural and financial, questions. Very different groups of people must be drawn into a common planning process. Furthermore, complex relations between cities and their hinterlands must be taken into account. Decentralization and democratization serve to complicate the picture. In most cases, local and regional institutions are ill-prepared to meet the new responsibilities implicit in decentralization, and central governments are reluctant to give up their power over lower level authorities. Effective democratization of decision making is also hampered by local political structures hostile to participation. In some cases, however, democracy is growing, and potentially serves as a focus for sustainable development planning and management.

The paper questions the poverty alleviation powers of economic liberalization. It points out that neo-liberal policies undermine development efforts by weakening government responsibility in key areas of public concern. In addition, free-market reforms lack environmental sensitivity and encourage deep splits within communities, as income gaps grow larger.

The experience of the Philippines provides insight into these issues. Rapid urbanization and a high incidence of poverty, combined with sub-optimal urban management, have lead to problems with water provision and pollution. For the poor, deeply embedded legal problems of land tenure constitute a key concern. The administrative structure of the Philippines, where legislation has encouraged decentralization of powers and resources to the municipal and community levels, has the potential to facilitate the implementation of sustainable development initiatives. However, the continuing strength of powerful local bosses blocks many efforts to address the needs of the poor and to consider paths to sustainable urban development. The development of physical infrastructure tends to be granted priority over smaller participatory community projects.

Thailand is the least urbanized of the three case countries, and urban poverty is less prominent than in the Philippines or Indonesia. Urban water supply is generally good, but industrial waste, pollution, land tenure and access to services are serious problems. Although the aim of sustainable development features in Thai economic and social policies, and some headway has been made in the environmental sector, there is virtually no progress towards this goal at the local level. The new Thai constitution provides for strengthening of

local government; but, with the exception of strong private sector involvement, participatory forms of local planning required by the constitution are slow in materializing. In part, this is because of the overarching powers of the Ministry of Interior, which is determined to maintain its control over local affairs. It is also because structures of political patronage slow the devolution of power from central to lower levels. NGO and community representation in local development processes is relatively weak and a long-term vision for local level development is absent.

Although some highly structured urban development programmes have been implemented over the past few years in Indonesia, urbanization is still uncontrolled, predominantly informal and characterized by high poverty incidence—especially following the collapse of the economy after July 1997. As in the Philippines, environmental pollution and land tenure problems are serious. But continued economic crisis dominates the policy agenda, and sustainable development planning remains weak at the local level. Post-Suharto-era legislation could allow Indonesia to do better than Thailand in terms of decentralization, but the current fluidity of the legal situation can work against, as well as for, sustainable development initiatives. Immediately following the collapse of authoritarian government, the co-operation of local level groups in consultative processes was limited by their fear of government co-optation. More recently, however, there are some signs that NGOs and community groups are engaging more effectively with recently elected councils and the municipal machinery.

The concluding section of the paper draws attention to the role that may be played in sustainable development initiatives by the new urban middle class of Southeast Asia. The collapse of authoritarianism has brought to the fore aspirations for a greater say in political processes. However, the dominant economic model is also breeding more divided societies.

Two distinct kinds of local development initiatives are emerging. On one hand, poor communities are being assisted by international development agencies, local governments and NGOs to improve their quality of life. On the other, middle class groups are organizing to improve the way that local governments are run. Yet these initiatives are not enough in themselves to overcome the deep divisions in these societies and to promote sustainable human development. Furthermore, this situation supports the survival of local patronage politics, which in turn militates against the success of any broader movement towards significant improvement in the processes of urban development.

Democratization has opened up spaces for progressive forces for change. In such a context, international development agencies can increase their support for community organizations—not only to promote self-help initiatives, but also to strengthen their voice in local political processes. It is also necessary to provide simultaneous support at the level of the municipality.

Too often, however, external support has been given on a short-term basis and targeted to local level interventions. So far there has been relatively little support for integrated urban programmes. Furthermore in the current climate of economic and social crisis, considerations of sustainable development can

too easily be pushed into the background. External agencies need to focus attention on how to organize and operate such programmes and to commit themselves to longer term and more flexible interventions that are effective in rapidly changing conditions. More thought should also be given to the national level context that would ensure that local level activities make genuine progress. Such support includes reinforcement of the decentralization process—and also devising defences against the social and environmental effects of neo-liberal policies.

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Résumé

Cette étude porte sur les fréquents décalages que l'on constate entre la théorie et la pratique dans les programmes de développement urbain au tiers monde. S'inspirant de trois études de cas réalisées en Asie du Sud-Est (aux Philippines, en Thaïlande et en Indonésie), elle montre combien il est important de comprendre les problèmes que posent les phénomènes actuels de l'urbanisation, de la démocratisation, de la décentralisation et de la libéralisation économique pour un développement urbain durable.

L'urbanisation dans les pays du Sud-Est asiatique est extrêmement complexe et fluide et soulève de difficiles questions sociales, mais aussi financières et d'infrastructure. Le processus de planification doit réunir des groupes d'individus très différents. De plus, il faut tenir compte des relations complexes entre les villes et leur arrière-pays. La décentralisation et la démocratisation ont encore pour effet de compliquer la situation. Dans la plupart des cas, les institutions locales et régionales sont mal préparées à assumer les responsabilités conséquentes à la décentralisation et les gouvernements centraux sont réticents à céder leur pouvoir à des autorités d'un échelon inférieur. La démocratisation de la prise des décisions est aussi ralentie par des structures politiques locales hostiles à la participation. Dans certains cas, cependant, la démocratie avance et peut servir de fil conducteur dans la planification et la gestion d'un développement durable.

L'auteur doute que la libéralisation économique ait le pouvoir d'atténuer la

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