

Session 3

Meeting the Challenge 2: The Role of Governments, International Organizations, and Civil Society

PANEL PRESENTATIONS

Jesus Estanislao, dean of the Asian Development Bank Institute, the Philippines, gave the first presentation of the third session. Commencing with a reflection on how the crisis has highlighted and perhaps changed some perceptions about the real needs of developing societies, Estanislao then spoke about the responsibility of governments to address the "holistic, wide dimensions" of human development and to realize that the needs of societies change and grow increasingly sophisticated as they develop. Governments need to become more flexible, opening up to new elements and accepting new influences from outside as interdependence in the region increases. The goal for each government should be to create an "enabling society" where citizens are encouraged to realize their potential. In Estanislao's view, the crisis has made clear the fact that governments in the region were pursuing purely economic growth rather than the holistic development of their societies. As a consequence, the extent of the crisis' impact is such that it now can be dealt with only on a regional basis.

Estanislao defined the region as comprising the ASEAN countries, Japan, South Korea, and the "three Chinas" and stressed that its problems therefore should be handled by this grouping. In terms of facilitating a remedy to the current situation, he recommended increasing consultation at all levels, especially informal discussion. In addition, a firm policy on exchange rates needs to be set and banking systems should be restructured. He welcomed the Miyazawa Plan as an opportunity to extend regional discussion and decision making, but warned that bilateral decision making could add yet another stumbling block to the decision-making process. On this matter, Estanislao called on the region's governments to

authorities. Similarly, in some countries there is a tradition of formulating one correct answer to complex questions, which is inherently anti-intellectual and restricts extensive debate. Second, think tanks and universities often rely on government for external funding and are reluctant, therefore, to risk losing it by challenging official policy. Also, in most cases the resources available to scholars do not permit the production of quality research, with the result that scholars are often unable to produce the required level of input in the time available.

Next, two points were raised relating to the quality of intellectual exchange so far in the region. A South Korean participant critically remarked that intellectuals have come to resemble hired diplomats since the 1980s, merely apologizing for government policy rather than providing truly independent commentary. To restore credibility to intellectuals, he recommended the active propagation of an independent intellectual culture in the region. A Thai participant observed that during the crisis the region has relied too heavily on "experts" from outside the region whose advice was influenced by their own agendas. He proposed that regional dialogue is crucial to, first, prevent a recurrence of this kind of crisis and, second, produce answers from within the region on which policy initiatives can be based.

A note of caution was sounded by a participant from the United States, who observed that during previous world crises intellectuals sometimes polarized rather than positively forwarded debate, and broached the line between objective analysis and self-interested advocacy. Furthermore, he pointed out that intellectuals need to be diligent about managing their inherently symbiotic relationship with the media.

The discussion closed on a note of agreement about the importance of fostering a stronger intellectual culture in the region, the necessity of raising the level of intellectual debate, and the urgency of expanding the region's capacity for independent analysis. Several participants emphasized the imperative of evidence-based policy making, as discussed in one of the presentations. In addition, the need to share information more willingly and to aim for a more efficient use of limited resources was discussed. The session concluded with comments on the capacity and responsibility of intellectuals to provide input to government policy and contribute to a vision for the future.

take the lead on multilateral discussion and to make policy decisions that are consistent with world trends. The banking system, for example, is an area where East Asia should adopt international ideas, particularly as it would be counter-productive to try to develop a separate banking system. Similarly, policy decisions should reflect an adherence to quality ideas rather than to a perceived "Asian way."

Estanislao suggested the difficulty even in defining the elements of civil society, let alone in harnessing their energy. Noting that a free and responsible press is an essential facet of civil society, he went on to stress that there must be a balance between freedom and responsibility. Churches, civic and business organizations, universities, and even the military, he argued, are all part of civil society and can be instruments for change and progress.

The second speaker of session three, Carolina Hernandez, president of the Institute of Strategic and Development Studies, the Philippines, concurred with previous comments to the effect that civil society groups have increasingly significant roles to play in the development of East Asia. She then noted that the crisis is multidimensional and regional and therefore demands a consolidated regional response. Furthermore, because regional leadership is weak and the effective capacities of ASEAN and APEC have been undermined by the crisis, it is imperative that strong links be forged among national governments, international organizations, and civil society.

Hernandez defined civil society as including "nongovernmental organizations, peoples' organizations, academic and professional groups, independent think tanks and research organizations, philanthropic organizations, nonprofit groups, civic organizations, private-sector groups, and the like." She acknowledged that while these organizations can operate to their fullest extent only in a productive and cooperative partnership with national and local governments and in a conducive political environment, "this does not mean that civil society groups not acceptable to states have no role in addressing the challenges or threats to human security." To forge partnerships, Hernandez continued, political will is needed on both sides, although governments are usually in a better position to initiate cooperation. Governments should recognize this and take appropriate action.

Hernandez maintained that private philanthropy, professional organizations, and business organizations can play vital roles in supporting social development, citing positive examples of this in the Philippines. She

suggested that private philanthropy could support the growth of truly independent think tanks and research organizations in East Asia, of which there are now far too few. Hernandez concluded by arguing that in a time of crisis civil society groups can assist governments in their role of promoting human security. In this sense, the principle of "subsidiarity" is important; specifically, that civil society groups located in target communities are often the best-placed to deliver the necessary assistance.

