STRATEGIES for Social Welfare

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Introduction

Throughout this century, East Asia has been pre-occupied with developing and sustaining political structures and economic wealth. As a result, the concerns of social welfare, seen by many as a hindrance to these goals, have been neglected or sidelined by the governments and left largely to the religion and traditional cultures by the citizenry. Over time, circumstances and priorities have summoned the necessity to reconsider the importance of humanity and the well-being of people. The purpose of our committee was to address the sub-theme of social welfare and suggest solutions in a basic framework and what we envision towards the betterment of the citizens of East Asia in general terms without setting specific parameters to limit the scope of social welfare.

We envision a society where every individual:

1. Is given the opportunity to grow and reach their full potential
2. Is socially conscious, a critical thinker, creative and is a transforming difference
3. Is self-reliant and unoppressed by existing government, cultural and foreign expectations when working towards pragmatic solutions.
4. Has initiative and a desire to act for the betterment of themselves and society
5. Has his or her material, personal, societal, and spiritual needs met through individual and societal efforts.
6. Retains individuality while having a sense of responsibility for society
7. Has the ability to adapt and be flexible for the changes of a dynamic world

Towards this vision, the objectives that we hope to achieve are as follows:

1. To create an enabling environment without discrimination that provides the basic needs and rights of every individual including education, dignity, and opportunity to maximise every person's full potential.
2. To empower all individuals through the ability to sustain one's physical needs, the access to quality education that fosters critical thinking, the ability to affect change in one's community and government and the realisation of one's capability to be a leader.
3. To promote and protect the needs and well-being of the individual and society by establishing a synergy to affect positive change bilaterally.
4. To achieve sustainable development by maintaining progress and co-existence between economic and social development, and environmental resources.

It must be noted that a welfare system, which refers to a concerted effort by government and non-government agencies, should not be confused with a welfare state, which is primarily the responsibility of a government.

Issues / problem situations

Issues and problems facing East Asia are copious. However, the list provided is by no means exhaustive, but due to time constraints, it was limited to the following scope. Although all countries in East Asia tackle the same fundamental problems, the degree to which the factors affect the individual countries depends upon the countries' wealth and industrialisation stature. Industrialised countries include Japan and Singapore, while examples of industrialising countries, among others, also comprise of Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand.

1. *Organisational structures*

   The lack of an enabling environment in countries, such as Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand, has caused the stagnation and hindrance of progressive moves and programmes towards tackling deteriorating social conditions. The absence and neglect of welfare systems for marginalised groups, such as the handicapped and people with HIV/AIDS, have resulted in a loss of their potential productivity and contribution to national economies.

2. *Local and regional co-ordination*

   In some countries, the lack of organisation, co-ordination and an efficient structure of existing government and non-government social welfare systems and independent services are pressing problems. This can lead to overlapping efforts and the disregard for necessary aspects that are overlooked. A centralised and co-ordinated effort towards a more transparent system will not only lead to efficiency and proper dissemination of resources, but costs will also be saved.

3. *Preservation and subsequent promotion of values*

   The loss or threat of losing Asian traditions and identity to Western values is a concern if countries move towards a welfare state system. As industrialisation is commonly accompanied by the westernisation of Asian societies, it is feared that new values may replace traditions. This, in turn, threatens social cohesion and social identity.

4. *Adaptation of a common set of Asian values*

   The absence of a common Asian perspective of fundamental and civil human rights has resulted in either the total neglect or indeterminate postponement of these rights altogether. Lacking common Asian perspective has brought divisions in Asia against the different existing social beliefs. A consensual agreement and recognition of a common set of values through a co-ordinated effort would bring cohesion and unity among Asian societies.

5. *Empowerment*

   The absence of fundamental empowerment instruments, such as education, has caused marginalised groups to be vulnerable to abuse, disease, discrimination, exploitation and other conditions detrimental to their well-being.

6. *Awareness*

   The lack of social consciousness and responsibility and as a result, insufficient resources for social welfare, dampen progress of social welfare in countries such as Japan and Singapore. The competitive edge of individuals against others for material and financial improvements creates single-mindedness and hence the lack of social consciousness and constructive engagements for mutual betterment.

