



## STRATEGIES for Social Welfare

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I truly believe that our future lies in the quality of our people so I congratulate Hitachi for this initiative. Quality is only striving for academic excellence which Asian parents put their priorities on all their children. Almost all leading universities in the UK, US and Australia boast of Asians as among the top ten entrants or graduates. So brains, we do have. But we also need a healthy overall understanding of ethics and social environmental issues. We not only need discipline and diligence, but also experiential learning, participation and commitment to the betterment of society. With equality for our future leaders and policy makers, we must seek quality, identify and develop the best resources in each country, take pride in Asia and its rich cultures. Only then are we equipped to lead the country to growth and sustainable development.

We have seen that impatience and opportunism in the race for growth and wealth and the conspicuously extravagant consumption was unsustainable, resulting in economic turmoil that has plagued our region. For example in Bangkok, massive construction by the private sector preceded infrastructure planning, creating environmental pollution problems on a major scale. To alleviate traffic problems mass transit systems were undertaken by choosing the cheapest and the quickest projects, certainly not because of their quality. Consequently the ugly elevated structures replaced treelined streets and criss-crossed the center of business district further aggravating the air pollution and economic hardship of the people alongside these structures. The government, no doubt with healthy kick-backs, fully supported these developments. But they were also anxious not to be impeded by social and environmental impact considerations which were regarded as obstacles to progress. This disregard for people and communities in favour of many projects has also led to much social unrest, demonstrations and sometimes violent internal clashes.

Not only this, we have delays or sometimes cancelled projects which erode international confidence. So, I think the economic downturn, in fact, has been a blessing in disguise. It has helped to push through the new constitution which has opened a new chapter in Thailand. Changes in election laws should help reduce corrupt politicians, allow better information access, to have a say in the management and development of our own community. Of course with these rights, we also need and must have responsibility.

As democratic progress is being pursued in the region, we must prepare our young people to understand and be ready to accept the more complex challenges that await them. Of course, the politicians and administrators must also be educated to progress with the times, with systems against cronyism and equality at all levels. Most Asian parents put pressure on their children for academic excellence from a very early age at the expense of social behavioral development. Education is not only for academic excellence with the ability for economic and financial successes, it must also help to nurture the student into a quality adult. One with the right values, ethics, an understanding of one's rights and duties as a citizen, commitment to the community while preserving oneself from negative impacts. Our students must understand that wealth without a quality life and good environment is not sustainable and not worthwhile. That for sustainable development, environmental, social, cultural, health and economic issues must be considered at the same time. Students must also learn by participation activities through hands-on experiences. Teaching is not only in technology or techniques. For example, through mass communication, students should learn and be aware of the enormous impact of the mass media and what their professions could do. Not only to entertain, or provide news and knowledge, but they can also influence behavior, cult and fashion. Social responsibility and commitment is therefore important.

The awareness and action on TV and films will be imitated. And so advertisements, programmes performance and actions should be used to convey positive images to influence behavior. Lifestyles depicting high consumption and wastage must cease to be promoted. Learning can start with the primary schools where environmental awareness can be nurtured. For example, children can be taught where paper and plastics come from.





The resources needed, the waste problems that they cause. In high school and universities, the students must learn the positive and negative impacts of their chosen careers. A simple example - water pollution occurs from pottery, arts, cooking. Air pollution emerges from gases and chemicals such as waste from paper, plastics, etc. Pollution should be prevented at the source.

Young people must become environmentally aware, and must learn to help preserve our natural resources. They must learn from the mistakes of the western industrialised countries - the 20 years of destruction and pollution that are still present. Learn the efficiency of using resources and reducing environmental costs. Prevent the export of obsolete technology or hazardous waste to our shores from the western countries. Here, regional sharing of information and experiences is essential. Watch dogs on a regional scale should be given the ability to ban such activities. Some countries are already initiating laws on registered companies to abide by the country's law wherever they choose to do business. Due to the severe impact of the economic disaster and the high number of unemployed in a country which has caused many social problems, His Majesty, King Bhumipol of Thailand advocated promoting economic self-sufficiency in

villages where workers could leave the cities and learn to work and live in a self-sufficient economy in a moderate lifestyle. The village life and support system must be preserved as an important part of sustainable development. So this is the ideal time to promote environmental preservation that also helps the economy reduce cost and alleviate social problems. For example, the promotion of re-using and recycling, the separation of waste that could provide income for door-to-door second-hand dealers, as well as reducing the cost of solid waste management and the use of natural resources.

