by Scott Younger

Elusive dream

Scotland's Glasgow was an environmental wasteland of smog and sludge, but now salmon are back swimming in its Clyde River. Java's environmental problems can also be fixed, but the time to do so is limited

I WAS INTRIGUED TO READ THE FOLLOWING OPENING paragraph from a colour supplement celebrating the first issue of The (Glasgow) Herald in 1783. "Britain is involved in an unwinnable foreign war, Scotland is at the forefront of developing new technology and Glasgow is re-inventing itself after the loss of its traditional industries.

There are concerns about pollution and climate change, and people are complaining about high prices". So, what's new?

Staying with Glasgow for a moment, it provides some valuable historical lessons for urban development today. In 1783, the city was at the threshold of expansion on the back of the Industrial Revolution and had played its part in pioneering mechanisation with steam power.

The lost transatlantic trade of tobacco was to be replaced by a leading role for designing, building and providing heavy machinery across the world – railways, sugar mills, shipbuilding.

It became the "second city of empire", with rapidly burgeoning and bustling population with access, at the upper end, to world class education, although John Anderson set up an institute 200 years ago to provide technical education to those who could not afford it – now Strathclyde University.

But the other side was less acceptable – rapid immigration leading to uncontrolled and unspeakably squalid conditions with poor housing for new arrivals, and dreadful pollution and relatable diseases. Bulk fresh water by pipeline arrived in the 1850s, and this began to relieve the perennial endemic problems from water-borne diseases.

For 2 decades in the early 20th century, the city and its river, the Clyde, and estuary became the largest ship-building centre in the world, but the end of WWII saw the start of the decline of the heavy industries, and the centre of shipbuilding thereafter moved to Japan and then also S Korea.

In Glasgow, pollution remained with dreadful pea-soup fogs in traffic jammed streets until the Clean Air Act of the mid 1950s forbade the use of open-hearth coal fires. The air in the city then started to get noticeably cleaner.

Renewable

WITH THE DECLINE OF HEAVY INDUSTRY ON THE RIVER, AND the stopping of raw sludge dumping in the estuary (using a vessel designed by my grandfather!), in hand with the construction of proper sewage 2 treatment works and river rehabilitation legislation, the river environment began to improve.

The speed of recovery surprised people; within a decade salmon decided that it was safe again to swim upriver to old spawning grounds.

Given a chance the natural habitat can recover if we can remedy the same errors of the past, which many countries, including Indonesia, have also made, and plan and build sustainably. This is an important message.

The drivers and consequences of pollution are all known; they are clearly manifest here in Java, but properly planned and coordinated action to counter pollution can relatively quickly allow the environment to recover.

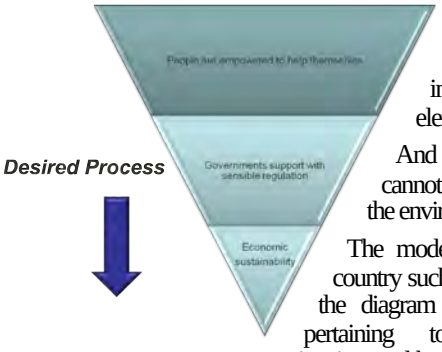
However, the rapid rate of growth of the area around Jakarta poses a major planning headache if the worst excesses of pollution, filthy rivers, damaged water table, dirty air, etc, are not to become even worse.

An integrated sustainable approach is required.

What do we mean by sustainable development in today's context? Does it affect everyone? – most definitely! My definition of sustainable development is "the utilization of natural resources for economic growth with the exploitation of those resources held compatible with sensible conservation of the environment such that future generations are not impoverished."

Natural resources include human capital and 'impoverished' is used in the widest meaning of the word.

Every level of society is affected in sustainable development, and civilization can only succeed when there is a healthy compatibility between social needs, economic and environmental factors and the political imperative – the SEEP elements.



And the key factor, which cannot be abused indefinitely, is the environment.

The model for development of a country such as Indonesia is shown in the diagram below, along with that pertaining to developed country situations, although at a recent lecture someone pointed out to me that the developing country model is apt also for the many poor urban areas of developed countries.

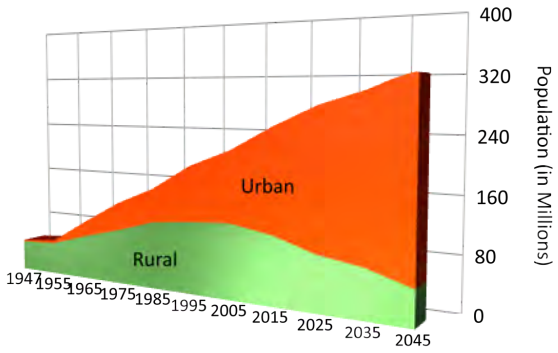
The diagram indicates that significant importance needs to be paid to the development of society from the bottom up, its foundation, because the bulk of the population is poor with substandard education and opportunity.

This therefore accounts for the emphasis on community development programmes, whether rural or peri-urban. However, while the degree of importance towards each of the four SEEP elements identified above varies according to the administrative jurisdiction involved, whether national, regional or below, each has to be taken into account in planning and subsequent implementation.

Contrast starkly

THE PLANNING ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE OF Indonesia contrast starkly between the needs for Java, the industrial and rice-growing heartland of the country (60% of annual output), and those off Java, where most of the natural resources can be found.

In the second diagram is shown the population growth forecast for Indonesia; 58% approximately resides in Java. However, the striking issue is the highly significant increase in the percentage of the population that will depend on an urban or peri-urban lifestyle.



On Java, this means an additional 40 million urban dwellers by the mid-2020s with huge planning issues to be addressed as rural land, often rice-growing, makes way for urban spread at the rate of 37,000 ha/yr. In turn this means a huge impact on land and water based infrastructure, including further pressure on flood areas.

So, while we grapple with today's problems of pollution, rising prices and climate change, and slow rate of resolution of key development issues, spare a thought for the planning that has to be put in hand and coordinated – and immediately, with hopefully sustainable implementation!

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