

GLOBE ASIA

Infrastructure Article

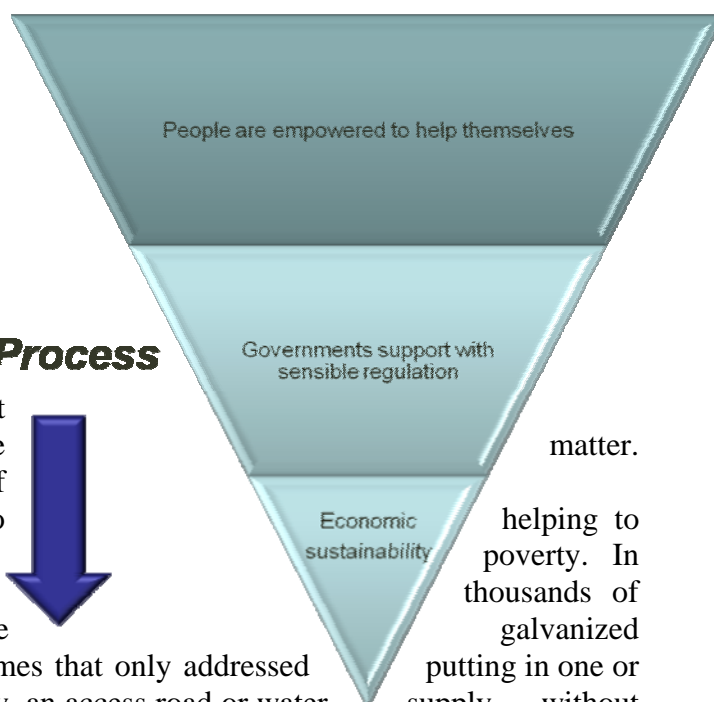
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN PRACTICE

Many of us will have been tuned into various discussions that emanated from this year's Davos meeting, with its high level evaluations of the state of the world, and the required measures to put right the global economies. More recently, Jakarta hosted the 5th World Islamic Economic Forum, which attracted many heads of state and in which global economic events naturally also took centre stage. It is important obviously to get a clear macro overview of problems and have world governments cooperate in trying to resolve the many interrelated issues, reverse the recessionary trend, and have economies, especially the key ones, once more moving positively. It will take time!

However, when the dreadful statistics on major blighting issues such as poverty and lack of access to the basic necessities of life, food and water, are tabled and addressed at the macro level, there remains a huge amount of work to be done at lower levels if any impact is to be made in making inroads to the problems. Since time immemorial, human organizations or cultures do not seem to have been able to reduce poverty to a containable level. The trouble is that the size of today's world population, almost 3 times what it was 75 years ago, means that the actual numbers affected by poverty are equivalent to the whole population of the world only some 150 years ago. The worst poverty stricken areas of the world are all too well known.

In Indonesia, the poverty level is gauged at around 40 million, the impact being relatively muted because of the richness of the land, sometimes adequate access to water, and the *kampung* culture of care. But it is still an unacceptable level of unused potential human energy and economic output.

It is encouraging to note that the multilateral agencies are addressing the poverty issue by engaging the factors at grass roots level. It is here where funding and practical assistance have to be directed. "Moving out of Poverty: Success from the Bottom Up" is the latest release from the World Bank on the matter. The report shows the importance of helping to poverty. In thousands of villages which remain to be galvanized into 'life'. The many past programmes that only addressed putting in one or two of a village's requirements – say, an access road or water supply – without due involvement of the villagers, usually failed with a waste of investment. The only



way to succeed is to take a holistic approach with continual engagement of the villagers and their active participation in sensible elements of the proposed development, and the continued need to go on caring into the future.

I have been very honoured to have been involved as Commissioner/Adviser of the East Bali Poverty Project for the past ten years, shortly after its inception. This is a totally private sector project, the brainchild of its founder and executive, David Booth MBE, with many donors contributing over the years, both within Indonesia and abroad. The 15,000 strong community in northeast Bali in the late 1990s were destitute with an appalling record of illiteracy (83%) across the 19 sub-villages, 25-50% infant mortality – depending on hamlet, wide range of infectious diseases, inadequate diet and limited and difficult access to water, some imbecility and goitres, and virtually complete lack of education. An early photograph highlights the desperate condition of the people of this hilly/mountainous located *desa*. Long discussions were first held with the community to gain trust and ascertain what the villagers wanted – education and a better life for their children. So moving into action, drawing up a preliminary masterplan, engaging some key young Indonesians, who now form the senior project team, US\$10,000 and belief! First the issues of access and health had to be tackled, followed quickly by dealing with water issues and improving diet in the villages, by teaching and helping the villagers, with prominent children participation, to grow a range of vegetables. This has been highly successful.



In August last year, the *yayasan* celebrated its first decade. Two photographs show one of the six schools – built by the villagers, with advice from the EBPP team - now operating, and another one of the schools being fitted with solar power.



There are now 377 children being



being schooled, mostly primary but some at higher levels. Passing national education standards has been highly successful all the way through to tertiary level. Infant mortality is below 0.1%. Motivation is tremendous. But this is only an incomplete summary of an astonishing programme, with 26 sub-programmes, where embracing empowerment and solving all the key issues in a steady systematic and holistic manner has been the major foundation for success, and all for not much more than US\$2 million over a ten year period.

The chart shows schematically, the cost-benefit diagram of the first ten years, while the project now moves into addressing the self-sustainability phase through trying to establish suitable tree plantations that are environmentally valuable and can bring income to the area, at the same time. Bamboo will be a key component of this, with a growing nursery and first plantings.

Empathetic engagement and empowerment are key to taking the poor areas of Indonesia out of poverty and also making a real impact towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. No one body that participates in poverty alleviation – whether private, public, multilateral agency or NGO – can undertake the whole task, but an important lesson concerns the need for a pre-development phase where community wishes are entertained and the people engaged to ensure long term sustainable success.