The promotion of the use of natural materials, such as rice stalks, (this is in Thailand), water hyacinth, grapevines for the making of the funeral pyre, instead of using styrofoam, have resulted in a new home industry for poor people living on the fringe of the cities where all these materials are free. Companies can of course reduce costs by energy

conservation, reduction of waste at source in production, the reduction of unnecessary packaging, etc. We must also try to seek and preserve our arts and crafts and adapt new technologies and ideas to facilitate and modernise the processes for uniformity and quality for export. Lately, all things Asian seem to be in vogue in the western world. Like exotic cloth, silk, as well as the more primitive straw bags, shoes, slippers. Our handmade labour-intensive goods sell overseas for many times the prices at home. So, we must learn to appreciate and preserve and develop these arts not only for our children and grandchildren, but also to provide stable incomes in our communities. Our countries are also rich in natural resources and natural beauty - religion, culture, ancient relics and the pride in our heritage. Our food is renowned not only for taste but also for health. Traditional herbal medicine used in many of our countries for centuries have been discovered as alternative medicine by the west. The simple green tea for example has been proven by western researches to prevent cancer, reduce cholesterol, etc. The art of localised pressure points, massage, acupuncture, martial arts, meditation are all being touted as cures or as preventive measures. The proper promotion of our handicrafts for export, our exotic natural and historical heritages for tourists will also bring income to all areas of the country helping to lessen the gap between the rich and the poor and lessen social unrest. But we must also learn to protect ourselves from being exploited. The rapid growth in the last decade has seen influx of western culture and influence on young and old alike. Although we are heading into the global age, we must have our own identities. We must instil in our young the pride and richness of our heritage, our history, customs and traditions, respect for elders and family ties are common in all Asian countries. These are qualities that the western countries are lacking and are now seeking.

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We must first find our roots, appreciate and preserve our own culture and wisdom. Then we must learn to only adopt the best from the western world. So the development of industries, research and development of new technology is still an essential part of our countries' progress and competition in the global arena. But it must done with care and responsibility. A few words on corporate responsibility.

Corporations can also play an important part in the social development of our community. It is not only monetary donations that are required - intellect, experiences, abilities are vital. Most non-profit and social welfare organisations in our region lack professionals. Some major corporations in America make it compulsory for young executives to spend up to three months working for their non-profit organisations or for their local communities. As such, they could help develop proper accounting standards, help with the marketing of products, uniformity in productivity and in management. This is to develop good corporate citizenship, understanding of the community so as to qualify as a quality executive and future leader. Of course, it is also a very good form of publicity for the programme's acceptance by the community in which the businesses work. So, I would like again to congratulate Hitachi for this very worthwhile programme of providing invaluable opportunity for these very impressive young people to learn and interact.

My own organisation also has a youth programme. We call it the "Magic Eyes Youth Ambassador" programme. For the past nine years, we have annually selected over 100 tertiary level students to come together and undergo a series of training, workshops and camps to understand environmental and social problems as well as to plan and participate in activities in schools, universities and communities. Now, with over a thousand ambassadors in the workforce in all types of professions, we are still in touch. They are still helping our new ambassadors. It is essential that we provide them with the basic knowledge, incentives, an ideal path and the ability to plan and manage. They are equipped to be responsible citizens with social and environmental awareness. In addition to helping them when they are students, we must also be there to support and encourage them on initiating programmes when they begin their career.

We provide a place where they feel that they belong and they can seek advice as they start out as juniors in their chosen field and they want to do activities or communal work or environmental work. We must be there to ensure continuity. To guide them and nurture them to become good business leaders, administrators and policymakers of the future.

I will end with an interesting observation. At an international youth conference in Canada a few years ago, a fifteen-year-old high school student stood up in front of 700 people and asked why we kept on referring to her as the future. She insisted that the youth are the present and they must start working for the betterment of the environment now to help improve what the present day adults continually destroy. So to you young leaders, as you plan ways to lead dynamic Asia into the global arena, please realise and remember the importance of your individual roles as you return home. Your actions can have an impact, not only in your homes, your institutions, your community, it will impact your town, your city, your country and also together with all the rest of you, will help influence Asia and the world. Be committed.

Thank you.

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