The third speaker of session three, Chalongphob Sussangkarn, president of the Thailand Development Research Institute, began his presentation by describing his experiences of working within a think tank, namely, the Thailand Development Research Institute, and the challenges of responding to government calls for input after the outbreak of the crisis. Chalongphob described how, particularly early on in the crisis, many disparate views arose concerning its cause and effects, adding that initially even academics and economists had no clear view. The difficulty was the sudden plunge into crisis, for which there was no precedent and therefore no explanatory model. There were debates on whether or not to print money. Most people's opinion seemed to be based on subjective feelings rather than actual analysis, reflecting the fact that no one seemed to have the tools for analysis. Meetings with the Bank of Thailand were problematic, especially once the Bank's officials realized that if no one had the capacity for analysis, perhaps the quality of their own policy could be challenged. The key challenge for the government at times like this is how to identify and form a consensus on the right policy. The corresponding challenge for think tanks is to ensure that governments feel ideas are their own early in the input stage; otherwise, they tend not to accept them.

The second part of Chalongphob's presentation reflected his concern about the need for dialogue on economic restructuring, the options for monetary frameworks, and how to develop the region as a whole and ensure its stability. Now is not the time, he argued, to push for a linked currency. Job creation and developing appropriate, sustainable industries, for example, are more pressing needs in Thailand. At the same time, the new high-technology and communications industries cannot be ignored; rather, international partnerships are essential for Thailand to be fully involved in such industries.

Chalongphob then expressed his view that an increasingly important role exists for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in social renewal in Thailand, noting the need to decentralize organizations and have NGOs more involved at a local level. He cited successful programs such as the

adopt-a-village program, which motivates people to help themselves, achieves the desired results for the village, and empowers the community. Empowerment, he emphasized, lays the foundation for future success.

Takemi Keizo, state secretary for foreign affairs, Japan, was the final speaker of session three. Takemi's presentation focused on three main themes: the implications of intellectual exchange and intellectual dialogue for securing stability and security in Asia, the role that governments should play in promoting these kinds of intellectual activities, and the kinds of mechanisms that are necessary in the process of government policy making.

Takemi remarked that efforts to promote a sense of community within Asia are particularly important, noting specifically that greater effort must be made to understand the concept of "coexistence within diversity" and to actively cultivate it. Given the current economic constraints in East Asia, what is most important at this juncture is "future-orientated intellectual dialogue and steps to foster a sense of community." On the issue of community, Takemi underlined the role of media and information networks in forming a sense of commonality in the lifestyles and tastes of middle-class Asians and how this was creating a sense of community beyond individual country borders. Arguing that it is vital that governments recognize these new trends and promote them through increased intellectual dialogue in Asia, Takemi stressed that governments also must strengthen cooperation with international organizations and civil society to create a greater sense of community.

At the policy-development level, Takemi asserted that evidence-based policy making is critical, which requires a full understanding of people's actual quality of life and the specific issues they are facing. Asian countries, including Japan, need to deepen their understanding of this concept. Takemi proceeded to give examples of government health-care policies developed in Canada and the United States in recent years based directly on comprehensive clinical surveys. In contrast, he described how Japan developed and implemented its Healthy Japan 21 policy without adequate major clinical studies, revealing an ignorance or limited understanding of the need for evidence-based policy making. On the other hand, he explained that the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs responded to the Asian crisis differently. It commissioned a survey of regional health centers in Indonesia to gauge whether people's needs had increased as a result of the crisis, concluding that community needs had risen dramatically and that there was clearly a need for financial assistance in this area.

As a result, the Japanese government was able to meet Indonesia's eventual request for funding because the necessary information gathering and analysis had been carried out.

Takemi stressed that gathering local information as a basis for policy making is profoundly important. As there is currently no established procedure to gather data at a local level, check its veracity, and feed it to central governments, he suggested this as an area where civil society can be of great use and expand its role. Because NGOs will continue to grow in number, there is an urgent need for coordination among them, he added. As well, there must be a system created to facilitate better networking between NGOs and governments at both bilateral and multilateral levels to meet the challenges facing East Asia.

DISCUSSION

Discussion following session three focused mainly on the role and contribution of civil society in enhancing human security in Asia, particularly in cooperation with various governments. A participant from the United States initiated the discussion by following up on several of the points made by Hernandez in her presentation. He acknowledged that governments fundamentally have reduced their role in providing social safety nets, but that this has been offset by increased corporate philanthropy. However, practical questions still remain of how governments can work more effectively with NGOs and nonprofit organizations (NPOs) to provide better administration of resources, and how an "enabling environment" can be created to strengthen social organizations. He suggested that intermediate organizations have two vital roles: first, they can raise capital from the public for social organizations, and, second, they can help facilitate communication among organizations to share experiences.

A Thai participant reinforced the necessity of cooperation between civil society and governments to reach a level of consensus. He also suggested that NGOs could increase their expertise by working with professionals from various fields, especially economists.

Differing opinions followed on whether civil society organizations have a mandate to act on behalf of their societies, especially considering that some of them have narrow interests. However, there was agreement on the point that the growth of civil society is a positive development. The same Thai participant reminded the other participants that NGOs are

only a minor subset of civil society, adding that with the decentralization of government power comes greater opportunity to act at the village level and address people's needs directly.

There was also consensus on the notion that civil society could contribute far more effectively if it sought partnerships with governments rather than constantly strike an adversarial pose. The discussion concluded with the acceptance that civil society does not have all the answers but has increasing power to promote social development and, in some instances, is better suited to this task than are governments. In addition, general agreement prevailed on the idea that the concept of governance needs to be rethought and, consequently, that national governments will inevitably have to change in the future.