7. *Financial resources*

   The lack of financial resources to effectively create and sustain social welfare programmes is the fundamental impediment against the programme's successful implementation.
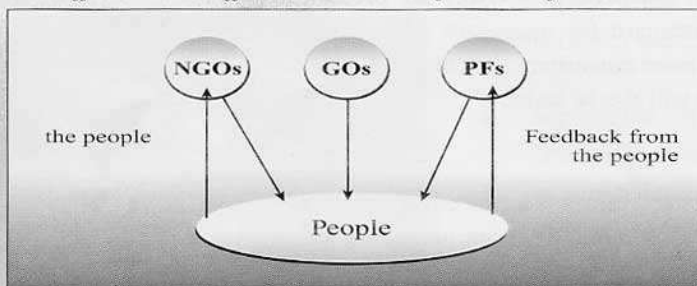
Recommendations

I.   A proposed system/mechanism

We must recognise that pre-existing organisations can begin the co-ordination of social welfare within a country. At present, the non-governmental organisations (NGOs), private foundations (PFs) and governmental organisations (GOs) act independently. As a result, wastage of effort and resources due to overlapping occurs while other needy sectors of society are neglected.
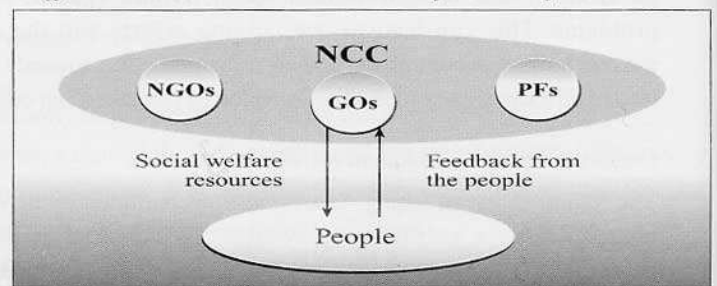
A national co-ordinating committee (NCC) is to be established in each country, acting locally as an organisation with a determined political and social will. The NCC could consist of representatives of all existing NGOs, PFs and GOs in the co-ordination of social welfare programmes.

For example, in Singapore and Japan, the government would be the most ideal organisation to spearhead this Co-ordination Council due to their strong and efficient political and social will. In Indonesia, a non-government organisation like WALHI, due to its strong influences on the people and good relations with the government, may be an ideal organisation.

Insufficient and inefficient distribution of social welfare services

Efficient and co-ordinated distribution of social welfare resources

1. *National Co-ordinating Committee (NCC)*

   The established national co-ordinating committee (NCC) may co-ordinate the distribution and allocation of physical and human resources so as to avoid wastage and inefficiency, therefore allowing greater coverage of social welfare needs on a broader spectrum.

   The NCC, through the co-operation of all the organisations may restructure the basic needs and rights system into one that is empowering to every individual, feasible to specific national conditions, applicable to the uniqueness of each culture while being flexible to change. The NCC may decide upon regular check-up programmes through reassessment of present systems of dissemination and coverage.

   The NGOs, PFs and GOs under the NCC may be required to establish communities and to facilitate public forums for the dissemination of information, physical resources and education.

2. *Communities /Public forums*

   The NGOs, PFs and GOs under the NCC may establish communities (in villages or towns) encompassing all facets of society without prejudice to wealth, religion and other social factors.

   The facilitation of regular public forums not only for the dissemination of education and resources, but for the expression of individual concerns and collaborative creation of solutions at a community level.

   At these forums, the collection of feedback regarding unresolved issues shall be raised to an NCC-level for immediate action.

3. *Regional Co-ordinating Committee (RCC):*

Assuming that NCCs are established in Asia, a regional co-ordinating (RCC) can be established for NCC representatives to meet at regular intervals in an effort to set a common standard for social reform in the region.

Annual evaluation and assessment regarding the implementation and improvement of present situations may be addressed.

Another benefit of the RCC will be providing opportunity for NCCs to distribute their resources among the individual countries towards the betterment of a common and united Asian society.

II   Areas of focus

Empowerment of individuals

By being empowered, individuals will be able to actively participate in decision making whether at the local or national level.

To achieve empowerment, we believe that:

1)   There should be greater access to information, education and services that allow marginalised groups the ability to protect themselves and reduce vulnerability to abuse, discrimination, disease and other conditions that threaten their development.

   For example, Thailand's aggressive and proactive approach to tackling the AIDs epidemic has effectively reduced the number of new infections. By providing comprehensive sex education, 100% condom usage programmes and PWHA healthcare service, Thailand has been considered by UNAIDS to be an example of best practice.

2)   Legal and support instruments protecting marginalised individuals should be established with community representation to obtain feedback by way of bilateral discussions and dialogue.

   A case to illustrate this, is the 1991 amendment of the State of New South Wales anti-discrimination laws to cover discrimination on the grounds of being indigenous or Aborigine origin. A Community Consultative Group was formed to consult the Aborigine community to identify and specify common problems faced by their community.

Access to informal/formal education

-   We recommend aggressive and well-thought social campaigns with the involvement of all sectors of society co-ordinated through the NCCs.
-   Actions taken include television programmes and commercials, radio, newspaper and other printed document, Internet public forums or seminars (in local, national or regional level) or churches and other religious places.
-   Training volunteers in social work and facilitating community activities must also be directed and administered by NCCs based on needs of the individual countries' necessities and conditions.
-   A useful case study is community activities such as social gatherings called 'pengajian' in Indonesia.
-   An additional value that needs to be inculcated and changed is the traditional stigma against marginalised people who are no longer of use towards economic development.
-   Informal leaders and their organisations as proactive role models need not be confined to political and religious leaders.
-   There are examples in some countries that important people are the models of fellow citizens:

   - Indonesia: the leader of the Moslem organisation
   - Singapore: the government
   - The Philippines: famous personalities

Sustainability

Concerns towards the preservation of the proposed system must be considered. A continuous effort towards the assessment of maintenance of progress must be addressed.

To sustain the efforts of the proposed welfare system, it is necessary for every individual to hold responsibility and take action.

It must be realised that effort towards a sustainable growth of social awareness is a pressing issue. The co-existence of economic growth, political stability, social development and environmental preservation are essential and fundamental for long-term progress. To neglect any of these factors, including social development, will create implications such as:

- political unrest/instability
- setbacks in the economic development
- moral and cultural degradation
- the extinction of regional/national identity
- the detriment of the physical environment

The NCC must be committed to the holistic growth of society in its implementation of projects and the dissemination of education, awareness and resources.

III. Finance

The purpose of our financial recommendation is to create a cost-effective mechanism for the execution of other recommendations. The creation of NCCs will save more money by concentrating and regulating resource management schemes. In many countries, with the creation of NCCs, a centralised distribution body will eliminate redundant use of funds.

The cost of the creation of NCCs will be minimal because it will merely be a re-organisation and collaboration of pre-existing organisations and not necessarily the creation of a new independent body. The NCC is an umbrella organisation of social welfare groups with one of its members selected to exercise its leadership, political and social will to re-distribute and administrate the other existing welfare groups as a combined effort towards the betterment of society.

Conclusion

The social welfare problems in Asia are very diverse. Each country has its own concerns, separated by wealth, history, culture and experience. And yet each county is bound together by a common vision of an Asia free of all the material and societal shackles it experiences today.

The inter-connection of each country is fast becoming not only inevitable, but also necessary. And as our communities grow from villages to provinces to nations to Asia and beyond, what is needed is a strong and definite political will that ties communities together through the participation and involvement of all its members.

The process towards this vision may be long and difficult, but we believe attainable. Many strategies to this end exist, but we believe that the strategy recommended is a feasible and necessary first step. Through the proposed co-operative body, we hope to make efficient the distribution of scarce resources for social welfare while increasing the citizenry's sense of community. The co-ordinated effort of private corporations, the government and civil society towards society's welfare and development is an exciting possibility.

And as isolation in all levels, from personal to society, reaches obsolescence, we look forward to an Asian citizenry active, empowered and ready to face the challenges of the new global age.

Leadership Statement

Leadership in the 21st century must be rooted in the people, never separated by power or prestige. It should not be based purely on position or titles. It should not be based on money or military might. It must be based on sincerity and competence. Leaders must be responsible and accountable, to the people they serve, confident in the decisions they make, and must be dynamic, ready to change when need be. They must be dreamers, never losing sight of their national vision, but must also be pragmatic, ready to sacrifice, work the hardest, while maintaining and improving the welfare of all members of society. They must exercise their political will to the fullest and serve as a unifying bond for their nation.